Petals of Blood

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was born James Ngugi in 1938 in Kamirithu, a suburb of Limuru, a town in Kenya. He is Gikuyu, the most common ethnicity in Kenya, and grew up speaking the Gikuyu language as well as English. His older half-brother belonged to the guerilla Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), more commonly known as the Mau Mau, which fought against the British Empire's colonial control of Kenya during the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952–1960). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o went to Uganda for college and graduated from Uganda's Makerere University College in 1963—the same year Kenya won its independence from England. In 1964, he published his first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, written in English. He then went to England to begin an MA in English at the University of Leeds, which he abandoned without completing. In 1965 he published his second novel, *The River Between*. His third novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, came out in 1967; around this time, he embraced Marxism, began critiquing English as a language that colonizers forced on Kenyans, and changed his name from James Ngugi to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. He published his fourth and final English-language novel, *Petals of Blood*, in 1977; due to the novel's trenchant critique of Kenyan politics, as well as the critique forwarded in his 1977 play *I Will Marry When I Want*, the Kenyan government arrested him, and he spent a year in prison. After his 1978 release, he and his family fled Kenya. He spent time teaching at various international universities—including the University of Bayreuth in Germany, Yale University, and New York University—while continuing to write novels and nonfiction, now in Gikuyu. He currently works as a professor of English and Comparative Literature in the School of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine. In total, he has written eight novels and five memoirs, as well as plays, short story collections, and assorted nonfiction.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Petals of Blood depicts the suffering that post-Independence Kenya experienced in the aftermath of European colonial exploitation. Foreign exploitation of Kenya has a long history. In the 1600s, Omani Arab slavers often kidnapped and sold people indigenous to Kenya; Portuguese people both bought Kenyan people as slaves and colonized parts of Kenya. By the late 1800s, both Germany and England had a colonial presence in Kenya. In 1920, Kenya—then called the "Colony and Protectorate of Kenya"—officially became a royal British colony under England's King George V (1865–1936). From the late 1940s, a guerilla organization called the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), more commonly known as the Mau Mau, began trying to drive out British colonizers. These attempts blossomed into an official war, often called the Mau Mau Rebellion, from 1952 to 1960. In 1956, British forces captured the KLFA/Mau Mau's most famous leader, Dedan Kimathi (1920–1957); the next year, they executed him. Nevertheless, the KLFA/Mau Mau continued to take action against the British for several years afterward. Likely due to the Mau Mau, the British realized they could not continue to control Kenya politically without recurrent violence. Kenya officially became the Republic of Kenya, independent from British rule, in 1963.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Petals of Blood repeatedly mentions William Shakespeare (1564–1616). In particular, a minor antagonist quotes from Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596 – 1598), while a major antagonist, Chui, quotes at length from Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* (1602). In *Petals of Blood*, Shakespeare's plays represent the imposition of English literature upon Kenyan students, who want to read African literatures and other literature more relevant to their personal and historical context. In a contrasting fashion, the novel also mentions *God's Bits of Wood* (1962) the English translation of Senegalese author Ousmane Sembène's 1960 French-language novel *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. This novel represents Senegalese resistance to French colonialism. By representing a politically engaged Kenyan student reading this novel in *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o may be suggesting both that *God's Bits of Wood* inspired his own work and that Ousmane Sembène is a more appropriate author for African students to read than William Shakespeare. Like *Petals of Blood*, the first three novels written by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o represent elements of Kenya's colonization by and independence from England, whether it be Kenyan culture under British rule as in *The River Between* (1965) or the fight for Kenyan independence as in *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's younger Kenyan contemporary Meja Mwangi has also written repeatedly about the Kenyan fight for independence in the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952–1960), as in his novels *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *The Mzungu Boy* (1990). Finally, as Ugandan author Moses Isegawa writes in a glowing introduction for the Penguin Classics edition of *Petals of Blood*, it seems possible that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work influenced Isegawa's novels *The Abyssinian Chronicles* (1998) and *Snakepit* (2004), both of which are set in Uganda after it gained independence from British colonial rule.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Petals of Blood
- **When Written:** 1970–1975
- **Where Written:** Evanston, IL, USA; Limuru, Kenya; Yalta, USSR
- **When Published:** 1977
- **Literary Period:** Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Novel, Realism
- **Setting:** Kenya
- **Climax:** Munira admits he set the fire that killed Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo.
- **Antagonist:** Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo, Nderi wa Riera
- **Point of View:** First-Person Plural (the people of Ilmorog)

EXTRA CREDIT

Fun with Poetry: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o took the phrase "petals of blood" from "The Swamp," a poem by Derek Walcott (1930–2017), a writer from St. Lucia (a Caribbean island colonized by both France and England) who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o uses a quotation from Walcott's "The Swamp" as the epigraph for *Petals of Blood*.

Literary Children: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has four children who have also published novels, including the Cornell professor Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ and the journalist Wanjikũ wa Ngũgĩ.

PLOT SUMMARY

One morning, the Ilmorog police detain the teacher Munira for questioning about the murder-by-arson of businessmen Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria. They also arrest the crippled Abdulla and the political organizer Karega.

In a flashback to 12 years prior, Munira arrives in Ilmorog as the town's new teacher. He starts drinking at Abdulla's bar and suggests Abdulla send his young helper Joseph to school; Abdulla ignores him. Then Wanja arrives to visit her grandmother Nyakinyua. One night at Abdulla's, Munira tells Abdulla and Wanja how he and his classmate Chui were expelled from the high school **Siriana** for organizing a strike against their racist headmaster Fraudsham. Touched, Wanja offers to work at Abdulla's in Joseph's place so Joseph can attend school. Another night, Wanja explains that she dropped out of middle school after a married adult man impregnated her.

One day, Munira finds Karega outside his home. Karega introduces himself as the son of Mariamu, who worked on Munira's father Ezekieli's farm. Karega went to Siriana after Munira but was expelled for another strike. He asks whether Munira heard Fraudsham left Siriana and Chui came back; Munira admits he didn't. Later that night, Wanja is thinking how Ilmorog's diviner Mwathi wa Mugo told her to have sex on the new moon to get pregnant. When Munira shows up at Wanja's with Karega, Wanja asks Munira to walk with her. On their stroll, Munira asks Wanja what happened to her baby, and Wanja bursts into tears. Then Munira walks Wanja back to her hut, and she invites Munira inside for sex. They initiate an affair until one night at Abdulla's, Wanja starts complaining about how little she earns and how awful Ilmorog is. The next day, she's gone.

A year later, Munira asks his boss, Mzigo, to help recruit more teachers. Mzigo refuses but gives Munira an invitation to tea with Ilmorog's MP, Nderi wa Riera. Munira goes to "tea"—only to discover that everyone who attends is forced to swear an anti-communist loyalty oath. Afterward, Munira goes drinking in Limuru—and runs into Wanja. She tells him that she's been working at another bar. Her coworkers were forced to attend "tea." When she avoided it, someone set her apartment on **fire**. She has decided to move back to Ilmorog. Munira and Wanja run into Karega, who tells them how he became a beggar after his expulsion. Wanja tells Karega to come to Ilmorog with them.

Munira hires Karega as a teacher. Meanwhile, Ilmorog is suffering a drought. After several months, Karega suggests they organize a delegation to ask Nderi wa Riera for aid in the city. As the delegation travels toward the city, Wanja tells Karega and Munira that after leaving Ilmorog, she began doing sex work. One night, she met a German man who lured her back to his house and almost raped her. After she escaped, a Kenyan lawyer picked her up in his car and gave her his card in case she needed help later.

On the journey, Joseph falls ill. The delegation decides to ask for shelter while they tend to him, but nobody will offer them shelter. When Wanja, Karega, and a farmer named Njuguna approach yet another house, guards catch them and lock them in a room. The homeowner, Kimeria, says he won't free them until Wanja has sex with him. When Kimeria's employee claims Wanja is Kimeria's runaway wife, Njuguna argues Wanja should have sex with Kimeria to save Joseph. Humiliated, Wanja has sex with the man.

When the delegation reaches the city, Nderi wa Riera is on a business trip and won't come back till the next day. Since they have nowhere to stay, Wanja suggests they ask the lawyer who saved her for shelter. At the lawyer's house, Munira asks Karega about his experience at Siriana. Karega explains that he participated in a strike for a more Africa-centric curriculum under Fraudsham. After Fraudsham left, Chui replaced him. When the students went on strike again, Chui had Karega expelled.

The next day, Wanja, Abdulla, Munira, Karega, and Njuguna meet Nderi wa Riera in his office. Nderi wa Riera goes outside to talk to the full delegation, waiting in nearby gardens, and

suggests they embark on another delegation to Gatundu. The delegation, outraged, throws things. Riera flees, returns with policemen, and insists they arrest Abdulla, Munira, and Karega. The lawyer successfully defends the men at trial, and newspaper coverage of the event publicizes Ilmorog's difficulties. Various organizations pledge to help the town.

A little later, it rains in Ilmorog. The town plans a post-harvest celebration and circumcision ceremony. The afternoon of the ceremony, Wanja, Abdulla, Munira, and Karega gather with Nyakinyua and other elders to drink **Theng'eta**, a traditional drink with spiritual properties. When Karega drinks, he speaks about Munira's sister Mukami. He and Mukami were in love, but Ezekieli—who believed Karega's brother Nding'uri had cut off his ear during Kenya's fight for independence because Ezekieli opposed the freedom fighters—demanded Mukami choose between her family and Karega, after which Mukami died by suicide. Abdulla, shocked, reveals he knew Nding'uri during the revolution; they were freedom fighters. One day, Nding'uri's girlfriend's brother sold them a gun. At the sale, the police arrived—the brother had tipped them off. Nding'uri was executed, but Abdulla escaped and swore revenge.

When the gathering disperses, Munira approaches Wanja and complains that they haven't resumed their affair. Wanja dismisses him. She ends up walking with Karega and telling him that Kimera, the man who forced sex on her during the delegation's journey, also impregnated her when she was an adolescent. She and Karega hold hands, and then he removes her clothes. She resists at first, but then they have sex. Afterward, Karega goes home and sleeps. Much later, Munira wakes him and says he was mumbling Mukami and Wanja's names. He accuses Karega of causing Mukami's suicide and claims they can't work together. Karega, outraged, refuses to quit the school.

The next year, Munira hires three new teachers. One day, seeing Wanja and Karega make romantic eye contact, Munira travels to the headquarters. Later, Karega is fired. Wanja accuses Munira of getting Karega fired and says she'll take revenge. Afterward, at Abdulla's, she finds Karega and Abdulla talking. Abdulla is explaining that he fought to end economic exploitation—but after Kenyan independence, exploitation continued. When he discovered that the man who betrayed Nding'uri, Kimeria, had gotten rich after independence, it broke Abdulla's spirit. Wanja starts sobbing. She explains Kimeria is the man who impregnated her as an adolescent. Then Wanja, Abdulla, and Karega hear a plane crash in a nearby field. Over the next few weeks, many people travel to Ilmorog to look at the plane. Wanja and Abdulla sell the tourists food and Theng'eta. Soon Theng'eta becomes a famous drink. Karega, meanwhile, leaves town.

Wanja and Abdulla start a Theng'eta brewery. One day, Nderi wa Riera visits Ilmorog and announces a plan to help local farmers develop their land with the help of bank loans. Many farmers cannot repay the loans, however, and their farms are repossessed. Wanja's grandmother Nyakinyua is one of the farmers whose land is repossessed. Desperate, Wanja and Abdulla sell their business to Mzigo. Wanja uses her profits to save Nyakinyua's land; she also builds a huge wooden bungalow. One night, she invites Munira there. Munira is excited—but when he arrives at the bungalow, Wanja announces her intention to start a brothel and demands Munira pay for sex. Meanwhile, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria all become directors of the company Theng'eta Breweries.

Five years after Karega left Ilmorog, he returns and visits Munira. Out of spite, Munira offers to take him to see Wanja without letting him know Wanja is a prostitute again. When Munira and Karega arrive at Wanja's brothel, Karega and Wanja are shocked to see each other. As Wanja questions him, Karega explains that after he left Ilmorog, he worked for the lawyer who was running for office as a progressive reformer. Then Karega worked for docks, plantations, and a UK-owned sugar mill. Everywhere he went, Kenyan workers were exploited. Finally, Karega decided to come back to Ilmorog.

Wanja abruptly confesses that she tossed the baby she had as an adolescent into a latrine. Finding no goodness in the world after Karega left Ilmorog, she has decided to take revenge on Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo by taking their money for sex and making them jealous of one another. Karega says that if the world is awful, people should make "a new world." Karega's words resonate with Munira. Disgusted by the world's evil, Munira seeks consolation in religion but finds none in the established church. Then he hears that the lawyer has been assassinated. Horrified, Munira goes walking—and comes upon evangelical Christians preaching redemption by grace alone. He suddenly converts.

Meanwhile, Karega starts working for Theng'eta Breweries and writing pro-unionization political pamphlets. The workers unionize; the brewery fires Karega, but the union hires him. A week before the fire, Wanja warns Karega that Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria plan to assassinate him. Karega thanks her for the warning but accuses her of siding with the exploitative capitalists and leaves. The same day, Abdulla gets a letter from Joseph, who has gone to Siriana and is doing extremely well. He goes to tell Wanja and runs into Karega leaving her hut. Abdulla finds Wanja and initiates sex with her. Later, she invites him to visit her at the brothel the following Saturday. She is secretly planning to gather Mzigo, Chui, Kimeria, and Abdulla, humiliate the first three by claiming Abdulla is her true romantic partner, and tell them all Kimeria's wrongdoings.

The next Saturday, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria visit Ilmorog. Seeing Kimeria's car, Abdulla abruptly decides to kill the man. He stakes out the brothel, not knowing that Wanja has already impulsively stabbed Kimeria to death. Then Abdulla sees the brothel is on fire. He breaks inside and rescues Wanja.

After Munira, Abdulla, and Karega are arrested, a police officer,

Inspector Godfrey, interrogates them. Godfrey eventually realizes that Munira set the fire to kill Wanja. In a flashback, the now zealously religious Munira sees Karega enter Wanja's hut and hears a voice telling him he has to rescue Karega from Wanja's sexual wiles.

After Munira is charged with the murder, Wanja discovers she is pregnant, Abdulla feels grateful that the future of Kenya rests with young men like Joseph, and Karega recommits to the struggle for workers' rights and economic equality.

CHARACTERS

Godfrey Munira – Godfrey Munira is the son of rich Presbyterian landowner Ezekieli. As a youth, he attends the boys' high school **Siriana**, which expels Munira and his classmate Chui after they lead a strike protesting the headmaster Fraudsham's racist policies. While most of Munira's siblings become businesspeople, Munira becomes a teacher. Of his family members, he is only close to his sister Mukami, who dies by suicide. As an adult, Munira marries Julia, whose religiosity he finds unsexy. Leaving her and their children behind in the large town Limuru, Munira moves to rural Ilmorog to teach in Ilmorog's school. There he befriends Abdulla, a shopkeeper; Wanja, granddaughter of local elder Nyakinyua; and Karega, a former student of Munira's who was also expelled from Siriana during a strike. Although Munira considers himself a passive loner, these friendships affect him deeply. When Wanja has a brief affair with Wanja, he becomes obsessed with her; when Munira realizes how badly Karega suffered after Siriana expelled him, he hires Karega to work at the school; and when Ilmorog suffers a drought, Munira, despite his contempt for politics, joins a delegation asking Ilmorog's MP Nderi wa Riera for help. Yet Munira's jealousy and fanaticism lead him to betray his friends. After Wanja and Karega begin a romance, a jealous Munira convinces his regional boss Mzigo to fire Karega from the school. Munira's lack of respect for Wanja's romantic decisions exemplifies how many men in the novel treat women like sexual possessions, not people. Later, sick of the world's corruption, Munira joins an evangelical Christian movement and sets **fire** to the brothel Wanja has started—intending to kill her, to "save" Karega from her sexual wiles, but instead killing her clients Chui and Mzigo. Thus, Munira represents how religion blinds believers, leading them to misdiagnose social problems: Munira blames the frequently exploited Wanja for the world's evils rather than the men who exploit her. At the novel's end, the police have realized Munira set the fire that killed the men, and Munira is in jail waiting to stand trial.

Wanja – Intelligent, beautiful Wanja is Nyakinyua's granddaughter, Munira and Karega's lover, and Abdulla's lover, employee, and business partner. When Wanja is an adolescent, her father's friend, the businessman Kimeria, impregnates her. Despairing, she commits infanticide after giving birth, leaves school, and becomes a barmaid. As a barmaid, Wanja suffers sexual harassment from clients and employers. Later, she wants to have another child. She visits Nyakinyua in Ilmorog, where she takes a job at Abdulla's store and begins an affair with Munira, hoping to get pregnant. The attempt fails, and she leaves Ilmorog, only returning after an arsonist sets her apartment on **fire** during political unrest. During Ilmorog's drought, she participates in the delegation traveling to the city to ask for help; on the way, Kimeria detains the travelers and forces sex on Wanja. Later, Wanja and Karega begin a romantic relationship. When Karega leaves town, Wanja starts a **Theng'eta** brewing business with Abdulla to forget her heartbreak. The brewery is successful, but when a bank repossesses Nyakinyua's land, Wanja has to sell the business to keep the land in her family. Devastated by this loss, Wanja adopts a dog-eat-dog philosophy and starts a brothel, reasoning that as a sex worker she can at least profit from her own exploitation. Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui, the Theng'eta brewery's new directors, frequent Wanja's brothel. After Karega returns and accuses Wanja of siding with capitalists, Wanja decides to stage a confrontation between Kimeria, Mzigo, Chui, and her new lover Abdulla at her brothel. When Kimeria arrives at the brothel, Wanja impulsively murders him. That same night, Munira—obsessed with Wanja and convinced she has Karega in her demonic sexual thrall—sets the brothel on fire to kill her. Abdulla saves Wanja, while Mzigo and Chui die; everyone assumes the fire killed Kimeria as well. Afterward, Wanja quits sex work and discovers she is pregnant. Wanja's constant exploitation by lovers, employers, and businessmen exemplifies the novel's condemnation of capitalism and its sense that women suffer specifically sexual forms of economic exploitation.

Karega – Idealistic Karega is Munira's sometime student and coworker and Wanja's lover. In grammar school, Munira teaches Karega; later, Karega attends the high school **Siriana**. In childhood, Karega falls in love with Munira's sister Mukami, whose father Ezekieli owns the farm where Karega's mother Mariamu works. As teenagers, Karega and Mukami have sex; afterward, Mukami tells Karega that Ezekieli has demanded she choose between Karega and her family. When Mukami dies by suicide, a heartbroken Karega redirects his emotional energy toward hero-worshipping revolutionaries. After Siriana's racist headmaster Fraudsham tries to expel several students on unjust grounds, Karega participates in a strike demanding an African headmaster and an Africa-centric curriculum. When former student Chui replaces Fraudsham, Karega believes that Chui will sympathize with the students—but Chui insists on maintaining a Europe-centric curriculum and, when Karega leads another strike, expels him. Post-expulsion, Karega becomes an impoverished street vendor. After two encounters with Karega, Munira—who feels somewhat responsible for his former student—hires Karega as

an "untrained teacher" at Ilmorog's school. When one of Karega's students faints from hunger in class during Ilmorog's drought, Karega helps mobilize a delegation to beg Ilmorog's MP Nderi wa Riera for aid. Riera turns out to be corrupt, which damages Karega's belief in Kenya's post-independence political establishment. Later, Karega begins a romantic relationship with Wanja—and Munira, jealous, gets Karega fired. Karega leaves Ilmorog. For a while he works on a Kenyan lawyer's progressive political campaign, but he ultimately finds the lawyer too eager to collaborate with the establishment, so he quits. Afterward, Karega works on docks, plantations, and in a sugar mill before returning to Ilmorog and becoming a labor organizer for the **Theng'eta** Breweries Union. After the brewery's directors, Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria, are murdered, the police arrest Karega—but Karega, undaunted, mentally recommits to fighting for racial and economic justice. Karega's struggle at Siriana exemplifies education's inherently political nature, especially in postcolonial countries, while his struggles against European-backed Kenyan economic elites represents the connection between white colonial exploitation of Black people and capitalist exploitation of workers.

Abdulla – Abdulla is Wanja's employer, business partner, and one-time lover. He is also Joseph's guardian. As a young man, he works in a factory that exploits workers and calls in the colonial police to break up strikes. Abdulla joins the fight for Kenyan independence from England because he dreams of communal Kenyan ownership of the country's factories and land. During the struggle, Abdulla fights alongside Karega's brother Nding'uri; when Kimeria informs on Abdulla and Nding'uri, Abdulla escapes but Nding'uri is executed. Abdulla vows revenge on Kimeria. Later, during guerilla fighting, Abdulla is shot in the leg and crippled. After independence, Abdulla learns British and British-affiliated Kenyan soldiers have massacred his family. Encountering a homeless child in the street, Abdulla names the child Joseph, tells him he's Abdulla's brother, and adopts him. Abdulla cannot find employment because no one will hire a crippled man. Eventually, he flees to rural Ilmomrog to be an anonymous shopkeeper. In Ilmorog, Wanja convinces him to send Joseph to school and hire her to help around the shop. Eventually, Abdulla and Wanja start a **Theng'eta** brewery. When Wanja wants to sell her share to help her grandmother Nyakinyua, Abdulla agrees to sell the business to Mzigo. Afterward, Abdulla becomes an impoverished fruit vendor; he resents Wanja, whose new business, a brothel, funds Joseph's high school education at **Siriana**. Yet one night, he gets a letter saying Joseph is doing excellently in school and goes to tell Wanja. They have sex, and Abdulla feels like a new man. The next week, Kimeria comes to town—and Abdulla, knowing he is one of Wanja's brothel clients, decides to get his delayed revenge. Yet when Abdulla approaches the brothel, he finds it on **fire**—and he rescues Wanja rather than kill anyone. As the novel ends, Abdulla is happily considering passing the torch of history to Joseph, who is developing a revolutionary consciousness. Abdulla's story represents how to be completely free from colonialism, post-Independence Kenya must overthrow capitalist systems: Abdulla originally fought for communal Kenyan ownership of land and factories, and economic injustice thwarts every attempt he makes to succeed under capitalism.

Kimeria – Kimeria is the sexual abuser of Wanja and the betrayer of Nding'uri, Karega's brother and Abdulla's fellow freedom fighter. During Kenya's struggle for independence from England, Kimeria is a member of the Home Guard, paramilitaries loyal to the British. At one point, he entraps two freedom fighters, Nding'uri and Abdulla, by promising to sell them weaponry and then tipping off the colonial police about the sale. Abdulla escapes, but Nding'uri is executed. Despite his support of colonial powers, Kimeria becomes a successful businessman in post-independence Kenya's capitalist economy—and he abuses his power and status. For example, as an adult, married man, he impregnates his friend's adolescent daughter Wanja. When Wanja learns she's pregnant, she goes to Kimeria for help—and he mocks her. Much later, he encounters Wanja again when she is participating in Ilmorog's delegation to their MP Nderi wa Riera, whom they hope will help them get relief from a drought. Kimeria has his employees detain Wanja and her friends and forces her to have sex with him as a condition of letting her friends go. After Mzigo buys Abdulla and Wanja's **Theng'eta** brewery, Kimeria joins the business's board of directors—and visits Ilmorog to frequent Wanja's brothel and buy sex from her. When Wanja decides to change her life, she impulsively stabs Kimeria to death in the brothel, an act that Munira's decision to set **fire** to the brothel ironically hides: Munira intended to kill Wanja, but Wanja is saved, while everyone assumes Kimeria died due to Munira's arson. Kimeria represents the afterlife of British colonialism in Kenya's post-independence capitalist economy, where a few European-backed Kenyan elites exploit and oppress the majority of Kenyans. Kimeria's abusive sexual pursuit of Wanja, meanwhile, represents how women suffer specifically sexual forms of exploitation in economically unequal societies.

Nderi wa Riera – Nderi wa Riera is Ilmorog's MP (representative in parliament). Early in life, Riera is a freedom fighter. Yet after Kenyan independence, foreign corporations co-opt him, bribing him with directorships on their boards. He becomes a rich entrepreneur in the tourist industry, commodifying "African culture" for European consumption. Thus, Riera represents how capitalism subverts Kenya's political independence by corrupting progressives, turning them into economic elites, and pitting them against Kenyan workers. Riera founds the KCO, the organization that makes various characters "drink tea" (swear an anti-communist government loyalty oath) to bolster "ethnic unity" and smother class struggle between elites and Kenyan workers. When Ilmorog sends a delegation to Riera asking for help with a bad

drought, Riera assumes it's a plot by his political enemies to make him look bad. He gives a speech to the exhausted delegation suggesting they travel on to Gatundu. Outraged, the delegation throws things at him. Riera convinces the police to arrest three delegation members, Munira, Abdulla, and Karega, but the lawyer who gave the delegation shelter while they waited to meet with Riera successfully defends them in court. Riera concludes the lawyer was behind the "plot" against him and vows revenge. Thus, when the lawyer is later assassinated while fighting for political reforms, the novel implies that Riera was behind it. Much later, Riera convinces Ilmorog's farmers and herdsmen to take out loans as part of an economic development scheme. When the people of Ilmorog are unable to pay back the loans, banks repossess their land, and Riera and other elites buy it up. This incident shows how capitalist economic development, supposedly a good thing, can benefit the already rich to poor people's detriment. Riera starts a tourist center in Ilmorog that may be sex-trafficking Kenyan girls to Europeans, demonstrating how women suffer specifically sexual economic exploitation under capitalism. Near the novel's end, it is implied that Riera has been assassinated while collecting rents in buildings he owns in Nairobi—suggesting new revolutionary fervor in the fight against Europe-backed elites' economic exploitation of Kenyans.

Chui – Chui is Munira's classmate and one of Karega's headmasters at **Siriana**. Later, when Wanja becomes a sex worker, Chui is also one of her clients. As a student at Siriana, Chui is charismatic and popular, nicknamed "Shakespeare" due to his appreciation of the English playwright William Shakespeare, and "Joe Louis" after the famous African American boxer due to his skill beating white opponents in European football (American soccer). When a racist British headmaster at Siriana, Fraudsham, insists the Kenyan students eat poor-quality food and only wear shoes on Sundays, Chui leads a strike against the racist policy. Siriana expels both Chui and Munira for participating in the strike. After Fraudsham retires, however, Siriana hires Chui as the new headmaster—and Chui expels several students, including Karega, for striking to demand an Africa-centric curriculum. That Chui opposes oppression as a student but supports it as a headmaster suggests not only that power corrupts but also that Chui needs to "decolonize" his mind after undergoing a racist, Europe-centric education: though Chui recognizes Fraudsham's overt racism, he doesn't understand that his own reaction to Karega and other striking students betrays a Europe-centric and thus implicitly racist bias. Though Chui continues on as Siriana's headmaster, he starts to neglect the school in favor of tending to his business interests, illustrating how capitalism frequently corrupts Kenyan elites in post-independence Kenya. He joins the board of directors of the **Theng'eta** brewing company located in Ilmorog, where he also becomes a client of Wanja's at the brothel. He dies when Munira sets fire to the brothel in an attempt to kill Wanja.

Mzigo – Mzigo is Munira and Karega's regional boss overseeing Ilmorog's school. A corrupt and incompetent administrator, he mostly ignores Munira's repeated pleas to help find more teachers for Ilmorog. When Wanja needs to sell her and Abdulla's **Theng'eta** brewing business to save her grandmother's land from repossession by the bank, Mzigo buys the business. Subsequently, Wanja learns that Mzigo patented Theng'eta—a traditional drink with a long history—when he bought the business, presumably to prevent Wanja from starting another brewing business in competition with his. After a devastated Wanja starts a brothel, Mzigo becomes one of her major clients. He dies when Munira sets **fire** to the brothel, intending to kill Wanja. Like Kimeria and Chui, Mzigo represents the corruption of Kenya's Europe-backed capitalist elite, who exploit and oppress other Kenyans.

Nyakinyua – Wanja's grandmother Nyakinyua is one of the respected elders in Ilmorog, the town where much of the novel takes place. When Munira first arrives in town to become the new schoolteacher, Nyakinyua questions him suspiciously about whether he has come to indoctrinate the children in white values and steal them away to the cities—a line of questioning that illustrates how colonial education and capitalism are depopulating Ilmorog and destroying its rural, agricultural way of life. Yet Nyakinyua is not hostile to teachers or newcomers in general. When, during a bad drought, Ilmorog newcomer and "untrained teacher" Karega suggests that Ilmorog form a delegation to their MP Nderi wa Riera to seek aid, Nyakinyua speaks up in support of his idea and helps persuade the townspeople. On the delegation's journey, Nyakinyua tells the travelers stories about Ilmorog's and Kenya's history. Later, she also teaches Wanja how to brew the traditional drink **Theng'eta**. Thus Nyakinyua represents traditional knowledge and informal education, in contrast to the formal colonial education that Munira, Karega, Chui, the lawyer, and Joseph all receive from **Siriana**. After Nderi wa Riera convinces Ilmorog's farmers to take out loans from banks as part of an economic development scheme, Nyakinyua finds herself unable to repay the loan; when the bank repossesses her land, Wanja has to sell her own business to keep the farm in the family. Though Nyakinyua tries to organize resistance to the banks in Ilmorog, she dies before she can accomplish anything. The bank's repossession of Nyakinyua's farm shows how modern capitalist systems trick traditionally independent people into debt and dispossession.

Joseph – Joseph is Abdulla's ward. Working as a poor, self-employed transporter of goods after Kenyan independence, Abdulla comes upon a homeless child searching for food in a pile of garbage. Abdulla questions the child, who does not know his own name and has been waiting for a long time for his parents and siblings to come find him. Abdulla, whose own family was massacred during the independence struggle, tells

the child he's Abdulla's brother, names him Joseph, and assumes responsibility for him. Abdulla takes Joseph with him when he moves to Ilmorog and makes him work in the store. Though he cares for Joseph, he also yells at him and treats him brusquely. Eventually, at Wanja's urging, Abdulla sends Joseph to school, where the schoolteacher Munira considers him among the best and brightest students. During the drought, Joseph joins the delegation from Ilmorog to the city to ask help from MP Nderi wa Riera; on the journey, he becomes very sick. The travelers approach various rich houses along the road for help and are rejected; it is while seeking help for Joseph that Wanja reencounters Kimeria, who detains her and coerces her into having sex with him. When he grows older, Joseph attends **Siriana**. By the time the **fire** that Munira set to kill Wanja kills Siriana's headmaster Chui, Joseph has joined a student group planning a strike to protest Chui's neglect of the school in favor of his business interests, poor staff and teacher pay, and the school's conservative curriculum. Thus, like Karega, Joseph represents a later stage in mental "decolonization" than Munira and Chui, who organized an earlier strike at Siriana: he knows to protest not only overt racism but also the school's politically conservative curriculum and its poor treatment of workers, which are subtler indications of the school's fundamentally colonial education style.

The Lawyer – The lawyer attends **Siriana** after Munira and Chui but before Karega. As a youth the lawyer is initially conservative and religious, but the extreme racism of Siriana's headmaster Fraudsham makes him doubt his convictions. After graduation he travels to the U.S. seeking a model of social equality; instead, he witnesses both violent anti-Black racism such as lynching and the economic exploitation of Black and white workers. When he returns to post-independence Kenya from the U.S., he sees a similar exploitation of Kenyan workers by Kenyan elites. He concludes that Kenyan elites, educated in British colonial schools, are mimicking European economic behaviors to prove to white people that they are "civilized." In other words, the lawyer believes internalized racism and Europe-centric values cause Kenyan elites to embrace capitalism and to exploit poorer Kenyans. He becomes a lawyer to defend poor Kenyans against criminal charges in an unjust legal system. After Wanja leaves Ilmorog the first time, she is working in Nairobi when a German man lures her to his house and nearly rapes her; as she flees the house along the road, the lawyer sees her, gives her a ride and shelter, and drives her to the bus station. Later, when Ilmorog's delegation needs shelter in the city, Wanja calls the lawyer and he agrees to host them. When Ilmorog's MP Nderi wa Riera convinces the police to arrest Munira, Karega, and Abdulla for defending the peace, the lawyer successfully defends them in court—leading a humiliated Riera to secretly vow revenge on the lawyer. Later, the lawyer becomes a politician fighting for reforms and greater economic equality. After Munira gets Karega fired from his job at Ilmorog's school, Karega works for the lawyer—but ultimately quits after deciding the lawyer, though a good person, is too focused on incremental political change, persuading individuals, and gaining the respect of the corrupt establishment. Eventually the lawyer is assassinated—an assassination that the novel implies Nderi wa Riera organized.

Ezekieli – Ezekieli is Munira and Mukami's father. A rich yet stingy landowner, he uses his Presbyterian Christian faith to manipulate his Christian workers, worshipping with them to earn their goodwill but dismissing those who ask for better pay as "devilish spirits." At one point, he tries to use his economic power over his employee Mariamu, Karega's mother, to initiate a sexual affair with her. Though Mariamu successfully refuses him, the incident demonstrates how women in capitalist societies tend to suffer specifically sexual forms of economic exploitation, such as sexual harassment by employers. It also illustrates the religious hypocrisy present everywhere in the novel: though Ezekieli claims to be a devout Christian, he exploits his workers, tries to take sexual advantage of Mariamu and commit adultery with her, and uses his religious faith to hide or justify his behavior. The novel implies that Ezekieli precipitates his daughter Mukami's death by suicide by demanding that she choose between her teenage love, Karega, and her family. After Munira is coerced into taking "tea," an anti-communist government loyalty oath, he confides in his father. Munira's father tells him he has already sworn the oath, as he believes the government will protect his property and wealth, which he claims are gifts from God. This incident too shows Ezekieli's hypocrisy, as during the Kenyan struggle for independence he refused to swear a loyalty oath to Kenyan freedom fighters, which resulted in the fighters cutting off his ear, an event he blames on Mariamu's son Nding'uri—but now that the post-independence government is successful and powerful, Ezekieli is willing to swear "loyalty" to them.

Inspector Godfrey – Inspector Godfrey is the police detective tasked with solving Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria's murders. Amoral but obsessed with social order, Inspector Godfrey has served in the police force both under British colonial rule and after Kenya's independence; he hopes one day to become a private investigator, so that he can solve crimes and mysteries for anyone who can pay him. Due to his love of social stability, Inspector Godfrey loathes the politically radical labor organizer Karega and suspects him of having committed the murders. Yet he ultimately realizes Munira is the true culprit. Though impatient with Munira's apocalyptic religiosity, Inspector Godfrey wonders whether Munira is right about the evil and corruption in Ilmorog: specifically, Inspector Godfrey suspects MP Nderi wa Riera's tourist center is a front for sex-trafficking Kenyan girls to Europeans. On his way out of Ilmorog, he considers reporting his suspicions—but quickly convinces himself that it's not his job to enforce morality or make trouble for important people, only to solve specific crimes. Inspector Godfrey's amoral, apolitical social conservatism leads him to

ignore the possibly sexual exploitation of Kenyan girls, which suggests that in an unjust society with unjust laws, law enforcement professionals are unlikely to bring about true justice in the course of doing their jobs.

Mwathi wa Mugo – Ilmorog's "diviner" and mysterious spiritual leader, Mwathi wa Mugo advises the town elders on matters of spirituality and serious difficulty. When Wanja comes to Ilmorog seeking advice for her infertility, her grandmother Nyakinyua takes her to Mwathi wa Mugo, who suggests Wanja should have sex on the new moon to get pregnant but also accuses her of having sinned. Wanja takes his advice but does not confess to him that she killed her first baby. During Ilmorog's drought, Mwathi wa Mugo tells the village elders to sacrifice a goat and Abdulla's donkey; saving the donkey, which Abdulla loves, is part of Karega and Wanja's motivation to organize Ilmorog's delegation seeking aid from MP Nderi wa Riera to mitigate the drought's effects. The elders do sacrifice the goat, though not the donkey; when the drought ends, they credit Mwathi wa Mugo. When developers build part of the Trans-Africa Road through Mwathi wa Mugo's sacred land, they discover materials of archeological importance; the road is diverted, and academics descend on the site. The displacement of Mwathi wa Mugo by development (the road) and academics (formal, colonial education) represents European-controlled, capitalist modernity's destruction of Ilmorog's traditional way of life.

Njuguna – A traditional farmer and one of Ilmorog's elders, Njuguna often speaks up in favor of wrongheaded conservative ideas. For example, Njuguna and his other elderly farmer friends have a conversation suggesting that Ilmorog's drought is occurring because God is angry at humanity's arrogant technological advancements, specifically the moon landing. When Karega suggests a delegation to seek aid for Ilmorog's drought, Njuguna argues it's beneath the town's dignity to journey somewhere to get help and suggests the MP Nderi wa Riera should come to them instead—something that is clearly not going to happen. Eventually, Njuguna does join the delegation. When Wanja's sexual abuser Kimeria detains her, Njuguna, and Karega on the way—refusing to let them go until Wanja has sex with him—Njuguna argues that Wanja should submit to Kimeria's advances. He furthermore suggests that because Kimeria and Wanja have had previous sexual contact, Wanja is something like Kimeria's wife and, by implication, the situation is something like her fault. Njuguna's character adds nuance to the novel's criticism of colonialism and capitalism's destruction of Kenyan culture; while the novel clearly believes that the destruction of Kenyan culture is bad, its implicit criticism of the elderly, conservative, sexist Njuguna also suggests that Kenyan culture should be open to change and development, especially better technology and more gender equality.

Mukami – Mukami is Munira's favorite sibling, Ezekieli's daughter, and Karega's first love. Playful and rebellious, she socializes with the children of her father's farm employees, to her father's disapproval. When she meets Karega, the child of Ezekieli's farm employee Mariamu, she asks why he doesn't attend school—which motivates him to work more and earn tuition money so he can go to the same school as she does. Due to this event, Karega eventually attends the high school **Siriana**. As teenagers, Mukami and Karega have a romantic relationship. After they have sex for the first time, Mukami tells Karega that her father has discovered their relationship and has demanded that Mukami choose between Karega and her family—Ezekieli blames Karega's dead older brother, the freedom fighter Nding'uri, for the loss of his ear, which freedom fighters cut off during the independence struggles, and doesn't want Mukami socializing with anyone related to Nding'uri. Shortly afterward, Mukami dies by suicide, jumping off a cliff. Much later, when Munira and Karega are working together in Ilmorog, Munira learns the circumstances of Mukami's death and uses them as a pretext to fight with Karega, blaming Karega for the suicide—though in fact, Munira is angry with Karega because he's jealous of Karega's relationship with Wanja. Ezekieli's politically motivated interference in Mukami's teenage romantic life illustrates how male characters often treat female characters more as passive objects they can order around than as individuals with their own desires. Similarly, Munira using Mukami's suicide as a pretext to fight with Karega over Wanja hints that Munira doesn't always see Mukami or Wanja as active agents. Rather, he sees them as passive objects over which men like he and Karega can struggle.

Mariamu – Mariamu is Nding'uri and Karega's mother and Ezekieli's sometime employee. Munira, who was childhood friends with Nding'uri, recalls her as an impressive and religiously sincere person, though she did not attend church. After Nding'uri is born, Mariamu protests her husband's economic exploitation of her: he demands that she do farm labor for their employers, do all the household work, and do all the work to care for Nding'uri—while taking all the money that she earns. When Mariamu demands better treatment, her husband beats her. She leaves him, travels to Ezekieli's property, and asks to become a tenant farmer on his land. Ezekieli agrees, hoping he can exploit her sexually; when she successfully refuses him, however, he lets her keep working for him—by implication, because he's afraid she'll tell people he tried to commit adultery. This incident reveals the externally devout Ezekieli's religious hypocrisy. Much later, Nding'uri persuades Mariamu to reconcile with his father. This reconciliation results in Karega's birth but doesn't last; Mariamu leaves her husband again. Much later, while in jail for questioning about the murder-by-arson that Munira committed, Karega learns Mariamu has died and feels intense despair that he was never able to improve her material conditions; he feels she represents all the Kenyan workers exploited first under colonialism and then under capitalism.

Thus, Mariamu's life represents both the exploitation of Kenyan agricultural workers under colonialism and capitalism and the exploitation of women by men.

Nding'uri – Nding'uri is Mariamu's oldest son, Karega's much older brother, and Abdulla's friend. During the struggle for Kenyan independence from British colonial rule, he fights for freedom alongside Abdulla. At this time, Nding'uri is dating Kimeria's sister. Kimeria, working for the British, lures Nding'uri and Abdulla into a trap by offering to sell them weapons and tipping off the colonial police about the sale. Nding'uri is caught and executed; Abdulla escapes and vows revenge. Ezekieli believes that Nding'uri was involved in a group of freedom fighters cutting off Ezekieli's ear after he refused to swear a loyalty oath to them during the independence struggle. Partly for this reason, he later threatens to disown his daughter Mukami unless she ends her romance with Nding'uri's much younger brother Karega. The novel implies that this threat precipitates Mukami's death by suicide.

Fraudsham – Fraudsham is a racist, white, British man who serves as headmaster of the Kenyan boys' high school **Siriana**. He expels several students, including Chui and Munira, for organizing a strike to protest Fraudsham's policy that Kenyan students should eat poor food and rarely wear shoes in order to remain "true Africans." When the lawyer is a student at Siriana, Fraudsham gives a sermon decrying the execution of Peter Poole, a white man in Kenya who shot his Black servant to death for throwing stones at one of his dogs. Fraudsham is obsessed with his own dog, Lizzy. Lizzy dies while Karega is a student at Siriana. When Fraudsham insists that several students serve as pallbearers at the dog Lizzy's funeral, the incredulous students refuse, at which point Fraudsham tries to expel them. Many students, including Karega, strike in protest, demanding that an African headmaster replace Fraudsham and that Siriana develop a more Africa-centric curriculum. When Fraudsham cannot suppress the strike, he feels defeated and shortly thereafter retires. Fraudsham's overt racism and Europe-centric values represent the bad political content of colonial education, which Kenyan students must overcome to "decolonize" their minds.

Rev. Jerrod Brown – Rev. Jerrod Brown is a rich, influential Black Anglican minister and a friend of Munira's father Ezekieli. When Joseph gets sick on the way to the city, Ilmorog's delegation approaches Rev. Jerrod Brown's house seeking shelter and aid. Assuming the delegation members are beggars, Rev. Jerrod Brown gives a strained, unconvincing reading of a Bible passage to argue that God hates begging and sends them away. After MP Nderi wa Riera kickstarts the exploitative economic development of Ilmorog, Rev. Jerrod Brown becomes the minister at a new, large church there, All Saints Church, and buys several stores. After Munira is charged with murdering Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria, Rev. Jerrod Brown visits Munira together with Munira's family and claims he would have given Munira help and spiritual guidance if Munira had sought it; Munira reminds the Reverend how he turned away Ilmorog's delegation, of which Munira was a member, when they did come asking him for help. Rev. Jerrod Brown emphasizes how in post-Independence Kenya, Christianity is a tool hypocrites use to get rich and bolster their social status.

Akinyi – Akinyi is a factory working at **Theng'eta** Breweries and a member of the workers' movement Karega has helped organize. When the police arrest Karega after the murders of Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui, Akinyi alerts the other workers; subsequently, she visits Karega at the jail with a message from the workers: they will continue striking and fighting for justice. She also hints that Ilmorog's corrupt MP Nderi wa Riera has been assassinated. Her message gives Karega new hope and resolve to struggle against oppression; as such, Akinyi represents the resilience of Kenyan workers and workers in general.

Julia – Julia is Munira's wife and the mother of his two children. When Julia and Munira first met, she was not a Christian, and Munira found her sensuality attractive. After they married, however, she converted to please Munira's parents and became devout and unsexual. Munira, who resents Julia for praying before and after sex, moves out of their family home in Limuru to teach in Ilmorog, where he cheats on her with Wanja. Munira's treatment of Julia reveals his religious and sexual hypocrisy: though a Christian, he commits unrepentant adultery; though sexually repressed himself, he wants his wife to be sensual and sexy for his benefit.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM

In *Petals of Blood*, only when Kenya rejects capitalism will it be truly free of European colonialism. The British Empire colonized Kenya in the late 19th century. Though Kenya became independent in 1963, *Petals of Blood* suggests that Europeans use capitalism to continue economically colonizing and exploiting Kenya. The novel illustrates Europe's capitalist exploitation of Kenya clearly through one of its major characters, Abdulla. Prior to Kenya's independence, Abdulla worked at a factory under terrible conditions. Though the workers tried to improve conditions by striking, the colonial police used violence to break the strikes. While working at the factory, Abdulla joined the

rebellion against the British colonial government because he hoped that after independence, the country's factories would "belong to the people"—that is, he hoped that ending colonialism would abolish capitalism's system of private ownership. Abdulla's motives for becoming a freedom fighter suggest that a major reason for rejecting white political control of Kenya was to end Europeans' capitalist economic exploitation of Kenyan workers.

Yet after Independence, Abdulla cannot realize his dreams of Kenyan economic freedom. Though Kenya has rejected British *political* control, it has retained the capitalist economic system European colonists introduced and remains under Europe's *economic* control. While fighting for Kenya's freedom, Abdulla received a crippling leg wound. Under post-Independence capitalism, he cannot get a job because employers refuse to hire a crippled man. After many years, Abdulla starts a small business brewing a drink called **Theng'eta** with his friend Wanja. Yet when an economic development scheme of politician Nderi wa Riera leads to a bank repossessing Wanja's grandmother Nyakinyua's land, Abdulla and Wanja sell their business to ensure that the bank doesn't take Nyakinyua's home. Due to a deceitful contract, Abdulla and Wanja lose not only their brewery but also their legal right to brew alcohol when they sell their business. A European-American (UK/U.S.-owned) group buys Theng'eta Breweries, and a few European-backed Kenyan elites, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria run it locally; meanwhile, Abdulla becomes impoverished, and Wanja becomes a sex worker. Abdulla's history shows how international capitalism introduced by European colonizers exploits Kenyan workers and leads to European control of the Kenyan economy. Thus, the novel argues that Kenya has to reject capitalism to truly free itself from colonialism.

EDUCATION

In *Petals of Blood*, there is no such thing as an apolitical education. A person's education shapes how they think, so education is fundamentally important to politics. The novel illustrates the political nature of education through the boys' boarding school, **Siriana**, which several major characters attend, including Munira and Chui. Munira and Chui attend Siriana together prior to Kenya's independence. Their first British headmaster is fond of (if condescending to) the Kenyan students. Yet the novel suggests that under this headmaster, Siriana's curriculum focuses exclusively on European writers and European sports—a focus that teaches the Kenyan students that Europe is the center of the world and that they should try to act European. This implicit teaching illustrates how a school's curriculum signals what a school thinks is important—and thus carries a political message. Siriana's next British headmaster, Fraudsham, is more overtly racist: he won't let the students wear European clothes or wear shoes except to church and forces them to eat dirty food because he believes they should be not "black Europeans but true Africans." In protest, Chui and Munira lead a student strike and are expelled. Their protest shows self-respect: Fraudsham's definition of "true Africans" is false and racist. Yet Munira and Chui seem outraged in part because Fraudsham claims they can't act European—which suggests that Siriana's implicit political curriculum has caused them to internalize Europe-centric attitudes and values.

Neither Chui nor Munira develops beyond the Europe-centric attitudes and values they learn at Siriana. After Fraudsham retires as headmaster, Chui replaces him—and refuses the students' demands for an Africa-centric curriculum, requiring that the students read only English writers and learn only European history. When the students strike in protest, he expels the ten ringleaders, including budding political activist Karega. Much later, when Munira and Karega are teaching at the same school, Munira targets Karega for talking to the students about "blackness" and "African peoples" and eventually gets him fired. Though Munira has a personal motive for hurting Karega—Karega is involved with Munira's former lover Wanja—the means he uses to attack Karega suggest that he, like Chui, permanently internalized Siriana's Europe-centric values. Chui and Munira's failure to move beyond their early education's damaging political content suggests a bad education can permanently warp people's political consciousness—so a good, politically informed educational system is necessary for political progress.

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND EXPLOITATION

In *Petals of Blood*, Kenyan women suffer specifically sexual forms of economic exploitation. Even the novel's more politically enlightened male characters sometimes fail to see women as people, not just objects of male sexual desire. The novel illustrates the economic exploitation of female sexuality primarily through the character Wanja. When Wanja is an adolescent, her parents violently beat her for walking home with a male classmate whose family is "even poorer" than they are. Her parents' reaction implies that they see Wanja as a commodity they don't want to trade cheaply. Perhaps rebelling against her parents, Wanja starts skipping class to meet her father's adult married friend Kimeria, who impregnates her. When Wanja goes to Kimeria for help, he mocks her. In desperation, knowing she can't support a baby, Wanja abandons her baby to die and starts working in bars. In bars, Wanja faces sexual harassment from employers and patrons; at one point, a German patron implied to be a sex trafficker targeting Kenyan girls almost rapes her before she manages to escape. After years of relentless sexual violence and exploitation, Wanja starts a brothel, reasoning that as a sex worker, she at least benefits from her own commodification. Yet Wanja gives up sex work after murdering Kimeria—which

suggests that becoming a sex worker was a symptom of her earlier sexual trauma and that she is better off obtaining agency some other way.

Even male characters sympathetic to women treat Wanja badly in sexual situations. The political activist Karega sees sexism as a pernicious tool that employers use to prevent male and female employees from uniting in solidarity. Yet at one point, while alone with Wanja, he removes her clothes and penetrates her while she says, "oh please Karega don't." Even though she subsequently participates in the sex and pursues a romantic relationship with Karega, his initial disregard for her explicit lack of consent shows he doesn't consistently respect her as an autonomous individual. Similarly, Wanja's friend Abdulla admires Wanja's intelligence and helps her on various occasions. Yet at one point, he goes to her house to have sex with her, which the book describes in the following way: "he took her and she did not resist." Karega and Abdulla—two of the novel's more politically enlightened male characters—sometimes treat Wanja as a sexual object to "take" rather than an individual who needs to give consent. Their poor treatment of her shows how deep-rooted the problems of sexual violence and exploitation are, suggesting that even greater economic and racial equality may not solve gender inequality.

RELIGION, HYPOCRISY, AND DELUSION

Petals of Blood represents religion either as a tool hypocrites use to get rich and oppress deluded believers or as a delusion that prevents believers from taking effective action. In other words, religion prevents political progress by helping the powerful manipulate the oppressed into passivity or collaboration with their oppression. The novel reveals many religious characters to be opportunistic hypocrites. For example, Munira's father Ezekieli, a wealthy Presbyterian farm-owner, hires religious workers and worships with them to keep them content with low pay; he dismisses those who ask for better pay as "devilish spirits." Though a married man, he tries to exploit one of his workers, Mariamu, sexually. Thus Ezekieli—like many characters in the novel—uses religion to hide his greed and lust and to convince the people he abuses to accept the abuse passively. Other characters are genuine believers. Munira himself is tepidly religious for much of the novel but converts to a zealous evangelical Protestantism near the end. The novel implies that Munira converts because he is so disgusted with the economic oppression and sexual exploitation he has witnessed throughout his life that he wants to believe in the "new earth"—the fundamentally changed reality—that Christianity promises will arrive after Jesus Christ's second coming. Yet it is precisely Munira's religion that prevents him from taking effective action to alleviate oppression and exploitation. He comes to believe that humanity cannot fix its own problems and must wait for God to fix them. When he finally does take action, setting fire to Wanja's brothel and killing the villainous exploiters Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria, it's because a voice he hallucinated tells him that Wanja is an evil temptress. In other words, Munira *accidentally* commits political assassinations while trying to commit an act of misogynistic, religious violence that a hallucinated voice dictated to him. This set of events shows how religion can manipulate believers into collaborating with oppression: to make the world a better place, Munira tries to attack Wanja, another oppressed person, rather than Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria, their oppressors. In this way, *Petals of Blood* represents religious believers either as hypocrites or as dangerously deluded and religion as a force that impedes political progress.

LAND AND NATURE

Petals of Blood suggests that people have a special relationship to the land from which their forebears came—but that people must still exert careful, custodial control over the land, because nature can be cruel. The novel asserts at various points that people have a special relationship to their land. For example, when the people of Ilmorog are traveling to the city to ask for aid during a drought, they feel that the Kenyan freedom fighters who died for the land they're crossing have "hallowed it," that is, made the land sacred. In the same vein, the anti-capitalist political organizer Karega thinks of the land as a mother or father and of the Kenyan people as its children—which is why individual people shouldn't own the land any more than one child should occupy all a parent's time to the detriment of other siblings. Despite hinting at a special relationship between Kenyan land and Kenyan people, however, the novel shows that nature can be cruel: it describes famines caused by natural events such as locusts and drought and calls "uncontrolled nature" a "threat" to people's flourishing. It also subtly undermines statements by Ilmorog farmers who suggest that harvests are good or bad according to God's will (and so better science and farming techniques are beside the point) by hinting that European colonists' poor land management and clear-cutting of forests made Kenyan harvests worse. In this way, the novel simultaneously asserts that people have a special, close relationship to their ancestral land—and that people need to exert control over land and nature to keep nature from hurting or even killing them.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FLOWERS/THENG'ETA

In *Petals of Blood*, flowers—in particular, the flowering plant Theng'eta—represent the potential of Kenya and Kenya's people, which capitalist oppressors exploit. In the first major scene involving flowers, the schoolteacher Munira takes his students outside to teach them about flower anatomy. The students discover flowers with "petals of blood," suggesting the bloodshed Kenya suffered to achieve its independence from British colonial oppression. Then one student finds a faded red flower whose insides a worm has eaten, which in turn suggests how a small capitalist elite in Kenya has collaborated with European capitalists to exploit—and metaphorically devour—Kenya's natural resources and its people.

This symbolism becomes more focused with the introduction of Theng'eta, a native plant with "four tiny red petals." Historically, the people in the Kenyan town where the story takes place brewed Theng'eta as a traditional drink that could inspire visions and bring fertility; the British colonial government attempted to ban the drink, which they believed made Kenyans rebellious. Theng'eta's backstory associates it with Kenyan culture and freedom. Yet after small business-owner Abdulla and barmaid Wanja begin brewing Theng'eta in larger quantities and selling it for profit, they lose their brewery to a more successful businessman, Mzigo—who patents Theng'eta to prevent others from selling it. After Theng'eta is privatized, it loses its cultural, historical, and spiritual properties; it becomes a mere alcoholic drink to dull the minds of poor workers who don't want to face their oppressed reality. Moreover, a company based in the U.S. and UK buys Mzigo's Theng'eta company while leaving Mzigo and his fellow Kenyan elites Chui and Kimeria to run the business. Thus, the Theng'eta flower pointedly represents how a small group of Kenyan elites, with backing from European capitalists, have privatized and exploited Kenya's common culture and resources to the detriment of ordinary Kenyan people.

FIRE

In *Petals of Blood*, fire represents how repression and shame can lead to oppressive violence—with unexpected consequences. Fire appears early in the book, in a newspaper article explaining that three Kenyan businessmen, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria, have died by arson in the Kenyan town Ilmorog. The book then flashes back to the earlier lives of various people of interest in the murder. The novel reveals that Ilmorog's schoolteacher Munira, after paying for his first sexual experience as a teenager, felt so much shame and religious guilt that he built an effigy of the sex worker's house and set it on fire. When he failed to put the fire out completely, the resulting blaze nearly burned down a barn. This incident links sexual repression and shame to fire and its out-of-control consequences. Later, Ilmorog's barmaid Wanja tells Munira that her cousin's estranged husband—who used to beat her cousin and steal her cousin's money, until her cousin left him—set her aunt's hut on fire and killed her by arson while trying to murder his wife. Wanja's story connects the symbol of fire, representing sexual repression, to the violent oppression of women. The novel thus implies that men's sexual repression or shame leads them to attack women. The novel's climax bears out this implication. Though the police suspected that the labor organizer Karega may have killed the businessmen, Munira eventually confesses that he burned down the brothel where the businessmen died because he wanted to kill Wanja, his ex-lover and the brothel's manager. Munira was trying to "save" Karega, another ex-lover of Wanja's, from her sexual attractions, which he believed to be demonically powerful. Munira expresses his religiously inflected fear and hatred of Wanja's sexuality by trying to set her on fire—again, fire symbolizes the violent outbursts that sexual repression can occasion. Yet Munira's fire kills three businessmen, not Wanja, so that fire also symbolizes how uncontrollable and unpredictable such violence can be.

SIRIANA

In *Petals of Blood*, the boys' high school Siriana represents how British colonial education indoctrinated Kenyan students in racist, Europe-centric, and capitalist beliefs and how successive generations of Kenyan students educated this way must "decolonize" their minds. The novel first mentions Siriana when the schoolteacher Munira tells his friends Abdulla and Wanja that when he was a teenager, Siriana expelled him and his classmate Chui for organizing a strike. The strike was protesting their white headmaster Fraudsham, who refused to let the Kenyan students eat decent food or wear shoes except on Sundays, because Fraudsham wanted them to be not "black Europeans but true Africans." As Fraudsham's idea of "true Africans" involves hunger and poverty, Munira and Chui's student strike is clearly protesting racism, demonstrating that Siriana hasn't fully indoctrinated them. Yet Munira and Chui seem offended that Fraudsham thinks they can't be "black Europeans," which suggests they have absorbed Sirana's Europe-centric worldview. Later, Karega—a former grammar-school student of Munira's who went on to attend Siriana after Kenya became independent from Britain—tells Munira that he, too, participated in a student strike against Fraudsham. The strikers were demanding to learn about Africa, instead of only European history and European literature. After Fraudsham retired, Chui replaced him as headmaster. Karega thought Chui would sympathize with the strikers' demands—but Chui insisted on a Europe-centric curriculum too, showing that he had not succeeded in "decolonizing" his mind after his own indoctrination at Siriana.

At the novel's end, Abdulla's young ward Joseph is attending Siriana after Kenya's independence. Joseph mentions to Abdulla that Chui's murder interrupted a strike the students were planning to protest Chui's business interests, to improve conditions for teachers and staff, and to demand a curriculum "related to the liberation of our people." With each successive generation of Siriana students, the strikers demand more and so decolonize their minds more: Munira and Chui's strike rejects outright racism; Karega's strike rejects racism and a Europe-centric worldview; Joseph's strike rejects racism, a Europe-centric worldview, and capitalist exploitation of staff and teachers. Thus, the characters' interactions with Siriana show gradual, generational progress in "decolonizing" the mind after colonialism.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Petals of Blood* published in 2005.

Chapter 1 Quotes

'We must always be ready to plant the seed in these last days before His second coming. All the signs—strife, killing, wars, blood—are prophesied here.'

'How long have you been in Ilmorog?' asked the tall one, to change the subject from this talk of the end of the world and Christ's second coming. He was a regular churchgoer and did not want to be caught on the wrong side.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira (speaker), Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo, The Lawyer

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

Two police officers, one short and one tall, are bringing Munira in for questioning about the murder-by-arson of Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo. When Munira brings his Bible with him, one policeman comments on it, at which point Munira starts talking about needing to "be ready to plant the seed in these last days."

Munira's religiosity shows European culture's continued "colonization" of Kenyan minds even after Kenya gained independence from British colonial control in 1963. Because white colonizers and missionaries brought Christianity to Kenya, the intense Christianity of a Kenyan man like Munira shows that even after gaining political independence from Britain, white European culture still lingers in the minds of many Kenyan people. Munira first absorbed Christianity from his pro-colonial father and from his colonial education at Siriana, the British-run boys' high school he attended. His family context and Eurocentric education made him vulnerable to religious zealotry in adulthood.

Munira's intense Christianity causes him to misdiagnose political problems as religious phenomena. Though Munira doesn't explain which "strife, killing, wars, [and] blood" he means, he could be referring to several events. By "strife" and "killing," he could mean the assassinations of progressive political reformers, including the assassination of a man Munira personally knows, the lawyer. By "wars," he could mean the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952 – 1960), the war between British colonial forces and Kenyan guerrilla fighters that preceded Kenyan independence.

White-supremacist colonialism and exploitative capitalism caused this violence—yet Munira chooses to understand it not in political terms but in religious ones, interpreting it as a harbinger of Jesus Christ's "second coming," a Christian religious belief that Jesus Christ will return to earth and judge all humanity at the world's end. This shows how religious belief can cause people to mistake political problems for religious phenomena, making them ineffective or harmful political actors.

A man, believed to be a trade-union agitator, has been held after a leading industrialist and two educationists, well known as the African directors of the internationally famous Theng'eta Breweries and Enterprises Ltd, were last night burnt to death in Ilmorog, only hours after taking a no-nonsense-no-pay-rise decision.

Related Characters: Karega, Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

After the police arrest the union organizer Karega in connection with the murders-by-arson of Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo, a newspaper publishes a lurid article about the case. The article shows media bias against protesting workers and for Kenyan economic elites.

The article calls Karega an "agitator," a word with negative connotations, though all he has done is organize workers to help them bargain for better wages. Kimeria was a known collaborator with brutal white colonizers prior to Kenya's independence, yet the newspaper respectfully refers to him "a leading industrialist." It calls Chui and Mzigo "educationists" even though Chui was neglecting the prestigious school he ran, Siriana, in favor of his business interests, and Mzigo as an educational administrator largely ignored requests from rural Ilmorog's primary school for new teachers. By calling Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo's decision not to give workers a pay raise a "no-nonsense" choice, the newspaper implies they made the right pragmatic decision. The biased way in which the newspaper describes each man shows its anti-worker, pro-capitalist slant.

The article's language suggests that it is biased in favor of Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo out of racial and cultural pride. They were Theng'eta Breweries' "African directors," which implies that the other directors aren't African and thus that the murder victims were among relatively few Black African people high up in an "internationally famous" Kenya-based company. Yet Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo's participation in the Breweries' board of directors basically gives cover to a largely white-owned company exploiting a Kenyan natural resource, Theng'eta, associated with Kenya's land and people. Thus, the novel suggests that racial representation in the upper echelons of international capitalism isn't a good thing—it just distracts from international capitalism's racist dynamics and its negative effects on the majority of Kenyan people.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ They nearly all had one thing in common: submission to the Lord. They called him Brother Ezekieli, our brother in Christ, and they would gather in the yard of the house after work for prayers and thanksgiving. There were of course some who had devilish spirits which drove them to demand higher wages and create trouble on the farm and they would be dismissed.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira, Ezekieli

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Munira is traveling to visit his family, including his father Ezekieli. As Munira travels, the narration describes Ezekieli's farm and the workers he employs. Ezekieli's exploitation of his religious workers exemplifies how the novel represents religious people as either hypocritical or deluded and ineffectual in changing unjust systems such as capitalism.

Ezekieli is a religious hypocrite. The passage implies that he hires Christian workers because they think of him as a "brother in Christ," almost a family member, and so are less likely to realize that he is exploiting them economically. The Christian bible criticizes the exploitation of poor people and says people who hoard their money rather than sharing it are unlikely to receive salvation; as such, Ezekieli clearly deploys his religion hypocritically, professing to believe in the Christian God while engaging in economic practices antithetical to Christian ethics, to get rich off his poor workers.

Meanwhile, Christianity deludes the poor workers. They assume overgenerously that Ezekieli is their religious "Brother," even though he is a hypocrite who exploits them. They also seem willing to believe that those among them who want "higher wages" must be troublemaking "devilish spirits." Thus, the novel suggests that Christianity makes workers passive and gullible in the face of exploitation and manipulation, preventing them from bettering their material circumstances.

❝ He stole a matchbox, collected a bit of grass and dry cowdung and built an imitation of Amina's house at Kamiritho where he had sinned against the Lord, and burnt it. He watched the flames and he felt truly purified by fire. He went to bed at ease with himself and peaceful in his knowledge of being accepted by the Lord. Shalom. But the cowdung had retained the fire and at night the wind fanned it into flames which would have licked up the whole barn had it not been discovered in time.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira, Wanja, Karega, Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

As Munira travels home to visit his family, he recalls an event from his adolescence after he had his first sexual

encounter with a sex worker named Amina. Due to his Christian upbringing, he felt such intense guilt over this sexual encounter that he created an effigy of Amina's house and set it on fire, accidentally almost burning down a barn.

This anecdote begins the novel's fire symbolism. In the novel, fire symbolizes the out-of-control violence that can arise from shame and repression, whether political or sexual. Young Munira experienced intense sexual shame due to his religious belief that he had "sinned." The sexual repression that Christianity taught him made him want to "purif[y]" himself after sex, and the only way he could regain inner peace (*Shalom* means "peace" in Hebrew) was by symbolically destroying the woman with whom he "sinned." Yet Munira's sexual repression and desire to purify himself almost led to out-of-control destructive results, as the fire he started spread without his knowledge.

This anecdote foreshadows the later revelation that Munira set the fire that killed Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo in an attempt to murder Wanja. Just as adolescent Munira commits symbolic murder-by-arson to purify himself, figuratively destroying the sex worker he frequented, so adult Munira will try to commit murder-by-arson to "save" Karega from Wanja's sexuality. Munira's symbolic and actual violence against women shows how male sexual repression can lead to misogynistic violence.

❝ 'But boys were always more confident about the future than us girls. They seemed to know what they wanted to become later in life: whereas with us girls the future seemed vague . . . It was as if we knew that no matter what efforts we put into our studies, our road led to the kitchen and to the bedroom.'

Related Characters: Wanja (speaker), Karega, Abdulla, Kimeria, Joseph

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Wanja decides to start working for Abdulla at his bar so that Abdulla's current young employee, Joseph, will have time to go to school. While celebrating her decision, Wanja tells Munira and Abdulla about her own schooldays, including a conversation she had with one of her classmates, a poor boy who wanted to become an engineer, and reflects on how her male classmates seemed to have more ambitions than she and her female classmates did.

This quotation suggests that due to sexism, working-class women and girls in capitalist societies have even fewer options than working-class men do. The major working-class male characters in the novel have jobs unrelated to their sexuality: Abdulla is a freedom fighter and then a shopkeeper, while Karega works as a teacher, a dockworker, a plantation worker, a factory worker, and finally a union organizer. By contrast, Wanja works primarily as a bargirl—a job that requires her to perform sexual attractiveness—or as a sex worker and brothel owner. Many male consumers desire sexual access to women; therefore, capitalist dynamics funnel women with otherwise limited employment options toward "the bedroom," whether they want to be there or not.

This quotation foreshadows Wanja's murder of Kimeria, the man who abused and impregnated her when she was a schoolgirl and later pays her for sex her when she becomes a sex worker. Wanja clearly resents that capitalist dynamics always lead her "to the kitchen and to the bedroom." When she finally decides to quit sex work, she calls Kimeria to her brothel with promises of dinner and sex, intending to humiliate him—but when he shows up while she's cooking, she impulsively stabs him to death with a sharp kitchen implement. Thus, the novel suggests that forcing poor women and girls into "the kitchen" and "the bedroom" ultimately ends badly for men, as women and girls will struggle violently to escape their sexual and economic exploitation.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ We are all searchers for a tiny place in God's corner to shelter us for a time from treacherous winds and rains and drought. This was all that I had wanted him to see: that the force he sought could only be found in the blood of the Lamb.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira (speaker), Wanja, Karega, Abdulla, Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

While the police are detaining Munira in jail, he begins writing an account of his relationships with Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla, all of whom are suspects in the murders of Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo. Reflecting on Karega's hope for a just and equal world, Munira writes that Karega's hopes are misleading—Karega will only find solace if he accepts Christianity.

In his writing, Munira implies that religious belief often initially arises as a response to suffering. Everyone wants "shelter [...] from treacherous winds and rains and drought," a description that refers to nature's cruelty literally and to life's cruelty figuratively. Some people, including Munira, believe they can only find that "shelter" in God. The phrase "the blood of the Lamb," meanwhile, refers specifically to Christian belief in humanity's redemption through Jesus Christ. References to Christ as a lamb appear in the Biblical New Testament several times—like in John 1:29, when John the Baptist refers to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," and in Revelation 7:14, which figuratively describes people who have received salvation from Jesus Christ as those who "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Munira's belief that Karega can only find what he seeks—justice or peace, for instance—in "the blood of the Lamb" exemplifies a Protestant Christian doctrine known as "justification by faith alone." According to this doctrine, human beings can do nothing to save themselves. They can only be saved through faith in God, whose activity will bring about redemption and paradise in the afterlife. By contrast, Karega believes that human beings can save themselves from exploitative political systems through organizing. Munira's viewpoint, antithetical to Karega's, illustrates why the novel represents Christian religious beliefs as an active hindrance to effective participation in politics.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Kenyan people had always been ready to resist foreign control and exploitation. The story of this heroic resistance: who will sing it? Their struggles to defend their land, their wealth, their lives: who'll tell of it?

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira, Karega

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Here the novel's narration is explaining that historians biased in favor of colonialism tend to argue that indigenous Kenyan people don't have a long presence on Kenyan land and so have no special right to it. Against such historians, the novel's narration argues that indigenous Kenyan people have a long history on the land and have fought multiple different attempts at "foreign control and exploitation" over the centuries.

This quotation implies one moral argument against colonialism: because indigenous Kenyan people have a long-standing relationship with the land, they have a special relationship to it and thus a greater right to live in it than colonizers who have arrived more recently. The quotation also suggests that historians and intellectuals are biased in favor of colonial powers. The rhetorical questions about "who will sing" Kenyan people's "heroic resistance" or "tell of" their "struggles to defend" themselves imply that almost no one is singing or talking about these historically important events.

Historians' bias may partly explain why Munira and Karega learned only about Europe, not Africa, at Siriana. It's not only that the school has a Eurocentric and implicitly white-supremacist curriculum (though it does), but also that historians biased in favor of colonizing nations just haven't produced accurate histories of Kenya or Africa more generally, so students can't read them. The quotation thus serves as a warning against assuming official histories of Africa are complete or accurate and a kind of advertisement for the novel itself as an alternative, technically fictional yet spiritually more accurate portrait of Kenya.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ We can imagine the fatal meeting between the native and the alien. The missionary had traversed the seas, the forests, armed with the desire for profit that was his faith and light and the gun that was his protection. He carried the Bible; the soldier carried the gun; the administrator and the settler carried the coin. Christianity, Commerce, Civilization: the Bible, the Coin, the Gun: Holy Trinity.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira, Nderi wa Riera, Ezekieli, Julia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Munira is traveling to Limuru to tell his wife Julia that he has been invited to have tea with politician Nderi wa Riera. As he approaches Limuru, where he grew up, he thinks about his relationship to his father Ezekieli and Ezekieli's conversion to Christianity. The narration transitions from Ezekieli's conversion to an imagined first encounter between indigenous Kenyans and European missionaries,

"the native and the alien."

This quotation makes clear that capitalism, Christianity, and white colonialism are so intertwined in Africa that they need to be considered together. "Christianity, Commerce, [and] Civilization" is the famous motto of the Scottish Christian missionary David Livingstone (1813 – 1873), who made multiple expeditions to Africa. An advocate for slavery's abolition, Livingstone believed that if indigenous African peoples became Christians and accepted "Commerce," or capitalist free trade, they would become "civilized," white people would respect them more, and slavery would end.

By asserting that the profit motive, not Christian zeal, really motivated white missionaries to Africa like Livingstone—it's "the desire for profit" that is the missionary's true "faith and light"—the quotation suggests that colonialism was a financial project to extract wealth from Africa. White European colonizers didn't care about converting African people to Christianity or "civilizing" them, but they used religious missions as an alibi for their violence and greed. Hence, the missionary's real "Holy Trinity" (a Christian theological term for the three entities that comprise the one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) is actually "the Bible" (Christian cultural chauvinism), "the Coin" (capitalist greed), and "the Gun" (violence used to protect and enforce Christianity and capitalism).

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Haunting memories from the past; the year of the locust; the year of the armyworms; the year of the famine of cassava […] uncontrolled nature was always a threat to human endeavor.

Related Characters: Karega

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Ilmorog is suffering a drought that threatens farmers' livelihoods and townspeople's lives. Karega, thinking about the looming disaster, recalls previous examples of "uncontrolled nature" that had disastrous results for Kenya. The "locust" is a swarming grasshopper that in large numbers will eat, damage, and destroy crops. Armyworms are a kind of caterpillar that will eat and destroy both crops and pastureland for livestock. Cassava is a tuber very commonly eaten in various parts of Africa. By listing these various natural disasters—a plague of locusts, armyworm pests, and cassava crop failure—Karega makes very clear the kind of "threat" that unpredictable nature can pose to human survival: it can destroy our food and starve us to death.

These thoughts of Karega's indicate that while Kenyan people may have a special relationship to their ancestral land, they still need to be wary of nature and control it as much as they can, because it often poses a "threat" to their survival. Karega's thoughts also foreshadow how he will eventually abandon his interest in Kenya's past in favor of focusing on Kenya's present and future. Though the pre-capitalist past may have had a superior economic system in Karega's view, it had less developed science and technology and was therefore more vulnerable to "uncontrolled nature." Therefore, Karega eventually decides that fighting for a post-capitalist, scientifically sophisticated future is better than trying to return to a pre-capitalist past.

The Journey Quotes

❝ 'Why should we fail, though? We are now going as a community. The voice of the people is truly the voice of God. And who is an MP? Isn't he the people's voice in the ruling house?'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Wanja, Nderi wa Riera

Related Themes:

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Ilmorog has decided to send a delegation to Nairobi to ask their political representative, Nderi wa Riera, for aid with the ongoing drought. One night on the journey to Nairobi, Karega and Wanja end up talking alone. When Wanja expresses doubts about whether the delegation will succeed, Karega asks, "Why should we fail, though?" What he says afterward illustrates both the role of politics in his life and his democratic political beliefs.

When Karega says that "the voice of people is truly the voice of God," it seems unlikely that he is literally referring to God speaking through the people, as he expresses contempt for religious belief at various times in the novel. Rather, Karega means that there is something sacred, even if not in a strictly religious sense, about a community assembling to express its political desires and needs. By

declaring political assembly and democratic organizing sacred, Karega reveals that belief in egalitarian politics serve the central role in his life that belief in God serves for religious people.

When Karega describes an MP (minister of parliament) as "the people's voice in the ruling house," he means that political representatives should consider themselves not self-interested individuals but mouthpieces for expressing the will of their constituents. As it turns out, Nderi wa Riera is a self-interested and selfish politician who views his constituents merely as a means of enriching himself in a corrupt capitalist system. Yet Karega's vision of the people's voice as "the voice of God" and elected political representatives as "the people's voice in the ruling house" proposes a sacred view of democratic politics that both provides an ideal for the novel and indexes how far post-Independence Kenya has yet to go in realizing the ideal.

❝ 'To understand the present . . . you must understand the past. To know where you are, you must know where you came from, don't you think?'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Wanja, Nderi wa Riera

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

A delegation from drought-stricken Ilmorog is traveling toward Nairobi to seek aid from their political representative Nderi wa Riera. Traveling as part of the delegation, Karega and Wanja are having a conversation when Wanja abruptly asks Karega whether he thinks about the past. Karega's response indirectly explains his intense interest in Kenyan history and his dissatisfaction with the education he received at Siriana.

Karega believes that if you want to "understand the present," then "you must understand the past." He compares it to trying to orient yourself physically: if you want to "know where you are," then "you must know where you came from." Without a point of comparison to your current location, you won't be able to locate yourself in the geography you're occupying. Karega's argument that you need to understand history to understand the present suggests that he isn't really interested in Kenyan history for its own sake—but he is interested in understanding Kenya's confused, hyper-capitalist, post-Independence present, and he thinks knowing the country's history is necessary to that.

Karega's argument reveals one reason why he wanted so badly to learn African history at Siriana. It wasn't just that Siriana's focus on Europe to the exclusion of Africa was implicitly white supremacist. It was also that learning African history was necessary to understanding contemporary Kenya. By depriving Kenyan students of African history classes, Siriana hindered their attempts to understand their own lives.

❝ To redeem the land: to fight so that the industries like the shoe-factory which had swallowed his sweat could belong to the people: so that his children could one day have enough to eat and to wear under adequate shelter from rain: so that they would say in pride, my father died that I might live: this had transformed him from a slave before a boss into a man.

Related Characters: Abdulla

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

As the delegation seeking aid for drought-stricken Ilmorog travels toward Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, Abdulla reminisces about his past and recalls why he joined the Mau Mau, the indigenous Kenyan guerilla fighters who rebelled against Kenya's British colonial government during the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952 – 1960) shortly prior to Kenya's independence in 1963.

Abdulla chose to join the rebellion against the British colonial government because he wanted not only Kenyan self-rule but also a socialist or communist economic system in Kenya instead of a capitalist one. He wanted not only to "redeem" (that is, take back) "the land" from the British but also to make "industries like the shoe-factory" where he worked public assets "belong[ing] to the people" rather than private owners, a socialist economic move. Thus, the quotation emphasizes that Kenyan freedom fighters had anti-capitalist as well as anti-colonial motives for rebelling against British rule.

In addition, Abdulla sees his desire for a socialist economic system as what "transformed him from a slave before a boss into a man." By describing his former self as "a slave before a

boss," Abdulla implies that under capitalism, sufficiently exploitative and racialized employee-employer relationships aren't meaningfully different from slave-slave boss relationships. Abdulla is expressing a belief, which recurs throughout the novel, that international capitalism is a form of racialized economic oppression continuous with white colonialism of Africa and, before that, the slave trade.

> The others surrounded the sculpture and commented on the fighter's hair, the heavy lips and tongue in open laughter, and the sword around the waist. But why did he possess breasts, somebody asked: it was as if it was a man and a woman in one: how could that be?
>
> They were arguing about it until Nyakinyua almost silenced them with her simple logic.
>
> 'A man cannot have a child without a woman. A woman cannot bear a child without a man. And was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeem this country?'

Related Characters: Nyakinyua (speaker), Karega, Nderi wa Riera, The Lawyer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Nyakinyua and other members of Ilmorog's delegation to Nairobi have taken shelter at the lawyer's house while they wait for Ilmorog's political representative, Nderi wa Riera, to return from a business trip. The delegation members admire the art in the lawyer's house, including a sculpture of an anonymous, androgynous Kenyan freedom fighter.

The sculpture and Nyakinyua's interpretation of it express the novel's view that women as well as men are necessary to struggles for political freedom. Because the sculpture depicts an anonymous freedom fighter, it represents not a particular person but all Kenyan people who fought British colonialism. The sculpture has enough masculine characteristics that the onlookers interpret it as a "he," yet it also has "breasts." The sculpture has both male and female physical characteristics to emphasize that both men and women, in Nyakinyua's words, "fought to redeem" Kenya from British colonial rule.

Nyakinyua argues that it's not just a contingent historical fact that both men and women fought for Kenyan freedom but a necessity to any nation's survival. Because "a man cannot have a child without a woman" and "a woman cannot bear a child without a man," no nation can reproduce itself—literally—without biologically male and female members. In addition, Nyakinyua's words have a figurative reading: if the "child" represents new life and thus the future, Nyakinyua is suggesting that collaboration between women and men is necessary to create a good future. This suggestion accords with Karega's belief, expressed elsewhere in the novel, that sexism impedes social progress by preventing oppressed men and women from collaborating to combat their oppression.

> 'I saw in the cities of America white people also begging . . . I saw white women selling their bodies for a few dollars. In America vice is a selling commodity. I worked alongside white and black workers in a Detroit factory. We worked overtime to make a meagre living. I saw a lot of unemployment in Chicago and other cities. I was confused. So I said: let me return to my home, now that the black man has come to power. And suddenly as in a flash of lightning I saw we were serving the same monster-god as they were in America.'

Related Characters: The Lawyer (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Wanja, Karega, Abdulla, Nderi wa Riera, Fraudsham

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

While the Ilmorog delegation is staying at the lawyer's house in Nairobi, waiting for Nderi wa Riera to return from a business trip, the lawyer gets to talking with Munira, Wanja, Karega, and Abdulla about his own past. Like Munira and Karega, the lawyer attended Siriana. While he was at Siriana, Kenya's British colonial government executed real-life historical figure Peter Poole, the only white person Kenya's British colonial government ever executed for murdering a Black person. Siriana's headmaster Fraudsham harshly criticized the execution, which opened the lawyer's eyes to the white supremacy in the school's administration. He traveled to the U.S. looking for an example of a free country, only to find that the U.S. was both violently racist and deeply economically unequal.

The lawyer's experiences in the U.S. make clear that while capitalism has racially disparate effects due to racist systems, it harms poor people of all races. In the U.S., he sees poor white people "begging," workers both white and

Black working overtime just to earn a "meagre" amount of money, and mass "unemployment." He also sees "white women selling their bodies for a few dollars." The example of poor white sex workers in the U.S. makes very clear that the sexual-economic exploitation of women and girls under capitalism, which occurs throughout the novel, is not a problem particular to Kenya or Africa but one that occurs wherever women and girls are impoverished.

Through this account of the lawyer's experiences, the novel implicitly argues that while capitalism in Kenya perpetuates racial as well as economic inequality, capitalism—the "monster-god," as the lawyer calls it—is a problem for workers of all races. Thus, people should organize across racial and ethnic groups to end their own exploitation.

❝ He did not therefore want to hear any more nonsense about African teachers, African history, African literature, African this and that: whoever heard of African, Chinese, or Greek mathematics and science? What mattered were good teachers and sound content: history was history: literature was literature, and had nothing to do with the colour of one's skin.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira, Wanja, Karega, Abdulla, Chui, The Lawyer

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

At the lawyer's house in Nairobi, Karega explains to him, Munira, Wanja, and Abdulla why he was expelled from Siriana. After Chui became the headmaster, he refused students' demands for African teachers and classes on African history and literature, so Karega participated in a student strike, for which Chui expelled him. The novel's summary of why Chui refused the students' demands shows how Siriana taught Eurocentrism and white supremacy curricula under the guise of color blindness.

Chui tries to make the students sound unreasonable by comparing their reasonable demands with unreasonable demands they never made. The students demanded African history and literature classes, not African "mathematics and science" classes. History and literature teachers often organize their classes by nations or continents, because, for example, "African. Chinese, and Greek" history and literature are importantly different from one another. By contrast, mathematic and scientific truths are the same everywhere. By comparing the students' demand to learn African history and literature with a demand to learn African math or African science, Chui both misinterprets the students and makes a false comparison between humanities and STEM disciplines.

Chui's false comparison between humanities and STEM disciplines bolsters Eurocentrism and white supremacy under the guise of color blindness. Siriana teaches European history and European literature, but not African history or African literature. In that context, when Chui claims that Siriana's curriculum doesn't need to change because "literature [is] literature" and history is history just like math is math, he is implicitly arguing that European literature and history comprise all the literature and history worth teaching. This implicit argument assumes that (white) European culture is more important than (Black) African culture. Thus, Siriana's curriculum implicitly teaches Eurocentrism and white supremacy while pretending its lessons have "nothing to do with the colour of [anyone's] skin."

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ 'Educators, men of letters, intellectuals: these are only voices—not neutral, disembodied voices—but belonging to bodies of persons, of groups, of interests. You, who will seek the truth about words emitted by a voice, look first for the body behind the voice. The voice merely rationalizes the needs, whims, caprices, of its owner, the master.'

Related Characters: The Lawyer (speaker), Karega

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238-239

Explanation and Analysis

When the delegation has returned to Ilmorog, Karega is trying to understand Kenya's current political situation and writes to the lawyer asking for recommendations of books about Kenya written by Black intellectuals. Karega reads the books the lawyer recommends but finds them disappointingly pro-colonial and silent about capitalist exploitation. When he writes to the lawyer asking why he recommended these books, the lawyer explains his rationale.

The lawyer's rationale—that Karega needs to "look first for the body behind the voice" before he can judge "the truth about words emitted by a voice"—partly explains the novel's

suspicion of formal education and cultural authorities. Formal education's lessons and cultural authorities' voices are assumed to be "neutral" and "disembodied" when (the lawyer argues) these lessons and voices spring from real, individual people's "needs, whims, and caprices." For example, the Black historians whose histories of Kenya Karega found so disappointingly pro-colonial may have been educated in colonial schools or employed by predominantly white universities; as such, they may have had a psychological or financial stake in writing histories sympathetic to white colonialism. The lawyer sent Karega the books he did, then, because he wanted Karega to discover that everyone has a political bias.

The novel's disbelief in "neutral, disembodied voices" entails that all histories, all novels, and all educational institutions have political commitments. The novel thus suggests that histories, novels, and educational institutions should be explicit about their political commitments—as this novel is explicit about its anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism—because being explicit about one's political commitments is much more honest than pretending one doesn't have them.

Chapter 8 Quotes

'We are all prostitutes, for in a world of grab and take, in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil [...] we are all prostituted. For as long as there's a man in prison, I am also in prison [. . .]. Why then need a victim hurl insults at another victim?'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Wanja

Related Themes:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Munira, jealous of Karega's burgeoning romance with Wanja, has started a fight with Karega in which he insults Wanja by bringing up her previous sex work. Karega's response suggests that insulting sex workers is inappropriate for two reasons.

First, sex work is no different from other work. This not to say that Karega believes sex work is good or morally neutral. Rather, he believes that all working conditions under capitalism are exploitative and bad, so in a capitalist "world built on a structure of inequality and injustice," all participants are "prostituted" in the same way—there's nothing special about sex work's exploitative and morally bad dimensions.

Second, Karega suggests that all human beings suffer if any human beings suffer when he claims, "as long as there's a man in prison, I am also in prison." If a sex worker is a "victim" of an economic system that limits safe, lucrative jobs and economic mobility, so is everyone else. People should be concerned with each other's victimization rather than "hurling insults." Karega's response thus implies a major difference in Munira and Karega's characters: whereas Munira tends to lash out at other victimized people when he feels victimized, Karega identifies with other victimized people and wants to organize with them to fight for justice.

Chapter 9 Quotes

'Are there pure facts? When I am looking at you, how much I see of you is conditioned by where I stand or sit; by the amount of light in this room; by the power of my eyes; by whether my mind is occupied with other thoughts and what thoughts. [...] Even assuming that there were pure facts, what about their selection? Does this not involve interpretation?'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Abdulla, The Lawyer

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

Munira, drinking at Abdulla's bar with Karega and other teachers at Ilmorog's primary school, has just argued that they should teach the students only facts, no arguments about politics or race.

Karega disagrees for two reasons. One reason, that the "selection" of facts "involve[s] interpretation," shows that after some confusion he has concluded why he and his Siriana classmates went on strike trying to gain classes about African history and literature. It wasn't that Siriana taught them falsehoods about history and literature—though it may have—but that its "selection" of facts, its decision to teach facts only European history and literature, perpetuated a Eurocentric and white-supremacist "interpretation" of reality according to which Europe had produced the only cultures in the world worth studying.

Karega's second reason suggests that he has internalized the lawyer's belief that every set of facts comes from some perspective whose biases must be interrogated. He uses the example of physical location: where he "stand[s] or sit[s]" and so on determines how much of Munira he can see. Yet he clearly means the example to argue that people's social positions, such as their class, race, gender, nationality, determine how much of any fact they can figuratively "see." Readers may or may not agree with Karega's skepticism about the existence of "pure facts"—for example, they may or may not believe that certain scientific facts or mathematical equations are "pure"—while still taking his point that people's social positions greatly influence how they interpret facts.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝❞ 'Even with you, I was hoping, but it did not work out. With him it has been different. I want him. I really want him. For himself. For the first time, I feel wanted . . . a human being . . . no longer humiliated . . . degraded . . . foot-trodden . . . do you understand? It is not given to many: a second chance to be a woman, to be human without this or that "except," "except" . . . without shame. He has reawakened my smothered woman-ness, my girlhood, and I feel I am about to flower . . .'

Related Characters: Wanja (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Karega, Kimeria

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

After Munira gets Karega fired from teaching at Ilmorog's school, Wanja tells Munira that she had sex with him (that is, Munira) because she was "hoping" to get pregnant, whereas she has a romantic relationship Karega because she "really want[s] him. For himself."

Prior to Karega, Wanja approached her romantic partners with ulterior motives and a transactional attitude. She wanted her partners not for themselves but for what they could give her (e.g., a baby), and she was willing to trade them access to her body for what she wanted. Though Wanja willingly engaged in transactional sex, it still made her feel "humiliated" and "degraded" because it required her to treat her body like a market commodity. By contrast, having a non-transactional relationship with Karega makes her feel like "a human being," someone with an essential value not dependent on market dynamics like supply and demand.

Wanja's attitude sheds light on the novel's negative portrayal of sex work. The novel, through Wanja's perspective, objects to sex work not because it believes *sex* is bad but because under a capitalist economic system, sex work encourages workers to view themselves as commodities rather than as people.

When Wanja says that her relationship with Karega "reawakened" her "woman-ness" and "girlhood" and that she is about to "flower," she taps into the novel's recurring flower symbolism. Flowers represent the potential of Kenya's people and land, which colonizers and capitalist elites have "smothered." Wanja has experienced this exploitation repeatedly. The capitalist elite Kimeria sexually abused young Wanja and "smothered" her "girlhood" by forcing her to see herself as a sex object. After Wanja dropped out of school, her bargirl jobs likewise exploited her by treating her sexuality as a market commodity. By contrast, Karega enables Wanja's healthy "flower[ing]" by treating her like a human being, not an object to be exploited, bought, or sold. Wanja and Karega's romance thus serves as a model of what a healthy relationship—that is, a relationship untouched by capitalist economic dynamics—might look like.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝❞ 'I was surprised to see it on sale . . . but it did not taste the same.'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Wanja, Abdulla

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 337

Explanation and Analysis

Karega has returned to Ilmorog after a years-long absence, during which Wanja and Abdulla started and subsequently had to sell a Theng'eta brewery business. When Karega visits Abdulla, Abdulla asks him whether he's tasted the version of Theng'eta being sold and marketed, and Karega replies that he's tried it once but "it did not taste the same. Karega "was surprised to see" Theng'eta "on sale" because the drink used to be a traditional Kenyan homebrew with

cultural significance, not a mass-produced product to be bought and sold.

When Karega says that the mass-produced version of Theng'eta "did not taste the same," he may literally mean that the Theng'eta brewery business changed the drink's recipe to facilitate mass production. Yet he also figuratively means that the mass production and capitalist exploitation of Theng'eta has changed its significance. Whereas Theng'eta used to represent Kenyan spirituality and history, its commodification, mass production, and mass distribution for profit has reduced it to a meaningless consumable, useful only for getting drunk. Thus, Theng'eta shows how allowing capitalist market dynamics to exploit certain forms of human potential or cultural meaning inevitably degrades that potential and that meaning.

> 'You cannot serve the interests of capital and of labour at the same time. You cannot serve two opposed masters . . . one master loses . . . in this case labour . . .'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Wanja

Related Themes:

Page Number: 342

Explanation and Analysis

Having returned to Ilmorog after a years-long absence, Karega is explaining to Wanja and Munira what has occurred in his life since he last saw them. When he speaks negatively of his time as a dockworker, Wanja objects that dockworkers usually make good money and have good union leaders. Karega disagrees, arguing that the dockworkers' union leaders are ineffective because too many of them are businessmen themselves.

Karega's criticism of businessmen union leaders relies on a Marxist critique of wealth. According to famous anti-capitalist economist Karl Marx (1818 – 1883), "capital" and "labour" are opposing social forces. "Capital" owns or controls the means of production and distribution, (e.g., the boats that the dockworkers are unloading, the items those boats are shipping, and the factories that produced those items). "Labour" are those people who—not controlling the means of production—have to sell their time and work to "capital" in order to survive. "Capital" always exploits "labour," paying wages worth less than the ultimate value of "labour's" work to pocket the "surplus value," the difference between how much capital it costs to produce a project and the price at which the product sells.

In addition to Marx's critique, Karega also relies on a Christian critique of wealth. The phrase "you cannot serve two opposed masters" is a paraphrase of the Gospel of Matthew 6:24, in which Jesus Christ states, "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despite the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [i.e., wealth, money]." On a plain reading of the New Testament, Christian ethics condemn excessive wealth accumulation and concern with wealth. At other points, Karega quotes the Bible to point out that greedy self-described "Christians" are hypocritical. In this case, however, he seems to use Marxist and Christian thought in tandem simply because he agrees with their critical analyses of wealth.

> This was the society they were building: this was the society they had been building since Independence, a society in which a black few, allied to other interests from Europe, would continue the colonial game of robbing others of their sweat, denying them the right to grow to full flowers in air and sunlight.

Related Characters: Godfrey Munira, Wanja, Karega, Kimeria, Nderi wa Riera, Chui, Mzigo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 348-349

Explanation and Analysis

Wanja has just explained—defiantly yet despairingly—to Karega and Munira why she became a sex worker and a brothel owner: under a capitalist system, you can either be a rich, exploitative employer or a poor, exploited worker, and she would rather exploit than be exploited. Though horrified, Karega thinks through Wanja has said, acknowledges that she is correct in some ways, and gives an explicit analysis of Kenya's post-Independence social pathologies.

According to Karega's social analysis, in the pre-Independence period, "interests from Europe" controlled and exploited Kenya directly through overt military and political domination. In the post-Independence period, these same colonial powers have allied with "a black

few"—Kenyan political or economic elites such as Kimeria, Mzigo, Chui, and Nderi wa Riera—to "continue the colonial game of robbing others of their sweat." By "robbing others of their sweat," Karega means controlling and exploiting Kenya through international capitalism: rich people (foreigners and Kenyan elites) buy up Kenyan land, extract Kenya's natural resources, and dramatically underpay Kenyan workers. As "flowers" represent Kenyan land and potential throughout the book, this quotation explicitly compares Kenya's exploited workers to "flowers" being "den[ied]" the "air and sunlight" they need to bloom by capitalist exploitation.

Karega is thinking explicitly what the novel elsewhere implies: when Kenya gained political independence from British colonial rule in 1963, it did not thereby become free. Britain and other Western powers simply began using capitalism to dominate Kenya economically instead of using military power to dominate Kenya politically. Thus, this quotation summarizes the novel's overall anti-colonial, anti-capitalist position.

❝ 'Must we have this world? Is there only one world? Then we must create another world, a new earth[.]'

Related Characters: Karega (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Wanja

Related Themes:

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

Karega has been discussing with Wanja and Munira Wanja's decision to become a brothel owner, which would make her both a sex worker herself and an exploitative employer of sex workers. Karega believes that Wanja is right that under capitalism, people either exploit others or end up exploited themselves. Yet he refuses to accept that this is the only way to live.

When Karega asks whether they have to settle for "this world" and questions whether there is "only one world," he means that colonialism and capitalism are not the only social and economic systems by which societies can organize themselves. Instead "we"—by which Karega may mean exploited Kenyan workers, an international workers' movement, or even anyone interested in justice globally—need to "create another world," which is to say, different political and economic systems.

This quotation is important in part because Munira radically misinterprets it. When Karega talks about "another world," he is not talking about a religious paradise or an afterlife. He is talking about a new, more just form of social, political, and economic organization. While Munira shares Karega's disgust with the current world order, he interprets Karega's words through an apocalyptic religious lens and ends up joining a millenarian Christian fringe movement. Thus, the quotation not only shows the importance of imagining new possibilities, as both Karega and Munira do, but the importance of imagining the *right* new possibilities, which (in the novel's implied judgment) only Karega does.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Kenya, the soil, was the people's common shamba, and there was no way it could be right for a few, or a section, or a single nationality, to inherit for their sole use what was communal, any more than it would be right for a few sons and daughters to monopolize their father or mother.

Related Characters: Karega

Related Themes:

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

Having returned to Ilmorog after a years-long absence, Karega observes how the town has changed: capitalist economic development has deprived the farmers and herders of communal land rights, rich elites from out-of-town have bought up the land, and stark economic inequality has set in. Contemplating these changes, he thinks through his moral objection to private land ownership in Kenya. The language Karega uses to voice his moral objection subtly reveals his beliefs about what land is for and his concept of the relationship between land and the people who live there.

When Karega thinks that Kenya's "soil" is "the people's common shamba," he means that the land is a common subsistence farm. In the novel, *shamba* usually refers to a subsistence farm that the farmer or farmers live on themselves. By implication, Kenya's land should belong communally to people who live there, not to foreign interests. (When he says the land shouldn't belong to "a single nationality," he means Kenyan people of a particular national origin or ethnicity, for instance indigenous Kikuyu people versus Indian immigrants to Kenya. He does not mean that people who live outside Kenya should own Kenyan land.) Moreover, the land is first and foremost for subsistence, growing food that enables Kenyan people's

survival rather than cash crops for export.

By comparing people who buy land for their "sole use" to "a few sons and daughters" who "monopolize their father or mother," Karega asserts a familial paradigm of the relationship between Kenya's people and its land. In this paradigm, Kenya's people are figuratively one another's brothers and sisters, while Kenya's land is their parent. This entails that each Kenyan person has the *same* relationship to the land—just like siblings have the same relationship to their parents—and that no Kenyan person has a greater right to the land than any other. This equal right to the land would guarantee that those with more money can't "monopolize" the land through private ownership and so infringe on their figurative siblings' rights.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ 'The junior staff—the workers on the school compound—were going to join us. And one or two teachers were sympathetic. They too had grievances, about pay and conditions of work and Chui's neglect. This time we were going to demand that the school should be run by a committee of students, staff and workers . . . But even now we are determined to put an end to the whole prefect system . . . And that all our studies should be related to the liberation of our people . . .'

Related Characters: Joseph (speaker), Godfrey Munira, Abdulla, Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo, Fraudsham

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 402-403

Explanation and Analysis

After Munira's arrest for the murders of Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria, Joseph explains to Abdulla that Chui's murder has temporarily delayed a strike that Joseph and other students were planning at Siriana, the school where Chui was headmaster. Joseph's explanation illustrates that while the fight to free Kenyan minds from pro-colonial education isn't over, it has progressed with each generation.

Other major characters have attended Siriana, a colonizer-founded school, both before Kenya's independence and after, and each generation of students is more anti-colonial than the previous generation. Chui and Munira attended the school under colonialism and were expelled for protesting the headmaster Fraudsham's racist policies. Yet while they were willing to protest overt racism, neither Chui nor Munira realized that their own commitment to color-blind education subtly enabled pro-colonial and white-supremacist sentiments. The lawyer, who attended Siriana just before Kenya's independence, became self-consciously anti-colonial and anti-capitalist in part as a reaction to Fraudsham's racism, yet he could not give up his attachment to the status quo's "respectable" political machinery. Karega, who attended Siriana shortly after independence, was expelled for demanding an anti-racist, Afro-centric curriculum but had not yet fully integrated explicit anti-capitalism into his critique of Siriana's pro-colonial bias.

Joseph's protest represents a culmination of the previous generations' activism and a movement beyond them. Like some previous protestors, he wants "an end to the whole prefect system," in which student leaders are chosen by the administration, not democratically elected by the students. Like Karega, he wants his studies to relate to "our people," not their colonizers. Yet unlike the other protestors, he is expanding his coalition beyond students to include "the workers on the school compound" and "one or two teachers," indicating that he is taking economic as well as racial inequality into account. Moreover, he wants Siriana's studies to be related not just to Kenyan and African people but specifically to their "liberation." By giving the youngest Siriana student the most developed anti-colonial, anti-racist, and pro-worker protest platform, the novel suggests that while the work of "decolonizing" Kenyan minds has not finished, each generation moves forward the work of decolonization.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

On Sunday, Munira is reading the Bible in the New Ilmorog Primary School where he works after "a night's vigil on the mountain." Two policemen arrive and tell him he's wanted for questioning about murder. Munira gathers up his coat and Bible. When one policeman asks about the Bible, Munira says the Second Coming will arrive soon. The other policeman, a religious man discomfited by talk of final judgment, changes the subject to how long Munira has lived in Ilmorog. When Munira says he's lived there 12 years, the policeman comments that Munira has been in town since before the construction of New Ilmorog.

The first character the novel introduces, Munira, is a teacher, which hints that education will be an important theme in the novel. The novel creates intrigue when it states that Munira has just spent "a night's vigil on the mountain"—but doesn't explain what Munira was watching for. The Second Coming is a Christian religious belief that Jesus Christ will come to earth a second time for a final judgment of every human being. Interestingly, the more religious of the two policemen shifts the subject away from Munira's talk of the Second Coming, which shows how characters can be uncomfortable or hypocritical about their own religious beliefs.

In the Ilmorog neighborhood New Jerusalem, Abdulla is sitting outside his shack-like home, staring at his hand "bandaged" in the hospital and wondering how the events of the previous night came to pass. Though what Abdulla wanted to happen happened, he doesn't think he brought it about. A policeman catches Abdulla's attention and says they want Abdulla to answer questions at the police station. Once Abdulla arrives, the police lock him up and hit him when he complains. He feels "old anger and new bitterness."

In Christianity, the "New Jerusalem" is the capitol of Christ's reign on earth after his Second Coming; it symbolizes redemption. Ironically, the buildings in Ilmorog's New Jerusalem are "shack-like," suggesting that Christianity has not overcome inequality and exploitation in the real world. Abdulla's "old anger and new bitterness" at police brutality suggest that though he is used to injustice, it still bothers him.

At the hospital, a policeman tries to see Wanja, but a doctor prevents the visit, claiming Wanja is hallucinating **fire** and yelling about her aunt. When the policeman suggests they record Wanja as evidence "in case," the doctor reassures the policeman Wanja isn't in danger and should recover in 10 days.

Readers already know a murder or murders have taken place. Wanja, the first named female character, has been hospitalized, suggesting she is a surviving victim—perhaps linking womanhood with violent victimization. That Wanja is hallucinating fire implies that fire was the murder weapon. This implication reminds the reader that while humans have long used fire for warmth, fire like many natural phenomena can be dangerous when out of control.

Sleeping after a nighttime **Theng'eta** Breweries Union meeting, Karega is woken by policemen who want him to come to the station for questioning. Karega, wondering how he'll get word to the other union members and whether the forbidden strike will occur, is driven to the station. Akinyi, seeing a car drive away from Karega's house, goes to his door and finds it locked. The workers disseminate news of Karega's arrest and go to the station to protest. A policeman explains they took Karega in for questioning about murder, not about the strike. When the skeptical workers begin yelling protest slogans, policemen with guns come chase them away.

The novel does not make clear what "Theng'eta" is, though its association with the word "Breweries" suggests it is an alcoholic drink. Given that the Theng'eta Breweries Union members are planning a strike, however, the novel is clearly linking Theng'eta with the economic exploitation of Kenyan workers. The union members assume that the police have arrested Karega because of the strike, not because of murders—an assumption that hints the police usually take the side of employers against their exploited workers.

A newspaper runs a special edition about the murders of Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria, directors of **Theng'eta** Breweries. The newspaper notes police have detained a "trade-union agitator;" the victims had just voted not to give workers a raise when they were burned to death inside a house they were tricked into entering.

This passage reveals who was murdered (the directors of Theng'eta Breweries) and how (by fire). That the victims ran Theng'eta Breweries again associates "Theng'eta" with exploitation and violence. When the newspaper mentions that police have arrested a "trade-union agitator," it is insinuating that some worker or workers committed the murder. This insinuation shows that the newspaper, like the police, usually sides against exploited workers.

CHAPTER 2

Twelve years prior, Munira bikes into Ilmorog and begins cleaning the dilapidated four-room school. The town believes he'll abandon the project soon, as previous teachers have done, but instead he teaches shepherds' children outside on the grave of the legendary Ndemi. Offended, the diviner Mwathi wa Mugo orders Munira reprimanded, and an elderly woman Nyakinyua defecates hugely in the schoolyard. Later, she confronts Munira about coming from a city where Africans imitate white people; she accuses cities of stealing the town's young and asks whether Munira has come to steal the remaining children. Munira, thinking how he wishes to be free of the past, accidentally sneezes in the old woman's face; she flees.

The poor condition of Ilmorog's school implies that Ilmorog is a rural town whose children have little opportunity for education. Munira offends the town's diviner (traditional seer or soothsayer), which shows he doesn't understand the town's culture. When Nyakinyua accuses Kenyan people who live in cities of imitating white people and cities of stealing Ilmorog's children, it suggests economic and cultural divides between urban and rural Kenya: the cities take young workers from the smaller towns, impoverishing them, and indoctrinates those young workers into behaviors that smaller-town people consider stereotypically white.

Munira bikes to Abdulla's shop and bar. Abdulla, a man with a crippled leg, recently moved to town with his donkey and a boy named Joseph. As Munira drinks a beer at Abdulla's, three older farmers, including Njuguna, enter. They chat with Munira about a possible drought, but Munira doesn't care about farming. Abdulla asks Munira about the school, and Munira says he wants to hire more teachers and hopes as an educated person to "pay back" the less educated people who fought for independence by teaching the children. Abdulla is skeptical of educated people, thinking they're out for themselves, but one farmer praises Munira's ideals.

Munira, from the city, doesn't care about farming, which seems to be the townspeople's main source of sustenance. His indifference suggests that he doesn't understand the town's economic realities or feel connected to nature. Munira wants to "pay back" other Kenyan people who fought for independence; he feels uncomfortable with his own non-participation in Kenya's war for independence from the UK (Kenya became independent in 1963). Abdulla's suspicion of educated people shows that Ilmorog's townspeople don't necessarily trust or value formal education.

Later that night, Njuguna and the other farmers visit Nyakinyua and vouch for Munira's decency to her and the other townspeople. Yet after a month, Munira can't keep the shepherds' children in school. Shocked at such recalcitrance in the modern 1960s, Munira goes to drink at Abdulla's, who mocks him with the story of Nyakinyua defecating in the schoolyard.

The shepherds' children don't want to attend Munira's school. Readers may infer that whatever Munira is trying to teach isn't relevant to the children's lives. Munira interprets the children's lack of interest as a symptom of their backwardness, not of his lessons' irrelevance—which suggests that his own education may not have prepared him to relate to rural workers and their families.

Munira bikes to Ruwa-ini to speak with his supervisor Mzigo. On the way, he sees three African men playing golf; young caddies dressed in rags wait on them. At Mzigo's office, Mzigo blows off Munira's concerns about the school but tells him he can hire UTs. He also claims he'll drive to visit Ilmorog, complains about the road, and tells Munira he's lucky to have a bike, not a car. Thinking how much he prefers the people of Ilmorog to Mzigo and the golfers, Munira asks whether he can really hire UTs. Mzigo says he can. .

The passage doesn't make clear what a "UT" is, but from context, the reader can guess it's a kind of teacher that Munira would hire for added help. That Munira prefers Ilmorog's townspeople to car owning Mzigo and the rich golfers who let their caddies dress in rags suggests Munira's negative judgment on the kind of people who have gotten rich in post-Independence Kenya.

Before returning to Ilmorog, Munira bikes to Limuru to visit his family. He feels like the odd one out. His living siblings have prestigious careers or foreign educations, while his favorite sister Mukami—who got in trouble for playing and working with laborers on their father's farm—recently died by suicide. His father Ezekieli, though a devout Presbyterian, is a stingy landowner who squeezes his religious workers, dismissing those who protest low wages as "devilish."

Munira's living family members are among the Kenyan nouveau riche he dislikes: his siblings have fancy jobs, and his father's a rich, exploitative landowner. That Munira's father Ezekieli exploits his workers despite his Presbyterianism—a Protestant Christian denomination—implies that Ezekieli is a hypocrite, and that religion fails to make people good.

As a high-schooler, Munira noticed the workers were more sincerely devout than his father Ezekieli; they made him want to confess a sin he'd committed with a woman in Kamiritho, but instead he burned the woman's house in a little grass effigy and abandoned the effigy still on **fire**—which almost caused a barn to burn down.

That Ezekieli's workers are less hypocritical and more earnest in their religion suggests that money corrupts religious beliefs. The passage implies that Munira felt so guilty for having sex with a woman that he burnt her house in effigy; this anecdote suggests that Munira is repressed for religious reasons and that his repression can lead to behavior that is potentially dangerous.

Munira's father's most sanctified worker was an elderly woman, Mariamu, who didn't actually attend religious services. Mariamu's son Nding'uri was Munira's friend until Munira went away to **Siriana** for school; later, Munira learned the son was caught smuggling guns for the Mau Mau Rebellion and executed. Rumors also link Mariamu to Mau Mau fighters cutting off Ezekieli's ear and to Mukami's suicide, but Munira still has good memories of her.

Mariamu was Ezekieli's holiest worker despite not going to church, which suggests thar organized religion isn't necessary to being holy. The Mau Mau Rebellion (1952 – 1960) was a war between Kenya's British colonial government and Kenyan freedom fighters. That the worker's son Nding'uri became a Mau Mau while the owner's son Munira went to a fancy school implies that Kenyan people's desire for freedom from colonialism varied by their class: the poorer Nding'uri wanted freedom more because he suffered more under colonialism. That Munira went to school while Nding'uri was fighting also implies that some kinds of formal education may quash young people's rebellious instincts.

In Limuru, Munira sees the place where Mariamu's hut used to be and wonders what happened to her. He goes to visit his own family; when he tries to tell his children stories about Ilmorog, his pretty yet prim, unsensual, and excessively religious wife (Julia) scolds him for "blaspheming."

Munira lives in a different town from his family, which hints at problems in his marriage. His wife claims he's "blaspheming"—insulting religion or God—just by explaining what Ilmorog is like, which suggests both that religion blinds some people to reality and that Julia's religiosity may have caused the problems in her marriage.

When Munira bikes back to Ilmorog, the people welcome him, appreciating that he won't run away like the other teachers and that he "carrie[s] the wisdom of the new age." Munira observes their way of life: they barter as much as they use money, consult the diviner Mwathi wa Mugo about when to plant crops, and argue in Abdulla's bar about whether farming or herding livestock is better.

Ilmorog's townspeople have come to believe that Munira, the one teacher who hasn't abandoned their school, has "the wisdom of the new age." What wisdom is this? Munira finds strange the townspeople's disinterest in money, their spiritual beliefs, and their relationship to the land via farming and herding. Munira's preconceptions—his "wisdom of the new age"—are based on capitalism, Christianity or secularism, and urban environments. Whether this "wisdom" will help Ilmorog remains to be seen.

In discussing farming versus herding, the people discuss which wealth white colonialists stole first and how the colonialists tricked them into accepting coins, useless in themselves, as "the true wealth." Uncomfortable with his own non-participation in the struggle against colonialism, Munira changes the subject by asking who Ilmorog's MP is. The town knows their MP's name is Nderi wa Riera but not what he does for them; they're more interested in why their youth keep leaving for the cities. Munira keeps asking questions to steer the subject away from politics; he's tired and contemptuous of politics.

The townspeople's discussion suggests that colonialism—in this case, white British colonizers' political control and economic exploitation of indigenous Black Kenyan people—comes from a desire for wealth: the colonizers came to steal from Kenyan people and to impose a capitalist economic system on them in which money, not land or animals, counted as "the true wealth." Given Munira's earlier discomfort with discussions of Kenya's fight for freedom, he may hate discussing politics because he feels guilty that he never fought against colonialism.

Munira gets into a routine of working at school during the day and drinking at Abdulla's in the evening. Abdulla, who has fickle moods, will sometimes remind Munira about Nyakinyua defecating in the schoolyard and will complain that the townspeople are suspicious of his donkey because it eats too much. He also verbally abuses his helper, the boy Joseph. When Munira suggests Abdulla send Joseph to the school, Abdulla blows him off. Despite Abdulla's occasional hostility, Munira now prefers Ilmorog to his home life and hopes Mzigo leaves him alone there so he can avoid personal, familial problems.

This passage illustrates that while Munira, an educated schoolteacher, values education, not everyone does—Abdulla, a working-class shopkeeper and bar-owner, seems to see no inherent value in sending his young ward Joseph to school. Munira's desire to hang around Abdulla's bar rather than visit his out-of-town family reminds the reader that his marriage has problems, possibly due to his wife's religiosity.

When April rains arrive, the townspeople are busy farming, and Munira sees them less at Abdulla's. Though lonely, he strangely comes to feel like the "feudal head" of Ilmorog. In June, he takes his class outside to teach them the anatomy of **flowers**. When one child starts shouting about "a flower with petals of blood," Munira corrects him, saying the color term is red. When another child finds a faded red flower, Munira explains that a worm has eaten the inside, which can prevent the flower from blooming fully, with its most intense color. The children begin asking Munira questions about why creatures eat each other and why God lets things happen. Flustered, Munira stops doing field trips; he feels more authoritative inside the schoolroom.

Feudalism was a pre-capitalist European socioeconomic system in which lords owned land cultivated by peasants, who farmed the lord's land. When Munira feels like Ilmorog's "feudal lord," it suggests he views Ilmorog's townspeople as pre-capitalist and therefore somehow as his servants or subjects. As the novel's title is "petals of blood," the use of this phrase seems symbolically significant. Since Kenyan people died to free the land from colonialism, the "petals of blood" may represent the violent deaths of those who sacrificed their lives for independence. The worm-eaten red flower suggests that negative social forces, represented by the worm, have prevented newly independent Kenya from fully blooming. Munira's discomfort with the phrase "petals of blood" and with the outdoors reminds the reader both of his non-participation in revolutionary politics and his disconnection from nature. These characteristics make Munira a worse teacher: he's unwilling to let students ask questions or explore the unknown.

One hot day, a beautiful woman (Wanja) approaches Munira outside and asks for water. He takes her into his house and gives her water. When she teases him that the townspeople were right about his spartan living quarters, he asks when she arrived in town. She says the night before. Worried that she heard about him so quickly, Munira wonders what the town says and thinks about him. He goes to check on the schoolchildren and resolves not to ponder insoluble questions like the "**flower** with petals of blood"; when he returns home, the woman is gone.

Munira worries what the town may have said about him, which implies that he fears the town still doesn't accept him. It may also imply that he finds this unknown woman sexually interesting, despite his marriage. Munira's resolve not to think about the "flower with petals of blood" strengthens the implication that Munira is incurious and a bad teacher; it also serves to link flowers more tightly with the other subject Munira hates to ponder: Kenyan politics.

That night, Munira goes to Abdulla's, where he meets the woman again and—uneasy and aroused—buys her a beer. As they talk, he learns her name is Wanja, Nyakinyua is her grandmother, and she used to wrestle with boys in school. When Abdulla turns to Munira, Munira angrily anticipates Abdulla will humiliate him with the story of Nyakinyua defecating in the schoolyard. Instead, Abdulla asks whether he can go to school too, so he can wrestle with Wanja. When Munira jokingly asks what two adults would do in school, Abdulla and Wanja banter back that he should make them prefects to discipline the other students. Then Abdulla suggests that Munira wouldn't want them in his school because they might lead a student strike.

Munira is, indeed, sexually attracted to Wanja. Abdulla's joke about going to school so he can wrestle with Wanja implies that he too finds her sexually attractive. That both men immediately relate to Wanja in a sexual way suggests that sexuality is the main lens through which men view women in the novel's world. In school, a prefect is a student given responsibilities or powers over other students; Abdulla's joking threat that he and Wanja would lead a student strike links being a student with political activism for the first time in the novel.

Munira tells Wanja and Abdulla that prefects have to know how "to lick the boots of those above" them. In school at **Siriana**, Munira was never great at that or anything else. The best student was Chui, who quoted Shakespeare and played football beautifully against white opposing teams. The other students nicknamed him Shakespeare and Joe Louis.

Being successful at Siriana meant "lick[ing] the boots" of people higher up in the hierarchy. To do this, successful Black students like Chui learned to quote William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616), England's most famous playwright, and to play football (i.e., soccer), a game very popular at English private schools. Siriana's focus on English literature and sports suggests that it was conditioning the Kenyan students to view English culture as superior. Thus, Siriana represents the way colonialism miseducated Kenyan people into viewing English culture and white people as inherently more valuable than Kenyan culture and Black people. The other students liked Chui because he could beat white people at white people's own games; his nickname "Joe Louis" refers to the African American boxer Joe Louis, who in a 1938 rematch famously defeated the Nazi-backed German boxer Max Schmeling, whom the Nazi press claimed could never lose to a Black person.

When **Siriana's** friendly headmaster—whom the students liked even though he was white—retired, the new headmaster Fraudsham refused to let the students wear shoes or eat decent food. Chui led the students in a strike. Inspired, Munira became another strike ringleader. Yet when Fraudsham called in the police, the strike ended. Munira and Chui were expelled. Munira concludes that whereas Chui ended up traveling to America, Munira retreated into himself.

At Siriana, the students were Kenyan adolescents, while the headmasters seem to have been white Englishmen. Thus, Siriana the school reflected the racial power structures of British colonial Kenya, where white foreigners oppressed the Black indigenous population. Fraudsham's decision to deprive Siriana's Black students of shoes and decent food illustrates how some racist people in Kenya's British colonial government didn't even want Kenyan people to assimilate into English culture—they simply wanted to keep Kenyans oppressed and poor. This passage hints that Munira's participation in a failed strike may have conditioned him to avoid political engagement.

Abdulla yells at Joseph. Wanja tries to help Joseph clear the table; noticing a tear in Joseph's trousers, she asks Munira whether Joseph is at school. Munira says no. Abdulla protests that with his crippled leg, he needs a helper around the store. Wanja tells Abdulla to send Joseph to school and offers to work in his place. Abdulla, in a gentler tone, tells Joseph to bring him another beer and then stop working.

Despite Munira's story about Siriana, Wanja still believes education is worth pursuing and intervenes with Abdulla so that Joseph can go to school. Wanja's attitude suggests that education need not indoctrinate students into bad political attitudes, even if Siriana did.

Though Ilmorog's townspeople believe Wanja will soon move on, they are very happy when she ends up moving her things into a hut near her grandmother Nyakinyua's. The townspeople end up throwing a party with singing and dancing to celebrate. The crops have changed, and people now walk around with **flowers** stuck to their clothes. Yet they worry that the pattern of rain and sunshine has been wrong all spring—and, indeed, the harvest isn't good. Nevertheless, the townspeople accept "that God was the Giver and also the one who took away."

That people walk around with flowers stuck to their clothes during harvest suggest that flowers symbolize the creative potential of Kenya's land as well as its people. The townspeople's acceptance "that God was the Giver and also the one who took away," however, suggests that their religious beliefs about God's power and humanity's powerlessness may prevent them from trying to change bad outcomes—say, with better technology or farm practices.

Wanja and Munira start up a low-key flirtation. Though Munira believes he doesn't want an intense relationship, he feels he made himself vulnerable to her and Abdulla by telling them about **Siriana** and keeps almost bringing it up again. He's also jealous of Wanja's flirtatious friendship with Abdulla. One day, an airplane flies over Ilmorog, and Wanja comes to the school to ask Munira about it. He doesn't know anything, and he ends up watching her buttocks as she leaves. Then he has a series of sexual dreams about her. He feels out-of-control and tormented.

Munira feels vulnerable around Wanja and Abdulla after telling them about Siriana, which shows that the school's white-supremacist administrators and Munira's expulsion for protesting them continue to affect his self-esteem as an adult. Munira's sexual obsession with Wanja, meanwhile, hints that he sees women as sexual beings first and has difficulty relating to them as friends.

A few days later, engineers travel through Ilmorog surveying the land in preparation for a possible highway connecting all Africa. Munira, Wanja, and others come out to watch and question the engineers, but when Wanja sees the head engineer, she flees. Later, the townspeople discuss whether the highway would be good or bad: Some worry their own land will be appropriated for the road, while others hope it will help them transport their goods to better markets.

Wanja's reaction to the head engineer implies that she knows him or that he reminds her of someone she knows. Ilmorog's townspeople react to the engineers primarily by discussing the economic effects of the road—its passage through their land, its opening of new markets—on their own lives. This shows that the townspeople aren't ideologues; they simply want whatever changes are coming to improve their material conditions.

The night after the engineers leave, Munira decides to make a move on Wanja. When he goes to her hut, Abdulla is there. At first Munira is jealous, but he feels better when Wanja and Abdulla inform him they're celebrating Wanja's decision to start working as a barmaid at Abdulla's so Joseph can go to school. Wanja credits Munira's "moving" story about **Siriana** for her decision to help Joseph. Abdulla, pleased, tells Wanja that she looks so young when she's happy that it seems she should be in school too, not working.

Munira was raised Christian and is married; nevertheless, he pursues Wanja. As Christianity forbids adultery, Munira is either no longer religious or somewhat hypocritical. Wanja found Munira's Siriana story "moving" and reacted by helping Joseph go to school, which suggests she interpreted Munira's story as a lament for losing educational opportunities, rather than as a disturbing revelation about British colonial education's white-supremacist tendencies.

Wanja, becoming thoughtful, says the head engineer they saw earlier reminded her of something that happened long ago. When she was in primary school, a poor boy had a crush on her. One day, he walked her home and told her about his dream of becoming an engineer. At home, her mother questioned her about where she'd been. She answered back, a little cheekily, that she'd been strolling with her boyfriend. Her mother and father beat her for walking with a boy and for talking back. Wanja felt they were beating her partly because the boy was poor and partly to "work[] out something between them," as they were becoming estranged.

Wanja believes that her parents beat her not simply for walking with a boy but for walking with a boy who was poor. This suggests both that Wanja's parents were very money conscious and that—even when Wanja was an elementary-schooler—they saw Wanja's romantic choices and sexuality as commodities they did not want her to trade cheaply or give to someone poor.

Wanja felt her parents' behavior was unjust and wanted revenge but had no power to get it. The incident turned her against school. Shortly after, a rich, married man (later revealed to be Kimeria) moved into her village and made friends with her father. The man gave Wanja's family presents for Christmas, including a dress with a **flower** pattern for Wanja. Unbeknownst to Wanja's parents, he began taking Wanja out in the city during school hours.

In previous scenes, flowers have symbolized the potential of Kenya's people and its land, which colonizers have exploited. Here, the flower pattern on Wanja's dress represents her potential as a young, intelligent girl—potential her father's adult, married friend exploits by sexually abusing her, initiating a relationship with her before she's even in high school.

Wanja's math teacher, who desired her sexually, followed her during one of her absences, found out about her outings with Kimeria, and told her he'd inform her parents unless she had sex with him. When Wanja refused him, the math teacher told her parents—but rather than beating her, Wanja's mother blamed her father for making friends with Kimeria.

Wanja's math teacher also tries to abuse Wanja sexually, emphasizing that sexual exploitation of women and girls is a common phenomenon.

Wanja stopped seeing Kimeria, started studying hard, and did excellently in the "mock-CPE results." The teachers were sure she would get into a good high school. But then Wanja discovered she was pregnant. When she told Kimeria, he said she could be his second wife, but his first wife would treat her terribly. Despite this, Wanja ran away to him rather than let her mother find out about the pregnancy. But when she showed up at his house, he laughed at her, saying he was too old for her and "a Christian."

CPE stands for Certificate of Primary Education. Kenyan students take CPE exams at the end of their primary education and use the results to apply to high schools. Wanja did excellently on her "mock-CPE results," meaning she received a high score on a practice exam for the CPE. Kimeria's reaction to Wanja's pregnancy—claiming he can't help her because he's "a Christian"—shows his hypocrisy. While he seems to be saying that he can't marry her because Christians don't practice polygamy, Christianity forbids both adultery and preying on others. If he took Christian doctrine seriously rather than using Christianity as a cover for evil behavior, he wouldn't have abused Wanja at all.

Wanja concludes her story by saying that after Kimeria rejected her, she went to live with her cousin, still wanting revenge, and became a barmaid rather than continuing with school. That's why it makes her sad when children aren't allowed to go to school. She says Abdulla and Munira must celebrate Joseph's matriculation and her first day of work at the bar the next night. When Munira demurs, Wanja insists he come and walk her home afterward. Abdulla and Munira leave, the latter thinking happily about "beautiful **flowers**."

Whereas racism and colonialism derailed Munira's education, sexual abuse derailed Wanja's, suggesting that sexual exploitation harms women and girls in a way that may exacerbate other oppressions they already face. Previously, flowers have symbolized the exploited potential of Kenyan people and Kenyan land; that Munira thinks about "flowers" after Wanja makes a date for them to walk home together implies he sees the date as full of (sexual) potential.

CHAPTER 3

Twelve years after Wanja's story, Munira tries to explain it to a police officer detaining him, but the officer doesn't grasp the relevance. Munira thinks the officer, an enforcer of the status quo, is likely discomfited by recent social unrest—students and employees striking, women protesting for rights. Munira believes that the Bible predicted this unrest and that Wanja is "the 'She' mentioned by the Prophets, extracting obedience from men, making them deviate from the path." He asks the unconvinced police officer for writing materials so that he can compose a full account. The police officer, annoyed, locks him up in a cell. Munira, remembering the incarcerations of Peter and Paul, feels contented and falls asleep.

The references to employee strikes and women's protests suggest that anti-capitalist and feminist protests are occurring in Kenya at this point in the novel. When Munira claims that the Bible predicted this unrest, he probably means the Book of Revelation, the final prophetic book of the New Testament that predicts social turmoil culminating in the Second Coming of Christ. The "'She' mentioned by the Prophets" would then refer to the female figure in the Book of Revelations often called the Whore of Babylon. Various Christian sects have interpreted this figure as an allegory for the city of Rome and the Roman Empire, the city of Jerusalem, pagan religion,; and so on. That Munira believes this allegorical Biblical figure refers to Wanja specifically suggests his religious beliefs have become delusional. It also suggests that Munira believes Christianity condemns greater economic and gender equality. The allusions to Peter and Paul refer to Jesus's apostle Peter and the post-Crucifixion Christian convert Saint Paul, both of whom were jailed while spreading Christianity during the 1st century CE. By comparing himself to Peter and Paul, Munira suggests that he is being religiously persecuted.

The next morning Munira is taken to talk with a new police officer (Inspector Godfrey), a man who's intrigued by criminal behavior and loves to solve crimes. He doesn't care which government he's working for—his dream is to become a private detective who will work for anyone. He's interested in this case because it brings together very different people: Munira; Wanja, "a prostitute"; Abdulla; Karega, who works for the union; and Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo, successful businessmen. The officer introduces himself to Munira and explains that they'll jail Munira while he writes as extensive a statement as he likes—which needs to include facts about Abdulla, Karega, and Wanja's movements in the days leading to Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo's deaths.

Inspector Godfrey is obsessed with solving crimes, but he doesn't care about justice—he's happy to work for anyone, good or bad, whether it's the British Colonial government, the post-Independence Kenyan government, or random citizens with money. This attitude suggests that in post-Independence Kenya, police officers protect the status quo but don't serve justice. The reference to Wanja as "a prostitute" suggests that she has become a sex worker at some point during the story's timeline.

Munira writes that he isn't sure how to tell the story. He once believed he could save Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla; then he saw that Wanja wanted power and revenge against men due to her past trauma, while Karega was a lost, immature man who—as he once wrote in a journal that Munira read—was looking for "a new force that will make the seed [of revolution] sprout and **flower**," when what he needed was "the blood of the Lamb."

Given Munira's religious beliefs, his desire to "save" Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla likely refers to his desire to convert them to Christianity. He interprets Wanja's anger at her sexual abuse as anti-male vindictiveness. Meanwhile, Munira dismisses Karega's desire that revolution "flower," a symbolic reference to the potential of Kenya's people and land. He says that instead of the flowers of worldly political revolution, Karega needs the "blood of the Lamb"—another allusion to the Christian New Testament, as the Gospel of John calls Jesus Christ "the lamb of God" and the Book of Revelation represents him allegorically as a lamb. By saying that Karega needs "the blood of the lamb," meaning Jesus Christ's sacrificial death by crucifixion, Munira is suggesting that political goals like Karega's are a waste of time; one should focus on spiritual redemption. Here the novel suggests that religion or at least religious perspectives like Munira's prevent oppressed people from engaging in politics.

According to Munira's prison statement, Munira encounters Karega the day after Wanja tells the story of her pregnancy. Biking home from an errand, Munira finds Karega waiting. Karega knows Munira, though Munira doesn't remember Karega. Having invited Karega inside, Munira suddenly wonders what happened to Wanja's baby and recalls his father Ezekieli's employee, an old woman named Mariamu, who made tea out of water and sugar alone. When he mentions such tea, Karega says his mother used to make it.

Munira's sudden confusion about Wanja's baby indicates to the reader that the story Wanja told about Kimeria's sexual abuse and her pregnancy was incomplete: Wanja has kept some secrets back. That Mariamu used to make tea out of sugar and water—no actual tea—illustrates how badly the rich landowner Ezekieli treated his employees.

When Munira asks, Karega admits he's from Limuru. He explains he's Mariamu's son, used to work on Munira's father Ezekieli's **flower** farm, and attended **Siriana** until a year ago. When Munira says he knew Karega's older brother Nding'uri, Karega admits he knew very little about his brother until Munira's sister Mukami told him his brother was hanged for revolutionary activities during the rebellion.

The reader already knows that Karega will become a trade-union organizer 12 years in the future. At this earlier point, his backstory raises issues of class status and politics: his mother was an employee of Ezekieli, who tends to exploit his workers, and he himself worked on Ezekieli's flower farm. Since flowers in the novel represent Kenyan potential, Ezekieli's flower farm seems to represent the exploitation of that national potential for private gain. Despite his exploited working-class background, Karega attended the fancy high school Siriana, which suggests he may have been exposed to the same white-supremacist, Europe-centric education Munira was. Karega's brother participated in the rebellion—that is, the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952 – 1960), the war that Kenyan guerilla forces fought against Kenya's British colonial government.

Though Munira wonders how Karega knew his dead sister Mukami, Karega changes the subject, saying he's actually visiting because Munira taught him back at Manguo. Suddenly Munira remembers Karega, a student he had who matriculated at **Siriana**. Heartened by a former student's success, he says freedom has given Black Africans many more educational opportunities and asks what Karega is studying at university. Karega, discomfited, explains he never went to university because Siriana expelled him.

Despite his own expulsion from Siriana for protesting racism, Munira sees Karega's matriculation at Siriana as a sign of success—showing Munira still believes that Siriana's Eurocentric curriculum constitutes a good education. Thus, Siriana represents Munira's indoctrination in European supremacy. Despite that, Munira believes that Kenya's political independence from British colonialism has created opportunities for Black Africans—a belief Karega challenges by revealing that he was expelled from Siriana post-Independence, nearly a repeat of Munira's pre-Independence experiences.

When Munira asks why Karega was expelled, Karega explains there was a strike and asks whether Munira read about it in the papers. Munira, who never reads the news except for stories about murder, admits he didn't. Karega, disappointed, asks whether Munira knew that Fraudsham left and Chui came back. These revelations shock Munira. After questioning Munira about his time at **Siriana**, Karega leaves without fully explaining what happened at Siriana or why he visited Munira. Alone, Munira vacillates: he doesn't want to disturb his peace with memories or other people's business, but he wants answers. Abruptly he decides to go after Karega and invite him to stay at his house.

Earlier, the novel introduced readers to the character of Inspector Godfrey, a man who is obsessed with solving crimes but doesn't care about politics or justice. Now readers learn that Munira reads the papers only for salacious details of murders. The novel's rather negative representation of these two characters hints that it's morbid, even pernicious, to care about crime without caring about crime's larger political context—an important clarification for the novel to make, since the novel itself functions something like a murder mystery. Karega's questions about Fraudsham and Chui suggest that Siriana may have changed dramatically since Munira's experiences there—but Karega vanishes without explaining.

In the hospital recovering from the **fire**, Wanja flashes back to the same day—the day they celebrated Joseph going to school. In the flashback, Wanja helps her grandmother Nyakinyua with her vegetable garden, while Nyakinyua complains the soil is poorer than it used to be. Then she goes and helps Abdulla and Joseph clean the store. When they open the store, no one comes—so Wanja puts out a sign claiming they're having a closing sale. When people arrive, no sale is occurring, but they stick around to drink at the newly cleaned store anyway.

Wanja, who survived the fire, has a sexual abuse history; as such, readers may wonder whether the fire represents not only out-of-control violence but in particular violence against women—though the victims who died were men, it's not yet clear who was the arson's intended target. In Wanja's flashback, Nyakinyua complains about the poor soil, which suggests that agricultural practices may have changed for the worse under colonialism, damaging the land. Wanja's trick with the closing sale sign, meanwhile, suggests that she's a natural at business—and that even small-scale capitalism involves deceiving others.

After the customers leave, Wanja sits and thinks that that night will be the new moon. She realized a while ago she wanted a baby, tried to conceive, and couldn't. In Ilmorog, at Nyakinyua's suggestion, she sought advice from Mwathi wa Mugo, who told her to have sex on the new moon. Now she has plans for Munira. She's worried he won't show up, but she knows she has power over men—power she feels ambivalent about but has observed while working in bars and receiving gifts from her sexual partners. Despite receiving these gifts, Wanja has never taken money for sex; she likes romance. When after a long time Munira hasn't show up, Wanja is upset and tells Abdulla she's leaving. He offers to walk her home.

Nyakinyua and Wanja's consultation of Mwathi wa Mugo reveals that despite modernization and British colonial oppression, they have retained some traditional spiritual beliefs. Wanja's belief that she has "power" over men, meanwhile, derives from her perception of her sexuality as an economic commodity: something she could trade men in exchange for money but chooses to only trade for gifts and favors.

Karega's father and his mother Mariamu began working for Munira's father Ezekieli after years of exploitation by European landowners. When Karega's father wouldn't give Mariamu any decision-making power in the household, she protested, and he beat her. She appealed to Ezekieli, asking for a different household on the property. Ezekieli let her build a hut in a remote place where he thought he could visit her for sex unseen. Though she wouldn't have sex with him, he let her stay where she was so she wouldn't tell anyone about his attempted adultery. Her beloved son Nding'uri briefly convinced her to try again with his father, and though it didn't last, Mariamu had Karega.

Mariamu's story reveals the multiple oppressions poor Kenyan women face: after she has already suffered due to her race under colonial rule, Mariamu's husband tries to exploit her due to her gender while Ezekieli tries to exploit her both economically (as a worker) and sexually. Ezekieli's attempt to exploit Mariamu sexually again reveals his hypocrisy: he presents himself as a devout Christian, yet he also wants to commit adultery with a woman over whom he has economic power.

The night of the celebration for Joseph, Munira and Karega arrive at Abdulla's shop shortly after Wanja and Abdulla left. Munira buys a six-pack of beer from Joseph, and he and Karega go to Wanja's hut, where Munira introduces Karega to the others. They all take beers except Karega, who doesn't drink. Wanja announces Abdulla used to be a fighter and was about to tell a story about Dedan Kimathi. Munira feels awkward because he himself never fought in the rebellion. Out of nowhere, a beer bottle cap shoots from Munira's hand and knocks over a lamp, starting a small **fire**. After Abdulla puts it out, he leaves without telling his story. Then Wanja asks Karega to watch her house while she and Munira take a walk.

Dedan Kimathi (1920 – 1957) was a leader in the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army, also known as the Mau Mau, the Kenyan freedom fighters who resisted colonial British rule during the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952 – 1960). Munira's intense reaction to Kimathi's name—he loses control of his hand and starts a fire—both shows his repressed shame at not fighting the British and reinforces the symbolism associating fire with repressed emotion and out-of-control violence.

Wanja and Munira walk to a grassy hill, where they sit down. Wanja asks about Karega, and Munira explains Karega too was expelled from **Siriana** for striking and knew Chui, "almost a repeat story of [his] past." On the subject of the past repeating, Wanja says she has a memory that keeps returning. She had a cousin whose husband beat her, so the cousin ran away to the city but would come back to visit her relatives and bring them gifts. One day her cousin was visiting her mother, Wanja's aunt, but came over to Wanja's house. Then they all heard screaming, ran outside, and saw that Wanja's aunt was on **fire**, as was her hut. Very likely, the cousin's husband had set the hut on fire thinking his estranged wife was inside.

Munira calls Karega's experiences at Siriana "almost a repeat story of [his] past"—but since Karega didn't tell Munira why he was expelled, the reader has no way of knowing whether Munira's assumption is accurate. Meanwhile, Wanja's story about her cousin's estranged husband trying to murder her and murdering her aunt instead reinforces the novel's link between fire symbolism and male violence against women.

Wanja tells Munira that though the cousin's husband must have murdered her aunt, she for a long time wanted to believe her aunt had self-immolated like a Buddhist. She admits that some of her memories make her want to set herself on **fire**—to be purified. When Munira protests, Wanja continues talking as if he hasn't spoken, saying her aunt's husband was a Mau Mau and her aunt smuggled ammunition for them. Though her aunt wasn't Christian, and her mother was, they loved each other. When Wanja's father suggested Wanja's aunt's death was divine punishment for her involvement with the rebellion, it caused the estrangement that partially motivated Wanja's parents' violent beating of her.

When Wanja talks about self-immolating like a Buddhist, she may be referring specifically to the Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam in 1963, the same year Kenya gained independence from Britain. During the Buddhist Crisis, several Buddhists set themselves on fire to protest the then-government's bias against Buddhists. Wanja's fantasy of self-immolation again connects the fire symbolism in the novel with out-of-control emotions—as well as a perhaps destructive desire for purity. Wanja's father's claim that Wanja's aunt's death was divine punishment shows that Christianity can make people judgmental and cruel.

After a silence, Wanja tells Munira that when she said she sometimes wanted to self-immolate, that was only a manner of speaking—she's too scared of **fire** to do that to herself. Abruptly, Munira asks what happened to Wanja's baby. Wanja bursts into tears. When Munira asks what's wrong, she says she thought the moon would arrive and asks Munira to walk her home. When they reach Wanja's hut, Karega is gone. Munira feels a sudden, inexplicable terror. The moon comes out from behind the clouds; Wanja, overjoyed, asks Munira to stay. He follows her into the hut.

The sudden transition from talking about fire to talking about Wanja's baby once again links the novel's fire symbolism to Wanja's sexual abuse and violence against women. The end of the passage suggests that Wanja intends to have sex with Munira to get pregnant; given how she burst into tears when he asked about her baby, she may be trying to replace a baby that died or was lost somehow.

CHAPTER 4

Though European colonial history suggests Kenyans "only arrived here yesterday," archaeology and oral history suggest Kenyans have occupied the land a long time and have fought off many different racist, greedy invaders. Ilmorog remembers a few of these. For example, a man named Lord Freeze-Kilby came to Ilmorog with his wife, conscripted local people as workers, and forced them to farm wheat. One night, in protest, the workers burned the wheat fields. The lord's wife fled to the Ol Kalou. After the indigenous people terrorized the Lord with strange sounds at night, he followed his wife—only to find her in bed with a lover. He shot both his wife and the lover. The people of Ilmorog burned the house he left behind.

This passage contrasts European colonial history with Kenyan archaeological and oral history. The contrast suggests that Europeans teach a false history (for instance, implying Kenyans have no special right to or relationship with their land) to justify European colonization of Kenya. By contrast, Kenyan history shows that Kenyan people have a long history in the land. The story of Lord Freeze-Kilby killing his wife makes clear the novel does not view violence against women as a particularly Kenyan problem—men of all nationalities have the potential to hurt women.

Later, Ramjeesh Ramlagoon Dharamashah came to Ilmorog from India and set up a shop. Though he had a very young wife, he hired and subsequently impregnated a local Ilmorog girl, whom he then set up as his mistress in the city. He got all the local people to shop at his store and eventually got them into debt with him. In 1956, he received a mysterious letter from Ole Masai and immediately skipped town with his wife—leaving his Ilmorog mistress and son behind.

Ramjeesh Ramlagoon Dharamashah sexually exploits his "very young" wife and an Ilmorog girl while also preying on Ilmorog's townspeople economically, which suggests that sexual and capitalist predation go hand in hand. The story of Ole Masai's letter implies that Ole Masai was a revolutionary who threatened the shopkeeper to get him to stop exploiting Ilmorog.

Shortly after Kenya's independence, Abdulla moved to Ilmorog, took over Dharamashah's shop, and yelled at Joseph much as the old owner used to yell at his wife. Yet eventually, he stopped yelling at Joseph, sent him to school, and started seeming much happier. Njuguna believed the credit was due to Wanja.

Though Abdulla initially behaves like the first shopkeeper, he acts better under Wanja's influence, showing that people may mistreat others not because they are inherently evil but because their economic or social context encourages that behavior. Things can be different in a different context.

After having sex with Wanja, Munira feels conflicted and guilty. His family is rigidly Presbyterian and never talks about sex. Though he's cheated on his wife occasionally, the memory of his first sexual experience still haunts him: he orgasmed so quickly with a sex worker who'd mocked his youth that he wasn't even sure whether he'd succeeded in penetrating her. With Wanja, he enjoys the sex very much and feels temporarily powerful but then feels powerless in the face of how much he wants her.

Munira's religious upbringing gives him a conflicted. He has a natural desire for sex and so seeks it out, including with people other than his wife, but he also feels shame and powerlessness because Christianity has taught him that he should exercise more sexual self-control.

Wanja often asks Munira about Abdulla. Once she asks Munira why he thinks Abdulla came to Ilmorog. Munira claims not to know. Wanja says it seems that Abdulla's true pain is psychological, not bodily pain from his crippled leg. She suggests they are all "maimed souls" and demands to know what Munira is hiding from in Ilmorog. Panicky and babbling, Munira claims first that he wanted to move and then that he wanted to help the country after independence. When Wanja crows that she knew there was more to his motives than he originally claimed, Munira feels guilty for deceiving her.

Wanja's claim that she and her friends are all "maimed souls" suggests that something is wrong with the social context of post-Independence Kenya, causing harm to Kenyan men and women in a wide variety of life situations. When Munira tells Wanja that he wanted to improve post-Independence Kenya, he feels guilty for lying—underscoring yet again that Munira doesn't really care about political questions or the common good.

During the maize harvest, Wanja helps the women farm during the day and listens to their sexual gossip; the women like her for helping her grandmother Nyakinyua. In the evening, Wanja works at Abdulla's and listens to the men's gossip; the men perform verbally for her. Munira finds himself jealous of Wanja's work and of how attentively she listens to other people. After the harvest, which is poor, ends, Wanja's mood sours. She criticizes Ilmorog harshly.

Though Munira has no legitimate claim on Wanja—he's married to someone else—he feels jealous when she does normal things like work and talk to other people. This unreasonable jealousy reveals that Munira sees Wanja as a sexual possession rather than an independent person. The poor harvest hints that Ilmorog, full of farmers, lives at the mercy of nature.

One night at Abdulla's, when Wanja is criticizing Ilmorog's poverty, Munira asks her why she moved there from the coastal cities and why she doesn't leave. Wanja wonders aloud why she doesn't. Then she turns on Abdulla, blaming him for not paying her enough and talking about how bar owners want their female employees to work for a pittance and have sex with customers. Suddenly, she suggests turning the bar into a church for city tourists, or a sanatorium, or a brewery that will help poor people drink themselves to death. Munira, angry but very attracted to Wanja, considers insulting her by calling her a whore.

Wanja's tirade moves quickly from Abdulla's failures as an employer to a larger pattern of workplace sexual harassment Wanja has experienced—implying that Wanja's problems are bigger than Abdulla and that women in capitalist societies tend to suffer sexual exploitation in addition to economic exploitation. When Munira gets angry at Wanja, he wants to call her a whore; this insult shows his hypocrisy, since he's committing adultery with her.

Before Munira can insult Wanja, she suddenly demands music and begins to dance erotically. When she finishes dancing, she seems less upset. She tells Munira and Abdulla that she and other bargirls used to dance like that to get men to spend money on them, but Wanja never had sex with the ones who thought they could buy her. Then she admits she's sick of Ilmorog, which she calls a "wretched hole." Abdulla, feeling compassion toward Wanja, tells her he knows what it's like to be in emotional pain and suggests she stay in Ilmorog and become a co-owner of the bar. Wanja is grateful but refuses Abdulla, calling herself "wicked." By the next day, she has left Ilmorog.

Wanja's comments about her dancing reveal that she knows female sexuality is a market commodity in a sexist capitalist system—but she still doesn't want to sell sex itself. When she calls rural Ilmorog a "wretched hole," it suggests she has negative attitudes about nature as opposed to more manmade environments like cities. Finally, it's not clear why Wanja describes herself as "wicked"—but it's possible she has internalized anti-sex attitudes and is judging herself for her own sexual history.

CHAPTER 5

In the year after Wanja leaves, a former Kenyan independence fighter of Asian descent, who has protested post-independence wealth inequality and alliances with imperialist countries, is assassinated. Drought continues to afflict Ilmorog. One day, Ilmorog farmers, including Njuguna, are sitting outside Abdulla's. They're discussing the drought, the possible failure of Mwathi wa Mugo's powers, and the U.S. and USSR's plans to send astronauts to the moon, when Munira joins them. They ask Munira when school will start; he tells them that unless he gets another teacher to help him, he won't be able to keep the school open and that he plans to travel to Ruwa-ini to appeal to Mzigo.

The ethnically Asian Kenyan freedom fighter's assassination suggests that while in the novel's view, indigenous Africans may have a special relationship to their ancestral land, any person who dies for Kenyan freedom counts as Kenyan. Since the freedom fighter protested capitalism and imperialism, his death hints that pro-capitalist forces will use violence to prevent greater economic equality. The farmers' discussion of Mwathi wa Mugo hints that in the face of natural calamities like drought, the townspeople are coming to doubt traditional beliefs and practices.

After Wanja left, Munira kept traveling to Ruwa-ini hoping to run into her, but he never did. Eventually he recommitted to teaching and tried to forget her. Now when he goes to Abdulla's, Abdulla mostly ignores him, so he's glad to encounter the farmers. The farmers, continuing to discuss the U.S. and USSR's quest to reach the moon, suggest God is angry at the astronauts' hubris and is punishing humanity with drought. They lament their children's desertion of Ilmorog for city jobs. Njuguna recalls that his son complained he worked too hard at farming for too little profit; another farmer says the land used to yield more before white colonizers cut down the trees and over-farmed the soil. Then the farmers begin fighting with Abdulla about whether Abdulla's donkey eats too much grass.

The farmers speculate that God is using drought to punish humanity for astronauts' technological arrogance; with this speculation, the novel seems to be suggesting that religious belief is anti-science and anti-technology, leading to false beliefs about the natural world. By contrast, when the farmers note that their children are leaving the farms for the city and that white colonizers degraded the land, they are accurately noting the negative effects of capitalism and unsustainable European environmental practices on their rural, agricultural way of life.

One day, as the drought continues, the elder farmers approach Abdulla and convey a request from the town that he get rid of his donkey. Abdulla is furious, thinking of the donkey as "his other leg." He mutters that the elders want to drive him out of Ilmorog. Overhearing this, Joseph worries that they'll have to leave Ilmorog and won't get to go to school anymore. He wishes Wanja were still in town.

Despite Abdulla's crippled leg, he receives no social support and must work to live—which means he relies on his donkey, "his other leg." This shows how the capitalist imperative to make money can cause difficulties to various groups, such as disabled people, in the absence of legal protections or a social safety net. Joseph's worry that he'll have to go back to work reveals that he values his education—not all students have bad experiences like the ones Munira and Karega had at Siriana.

Two henchmen of MP Nderi wa Riera arrive in Ilmorog. They bring news of the Kiama-Kamwene Cultural Organization, a new entity intended to "bring unity between the rich and the poor and bring cultural harmony." The henchmen say the people of Ilmorog need to travel to Gatundu to have tea and bring 12 shillings and 50 cents with them. The people of Ilmorog are confused and angry. Nyakinyua tells the henchmen that Ilmorog doesn't have the money and doesn't need tea—they need water and their children back. When the henchmen claim that other tribes under sway of the recently assassinated "Indian communist" plan to steal from Ilmorog, the incredulous and infuriated women of Ilmorog threaten them and chase them back to their car.

This new political organization wants "unity" and "harmony," not equality or justice. It represents the unequal capitalist status quo: it wants poor people to shut up and donate what money they have, not protest for their rights. When the henchmen refer to the recently assassinated freedom fighter as an "Indian communist" and claim he has inspired other tribes to rob Ilmorog, it shows that the henchmen are trying to sow racial divisions among poor Kenyan populations to keep them from allying against the status quo.

After this incident, Munira bikes to Ruwa-ini to ask Mzigo for more teachers in Ilmorog. At the office, Mzigo tells Munira he's now officially the headmaster of Ilmorog's school, which pleases Munira tremendously. Yet when Munira tries to ask for more teachers, Mzigo blows him off, telling him to recruit the teachers himself. Munira, defeated, turns to go. Before he can leave, Mzigo gives him a letter from the Kamwene Cultural Organization inviting him as headmaster to tea in Gatundu with Nderi wa Riera.

Mzigo gives Munira a more important-sounding title but no material help, which suggests that Mzigo doesn't care about educating rural Ilmorog's children. He also passes on the same message about "tea" that Nderi wa Riera's henchmen sent, revealing that Mzigo represents the same pro-status quo forces that are smearing the recently assassinated anti-capitalist freedom fighter.

Munira, proud and delighted, hurries to Limuru to tell his wife Julia. Entering Limuru, he thinks of the contrast between Limuru's vivid landscape and his otherworldly religious upbringing. White colonists came to Kenya with their Christianity, capitalism, and cultural imperialism. As a young man, powerful warriors forced Munira's father Ezekieli to leave his ancestral lands; he decided that the white colonizers had magic more potent than those of the indigenous warriors, so he became a Christian and changed his name to Ezekieli against his own father's wishes. He exploited the colonial system to appropriate the land of Kenyans who didn't convert, and he became extremely wealthy while others perished.

Ezekieli converted to Christianity because he wanted access to the power white Christians were gaining in Kenya. Under colonialism, he fared better than other Kenyan people because he shared a religion with their colonizers and thus became wealthy under the capitalist system the British colonial government imposed. Thus, whether or not Christian teaching actually supports capitalism, Christianity and capitalism are associated and mutually reinforcing systems in Kenya.

Munira married a non-Christian woman, Julia, perhaps to protest his father's behavior and values—but Julia converted and become a perfect, sex-fearing daughter-in-law, which Munira resents. Munira has a difficult relationship with his father Ezekieli, who holds him in contempt, and wants to "break loose" from him—but doesn't know exactly how or why.

Here the novel reveals explicitly that the problems in Munira's marriage derive in part from Julia's religiosity. Now the reader learns that Julia converted to Christianity after the marriage—and Munira resents it, because he wanted to use his non-Christian wife to rebel against his father and because he thinks her religion negatively impacts their sex life. Munira's resentment betrays how he tends to see women as tools, possessions, or sexual objects rather than individuals with a right to their own beliefs.

With his invitation to tea with Nderi wa Riera, Munira is for once glad to return home. He and Julia happily prepare to travel to tea. They take a bus with other teachers and spouses. The bus drives past Gatundu and stops, letting the passengers off in a silent crowd. When one man asks about tea, another man appears, hits him, and vanishes. The assembled people are taken into a hut in groups of 10. After it's over, everyone feels like they've been "taken in" and had their "post-Uhuru expectations" violated. When Munira and Julia arrive home after midnight, Julia accuses Munira of knowing what would happen and not telling her.

At this point, the novel does not clarify what happened to the groups of 10 brought inside the hut, but since a man hit one of the invitees for speaking, the subsequent events may have been violent as well. "Uhuru" is the Swahili word for freedom. If "tea" has violated "post-Uhuru expectations," it suggests that whatever happened inside the hut, it was not appropriate in an independent nation.

Munira, thinking how his father Ezekieli stayed Christian against "movement" command in 1952 and lost his ear to guerillas as a result, decides to go talk to him. He confesses what happened the night before; he dwells on a man he heard, a tea worker, who said he had worked on a plantation for Milk Stream Tea estates before and after independence—and that the only difference between before and after was that "some of our people have joined" the capitalists. The tea-worker refused to take the oath—at which point he was beaten until he relented and took the oath.

Because the British were Christian, Christianity in pre-Independence Kenya was associated with colonialism and loyalty to the colonial government. Because Ezekieli refused to give up his Christianity, Mau Mau guerilla fighters cut off his ear. This anecdote illustrates that colonizers used Christian conversion to get loyalty from Kenyan people and that, as a result, Kenyan freedom fighters committed acts of violence against other Kenyan people who were Christian. The story of the plantation worker suggests that after Kenyan independence, most Kenyan people remain poor and exploited—only "some" Kenyan people have joined the capitalist class and accessed increased wealth and political control. Nevertheless, "tea" involves beating Kenyan citizens until they profess loyalty to the status quo.

After hearing Munira's story, Ezekieli scolds him for being a disappointment and for failing at everything—by being expelled from **Siriana**, by leaving his wife Julia alone to work in Ilmorog. Ezekieli notes that all his children have been successful except Munira and Mukami. When Munira asks why Mukami died by suicide, Ezekieli blames Mariamu and her sons without providing details.

Though Siriana expelled Munira for protesting racist policies, Ezekieli believes the expulsion reflects badly on Munira—showing that Ezekieli has absorbed the same white-supremacist, Eurocentric beliefs in which Siriana was indoctrinating its students. That Ezekieli vaguely blames Mariamu, the employee he tried to sexually exploit, for his daughter Mukami's suicide foreshadows future revelations about Mukami's death.

Ezekieli tells Munira to walk with him and takes him to the edge of the family estate. Gesturing at the rich land, Ezekieli tells Munira that the family's wealth comes not just from hard work but from God's blessing—and that "Satan is working through other tribes, arousing their envy and jealousy," so he took the oath to protect himself. He praises the KCO and insinuates that God wants poor people to work harder. Munira is utterly baffled that his father refused to swear oaths previously but swore this one now. He protests that the tribes have often worked and lived peacefully together. His father tells him to go back to Ilmorog, work, and stop drinking. Then he walks off.

Ezekieli's belief that God wants him to be wealthy resonates with "prosperity theology," a belief among fringe Protestant movements that God will bless you with riches if you believe in him. Many mainstream Christian leaders have publicly argued that the Bible contradicts prosperity theology. Ezekieli's adherence to prosperity theology highlights that he's less interested in what Christian scripture says than in using Christian cultural privilege to get rich. His statement that "Satan is working through other tribes" emphasizes that the KCO is dividing Kenyan ethnic groups to prevent anti-capitalist activism.

Munira decides not to think about the political situation anymore. Feeling eased yet powerless, he bikes to Kamiritho for a drink. There, he unexpectedly spots Wanja. He buys her a beer, and she tells him she's planning to return to Ilmorog. She has been working at a fancy bar near a golf club where rich men eat and pick up women. Lately, men from different indigenous ethnic groups have been avoiding one another and saying nasty things about one another's groups. The bar girls were rounded up and forced to attend "tea," but somehow Wanja managed to avoid it.

Wanja's story places interethnic tensions and "tea" in close proximity, implying that the same people who organized the "tea" oaths are also stoking interethnic tensions to prevent different Kenyan ethnic groups from banding together to protest the unequal status quo.

Shortly after the other bargirls had "tea," Wanja went home with a "regular," a rich Somali man, only to find her apartment on **fire**—apparently someone had hoped to burn her and the Somali man alive. Wanja wanted to inform the police, but the Somali man chose to flee instead. When Wanja went to stay with another bargirl, the girl said she'd heard rumors that Wanja was stuck-up, dating a *shifta*, and hadn't drunk the tea. The girl suggested Wanja wouldn't be able to find out who'd set the fire. After that, Wanja decided to return to Ilmorog. She had just stopped in Kamiritho on the way when she saw Munira.

Shifta *is slang for robber, a bandit, or a criminal. Context suggests that the "shifta" in question is the Somali man. Since Wanja never says the Somali man is a criminal, this in turn suggests that nosy people have assumed the man is a criminal merely because he's foreign—and tried to kill Wanja, both for having a sexual relationship with him and for avoiding the pro-status quo loyalty oath. This situation associates fire with political repression and misogynistic violence.*


To forget "tea," Munira suggests he and Wanja go drinking. They bar-hop and eventually end up back in a Limuru bar. Munira, feeling "**fire**-tongues of desire" for Wanja, wants to have sex with her right there—but then they both spot Karega arguing drunkenly with another young man about Kamaru (whom Karega prefers, for "sing[ing] about our past") and DK.

Someone has just tried to burn Wanja alive, so the description of Munira's desire as "fire-tongues" is ominous, hinting that his feelings for her are dangerous. "Kamaru" refers to John Kamaru (1939 – 2018), a Kenyan musician who wrote political songs and engaged in activism. Karega's preference for Kamaru, who sings "about our past," emphasizes Karega's interest in Kenyan history and activism. "DK" likely refers to Daniel Kamau (born 1949), another Kenyan musician. Karega's drunkenness is surprising—the last time he appeared in the novel, he didn't drink beer.


Wanja yells Karega's name. Walking in a drunken zigzag, Karega comes over to join Wanja and Munira. A song about someone refusing to visit their sick mother begins playing on the jukebox. Wanja, looking suddenly agonized, confesses to Munira that the night she ran away from home, her mother was very sick. Much later, while working as a bargirl, Wanja learned her mother had had appendicitis and needed surgery—and the revelation made Wanja laugh.

Wanja's story about laughing at her mother's appendicitis betrays how badly Wanja's mother damaged their relationship by beating Wanja just for walking with a boy. It may also imply that Wanja blames her mother for not realizing that Kimeria was sexually abusing Wanja.

Karega falls asleep at the bar. Munira suggests he and Wanja take Karega back to the room that Munira rented in Kamiritho. After they get an unconscious Karega into bed, Munira considers approaching Wanja for sex—but then Karega wakes up, and Munira feels abruptly guilty that he let Karega leave Ilmorog without a word after Karega came to see him. Munira inwardly laments that a "hopeful" young person is drowning himself in music and alcohol.

Though Munira is often self-absorbed and detached from other people, his guilt about Karega reveals that he does feel some responsibility toward others—perhaps particularly young former students. His description of Karega as "hopeful" emphasizes that Karega used to have aspirations and goals.

Karega demands to know where he is. Munira identifies himself and asks what happened. Digressively and incoherently, Karega explains how after his expulsion from **Siriana**, he couldn't get a job and ended up selling cheap items by roadsides and begging. He wouldn't go back to his mother Mariamu's because he was afraid that she would ask him why he participated in the strike. Sick of begging, he remembered that Siriana had expelled Munira, too, for striking, and he decided to go see him. But when Karega sought out Munira, he hated what he perceived as Munira's "pleading ignorance and mock surprise" about the strike and expulsion—so he fled and began drinking.

Karega's poverty after his expulsion underscores how important education is to economic stability—so that, at a school like Siriana, it's in students' economic self-interest not to protest the racist curriculum. Thus, Siriana represents how, in a society still suffering the effects of colonialism, those Kenyans who accept the Eurocentric, capitalist status quo succeed while those who protest injustice suffer. Karega's negative reaction to Munira's "pleading ignorance and mock surprise" highlights how Munira's disinterest in politics can hurt the people with whom he interacts.

After Karega finishes his tale, he suddenly notices Wanja—and they stare at one another, rapt, in a way that causes "**fire**-tongues of stinging nettles" in Munira's belly. Wanja tells Karega to come back to Ilmorog; he agrees.

Earlier, Munira felt "fire-tongues of desire" for Wanja. Now, when she and Karega make eye contact, he feels "fire-tongues" of jealousy. Since Wanja has barely escaped death in a fire, the "fire-tongues" in Munira hint that his sexist jealousy and lust may endanger Wanja.

CHAPTER 6

Munira, Wanja, and Karega travel to Ilmorog together, taking turns on Munira's bicycle. Munira ponders Mukami's death, his father Ezekieli's strange behavior and reference to Mariamu, and his own decision to hire Karega as another teacher. He also feels ashamed that he took the KCO oath—but he tries to avoid that shame, "still[ing] the inner doubt that would have awakened him to life." Meanwhile, Wanja wants a fresh start and has resolved not to have sexual relationships until she has "defeated the past."

Munira's ongoing curiosity about his sister Mukami's suicide and Ezekieli's blaming Mariamu hint that the novel will reveal more about Mukami's death in time. That Munira's "inner doubt" could "awaken[] him to life" if he let it implies his life is unsatisfactory because he avoids thinking hard about troubling events. Wanja, by contrast, seems to have thought hard about her history of sexual abuse and exploitative relationships—and decided to avoid sex. It is unclear, however, whether Wanja thinks she can only "defeat[] the past" while celibate because sex is innately bad or because sex distracts her from her real problems.

Finally, Karega wonders about his strong reaction to Wanja, recalls Mukami with grief, and decides to be the best teacher he can be. Munira has explained that European and Asian schools stole the best African teachers from African schools once segregation in "the allocation of teachers was removed," so Karega feels his new job will have extra political meaning.

Munira's comments to Karega imply that ending racial segregation in Kenyan education hurt Black students in certain respects: because the schools with predominantly European or Asian students had more money, they could hire away the best Black teachers from the schools with Black students as soon as the segregated "allocation of teachers" ended. Black students ended up with fewer or worse teachers. When free-market logic determines the allocation of teachers, in other words, the poorer students get worse teachers—and in Kenya, Black students tend to be poorer due to a history of colonial exploitation.

When Munira, Wanja, and Karega reach Ilmorog, they notice it is still drought-stricken. Outside Abdulla's shop, they encounter Abdulla, Joseph, and Nyakinyua. Nyakinyua tells them the town elders want to kill Abdulla's donkey in a ceremony to end the drought. After Munira has introduced Karega and they've sat down, Karega points out that donkeys don't influence the weather. Nyakinyua says it's really about grass—Abdulla's donkey eats grass that others want to reserve for goats. Munira and Wanja both suggest the drought will end—thought Wanja inwardly thinks that if it doesn't, Ilmorog will be "ruined."

The drought makes clear the Ilmorog farmers' need for good weather—and so their economic vulnerability to bad weather. Karega's comment that sacrificing the donkey won't change the weather implies that traditional beliefs may prevent people from taking effective action to improve situations, relying on ineffective, quasi-magical solutions instead. Nyakinyua's response reveals that what appears to be an ineffective spiritual action may disguise practical reasoning: the elders want to kill the donkey for eating too much grass.

With Mzigo's approval, Karega begins working as an untrained teacher, a "UT," in Ilmorog. Educating children makes Karega think more about **Siriana**. He's concerned his students don't understand life "outside Ilmorog" or larger political entities like Kenya, Africa, and the African diaspora. He feels Siriana didn't help him understand "the African experience," so he has difficulty teaching it. In the face of drought, poverty, and exodus to cities, Karega feels that his and Munira's lessons trick the children about what's important, the same way Chui tricked students at Siriana.

The term "African diaspora" refers generally to people of African descent living outside Africa; however, it often refers more specifically to descendants of enslaved African people in the Americas. Karega believes that Kenyan students should know not only about Kenya but also about the African continent and about how colonizers kidnapped, enslaved, and trafficked African people. Siriana did not help Karega understand these histories, indicating Siriana's pro-European, pro-white bias, which minimized the evils people of European descent committed in Africa. Karega also believes that education should help children understand climactic phenomena like drought and socioeconomic phenomena like urbanization. These beliefs show that Karega is committed to teaching lessons relevant to students' lives.

One day in March, Karega goes to Abdulla's and finds a gathering there. Nyakinyua tells him that an old farmer's goat has died, which caused him to weep; the people tactfully ignored his tears and stayed with him.

The farmer crying over his dead goat shows how bad the drought is and how dependent Ilmorog's farmers are on both livestock and the climate.

The drought lasts through April. In the middle of May, Wanja meets Munira and Karega at the school and tells them Mwathi wa Mugo has ordered the townspeople to sacrifice both Abdulla's donkey and a goat. Wanja wants to save the donkey somehow. Munira asks how they can intervene; no one answers.

Karega has already pointed out that sacrificing a donkey won't change the weather. Though Nyakinyua pointed out that the donkey eats grass that farmers' livestock needed, the drought has gotten bad enough that killing the donkey won't make much difference. Thus, the planned sacrifice suggests the people of Ilmorog do not know how to respond effectively to the draught and that Mwathi wa Mugo's religious interventions may be a distraction, not a solution.

Karega recalls both natural and manmade famine in Ilmorog's past. Though "uncontrolled nature was always a threat to human endeavor," colonial policy and wars also caused mass Kenyan deaths. These recollections intrude on his thoughts as he tries to teach his students about Africa's great early history. During one such lecture, a student faints from hunger, and Karega has to revive him with food from his own living quarters.

The phrase "uncontrolled nature was always a threat to human endeavor" hints that humans must learn to govern nature through scientific progress to keep themselves safe. Yet Karega knows that political policies as well as climactic conditions can cause famines, so controlling one's political environment is as important as controlling nature.

When Karega broaches the problem with Munira, Munira asks rhetorically what they can do. Karega suggests they organize an Ilmorog delegation and travel to the city seeking aid. Munira initially doesn't want to return to the city because of his experience drinking "tea," but Karega's mockery of the KCO improves Munira's mood to the point that he suggests they tell Nderi wa Riera they're KCO members.

"The city" is Nairobi, Kenya's capital. Munira's bad memories of "tea" remind readers that while Kenya has achieved independence, its new political order has violent, repressive elements; thus, Karega's hope that the political system will help Ilmorog may be unfounded.

Karega gathers Munira, Wanja, and Abdulla to pitch his plan of visiting Ilmorog's MP in the city. Rather than allowing Ilmorog to sacrifice Abdulla's donkey, they'll bring the donkey with them. Abdulla agrees, wanting to save his donkey; Wanja hesitates, recalling bad experiences in the city, but she thinks this trip could be better because she has altruistic motives now. When Abdulla and Wanja agree, Munira gives in to peer pressure—but he also hopes to exorcise his guilt about the KCO oath and see whether he can extract anything good from the experience.

Karega and the rest of the delegation plan in part to save Abdulla's donkey from being sacrificed. Thus, the novel contrasts the traditional spiritual practices that Mwathi wa Mugo represents with secular political action. Yet the novel also reminds the reader that someone tried to kill Wanja for dating a Somali man the last time she was in the city—which may foreshadow dangers for the characters as they seek political solutions to their problems.

At a town meeting to discuss sacrificing Abdulla's goat, Karega gets up and gives a speech suggesting they send a delegation to their MP instead. Njuguna speaks against the suggestion. He says that they shouldn't have to plead with their MP and that he should come to Ilmorog instead. Then Nyakinyua argues that nothing good ever happens when important people come to Ilmorog—they just collect taxes or survey the land and then leave. If the people of Ilmorog want something, they should travel to the city and demand it. Nyakinyua's speech persuades the town, and they begin preparing a delegation to travel to the city.

Nyakinyua's contention that visitors never help Ilmorog indicates that Kenya's post-Independence political status quo does not benefit poor people or people living in rural areas. While this contention makes clear that Ilmorog's townspeople need to go to the city themselves if they want help, it may also make the reader doubt whether Ilmorog will get real help even if the townspeople do make it to the city.

THE JOURNEY

Nyakinyua tells the Ilmorog delegation stories at night around a fire. She tells them of Ndemi, the first farmer of Ilmorog, who gave up the nomadic life of a herdsman to make tools and cultivate crops—an innovation that first earned him mockery but then wealth, respect, beautiful wives, and the epithet "He who wrestled with God." She tells them about Ilmorog's history as a wealthy locus of trade with Europeans—and as the site of the murder of a white missionary on his way to attempt to convert the King of Uganda. The murder led to white fighters shooting not only men in Ilmorog but also women and children.

Nyakinyua's stories include both legends and recent history. They represent an informal education that teaches her listeners things relevant to their lives, in contrast to the formal education that schools like Siriana provide, which teaches Kenyan students exclusively about Europe. Nyakinyua's story about Ndemi illustrates that Kenyan people sought to control nature through tools and cultural practices long before Europeans colonized them. (The Hebrew word "Israel" literally means "wrestles with God"; with Ndemi's epithet, the novel may be suggesting that Kenya possessed religious concepts analogous to Judeo-Christian ones prior to white missionaries' arrival.) Nyakinyua's story about the missionary demonstrates how white Christian evangelization in Kenya involved both local resistance and retaliatory colonial violence.

Nyakinyua also tells a story about a farmer named Munoru, "bewitched" by European bicycles, who volunteered to fight in the war between British and German colonists. Many Ilmorog men were pressganged into fighting in this war. Those who returned became materialistic and uninterested in farming. Many departed for jobs in other areas, especially cities. Ilmorog declined in population and importance.

The war Nyakinyua mentions here is likely World War I (1914 – 1918), during which Germany and the UK had colonies in East Africa and fought one another there. According to Nyakinyua, the Ilmorog men who fought for the Europeans became disconnected from the land and contributed to Kenya's urbanization. Nyakinyua connects Kenya's history of colonialism with its post-Independence socioeconomic situation: capitalist inequality, growing cities, and declining farming populations.

Nyakinyua breaks off her story, afraid for the children who have joined the delegation for their long journey. When Karega urges her to keep going, Nyakinyua claims there's nothing more to say. Karega suspects she is holding back some secret knowledge or understanding. Nyakinyua urges them all to go to bed, because they have a long day of travel the next day.

Karega's suspicion that Nyakinyua is holding back secret knowledge makes clear that he is dissatisfied with the Eurocentric education he received at Siriana. He wants to know more about Kenyan history, and he believes Nyakinyua can educate him.

Karega, suffering insomnia, walks away from the camp. He thinks about Nyakinyua's stories, how they seem more truthful and alive than his education at **Siriana** or what he teaches Ilmorog's children. He thinks, too, about how greedy European colonialism obliterated so much indigenous work and knowledge and put the current-day people of Ilmorog at the mercy of nature.

Here Karega explicitly compares the formal, Eurocentric education he received at Siriana to the informal education of Nyakinyua's stories and judges that Nyakinyua's stories are more truthful. He goes on to think about European colonizers' destruction of indigenous knowledge, emphasizing that Karega's Siriana education wasn't just incomplete but harmful in its omission of Kenyan history and culture. Karega blames the drought on colonial education's suppression of Kenyan knowledge, suggesting that lost traditional Kenyan farming practices would have been adequate for waiting out the drought.

Suddenly Karega notices someone behind him. It's Wanja. When she asks whether she startled him, he says no—only he's afraid of snakes and was worried about that. Wanja cautions him to use some euphemism rather than call snakes by name, lest he summon them. He dismisses that as superstition. When Wanja claims that Karega doesn't think names matter, Karega says that's not true—for instance, he thinks it's ridiculous "self-hate" when Africans adopt European names. He just thinks the thing or person you're naming matters more than the name itself.

Karega, the character most interested in politics, disdains traditional superstitions and beliefs. Through Karega, the novel implies that political progress may require rejecting superstition, spirituality, and religion. Karega's disdain for African people who adopt European names, meanwhile, suggests that political progress in Kenya will require rejecting not only anti-Black racism but also European culture.

Wanja asks whether Karega was thinking about names or about the delegation's journey as he walked. Karega says he was thinking about Nyakinyua's stories of Ndemi, which he believes truly gesture toward a great past even if they aren't totally accurate. Wanja says he's a strange person and gives as an example Karega refusing all alcohol and then showing up one day drunk in a bar. Karega says he just felt beaten down and wanted to forget everything.

Karega believes Nyakinyua's stories contain a useful truth because they assert that Kenya has a history of which it can be proud, even though some of her stories can't be taken literally. Thus, Karega suggests that the political or ideological slant of historical accounts may be as important as their factual accuracy.

Wanja tells Karega that she understands feeling beaten down, but she asks him why he thinks this visit to the city will be different from his last and suggests Ilmorog may turn against him if the delegation fails. Karega believes the delegation should be successful, because "the voice of the people is truly the voice of God" and the MP is, in a sense, their employee. Wanja likes Karega's optimism but has her doubts.

Karega's claim that "the voice of the people is truly the voice of God" indicates that instead of holding religion sacred, he holds sacred human equality and political representation. Wanja's cynicism about politics foreshadows that the people Ilmorog's delegation appeal to may not share Karega's egalitarian values.

Karega and Wanja stand quietly under the moon. Karega stares at a hill in the distance. Wanja tells him that legend says a child who runs around that hill will change sex—a boy will become a girl, and a girl will become a boy. When Karega dismisses the legend as obviously false, Wanja says "fiercely" she wishes it were accurate. She recalls her vow not to have sex until she's accomplished something and thinks, given Ilmorog's dire situation, accomplishing something is about as likely as her transforming into a man like Karega. Karega, meanwhile, thinks about Mukami's suicide and his attempt to write about her memory's effect on him just before Chui's arrival at **Siriana** and his expulsion.

Karega dismisses the legend of the hill without considering what emotional weight it has for Wanja. While the novel may agree with Karega's anti-superstition view, the scene subtly criticizes Karega for not considering what superstitions, legends, or traditional beliefs mean to others. That Wanja "fiercely" wishes the legend were true implies that she wishes she could become something other than a woman. This wish reminds the reader of the sexual abuse and gendered violence Wanja has suffered. When Karega reminisces Chui and Siriana, meanwhile, it hints that Chui's arrival had something to do with Karega's expulsion.

Wanja asks Karega whether he contemplates the past. Karega, startled by Wanja's insight, realizes that she reminds him of Mukami. He tells her that understanding the present relies on understanding the past. Wanja disagrees; she says that in times of crisis, history can't help you, and she'd rather have help than a good story. Then she comments, "Sometimes one would like to hide the past even from oneself," and begins to cry. Karega asks whether Wanja's past was very difficult and thinks how many different sides she has—sexually powerful, then sympathetic and helpful, then hardworking, and now sobbing.

Karega's comments about the past imply two things. First, Kenya's European colonial past still shapes its present. Second, Siriana failed its students not only because it avoided teaching Kenya's history but because, in so doing, it prevented them from understanding their reality. Wanja's admission that she "would like to hide the past" from herself both reminds the reader of Wanja's sexual abuse and hints that she may have experienced other painful events she hasn't discussed. Unlike Munira, who sees Wanja primarily as a sex object, Karega in this passage sees Wanja's sexual and non-sexual aspects simultaneously.

Wanja can't make herself tell Karega about Kimeria and what he did to her. Instead, she tells him about the sexual harassment she has experienced from her bosses in bars and the intense desire clientele have to have sex with new bargirls. She attributes men's desire to be the first one to sleep with a new barmaid to the presence of barmaids all over Kenya.

Wanja was not only sexually abused as an adolescent but also sexually harassed at work. When Wanja attributes the ubiquity of barmaids to male desire, she's making clear the link between capitalist imperatives (demand for sexy female staff) and harassment working women suffer.

Munira, joining Wanja and Karega, asks Karega whether Wanja is telling him about her time working in bars. Wanja tells them she enjoyed the feeling of sexual attractiveness and power the work gave her, but it didn't seem right. She knew women who tried to leave the work. One left and worked as a maid for extremely low pay with a married boss who tried to have sex with her; she returned to working in bars. Another worked on farms now owned by Africans, but she, too, earned so little that she returned to bars.

Wanja's comments reveal that while being an object of sexual desire may make working women feel *powerful, they don't actually* have *much power or many options: Wanja's coworkers didn't want to be bargirls, but they faced sexual harassment and poor pay in other jobs as well and so settled for working in bars.*

Wanja tells Munira and Karega that when she tried to leave working in bars and return home, her father rejected her, saying he wouldn't let "a prostitute" live in his house. After working in bars a bit longer, she came to Ilmorog without knowing why. She decided to leave, get rich, and come back to stay. To get rich, she decided to have sex with Europeans—something she had only done once before, with a policeman, who jailed some men Wanja was socializing with for drug possession but let Wanja go free in exchange for sex.

Wanja's father rejected her and called her "a prostitute" though she wasn't selling sex for money then—she was simply sexualized on the job. His use of "prostitute" as an insult illustrates how some men disparage sexually exploited women and blame them for their exploitation. Wanja's story of having sex with a European police officer to avoid jail shows how powerful people, like the police, can use the law to exploit the marginalized.

Though revolted by European skin, Wanja decided to become a prostitute exclusively for Europeans, but she couldn't figure out how to dress for or flirt with European men. One night she met a German man in a bar who told her he was trying to find and help a Kenyan girl whom another German man had trafficked for sex in Germany and who had escaped back to Kenya, leaving a baby behind. He offered to pay Wanja to help him find the girl. Though Wanja wondered whether the man was a lunatic, he sounded coherent and was offering a lot of money.

By mentioning the sex-trafficking of Kenyan girls in Europe, the novel connects the legacy of colonialism, capitalism, and the sexual exploitation of women: the power imbalances between European former colonizers and formerly colonized Africans, rich people and poor people, and men and women converge in the phenomenon of Kenyan girls sold for sex to rich European men.

Wanja went back to the German man's house with him. He gave her a tour and led her into his bedroom, where a dog accosted her. Wanja, terrified, sat on the bed. The man, aroused by her fear, began trying to take her clothes off. Though terrified, Wanja had the presence of mind to claim she had left her handbag in the car and needed something from it. As soon as she got out of the man's house, she sprinted away.

The German man tries to take Wanja's clothes off without her consent while she is terrified, which implies that he means to rape her and concocted the story about saving a sex trafficking victim to lure her to a private place. Thus, the novel suggests that European people who play savior to African people have ulterior motives.

As Wanja ran away from the German man's house, a Black man in a car (the lawyer) stopped for her. Sobbing, she told the man her story. He drove her to his house, let her stay there for two nights, and asked her more questions about what happened. Eventually he concluded they wouldn't be able to take any successful legal action; he drove Wanja to the bus stop and suggested she return to her parents' house. Then he gave her his card and offered to help her any time. Though Wanja considered going home, she began working in bars again instead.

The lawyer believes Wanja couldn't take successful legal action against a white German man who tried to rape her—which illustrates that in an unjust society, the law won't protect marginalized people from injustice. Wanja's decision to continue working in bars rather than go to her parents emphasizes that their violence and sexism toward her have damaged their familial relationship and removed Wanja's safety net.

As the delegation continues its journey, Abdulla's personality blossoms. Despite his crippled leg, he walks rather than riding in the donkey cart so more children can ride. He tells the children stories and teaches them about plants. One day, the delegation sings a hymn about how only "those who/Would not eat the bread of Jesus" starve. Though Abdulla hates the lyrics, the singing reminds him of when he was a freedom fighter singing songs about Black solidarity and resistance. At that time, he had worked in a shoe-factory whose rich boss exploited the workers; the workers went on strike, only to be beaten up by policemen. He dreamed of driving out the boss, instituting communal ownership, and getting food for his children. This dream made him "a man."

The stories and knowledge that Abdulla shares with the children make him, like Nyakinyua, a source of good informal education in contrast with the oppressive formal education available at schools like Siriana. The lyrics arguing that "those who/Would not eat the bread of Jesus" starve mean that spiritual nourishment is more important than physical nourishment. Abdulla's hatred for the lyrics indicates that he thinks this belief is untrue and harmful. His memories of becoming a revolutionary reveal that he joined the rebellion against the British colonizers because he wanted to end exploitative capitalist working conditions and enact socialism in Kenya.

Walking with the delegation, Abdulla thinks how good it is that Karega came to Ilmorog. Karega brought the conversation in Abdulla's bar around to African and African diasporic freedom fighters such as Toussaint, which makes Abdulla feel the Mau Mau were "a link in the chain in the long struggle of African peoples." Abdulla recalls how his freedom fighters' leader was a half-African, half-Indian man named Ole Masai who definitively sided with Kenyan freedom when he pointed a gun at white policemen and "humiliated" them. Afterward, he wrote a letter to his Indian father demanding he vacate Kenyan land.

The man who scared the exploitative, possibly sexually abusive Indian shopkeeper out of Ilmorog was his own son, Ole Masai. Thus, while Abdulla is interested in commonalities among all African freedom fighters—"Toussaint" refers to Toussaint Louverture (1743 – 1803), a famous Haitian general who fought French colonizers during the Haitian Revolution—Abdulla's collaboration with Ole Masai emphasizes that being an African freedom fighter requires anti-colonial political commitments, not a purely African racial background.

Ole Masai and Abdulla talked about various communist revolutions globally, until Ole Masai was killed, and Abdulla, crippled. As Abdulla remembers the mission gone awry, the delegation's children start yelling about antelope. Abdulla brings down two with a slingshot. That night, the delegation feasts on antelope, and Abdulla tells stories. When Karega asks about Dedan Kimathi, Abdulla tells how one time, when his freedom-fighting group was low on food and men, they received a summons from Kimathi to come to a meeting in Mount Kenya Forest to discuss alliances with other anti-colonial groups in Kenya and internationally.

Abdulla became crippled fighting for Kenyan freedom from British colonial rule in the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952 – 1960). He's also an excellent hunter with a slingshot, a storyteller, and a former freedom fighter who sacrificed for his country and who was in contact with Dedan Kimathi (1920 – 1957), the Mau Mau Rebellion's most famous general. These revolutions suggest that while up to this point Abdulla has appeared as a poor, embittered shopkeeper, that is due to his economic and social context, not his ultimate aspirations or his potential.

Though the trip would be long, Abdulla and the fighters were inspired by the thought of seeing Kimathi. Despite hunger and internal dissension, the fighters made it to the meeting. There, they found a massive gathering singing political songs about "traitors" to Black sovereignty in Kenya. It turned out that Kimathi had been betrayed to the English. Four days after Abdulla's arrival, the meeting received word that the English had executed Kimathi. After that, the fight for freedom was different.

British colonial forces, with help from Kenyan collaborators, captured the Mau Mau general Dedan Kimathi in 1956 and executed him in 1957. That Kimathi's death changed the way freedom-fighting felt suggests that his betrayal by other Kenyan people undermined the fighters' belief in Kenyan solidarity and demoralized them.

The day after Abdulla's stories, the people of Ilmorog feel inspired and empowered; they sense the land they travel is "hallowed" by the past presence of freedom fighters. But three days after that, they run out of food and run low on water. Finally, they arrive at a highway through a rich, green neighborhood and find water. As Wanja is tending to the children, feeling painful maternal feelings toward them, she notices that Joseph is sick. When she tells the delegation, they decide to take Joseph to the closest farmhouse to seek rest and shelter where they can treat his illness.

The word "hallowed" means "sacred." If the Ilmorog delegation feels that the freedom fighters have made Kenyan land sacred, that suggests that people who fight or die for a land—and people connected to the fighters—have a special relationship to it. The title of this section of the novel is "Toward Bethlehem." Together with the name Joseph, this title alludes to a Christian Biblical story. In Luke 2:1 – 7, Mary is very pregnant with Jesus Christ when she and her husband, Joseph, must travel to Bethlehem to be counted in an imperial Roman census. Because no inns make room for the couple, Mary ends up giving birth unsheltered and putting the newborn Jesus to sleep in a manger. The allusion suggests that as the inns provided no special care for Joseph or Mary despite Mary's holy child, the Ilmorog delegation may receive no help for their Joseph despite the "hallowed" ground on which they are traveling.

The closest farmhouse belongs to a white woman, who demands the delegation leave her property before hearing what they want. The next farmhouse has a signpost that reads "Rev. Jerrod Brown." Though they assume he's white, they hope he'll help them because he's a Christian. When Karega, Munira, and Abdulla approach the Reverend's house, two Alsatians start barking. A security guard and a cook come out to ask Karega, Munira, and Abdulla what they're doing. Munira tells them they're with a sick child and need help.

The white woman's immediate negative reaction to Black travelers shows that although Kenya has won independence from white colonizers, white people in Kenya still treat Black Kenyans as lesser. The delegation assumes a Christian minister will be more likely to help them, as most Christian denominations consider helping hungry, homeless, or sick people a religious duty. Yet the Reverend's guard dogs hint that he may not be as willing to help poor strangers as the delegation hopes.

The cook goes inside, and the Reverend comes out. They see that, counter to their assumptions, the Reverend is Black—and Munira recognizes him as an old religious associate of his father Ezekieli. The travelers explain to the Reverend that they're traveling from Ilmorog and have a sick child with them. The Reverend, supposing they're begging for food, invites them into his large, fancy house.

It isn't clear whether the delegation assumed the Reverend was white due to his European name or his fancy house. Either way, the Reverend's wealth and European name imply that he may have a conservative, pro-colonial outlook. The Reverend's association with Ezekieli, whom the novel has portrayed as self-interested and hypocritical in his Christianity, may foreshadow uncharitable, hypocritical behavior from the Reverend.

Munira is about to explain to the Reverend their social connection when the Reverend pulls out a Bible and reads a passage about Peter miraculously curing a crippled beggar. Then the Reverend says the passage means the Bible frowns on beggary and laziness. The travelers are astonished. Munira is glad he didn't tell the Reverend who he is, while Karega quotes the Bible passage about Jesus multiplying loaves and fishes for hungry people. The Reverend claims that's about "the bread and fish of Jesus." When Munira, Abdulla, and Karega return to the others, Abdulla tells them they should look for a house owned by a non-white, non-clergyperson, while Karega bitterly jokes about the hymn the group was singing earlier—the Reverend could only offer spiritual, not literal, food.

The Reverend's interpretation of the Bible passage astonishes the listeners because it is so implausible. The New Testament contains many stories of Jesus Christ or his disciples miraculously curing illness or disability, but the New Testament frames these miracles as intended to help people and glorify God, not to get beggars back to work. The miracle to which Karega alludes in response occurs in all four gospels—Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke: 9:12 – 14, and John 6:1-14. This miracle story, called "the loaves and fishes" or "feeding the multitude," describes Jesus Christ multiplying a small amount of available food to make sure a crowd that has come to hear him preach doesn't go hungry. When the Reverend replies that that miracle is really about "the bread and fish of Jesus," he means the food in the story is just *a metaphor for spiritual sustenance. The Reverend's implausible Bible readings show how his wealth has made him a hypocritical Christian.*

The delegation travels on, checking names on signposts. Most houses are owned by European or Asian people. Then they come upon a house with a signpost reading "Raymond Chui." Karega refuses to go in; Munira happily volunteers to go, thinking of Chui as his "comrade-in-protest." As he approaches the house, he hears a women's singing group performing "native cultural songs." Then men begin to sing a sexually graphic song usually performed at circumcisions. Suddenly conscious of his own unwashed state, Munira stops at the door without knocking. A woman in a "huge Afro-wig" opens the door, sees Munira, screams, and faints. Munira, terrified Chui and his associates will beat him before asking what happened, flees back to the delegation and tells the others to move quickly away.

Munira thinks of Chui as his "comrade-in-protest," implying he believes that Chui will treat him well due to their shared history of striking at Siriana. Yet Karega, who encountered an older Chui at Siriana, has a negative reaction to the idea of seeing him. The difference in Munira and Karega's reactions suggests that Chui may have changed for the worse between his expulsion and his return to Siriana. At Chui's house, the "native cultural songs" sung out of their ceremonial context and the presumably African woman wearing a "huge Afro-wig" both suggest that the rich partygoers are divorced from Kenyan culture but appropriate elements of it for amusement or fashion.

By this point, Joseph is very feverish, sleep-talking about his hunger, begging someone not to beat him, and explaining a past life of homelessness. His obvious suffering activates Wanja's "unfulfilled motherhood," and she demands they go straight to the next house. Karega and Njuguna go with her; the delegation assumes that Njuguna, being an elderly man, will prove the travelers' good intentions.

Wanja's "unfulfilled motherhood," alludes to Wanja's adolescent sexual abuse and subsequent pregnancy and should make readers wonder what happened to Wanja's baby, if she did in fact give birth to a living infant.

Before Wanja, Karega, and Njuguna reach the house, men appear, grab them, tie them up, take them into the house, and lock them in a room. A little later, a man in a suit (later revealed to be Kimeria) walks in. After he and Wanja stare at each other, the man apologizes for the "precautions" and asks what the travelers want. When Karega explains their journey's purpose, the man claims he's friends with Nderi wa Riera—though Nderi was a freedom fighter and the man in the suit was on the opposite side, they've since realized they want the same things and are both members of the KCO. Karega wonders who the man is trying to impress. Njuguna asks the man to untie them. The man agrees to send someone and leaves.

This rich man in a suit has imprisoned the poor travelers; that he calls this imprisonment "precautions" suggests he is suspicious that any poor person near his house might be dangerous. It also illustrates that some rich people feel entitled to control and abuse poor people in order to protect private property. The man's casual admission that he fought for the British but is now friends with Nderi wa Riera, a former freedom fighter, shows that in post-Independence Kenya, former revolutionaries who have gained political power have not maintained their anti-colonial ideals. Finally, the long look the man in the suit shares with Wanja suggests a connection between them.

One of the men who tied up Wanja, Karega, and Njuguna enters the room, cuts their ropes, and says his employer (Kimeria) wants to speak with Wanja. Wanja follows the employee through the house to Kimeria's office. Kimeria shuts the office door behind Wanja and says, "At long last." When Wanja asks why Kimeria is treating an elderly man and a sick child like this, Kimeria claims Wanja's lying about the others—he sent employees to the gate to fetch them, and they weren't there. Wanja says he's lying.

The rich man who kidnapped the travelers demands to see Wanja alone, hinting at a threat of sexual violence to the sole woman among the travelers. When the rich man says, "At long last," it makes clear he knows Wanja but hasn't seen her for a while. His and Wanja's dispute over whether the delegation is at the gate suggests either that he's lying to confuse Wanja or that the delegation has fled.

Kimeria demands to know why Wanja ran away from him. Wanja says he "ruined [her] life" and she doesn't want to talk. When Kimeria asks whether Wanja's child was a son—his wife has only had daughters—Wanja begs to be released. Kimeria approaches her. When Wanja threatens to scream, Kimeria calls her a "witch," claims to love her, and offers to keep her in a nice apartment in the city. Then he puts his arm around her. Wanja lurches away and grabs a knife that is on the office desk. Kimeria threatens to call the police and says he won't let her or her associates leave until Wanja has sex with him.

This passage makes clear that the rich man is the Kimeria who impregnated Wanja when she was very young. Though Wanja states that his abuse "ruined [her] life," Kimeria does not address the harm he has caused. Instead, he calls Wanja a "witch," implying that she put a romantic spell on him—so his abuse of her is her fault. Then he offers, essentially, to buy her—to rent an apartment for her in exchange for a sexual relationship. He sees Wanja as a commodity that he, a rich man, can purchase. When Wanja grabs the knife, it reminds readers that Kimeria will later die by arson and that Wanja has a motive to kill him—raising the possibility that Wanja will set the deadly fire. Finally, when Kimeria threatens to call the police, even though he has kidnapped Wanja and the others, it makes clear that the police will side with the rich man over poor, marginalized people.

One of Kimeria's employees takes Wanja back to the room with Karega and Njuguna. Another takes Njuguna out and tells him Wanja married Kimeria but left him and is now refusing to have sex with him. Njuguna comes back into the room, explains what the employee said, and suggests Wanja have sex with Kimeria rather than let Joseph die. Karega protests that Wanja's never met Kimeria before and then asks her whether what Njuguna's saying is true. Wanja is worried that if she doesn't have sex with Kimeria, she'll be responsible for the deaths of Joseph and the others. She says yes to Karega and moves to go out. Karega asks whether she has to go; angry at his naivete, she leaves without answering. Both Wanja and Karega wish death on Kimeria; Karega fantasizes about setting his house on **fire**.

A village elder and farmer, Njuguna to some degree represents Ilmorog's traditional, agricultural way of life, which capitalism and urbanization are destroying. Though the novel sympathizes with Ilmorog's traditional way of life, Njuguna's assumption that Wanja should submit to unwanted sex to benefit Joseph and the delegation implies a degree of misogyny in traditional communities that the novel is passing a negative judgment on. That Wanja and Karega both fantasize about killing Kimeria makes clear that they both have motives to murder him later. When Karega specifically fantasizes about setting Kimeria's house on fire, the novel again links fire symbolism with out-of-control, violent emotions such as anger and shame.

The delegation arrives in the city on Monday morning, and Munira and Karega visit Nderi wa Riera's offices while the others wait in the nearby Jeevanjee Gardens. But the office secretary tells them Nderi wa Riera is away and won't return till the next day. When Munira and Karega go back to tell the delegation they'll have to stay overnight, Wanja suggests calling the lawyer who saved her from the German man. She calls the lawyer from a nearby restaurant phone, and he asks her to come to his office and explain the situation. After she and Karega take the bus to his office and explain about the delegation, he offers to put them all up at his house, which has a back garden.

The Jeevanjee Gardens are public gardens in the central business district of Nairobi, Kenya's capital. That Nderi wa Riera isn't available to speak with his constituents seems like a bad sign, suggesting that in post-Independence Kenya, elected officials are less available to the people they represent than they should be.

As they ride the bus back through impoverished neighborhoods, Karega wonders whether the rural or urban poor are worse off. Wanja believes Karega isn't speaking because he judges her for what happened at Kimeria's. She's angry at his judgment and naivete.

Karega's curiosity at Nairobi's impoverished neighborhoods shows his desire to understand economic inequality throughout Kenya. Wanja's misplaced anger at Karega seems like trauma and projection—other men have shamed her for suffering sexual abuse, so she judges herself and believes Karega will too.

The delegation travels to the lawyer's house. By this time, Abdulla has given Joseph an herbal remedy and he is feeling better. Both Wanja and Karega are thinking about Kimeria's house. When Wanja stealthily leaves the lawyer's to walk by herself, Karega follows. She tells him to go away, but he keeps following her. Eventually, he thanks her. She apologizes for snapping at him and says she's "ashamed." Karega replies that what happened to her "was a collective humiliation": when one person is "humiliated and degraded," everyone is.

Here Wanja makes explicit that she feels shame due to her abuse history and is projecting her self-judgment onto Karega. Karega demonstrates his developing political and anti-sexist beliefs when he argues that abuse of anyone is "a collective humiliation": all humanity should care when another person is "humiliated and degraded"—which entails that men should care when women are "degraded" by misogyny and sexual violence.

In the evening, the lawyer returns and invites the whole delegation into his house. They notice a sculpture of a male freedom fighter with breasts. Nyakinyua argues the sculpture makes sense because both men and women fought for Kenya's freedom. When Njuguna claims women are less important, Nyakinyua ignores him and asks the lawyer where his wife is. The lawyer explains she's currently on an international trip training as a midwife; then he jokes about surprising her with a second wife (Wanja) and additional children (all the children in the delegation.)

When Njuguna urged Wanja to have sex with Kimeria, he seemed to represent a sexist strain in Ilmorog's traditional, rural culture. Yet Nyakinyua, another village elder, also represents Ilmorog's cultural and historical memory, and she has no patience for Njuguna's sexism. Thus, the novel suggests that fighting sexism need not involve rejecting the best elements of Kenya's traditional, rural, agricultural cultures.

After the delegation has eaten dinner, the lawyer gathers Karega, Munira, Wanja, and Abdulla in his library and questions them about their goal and their MP Nderi wa Riera. The lawyer seems pessimistic about any chances for true reform, but he suggests the MP may give them "a little charity." Munira says they wouldn't mind charity—on their journey, Reverend Brown and Chui treated them horribly uncharitably.

The phrase "a little charity" hints that Nderi wa Riera may think he's better than the people he represents and that in helping them, he'd believe he was doing them a favor rather than his job. This attitude suggests a dysfunctional political culture in which elected officials fail to respect their constituents.

The lawyer says he hates to see Black people obeying "the master's voice." He believes that after Kenyan revolutionaries defeated the colonizers who "enslaved them to the ministry of the molten beast of silver and gold," they could have really changed things, but instead they began worshipping the beast themselves. Priests get rich while the people they're supposed to shepherd suffer poverty. The lawyer accuses himself of "ministering to the monster," too, because he's a lawyer, and the current laws protect property—even though he defends those who break the law.

When the lawyer refers to white culture as "the master's voice," it reminds the reader of the history of white Europeans enslaving Black Africans ("master" can mean a slaveowner). The phrase "the molten beast of silver and gold" may be an allusion to the golden calf in the Biblical book of Exodus. In Exodus, God frees the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Traveling away from Egypt, the Israelites melt their jewelry and shape it into a golden calf statue, which they worship—offending God. Because the calf is golden, some religious traditions interpret the Exodus story not only as a condemnation of idols but also of worshipping wealth. The lawyer is arguing, then, that white colonizers oppressed Kenya because they worshipped money and wanted to exploit Kenya economically. After independence, the Kenyan elite started worshipping money too instead of rejecting colonizers' capitalist values.

The lawyer speculates that when Black revolutionaries had a chance to reject the monster, white people mocked them as uncivilized, and colonially educated Black elites doubled down on worshipping the monster to prove they were "as civilized" as Europeans. He says he went to **Siriana** after Munira and Chui were expelled and, as his ambition was to become a priest, hated Chui. Then Fraudsham preached a sermon condemning the execution of "Peter Pooles" for shooting an African who threw a rock at Pooles's dog, claiming that kindness to animals was a true marker of being civilized. The sermon ended with a quotation from Shakespeare, including "the quality of mercy is not strain'd." The lawyer ended up feeling confused and ashamed that he'd been glad about the execution.

Here the lawyer speculates that Black people educated in colonial schools founded by white people, like Siriana, absorb white values and want to prove to white people they are "civilized"—which leads to them replicating white colonizers' pathological behaviors. The man the lawyer calls "Peter Pooles" (his name is actually Peter Poole) was the only white person Kenya's colonial government ever executed for killing a Black person. That Fraudsham quoted Shakespeare while criticizing the decision shows how Europeans misuse their literature and culture to oppress Black people. In Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice (c. 1596 – 1598), the phrase "the quality of mercy" comes from a speech in which one character is trying to persuade another to forgive a financial debt, not a murder.

The lawyer traveled to the U.S. to continue his education, where he read that the U.S. cared about "the equality and freedom of man" and yet, in Louisiana, saw a Black man who had been lynched for protecting his sister from a white man's groping. In cities like Detroit and Chicago, he saw both Black and white workers exploited in factories and white women doing sex work. He returned to Kenya, hoping it would be different "now that the black man has come to power"—but back in Kenya he found another elite minority worshipping the "monster-god" and exploiting the poor.

Though capitalist democracies like the U.S. pay lip service to "equality" and "freedom," the lawyer sees the U.S. both as violently racist and as economically exploitative of its poor residents regardless of race. In the U.S., racial and economic inequality leads to sexual abuse and commodification: white men use their racial privilege to assault Black women with impunity, while poor white women end up in sex work. When the lawyer returned to Kenya after Independence, he assumed that putting "the black man"—that is, Black people—in power would lead to greater social equality. That it didn't suggests capitalism as well as white colonialism must be defeated for Kenya to be a truly egalitarian society.

Each listener reacts differently to the lawyer's story. Abdulla wonders whether it's fair that only a few Kenyans get to own the land that many Kenyans bled and died to liberate—though he likes that it's Black people who now own the land and wishes he had a farm himself. Wanja is amazed white prostitutes exist. Munira is surprised that the lawyer, too, went to **Siriana**. Finally, Karega feels the lawyer's story helping him construct a "coherent" picture of reality out of "his own experience and history."

Abdulla's thoughts on land ownership suggest that racial and economic justice are not identical, though they are related. He's glad Black African people own Kenya's land now, by implication because they have more right to own it than white colonizers do. Hence, there is more racial justice post-Independence than there was under colonialism. Yet economic justice remains elusive: most Kenyan people are still excluded from land ownership. Wanja's focus on white prostitutes also shows that economic and racial hierarchies are distinct though related: in white-supremacist societies, white people are less likely than people of color to be poor—but poor women's sexuality is likely to be commodified, regardless of race. That the lawyer went to Siriana—an unlikely coincidence—shows the importance of Siriana as a symbol of colonialism's afterlife among Kenya's educated elite. Karega's sense that the lawyer is providing a "coherent" history emphasizes how dissatisfied Karega is with Siriana's racist curriculum.

Munira abruptly asks Karega about his real experience at **Siriana**. When the shocked lawyer asks when Karega was at Siriana, Karega explains he was expelled three years prior. The lawyer, realizing Karega was expelled during the strike, gets excited. After he returned from America, he tried to use his law degree to help poor people, but he felt complicit in upholding an unjust society. The strike at Siriana made the lawyer hopeful that Black youth, who didn't feel like they had anything to prove to white people, could liberate the country.

The lawyer hopes that younger Black people will be less invested in white values than the Black elite educated in white-run schools during colonialism, which will make them a better revolutionary force. This hope emphasizes the lawyers' belief that white-run schools colonized the minds of Kenya's youth and made it harder for them to resist colonialism and anti-Black racism.

Karega explains that he was involved in two strikes, both involving Fraudsham and Chui—though not the Chui strike for which Munira was expelled. The lawyer remarks at the coincidence that Munira, too, was expelled for striking. Karega goes on to explain that while the **Siriana** students believed Fraudsham was powerful and tough, he was obsessed with his dog Lizzy. When Lizzy died, grief-stricken Fraudsham assembled the school and lectured them on the centrality of pets to civilization. The students, incredulous, laughed. Fraudsham insisted four students serve as pallbearers at Lizzy's funeral; when the students rebelled against holding a "human burial" for a dog, Fraudsham expelled the pallbearers.

When Fraudsham arbitrarily imposes his personal love of dogs on Siriana students, including Karega, and tries to pass that love off as a marker of civilization, he reveals to the students that the colonizers' claims to be fundamentally more civilized than indigenous Kenyans are themselves false, based on flawed or arbitrary standards imposed by force.

The students went on strike to protest the pallbearers' expulsion. After Lizzy's death, they saw Fraudsham's weakness and began to sense "contradictions" in his teachings. Though Fraudsham raved at them that hierarchy and obedience were central to civilization and religion, the students refused to go back to class. When Fraudsham was willing to negotiate, suggesting the pallbearers be punished but not expelled, the students began demanding education in "African literature, African history" by an African staff. Eventually, "people in the ministry" visited the school, promised the pallbearers would be punished but not expelled, and begged the students to end the strike. The students did, but Fraudsham, recognizing his defeat, resigned and died shortly after.

When the students realize that Fraudsham's teachings may be not only wrong but logically impossible, containing internal "contradictions," it empowers them to reject Fraudsham's claims that civilization and religion require them to obey. It also destroys the prestige of Fraudsham's Eurocentric curriculum in their eyes, leading to demands for an Afrocentric education. Fraudsham's deaths symbolize the waning power of white-supremacist, Eurocentric education over younger Kenyans' minds.

The students hoped for an African headmaster and a "populist" system where student leaders were elected, not just chosen as prefects. When Chui became headmaster, the students rejoiced. Yet at his first assembly, Chui quoted a Shakespeare passage arguing for hierarchy's cosmic importance and refused to teach "African this and that" on the grounds that education was race neutral and all racism must be rejected. He furthermore claimed all Europeans would be safe at the school. When Chui enforced the prefect system even more rigidly and had the teachers teach only Western history and literature, the students went on strike again. Chui brought in police to break the strike. Karega and nine others were expelled.

Though Chui led a strike against Fraudsham's overtly anti-Black policies, he upholds Siriana's Eurocentric curriculum, quoting Shakespeare and speaking flippantly of "African this and that." Chui's Eurocentric values and expulsion of Karega show that to "decolonize" fully, Kenyan people educated in schools founded by white colonizers need to reject European values as well as overt racism. Chui's relative conservatism also suggests that decolonization is a long process; Karega, a generation younger, is more radical and more invested in equality than Chui is.

After Karega's story ends, Munira expresses confusion about why Karega and the other students went on strike and what they really wanted. Karega can't express exactly what they wanted but says "the phrase African populism seemed to sum it all."

Munira's confusion about why Karega went on strike suggests that he, like Chui, understands protesting overt racism but not subtler forms of white supremacy and Eurocentrism. The word "populism" has many definitions, but it broadly refers to the view that political power should rest with the common people and not the rich or elite. Karega's somewhat confused desire for "African populism" indicates that he desires racial and economic justice but hasn't fully worked out the details of his political commitments yet.

When Nderi wa Riera first became an MP, he socialized with everyone and advocated for reforms to help the poor. But when "foreign-owned companies" started helping him make money, he began socializing with rich people only and investing in "the tourist industry." He rejected socialism but continued to insist on "African culture, African personality, Black authenticity," especially in his businesses.

Nderi wa Riera's history illustrates how business interests, especially "foreign-owned" ones, can corrupt politicians in postcolonial countries. His investments in "the tourist industry" and in "African culture" suggest that he is commodifying Africa and Blackness for white tourists' entertainment to make money.

After Riera returns from his trip—where he was investigating complaints about European sex tourists preying on African teenagers at one of his resorts—he learns from Kimeria at a bar that some constituents from Ilmorog have come to see him about a drought. He immediately assumes the drought isn't real—otherwise he would have read about it in the newspapers—and the delegation is a ploy by another politician who wants his power.

This passage connects European tourism in Africa with rich European people's exploitation of Kenyan girls—suggesting that tourism is a harmful industry that reinforces power imbalances between richer and poorer countries. Riera's complicity with sex tourism and refusal to take Ilmorog's drought seriously reveal his corruption.

The next afternoon, Nderi wa Riera meets Wanja, Abdulla, Njuguna, Karega, and Munira in his offices. When Riera learns that only Njuguna is originally from Ilmorog, he takes it as further evidence the delegation is really a plot against him. When Riera casually comments that unemployment is a global problem only family planning can solve, Karega argues family planning is about Western countries trying to reduce "our population"—China feeds its large population, after all. Riera, struck that he used to think like Karega, claims China is only able to feed its people by political repression. He argues for "realism." Wanja, upset, asks whether women shouldn't have children anymore; Riera claims they should have only as many children as they can feed.

Riera wants to solve unemployment and its corollary, poverty, through family planning—(i.e., he thinks poor people should have fewer children). This "solution" blames poor people's individual reproductive decisions for economic inequality. Riera's comment about family planning upsets Karega because it strikes Karega as eugenicist; when formerly colonial Western countries talk about solving global poverty through family planning, he suspects they really want to minimize "our population," (i.e., Black Africans). It upsets Wanja, too, because it denies poor women's right to have children if they want them.

Riera changes the subject and asks Abdulla about himself. Abdulla tells a parable about a hare and an antelope that fell into a hole. The hare suggests that he jump onto the antelope's back and then out of the hole, at which point he can help the antelope out. The antelope agrees. But when the hare gets out of the hole, he lectures the antelope on his irresponsibility for falling into the hole and leaves him there. After telling this parable, Abdulla walks out of the office.

Abdulla's parable mocks Riera's comment about family planning. Riera is the hare, Kenyan people are the antelope, and the hole is poverty. Riera left poverty because Kenyan people voted him into office and gave him the opportunity to make investments and get rich; now that Kenyan people have helped him out of poverty, he refuses to help them and instead blames their poverty on their supposed irresponsibility.

Riera concludes the delegation is a plot against him. He recalls how he and some friends came up with the idea to make everyone "drink tea" after the ethnically Indian political reformer was assassinated and how the people of Ilmorog chased away the men who ordered them to attend tea. Aloud, he assures Wanja, Njuguna, Karega, and Munira that he'll help them even if they aren't from Ilmorog. They explain they left more people from Ilmorog waiting outside the building, and Njuguna tells Riera about the drought. Riera realizes it will look bad that he didn't know about a drought in the area he represents. When he discovers Munira works for Mzigo, he guesses Mzigo was bribed to send in Munira as an agent to weaponize his constituents against him.

Riera refuses to believe Ilmorog has a real problem. Instead, he nurses the paranoid suspicion that their request for help is a plot his enemies hatched. His callousness toward his constituents and his paranoia suggest that power and money have corrupted him. That Riera organized the "tea" (i.e., the forced anti-communist loyalty oath) shows his opposition to economic reform and his willingness to use violence against people who disagree with him politically.

Riera suggests they go outside and find the other travelers from Ilmorog. When he arrives, the people of Ilmorog applaud him. Then he gives a speech in which he tells the delegation to return to Ilmorog, sell their remaining livestock and raise money, gather "traditional" performers, and make another delegation to Gatundu. He says he'll lead the delegation, and they'll "put the name of Ilmorog on the national map." As he ignores the people who point out Gatundu was the location of "tea" and that they're already starving, the assembled people of Ilmorog begin throwing rocks and trash at him. He flees.

Riera ignores the delegation's economic situation when he tells them to sell their livestock and raise additional money for another delegation. Their livestock are dying, they are impoverished, and they are appealing to him in a last-ditch attempt to get aid. Riera's focus on commodifying "traditional" life in Ilmorog and his desire to make Ilmorog famous rather than simply help its people betray that he's more interested in tourism and business than public service.

Riera returns with police and points out Munira, Abdulla, and Karega, whom the police take away for questioning. Nyakinyua tells the remaining people of Ilmorog that they must protest the arrest.

The police obey Riera without verifying that Munira, Abdulla, and Karega have done anything wrong. In an unjust, unequal society, the police serve not justice but order, the status quo, and the powerful.

The lawyer arranges to have Munira, Abdulla, and Karega tried the next day, so they aren't held a long time in jail. He successfully defends them against charges of "acting in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace" and talks passionately about Ilmorog's drought and the delegation's epic journey seeking help. The press dubs Munira, Abdulla, and Karega "Good Samaritans" and publicizes Ilmorog's trouble in sensational language. As a result, clergymen, including Rev. Jerrod Brown, organize a church committee to see what can be done; later, they pray for rain. Government officials claim they'll investigate and write a report. People donate food to the delegation. Finally, college students call Ilmorog's drought an effect of "neo-colonialism" and demand "the immediate abolition of capitalism."

The charge of "acting in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace" is so vague that it could target any person whose behavior police officers don't like. This vagueness shows that laws aren't necessarily just or fair. The phrase "Good Samaritans" alludes to a parable in the Gospel of Luke, about a Samaritan—a member of an ethnic/religious group with whom Jewish people had poor relations—helping a Jewish stranger who has been robbed and beaten. The Good Samaritan is a role model in Christian ethics, and "Good Samaritan" can refer to any person who helps strangers. The term is being applied to Munira, Abdulla, and Karega because they aren't originally from Ilmorog but are helping Ilmorog. The Rev. Brown—who did not *act like a Good Samaritan when the delegation asked for his help—wants to aid Ilmorog now that the papers have publicized their case. This again shows his religious hypocrisy. The students' calls for "the immediate abolition of capitalism" satirize protestors who want dramatic outcomes but take no concrete steps to bring those outcomes about.*

Angry and humiliated, Nderi wa Riera plots how to turn the situation to his advantage—a situation he still believes is a political maneuver against him by some enemy. Recalling he started the KCO to "use culture as a basis of ethnic unity" and support "active economic partnership with imperialism," he decides to strengthen the presence of KCO in Ilmorog, develop Ilmorog economically, and involve the people of Ilmorog in business. After thinking it over, he also decides the lawyer must have orchestrated the plot against him. He vows to destroy the lawyer one day.

Given Riera's loyalty to business interests, it seems he wants to focus on "culture" and foster "ethnic unity" to keep poor people from organizing for economic justice across ethnic groups. His "partnership with imperialism"—with countries that colonized Africa—suggests that international capitalism is colonialism by another name. His conclusion that the lawyer organized the delegation to hurt him foreshadows later conflict between Riera and the lawyer.

CHAPTER 7

Munira spends eight days in jail with no human contact after his interview with Inspector Godfrey; he writes his account of events alone. On his ninth day, he approaches the policeman on guard and demands to be released, saying he was being brought in for routine questioning but since entering jail hasn't been able to change clothes or see a newspaper. The policeman, who believes in the second coming and is afraid of Munira's professed religious power, tries to sweet-talk Munira, claiming Munira is in jail of his own free will and that the policeman is "waiting on" him, not incarcerating him. Then he goes to get Munira a newspaper.

Munira's indefinite detention and poor conditions of incarceration highlight again that in an unjust society, the criminal legal system serves the status quo, not justice. The cowardly policeman's fear of Munira leads not to help Munira but to make up implausible stories about "waiting on" Munira, which again demonstrates the novel's implicit belief that religious people tend to be superstitious and hypocritical.

The policeman returns with a newspaper. Munira reads an article describing Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria. It notes they were owners of **Theng'eta** Breweries & Enterprises, Ltd.; it laments that, with their deaths, their plan to buy out all shares owned by non-Kenyans might come to an end and insinuates that their deaths may have been a plot to prevent "total African ownership" of the company.

Theng'eta symbolizes the small economic elite's exploitation of Kenya's potential. The newspaper's focus on "African ownership" of Theng'eta Breweries ignores that even if all the company's owners were African, only a tiny handful of elites would see the profits. Full social equality requires economic as well as racial justice.

Munira reads another article describing how Nderi wa Riera is seeking to institute the death penalty for stealing and for "economically motivated" crimes, as well as to illegalize strikes. Munira recalls how Ilmorog's delegation threw things at Riera and laughs. Then he contemplates how Ilmorog organized a delegation to seek help for drought and brought back "spiritual drought."

Riera wants to use the law to kill people who commit "economically motivated" crimes (i.e., crimes of poverty) and to prevent strikes. This shows that in capitalist countries, laws often reinforce economic inequality. Munira's thoughts about "spiritual drought" suggest that something bad happened to Ilmorog after the delegation returned.

In a flashback, a month after the charitable organizations and other visitors leave Ilmorog, it begins to rain. Munira interprets this outcome as an expression of humankind's impotence compared to God; the older townspeople believe Mwathi's sacrifice brought the rain. All the townspeople celebrate.

Munira interprets the rain according to his religious beliefs; Ilmorog's elders, according to theirs. Since the rain is open to multiple, unfalsifiable religious interpretations, the novel implies that any religious certainty about it constitutes superstition. Munira's beliefs encourage inaction—he thinks that people are subject to God's will, so there's no point in doing anything to alleviate the effects of drought. Meanwhile, the elders' beliefs encourage dubiously effective action (sacrificing animals). The novel may be hinting, then, that people should rely on knowledge unrelated to religion to protect themselves from natural phenomena like drought.

At Abdulla's store, Karega, Munira, and Abdulla gather; each of them becomes aroused when they see Wanja coming to join them. Yet they all feel their journey with the delegation has posed them "questions" and "challenges" they haven't yet answered. As an aside, Karega tells Abdulla that Joseph is doing extremely well in school.

The men's aroused reaction to Wanja reveals their tendency to see her as a sex object first and a human second. The "questions" and "challenges' they intuit after the delegation suggests that the journey made them wonder whether the status quo needed to change. The conversation about Joseph shows that the characters believe education is important, despite the bad experiences several of them had with racist or Eurocentric schooling.

Karega devotes a lot of energy to teaching to distract himself from the question, "where now the solidarity and unity of blackness?" As a youth, the love he shared with Mukami seemed to offer adequate meaning. Once "hypocrisy and religious double-dealing" destroyed that love, he looked to people who had practiced self-sacrifice for others' freedom to provide meaning. But when Karega saw Chui, a former striker, become "a tyrant who thought that his power came from God and foreigners," Karega lost that source of meaning, too.

Karega wants to believe in racial "solidarity and unity" but didn't see it in Riera's response to the delegation. This passage reveals that Karega wants to organize his life around some source of meaning. It also confirms he used to have a romantic relationship with Mukami, Munira's sister who died by suicide, and that religious "hypocrisy" somehow destroyed that love. Karega blames Chui's conservatism on religion and the Eurocentric views he absorbed at Siriana, which suggests that Christianity and colonial education pose problems for an egalitarian future in Kenya.

Wrestling with confusion, Karega recalls the lawyer as someone who seems principled and knowledgeable. He writes to the lawyer asking for books. The lawyer gives him books and recommendations for further reading. Karega reads history, hoping it will explain how the idle rich came to parasitize the working poor. Instead, the histories jump from ancient history to colonial times, bypassing most of Kenyan history before colonialism, and treat Kenyans as barbarians for resisting European exploitation. He reads political science, but political scientists seem to avoid talking about "colonialism and imperialism" directly. He reads literature, but though writers accurately describe the horrible conditions that colonialism created, they respond with "pessimism, obscurity and mysticism."

Historians, political scientists, and novelists don't adequately explain Kenya's past or present. The historians and political scientists are too beholden to white-supremacist and colonialist values while the novelists peddle "obscurity and mysticism," failing to explain how one ought to react to the terrible conditions colonialism has created. Thus, Karega cannot educate himself just by reading what academics and novelists have written—because they too are enmeshed in and compromised by a white-supremacist, postcolonial world order.

Karega sends the books back to the lawyer with a letter asking why none of them contained "the history and political struggles of Kenya." The lawyer responds with a long letter telling Karega that, in response to Karega's request for works by Black intellectuals, the lawyer sent him what existed. This will allow Karega to discover for himself that scholarship contains no "neutral, disembodied voices" but rather perspectives connected to material interests that the reader has to learn to identify. Karega, thinking that he only desires "truth," wonders what kind of education he and the **Siriana** students went on strike hoping to get.

Karega, wanting the "truth" about "the history and political struggles of Kenya," asked for Black-authored history and political science. The lawyer's response—that readers must interpret all writing through the lens of the writers' material interests—indicates that Karega won't find "neutral" "truth" anywhere: each writer comes from a particular socioeconomic viewpoint. When Karega wonders what he and his Siriana classmates went on strike to get, he's wondering whether an Africa-centric curriculum of African writers would be sufficient to get closer to the truth. The novel seems to imply that an Africa-centric curriculum is necessary to combat colonialism but not sufficient to get the truth, because capitalism and colonialism can corrupt African writers as well as European ones.

Meanwhile Ilmorog women, including Wanja, form a farming group, the Ndemi-Nyakinyua Group. They help each other weed and harvest. Abdulla, repentant he ever kept Joseph from school and amazed by Wanja's transformation into a worker, thinks hopefully that perhaps they're on the brink of something new. Suddenly two trucks come and begin building a police station and a church in Ilmorog; just as suddenly, heavy rains arrive and drive the builders away. The people realize that their next harvest is going to be enormous. Everyone plans to help with the harvest, and there will be a circumcision ceremony. Munira, recalling that he met his wife Julia during such a ceremony, hopes he'll "possess[]" Wanja again around the time of this ceremony.

In contrast with Munira's passive attitude toward drought and the elders' mystical one, Wanja and the other Ilmorog women take a practical view: they decide to start a mutual aid society to improve their farming. This development hints at how the novel thinks people should treat nature: husbanding it and controlling it through social policy rather than submitting to it or trying to influence it through religious ceremonies. Munira's hope to "possess" Wanja reminds the reader that his attitude toward Wanja is often objectifying and sexist.

One night during harvest time, Munira and Abdulla are chatting while Karega teaches Joseph some math when Wanja joins them, looking thoughtful. She shrugs off Munira's lustful stare and tells them about **Theng'eta**, a plant the people used to brew and drink on special occasions such as circumcisions. Drinking it helped people create art and prophesy. Though European colonists outlawed it, believing drunkenness made the colonized lazy and rebellious, Nyakinyua knows how to make it. Wanja suggests that Nyakinyua will show them how to brew the Theng'eta, and they can drink it with the elders on the day of the circumcision ceremony to celebrate.

In this scene, Theng'eta represents the potential of Kenya and Kenyan people. It seems to be indigenous to Kenya (hence, it represents the land's potential) and it makes a culturally significant drink that colonizers attempted to ban (hence, it represents Kenyan people's potential power). The reader already knows that Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui will commodify Theng'eta, so it also represents the exploitation of Kenyan potential by a rich, elite few.

Nyakinyua, Wanja, Munira, Karega, and Abdulla prepare millet seeds, mix them with flour and water, and put them in a pot to ferment. On the night before the circumcision ceremony, the town comes together for dancing and singing contests. Nyakinyua and Njuguna engage in a song duel full of sexual innuendo. After a while, Njuguna concedes Nyakinyua's victory. Munira tries to join in the singing at this point, but he messes up. When Nyakinyua and Njuguna mock him in song, Abdulla sings to defend Munira. Njuguna then challenges Karega to sing—but as he doesn't know any songs, Abdulla defends him too, singing that they should transition to a different activity.

Whereas Nyakinyua, Njuguna, and Abdulla know how to engage in a celebratory singing contest, Munira and Karega do not. Though the novel doesn't explain why Munira and Karega are less well versed in this traditional activity, context suggests that their Eurocentric education has cut them off from rural Kenyan culture.

While the others sit down, Nyakinyua sings about Ilmorog's drought, the arrivals of Munira, Wanja, and Karega, the delegation's journey, and the horrors of the city. She asks who impoverished Kenya. Then she transitions into singing about Kenya's longer history of natural disasters and of violent colonization. She concludes by singing that the youth must resist "foreigners and enemies" and "that was the meaning of the blood shed at circumcision." Though her song and the other celebrations are beautiful, they put Karega in a melancholy mood; he feels as though he's witnessing a "relic," something "from a dying world"

Nyakinyua's song pairs natural disasters and violent colonization as two kinds of trial Kenyan people must overcome. Thus, she makes clear that while Kenyan people may have a special relationship to their land, they must also struggle to control it, lest it harm them. When Karega thinks of the song as a "relic"—an artifact from a vanished culture, a "dying world"—it suggests that rural Kenyan culture won't survive international capitalism or increasing urbanization.

The next afternoon, Wanja, Karega, Munira, and Abdulla walk to Nyakinyua's. Wanja explains to the others that they finally managed to find the **Theng'eta**, a small plant "with a pattern of four tiny red petals." Nyakinyua opens the pot containing the brew. She explains that without the Theng'eta, the brew is just alcohol, but with Theng'eta, it can give you artistic inspiration, visions, and fertility. Nyakinyua squeezes the plant over the brew, and the alcohol turns green.

The Theng'eta plant has "four tiny red petals," linking it to the "petals of blood" that Munira saw with his students and that give the novel its title. The flowers Munira saw represent the independent country that Kenyan freedom fighters bled for, which elite Kenyan capitalists are eating alive from the inside. By connecting the Theng'eta plant to those earlier flowers, the novel emphasizes that Theng'eta symbolizes Kenya's potential, which colonizers and capitalists have exploited.

That evening, Wanja, Karega, Munira, and Abdulla gather at Nyakinyua's with the town elders to drink the **Theng'eta**. Everyone takes off their shoes and puts any money they're carrying, "the metal bug that split up homes and drove men to the city," outside the "ritual circle." After several ritual utterances, Nyakinyua states that Theng'eta manifests dreams and wishes. She tastes it and tells the assembled that her only remaining wish is to meet her dead husband, who taught her to brew Theng'eta, "in the other world."

When the people gather to drink Theng'eta, they exclude money from "the ritual circle," the space where Theng'eta's spiritual power will be effective. Theng'eta and commerce don't mix: Theng'eta's later mass production and distribution as a commodity by Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui is antithetical to the drink's spiritual and cultural properties. The description of money as "the metal bug that split up homes and drove men to the city" places the blame for Ilmorog's depopulation and Kenya's urbanization squarely on the capitalist imperative to accumulate wealth.

Nyakinyua begins passing the **Theng'eta** around. When Munira drinks it, he has a vision that conflates past, present, and future, and he sees Nyakinyua working side-by-side with Ndemi. From beyond his vision, someone asks what his dreams and wishes are. He longs to ask Wanja to have sex with him again, believing that she can transform him from a passive spectator of life into "a player, an actor, a creator." Instead, he says he sees Nyakinyua in the past, present, and future, with Ndemi but also with warriors. He asks Nyakinyua to explain what the vision means.

Ndemi is Ilmorog's legendary first farmer, who changed the culture from mostly nomadic to mostly agricultural. When Munira sees Nyakinyua with Ndemi in a vision, it suggests that Theng'eta represents Kenyan culture, continuous from the legendary past to the present. Munira's belief that sex with Wanja will turn him into "a player, an actor, a creator" shows both his dissatisfaction with his own passivity and his tendency to treat Wanja as a sexual object or a means to an end.

Nyakinyua says they ask her to explain too much—don't they, too, have secrets? She also claims Ndemi has cursed the people, who were supposed to "defend [the land] with blood." Then she tells them her husband was pressganged into serving in a European colonial war, because he refused to provide animal fat to a chieftain who collaborated with the Europeans. With other indigenous men, he was forced to carry burdens for the European army through the forest. On this journey, the men saw a mysterious animal. When one threw a rock at it, it "vomited out a fire" and slithered away. Several more men threw rocks; none of the men who threw rocks survived to go home. Nyakinyua's husband did return, but when he did, he was "not the same man."

Nyakinyua argues that Ndemi has cursed the people because they failed to "defend [the land] with blood"; in her view, Kenyan people had a special relationship to the land that they violated by not preventing colonization. The European colonial war Nyakinyua mentions may be World War I (1914 – 1918), as German and British colonial forces did fight each other in East Africa during that war. Nyakinyua's sense that the war made her husband different shows the negative effects of colonialism on colonized people's selves and relationships.

Nyakinyua's description of her husband coming back different makes Karega think of moments of change in his own life: Mukami's death, his expulsion from **Siriana**, and Ilmorog's delegation to the city. He wonders whether African history belongs to the freedom fighters like Kimathi, the collaborators, or those who falsely conflated obedience to white people with religious duty. He concludes that Africa has multiple conflicting histories, not just one.

Mukami's death turned Karega against religion. His expulsion from Siriana showed him that some fellow Kenyan people like Chui will uphold the unjust status quo. The delegation showed him that Kenya's post-Independence political system isn't working for most Kenyans. For Karega, freedom fighters like Dedan Kimathi (1920 – 1957), the most famous Kenyan general among the guerilla fighters against the British colonial government immediately prior to Kenya's independence, represent what is best in African history. Yet African history also includes African people who collaborated with colonizers, converted to Christianity, and so forth. Karega seems to be concluding that someone's African identity doesn't guarantee that they'll have the anti-colonial or anti-religious beliefs that Karega espouses.

Out of nowhere, Karega sees the face of his brother Nding'uri, whom he never knew. He wonders whether Abdulla knew his brother when they were both freedom fighters. He's unsure why he never asked Munira about his brother, since they certainly knew each other. Then he begins thinking again about Munira's sister Mukami. Thinking how his passion for her follows him everywhere, he suddenly begins to speak of her. One day when he was a youth, he encountered her sitting with her legs dangling over the quarry's edge. She asked him why he didn't attend school, and he decided to start going.

Karega never knew his freedom-fighter brother, which shows the human cost of resisting colonialism. Initially, Karega wanted an education neither to conform to the colonial status quo nor to protest it. Rather, he wanted an education to get closer to Mukami. This motive reveals the importance of sexuality to the novel's understanding of characters' psychology and actions.

Karega picked **flowers** at Mukami's father Ezekieli's pyrethrum fields to earn money for tuition. Mukami would sometimes help him in the fields; other times, she would bring him fruit. When he earned enough money to attend school, Mukami tutored him, and he worked very hard, skipping grades until he was just one grade behind her. One day, she got sick, and Karega—not religious—prayed to God for the first time ever that Mukami get well and become his girlfriend. They began spending time together unrelated to work or school, wading in the lake and wrestling each other. The wrestling excited Karega in a way he didn't understand.

Pyrethrum flowers contain a compound that works as a natural insecticide. In the past, Kenya was one of the world's major producers of pyrethrum. In the novel, flowers generally symbolize Kenyan potential; in this passage, they represent the potential both of Kenyan agricultural products (the pyrethrum industry), which Ezekieli has privatized and exploited, and the burgeoning relationship between Karega and Mukami. Their romantic potential unlocks Karega's educational potential and his nascent religious sentiments.

Mukami began attending Kanjeru High School. The next year, Karega matriculated at **Siriana**, which was close by. One vacation, Mukami asked Karega to attend church with her. Afterward, they went to the lake and sat together on a little island in the middle. They got into a fight, wrestled, and began having sex. Afterward, they fell asleep.

By implication, Karega went to Siriana not because of its reputation or ideology but because it was close to Mukami's school—which may partly explain why Karega went further in criticizing Siriana than Munira did. Mukami asked Karega to go to church with her and then sex with him; while fear of sex may characterize Munira's religious beliefs, not all religious people share his fear.

When Karega and Mukami woke up, she began crying and asked him whether his brother (Nding'uri) had died. Karega didn't know—his mother Mariamu had told him, vaguely, that his brother went to live with his father—and asked why Mukami wanted to know. Mukami said Ezekieli had discovered she and Karega were in love. Ezekieli claimed Karega's brother was a Mau Mau and had been involved in cutting off Ezekieli's ear for denouncing the Mau Maus in church. Ezekieli gave Mukami an ultimatum: either she break up with Karega, or Ezekieli would disown her and kick her out of the house.

This passage reveals why Karega believes hypocrisy and religion destroyed his and Mukami's love. Ezekieli's religious commitments derive not from conviction but from a desire for power. His religious denunciation of the Mau Mau guerilla fighters is thus hypocritical—and it incites the Mau Maus to cut off his ear, which leads to him forbidding Mukami from dating Karega, a Mau Mau's brother.

Karega walked Mukami home. Back at his own house, he asked his mother Mariamu for the whole truth about his brother (Nding'uri). She admitted that Karega's brother was executed for transporting ammunition for the Mau Mau. Shortly after—before Karega had a chance to see her again—Mukami died by suicide, jumping off the quarry's edge where she and Karega met the first time. Karega's story ends there.

Karega lost his brother to colonial violence against freedom fighters. The novel implies that Ezekieli's ultimatum to Mukami—forbidding her from having a relationship with a Mau Mau's brother—prompted her suicide. In a way, Karega lost his first love to pro-colonial attitudes as well. Karega's story thus shows how harmful colonialism has been not only to Kenya as a whole but to individual Kenyan people and their relationships.

Munira isn't sure whether he should hold Karega or his own father, Ezekieli, responsible for Mukami's death. He flees the hut for a moment. When he returns, Abdulla is shaking Karega and asking whether Karega is Nding'uri's brother. Abdulla composes himself, drinks some **Theng'eta**, and explains: Nding'uri was Abdulla's friend. They were both involved in the Mau Mau rebellion. One day, the brother of Nding'uri's girlfriend offered to sell them a gun and bullets. At the hand-off, the girlfriend's brother gave them bullets but no gun. After the brother disappeared, police descended on Abdulla and Nding'uri—suggesting that the girlfriend's brother had sold them out. Abdulla managed to escape, but Nding'uri was arrested and hanged. Abdulla swore revenge on the girlfriend's brother but to this day hasn't fulfilled his oath.

The Theng'eta inspires various characters, including Abdulla here, to tell their politically inflected personal histories. Thus, it shows both their individual potential and the way that colonial history has exploited and harmed them. The story of Nding'uri's girlfriend's brother, who collaborated with the colonial police to kill Nding'uri, reminds readers that while Kenya may be independent, Kenyan people who helped the violent, oppressive colonial government may remain in the country—another way in which colonialism's influence lingers after independence.

Wanja asks Nyakinyua what her husband saw that made him come back so different from the war. Nyakinyua explains he had a vision in the light that the strange animal vomited. According to the vision, white people would trick Black people into turning against each other, and "a few hungry souls sick with greed" would keep the people impoverished and wretched until eventually a great struggle would come. Most of the listeners think they understand the vision Nyakinyua is relating and believe it has already come to pass. Abdulla starts swearing and groaning with pain; Wanja comforts and quiets him. Nyakinyua tells the assembled to go home and sleep.

Nyakinyua's husband's vision seems to summarize the Kenyan socioeconomic situation as the novel represents it: in postcolonial Kenya, white former colonizers have tricked or bribed Kenyan elites, the "hungry souls sick with greed," into participating in the continued economic oppression of the Kenyan people. The great struggle that ends the vision may prophesy a social and economic revolution yet to come.

Abdulla, Wanja, and Karega leave Nyakinyua's. Munira follows. Seeing Wanja walk first with Abdulla and then Karega, Munira feels left out. He calls to her. When she joins him, he complains about the sexual distance she's kept from him and asks why she came back to Ilmorog, claiming she's disturbed his "peace." Wanja calls his peace "the peace of nothing happening" and returns to Karega. Walking home by himself, Munira contemplates how he's always felt like an outsider in his family, how Karega seems to know more about it than he does, and how he wants to "avenge" something so as not to remain a "spectator."

Munira blames Wanja for his disturbed "peace," though she hasn't done anything except live in the same town as he does. In other words, he blames Wanja for being sexually attractive to him, treating Wanja like a sex object and dodging responsibility for his own desires. When Wanja calls his peace "the peace of nothing happening," she touches on Munira's fear that he's a passive person, a "spectator."

CHAPTER 8

As Karega walks away from Nyakinyua's, he thinks about how his brother Nding'uri died for Kenyan freedom. The thought fills him with "pride and gratitude." Wanja follows Karega, and each wants to talk to the other without knowing what to say. Eventually they sit down together in the grass, and Wanja says Karega "must have the blood of rebels in [his] family," given Karega's brother's actions and Karega's participation in strikes at **Siriana**. When Karega points out that Munira went on strike at Siriana too, Wanja claims that Munira was really a sort of "spectator" to Chui's organization of the strike.

Karega feels "pride" at his brother's death because it seems to confer some dignity on him through his relationship to his brother. He feels "gratitude" because his brother helped secure Kenya's independence, from which Karega is now benefiting. When Wanja claims that Munira was just a "spectator" at his strike, unlike Karega who participated, she may be speaking out of annoyance with Munira—but her words also remind readers that Karega's demands for reform were much more radical than Munira's.

Karega asks whether Abdulla told them the whole story. Wanja replies that everyone has something to hide. When Karega asks whether Wanja has something to hide, she tells him how an adult man impregnated her as an adolescent, causing her to drop out of school before she even reached high school.

Though Wanja has chosen not to reveal her sexual abuse history to Karega in the past, she reveals it now—a choice that illustrates her and Karega's increasing closeness.

Karega asks whether the man who impregnated adolescent Wanja was Kimeria, who also detained them and insisted Wanja have sex with him during the Ilmorog delegation's journey. Wanja admits it was but downplays the event's seriousness. When Karega insists it was serious, she—thinking he blames her—retorts that it shouldn't "always be held against her." He clarifies that he would never blame her for being a victim. They hold hands. Then Karega, full of desire, begins removing Wanja's clothes. She begs him to stop, but he hears "fear of need and desire" in her voice and keeps going. They have sex and fall asleep. He wakes up covered in dew and then wakes Wanja up, asking her to look at the sunrise.

Wanja downplays her abuse history because she believes it will "be held against her," a fear that emphasizes the misogyny and victim-blaming she has suffered. Disturbingly, Karega reacts to her revelation that Kimeria has repeatedly abused her by taking her clothes off—even after she tells him to stop. He keeps going because he believes she's unnecessarily scared of her own "need and desire." Even so, he ignores her explicit lack of consent, revealing that even progressive Karega sometimes discounts women's agency while pursuing sex.

Back at home, Wanja feels "an inner peace" she has never before felt after sex. She sleeps and dreams about the boy who loved her in elementary school and about learning to read from her father. Then, in the dream, her father wears a soldier's uniform and a KAR hat, telling her how he's come back from fighting "Italians, Germans, Japanese" for the king. When Wanja asks which king, her father dodges the question and takes her into a workshop.

Wanja's "inner peace" after her dubiously consensual sex with Karega suggests that she did and does want a relationship with him, though prior to the sex she was conflicted about pursuing it. "KAR" stands for "King's African Rifles," a British colonial military force that fought against Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and Japan during WWII (1939 – 1945). Wanja's dream suggests that her father belonged to the British colonial army in WWII—but may have felt uneasy about it, given that he avoids young Wanja's question about which king he fights for.


In the dream, Wanja overhears her mother beg her father to move the family to Ilmorog, to live with his parents. When Wanja's father refuses, her mother asks whether he's afraid of what his own father "saw in the light." Wanja's father tells her mother to shut up, says Englishmen are too militarily powerful to fight, and suggests that money is the real path to freedom. Wanja's mother implies her father is a "traitor."

When Wanja's mother refers to what Wanja's grandfather "saw in the light," she may mean the vision Nyakinyua's husband had of white people tricking greedy Black people into oppressing other Black people. Her reference suggests she thinks Wanja's father is one of the greedy ones who oppresses others. Wanja's father's response is a self-justification: he thinks Kenyan people can't beat the British in a war but might achieve economic freedom if they play the capitalist game well. Wanja's mother doesn't buy his argument, calling him a "traitor."

Wanja's dream changes again. Wanja's father is saying her mother disobeys God by visiting Wanja's aunt, who gives aid to the Mau Mau. When Wanja's father suggests the sister and her husband are idolators and murderers, Wanja's mother points out that Wanja's father killed people during the white people's war and suggests he worships money. Wanja's father begins beating her mother. Her mother yells about "**fire**" and her "only sister." When her father says the fire was God's punishment, Wanja's mother becomes "speechless with terror and hatred," so Wanja herself starts yelling that the hut is on fire. She yells for help from Karega until she wakes up. Nyakinyua is there, asking what's wrong. Wanja asks Nyakinyua what really happened to her father and grandfather.

Wanja's father criticizes Wanja's aunt both for helping the anti-colonial Mau Mau and for not being Christian. These paired criticisms suggests that loyalty to the British colonial government and Christianity are linked. Wanja's mother's cries of "fire" reminds the reader that Wanja's aunt died by arson. Fire symbolizes how repression, shame, and misogyny can lead to violence: here, Wanja's father's shame at being a collaborator leads him to beat Wanja's mother. Though these scenes are technically a dream—they don't follow logically, as Wanja's mother is arguing about visiting her sister one minute and lamenting her sister's death the next—they seem based on Wanja's real childhood memories.

Karega goes to bed feeling as though "he has known Wanja all his life." He dreams he has followed his mother Mariamu and other women into the bush and gotten lost. Then he dreams he's playing on the **flower** farm of Ezekieli, Mukami's father, while an exhausted Mariamu works. They go home, women come to their hut, and the woman and Mariamu whisper about "bullets and freedom." The women cry, pray, and sing. Then Karega dreams he's standing on a little island in the center of a lake with Mukami, who flies away when he tries to touch her. Mukami transforms into Wanja, who transforms into Nyakinyua.

Karega has dubiously consensual sex with Wanja after revealing his history with Mukami. As Wanja reminds him of Mukami, he may feel as though "he has known Wanja all his life" because he's conflating her with Mukami. This, together with the transformation of Mukami into Wanja and Nyakinyua later in his dream, hints that Karega sometimes sees the women around him as interchangeable symbols or objects of desire. His dream about his mother whispering about "bullets and freedom" to other women, meanwhile, suggests he's recalling his mother receiving news of his brother's death (his brother died trying to buy bullets for freedom fighters). This occurred while Mariamu was laboring on Ezekieli's flower farm, symbolizing capitalist exploitation of Kenya's land and workers—and thus suggests Karega's brother died to liberate Mariamu from economic exploiters like Ezekieli as well as from British colonial rule.

In the dream, Karega realizes the people he thought were Mukami, Wanja, and Nyakinyua are actually his students. He is trying to explain the history of "Mr Blackman in three sentences." In this history, white people first steal Mr Blackman's body and then use religion and colonial education to try to steal his mind, soul, and land. Karega realizes the class is floating down a river on a raft and that he himself has transformed into L'Ouverture. He transforms into one Black revolutionary leader after another.

Karega has previously expressed a sense of failed responsibility toward his students. The transformation of Mukami, Wanja, and Nyakinyua into his students may hint that Karega feels he will fail the women too. Karega's history of "Mr Blackman in three sentences" reiterates that in Karega's view, slavery, Christianity, and white-run schools are all tools of white supremacy and capitalism. "L'Ouverture" refers to Toussaint L'Ouverture, a famous Haitian general in the Haitian Revolution overthrowing French colonizers. Karega may see himself as different Black freedom fighters because he feels he too should be fighting for Black liberation or because he feels all Black revolutionaries are striving toward the same general goal.

Karega's brother Nding'uri appears behind him carrying three bullets. When Karega tries to tell Nding'uri about his journeys and about Abdulla, Nding'uri says he knows about "the journey of search and exploration taken by all my brothers and sisters." When Nding'uri begins to walk away, Karega calls after him, wanting to follow him. Nding'uri rebukes Karega for being willing to abandon his students. Then Nding'uri disappears.

The bullets that Nding'uri carries allude to his death (he was executed for buying bullets for the Mau Mau). When Nding'uri talks about "all [his] brothers and sisters," though Karega is his only brother, it implies that this dream-Nding'uri sees all Black people or all anti-colonial revolutionaries as his siblings. When dream-Nding'uri criticizes Karega for trying to follow him and leave the students behind, it suggests that liberating the oppressed people who are still alive is more important than biological ties or honoring the dead.

Among Karega's students, Joseph raises his hand and asks how Europeans were able to colonize Africa and exploit it for centuries if white supremacy and myths about "the children of Ham" aren't true. Karega, furious, tells Joseph that the Bible is a tool white people use to subdue and economically exploit African people while African people subdivide themselves into smaller ethnic groups that fruitlessly fight one another. He begins yelling curses at Nderi wa Riera, white colonizers, and white politicians.

In the Biblical book of Genesis, Ham was one of Noah's sons. In Genesis 9:20 – 27, Ham sees Noah drunk and naked and gossips about it to his brothers. Later, in retaliation, Noah curses Ham's son Canaan. Though Canaan's race is not described, some white people claimed that Black Africans were descendants of Ham and Canaan and that Noah's curse somehow justified enslaving them. In response to dream-Joseph's invocation of this myth, Karega states his belief that the Bible and Christianity are tools of oppression.

Karega wakes up. Munira, standing beside his bed, informs him he's slept through an entire day and into the next morning. After fidgeting, Munira mentions Karega said Mukami's and Wanja's names in his sleep. He calls Karega "Mr Karega" and tells him that given Karega's revelations about Mukami, he and Karega shouldn't work together. He accuses Karega of having caused Mukami's suicide and says it's insulting for Karega to murmur her name and that of "a Very Important Prostitute" back-to-back.

Munira calls Wanja "a Very Important Prostitute," using her history with sex work as an insult and showing his hypocrisy: he was pursuing sex with her the night before, but now he's criticizing her sexual history. His hostility toward Wanja and Karega suggests that he's jealous of their burgeoning romance and is using Mukami as an excuse to drive Karega away.

Enraged, Karega charges Munira. When Munira dodges, Karega stops attacking, because he respects Munira as a teacher and because Munira's poked "a sensitive guilty core" in Karega. He sits on the bed and gives a long speech about how, given that everyone is oppressed, bought, and sold, everyone is "prostituted": "Why then need a victim hurl insults at another victim?" Munira, feeling morally wrongfooted, blurts out a snide response about how he's had enough of sermons from Ezekieli. Karega, angered by the mention of Ezekieli, says he won't quit the school. Munira says, "We shall see."

The reference to Karega's "sensitive guilty core" implies that he feels responsible for Mukami's suicide. When he argues that under conditions of oppression, everyone is "prostituted," it suggests that modern sex work is a kind of exploitation fundamentally similar to other capitalist oppressions. All the oppressed are "victims," so stigmatizing sex workers doesn't make sense. When Munira says "we shall see" in response to Karega's refusal to leave, it hints that Munira may try to make Karega leave somehow.

CHAPTER 9

In the new year, the people of Ilmorog bless those of the delegation who journeyed to the city on their behalf: Munira, Karega, Wanja, Nyakinyua, and especially Abdulla and his donkey. They do not yet know that in a year's time, people from that journey will come to Ilmorog and completely alter it. During that time, Munira bikes around alone and mostly avoids Abdulla's bar, while Karega and Wanja spend a lot of time together.

This passage foreshadows that Ilmorog's delegation will have unexpected, potentially undesirable consequences. Since Ilmorog undertook the delegation to petition its political representative, this foreshadowing suggests that Kenya's postcolonial political system may not work well for rural poor people.

Much later, in the account he writes in prison, Munira claims he wishes he had rescued Karega from Wanja. Yet he recalls how as Karega and Wanja's relationship developed, he himself became more and more sexually obsessed with Wanja. He secretly followed her and Karega and watched their love "**flower**." Absurdly, he began thinking that their non-marital relationship might be corrupting the children.

Munira's regrets about not "rescuing" Karega from Wanja betray his misogyny: he now thinks of female sexuality as a lure that leads men astray. His fear that Karega and Wanja are corrupting the children shows his hypocrisy; he had no such worries when he was the one having sex with Wanja. The language that describes Wanja and Karega's love "flower[ing]" connects their romance to the novel's flower symbolism, in which flowers represent Kenya's frequently exploited potential. Thus, their figurative romantic "flower[ing]" indicates both the potential of their relationship and its vulnerability to harmful forces.


Munira hired three new teachers for Ilmorog from Limuru. One day, he gathered all the teachers at Abdulla's and started talking about teaching, arguing that as authorities over malleable minds, they had a responsibility to teach only facts, not politics or "propaganda about blackness." Karega disagreed, arguing they couldn't teach only facts because facts always involved perspective, interpretation, and "selection." He went on to point out that "the oppression of black people," the African diaspora, and African resistance to invaders were facts. He concluded by arguing that the children needed to know these things for their own "liberation." The other teachers seemed impressed, and Munira felt wrong-footed. Then Wanja walked in and made intense eye contact with Karega before saying hello to anyone else. Later, unable to "resist the evil thought," Munira biked to "the headquarters."

The word "propaganda" has a negative connotation, implying political manipulation. When Munira mentions "propaganda about blackness," he implies that all teaching about race must be politically motivated, not factual. Karega argues that because facts always involve "selection," the distinction Munira makes between factual and political education is false: all curricula have a political perspective implicit in what they teach or omit. Since all education is political, Karega thinks students should learn what "liberat[es]" them. After the argument, shame and sexual jealousy motivate Munira to give in to some "evil thought"—though the novel does not make clear at this point what the thought is.


CHAPTER 10

At the end of Munira's fifth year teaching in Ilmorog, Munira walks outside the school. The help promised after Ilmorog's delegation hasn't appeared. Mzigo sometimes visits and has found one more teacher for the school, but that's all. The trauma of "tea" has faded for Munira, and he contemplates visiting Ezekieli, though he's not sure how he'd feel seeing his father now that he knows the truth about Mukami's suicide. Biking along, he sees Nyakinyua and stops to speak with her. Bringing up the new teachers, she accuses the headquarters of having given "with the right hand only to take away with the left." When Munira claims not to know what she means, she says he knows exactly what she means. Then she vanishes.

Mzigo neglects Ilmorog's school, hinting that rural schoolchildren aren't priorities for urbanizing, hyper-capitalist administrators like Mzigo. The idiom "to give with the right hand and take away with the left" (or "to give with one hand and take away with the other") means to help someone and then undermine or harm them. Nyakinyua is suggesting that the new teachers have helped Ilmorog—but the headquarters has done something else to hurt the town.

Returning home, Munira finds Wanja waiting for him and invites her inside. She asks him whether he remembers, on the night they drank **Theng'eta**, asking her why she'd come back to Ilmorog. She tells him that she was afraid she was infertile and had tried many treatments. When he interrupts to point out that she said she was pregnant once, she tells him that child died, and it wasn't until much later that she realized she wanted children. She visited Nyakinyua seeking advice, and Nyakinyua took her to Mwathi wa Mugo, who told her to have sex outside under a new moon.

Theng'eta, drunk in a culturally appropriate context, represents Kenyan potential—but in an inappropriate, capitalist context, it represents exploitation of Kenyan people. Wanja mentions Theng'eta now while revealing that her first child died and that she has been trying to have another, suggesting a symbolic parallel between capitalist exploitation of Kenya and Kimeria's sexual exploitation of young Wanja.

Munira, hurt that Wanja only had sex with him to get pregnant, asks why she's explaining this all now. She says she's trying to make clear that she's had an ulterior motive with every man except Karega, who gave her back her womanhood and made her feel she was beginning to "**flower**." Then she accuses Munira of getting Karega fired. She demands that Munira get Karega his job back, or she'll take revenge on him and Mzigo. Then she leaves. Though Munira feels overpowered by Wanja's forcefulness, he knows he can't do anything about Karega's firing now and tells himself that he did it for Wanja, in any case.

Prior to Karega, Wanja's sexual relationships have been mutually exploitative and capitalist: men have wanted sex, Wanja has wanted power, gifts, money, or a baby, and she has engaged in businesslike exchanges with men to get what she wants. She "flower[s]" when Karega helps her discover her own potential for non-exploitative, non-transactional sex. This passage reveals that Munira's "evil thought" was to get Karega fired; when Nyakinyua talked about "taking away with the left hand," she meant the headquarters firing Karega.

Walking to Abdulla's, Wanja swears to herself that if Karega leaves Ilmorog, she will too—even though the idea of leaving Ilmorog frightens her. At Abdulla's, Abdulla offers Karega partnership in the shop. Karega, shocked and disappointed at Munira's pettiness, almost makes "the fatal mistake of losing faith in people and in the possibilities of truth and beauty and ideals." But Wanja and Abdulla's support keeps him from that mistake.

Abdulla offers Karega a partnership in the shop even though there's no economic benefit to Abdulla. Though Abdulla is a businessman, he sometimes ignores capitalist self-interest in favor of interpersonal generosity. Forgetting that people have this capacity for generosity is a "fatal mistake" to Karega, because generosity forms the basis for "truth and beauty and ideals"—and change.

Karega asks Abdulla why he moved to Ilmorog. Though flinching at the question, Abdulla answers: when he was released from Manyani detention camp just before independence, he joyfully anticipated that the country's factories and farms would belong communally to all Kenyans and that Black collaborators who worked with white colonizers would be punished. Yet no economic redistribution or mass employment occurred. Abdulla bought a donkey and cart to support himself hauling goods. When he went to a loan office to buy a farm—though he didn't understand why he should "buy lands already bought by the blood of the people," they told him no one gets anything for free in "New Kenya."

Manyani Detention Camp was a prison where the British colonial government incarcerated Mau Mau guerilla fighters and other political dissidents prior to Kenyan independence. After independence, Abdulla expected more economically just land distribution and punishment for collaborators. Though Abdulla's blood and "the blood of the people" brought about the "New Kenya," its capitalist system meant that communal land ownership did not occur and many former freedom fighters like Abdulla remained poor.

Abdulla saw regional and ethnic tensions growing between Black factions and wondered where memories of the independence movement had gone. One day, he went back to the factory where he'd worked before the war to seek a job. They told him they wouldn't hire a crippled man; if he wanted anything for free, he should move to Tanzania or China. While standing outside the office, he saw a man arrive in a Mercedes Benz and enter the office—Kimeria wa Kamianja, who betrayed him and Nding'uri to the police. He overheard the clerks saying Kimeria had a contract with the factory and how good it was an African man "handled millions." After that, Abdulla fled to Ilmorog to forget all that had happened.

Tanzania, an East African country bordering Kenya, became a socialist state in 1967. China became a communist state at the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. Abdulla cannot even get a job at the factory where he worked before Independence, after becoming crippled fighting for Kenyan freedom. The people at the factory suggest that to give Abdulla any economic help would be tantamount to Tanzania's socialism or China's communism. This illustrates that while corrupt elites like Kimeria "handle[] millions" after independence, most Kenyan people suffer from economic injustices.

Abdulla finishes his story and advises Karega to stay in Ilmorog, as there's nowhere better to go. Then the men hear Wanja crying. She asks whether Abdulla's Kimeria had a scar on his forehead. When Abdulla says yes, Wanja explains that Kimeria is the man who impregnated her when she was an adolescent and then forced her to have sex with him during the Ilmorog delegation's journey to the city.

This passage makes explicit that the same Kimeria betrayed Nding'uri to the colonial police and abused Wanja. In so doing, it parallels the colonial violence and capitalist exploitation that ordinary Kenyan people suffered to the abuse women and girls suffer at the hands of powerful men.

Suddenly, Abdulla, Wanja, and Karega hear an airplane flying in odd circles. When they spot it in the sky, they realize it's going to make a crash landing near them, and they throw themselves to the ground in terror. After the plane lands in a nearby field, they go investigate and find the passengers—a European and three Africans—unhurt and examining the wreck. Circling the plane, Abdulla cries, "My other leg!"

While the people in Ilmorog live in poverty, Europeans fly overhead in planes—showing the ongoing economic inequalities that European colonial exploitation of Africa has caused. Abdulla has previously referred to his donkey as "his other leg;" his cry suggests that something has happened to the donkey.

In the next weeks, many people come to see the wrecked plane, and an impromptu "festival" forms. To cheer Abdulla up, Wanja suggests they sell food and **Theng'eta** to the tourists. Abdulla thinks that's a great idea, and indeed, Theng'eta is a huge hit—it becomes a nationally famous product. A newspaper reports that after the crash of an airplane doing survey work for a projected Trans-Africa Road, Ilmorog has become the location of a "strange cult" that worships a mysterious animal "bring[ing] power and light" and that drinks Theng'eta, which confers fertility on drinkers. Among the people of Ilmorog, however, the main topic of talk isn't the wreck or the tourists but Abdulla's donkey, which the plane crashed into and killed, and Karega, who has left town.

When Nyakinyua introduced the Theng'eta ceremony, she made everyone put money outside the ritual circle—suggesting that economic exchange had no place in Theng'eta's cultural use. Wanja may have good intentions when she suggests that she and Abdulla sell Theng'eta to tourists, but since Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui will later own a Theng'eta factory, this initial commodification of Theng'eta will lead to more egregious exploitations of what was once a non-commercial, culturally important practice. The sensational newspaper coverage of a "strange cult" and an animal "bring[ing] power and light" suggests that journalists are misinterpreting the people of Ilmorog, treating them as weirdly religious and superstitious when they are more concerned with practical matters, like Abdulla's dead donkey and Karega's move.

CHAPTER 11

The Trans-Africa road is constructed, connecting Ilmorog to Nairobi and other cities. It is a perverted version of the revolutionaries' dream of pan-African solidarity; instead of political solidarity, African elites seeking to impress white loaners enact a physical unity that allows for more efficient "international capitalist robbery and exploitation." The older people wait to follow Nyakinyua; meanwhile, the children, not knowing any better, practice their spelling with the names of corporations and sing songs about different African cities the road could take them to.

This passage represents capitalism in Africa as a horrible parody of African unity: Africans are united across countries, not by shared goals or pride, but by their subjection to capitalist infrastructure like the Trans-Africa road and by "international capitalist robbery and exploitation." The phrase about older people wanting to follow Nyakinyua implies that she has died.

In a flashback, Wanja builds a restaurant and bar onto Abdulla's shop that serves meat and Theng'eta. The men working on the road construction come to eat, drink, and talk there. Ilmorog's sporadic market is institutionalized to sell to these men's needs. Eventually, the road workers raze Mwathi wa Mugo's house, which is in the way of their planned development—only to discover that Mwathi wa Mugo has been living on top of "an archaeological site," which Nairobi academics fence in and the road workers are obliged to circumnavigate. Though the people of Ilmorog think Mwathi wa Mugo may take vengeance, he never appears.

The Trans-Africa road represents international capitalism, while Mwathi wa Mugo represents rural Kenyan spirituality and perhaps Kenyan traditional culture more generally. The road's destruction of Mwathi wa Mugo's house thus represents capitalism's destruction of Kenyan traditions. That academics take over the "archaeological site" that Mwathi wa Mugo has been protecting suggests that systems of Westernized formal education are colonizing the informal education and cultural knowledge that Mwathi wa Mugo, Nyakinyua, and other elders represent.

After construction in Ilmorog finishes, Abdulla and Wanja's restaurant/bar becomes a stop for truck and car drivers. They add a small hotel to their other businesses. Then Nderi wa Riera arrives, along with his two henchmen who have visited Ilmorog previously. He gives a speech, saying that KCO will help the region. He takes credit for Ilmorog's economic development and for the road passing through it, and he says that the town will be "develop[ed . . .] into ranches and wheat fields." People will get loans to "develop their land," but they'll have to register and get "title-deeds" for their land first. Though the people don't fully absorb Riera's meaning, they decide to trust him because of the development they've already seen and scold themselves for having distrusted him before.

A "title-deed" is a legal document showing who owns a piece of land or property. Riera's speech implies that to "develop" Ilmorog, the people must submit to a system of capitalist private ownership rather than holding their land communally. It also implies that just because the people of Ilmorog don't have specific legal documents, they may not have a legal right to the land they have historically occupied. Riera's speech thus foreshadows trouble for the people of Ilmorog.

Various developments Nderi wa Riera has promised occur. Herdsmen and farmers come to listen to a man from the African Economic Bank, who promises them loan repayment will never burden them—they just have to pay regularly. For the next year, everyone feels hopeful except Njuguna, whose sons all come back to Ilmorog and demand shares in his farms. The sons' disputes with one another grieve Njuguna. Despite this sadness, the people of Ilmorog are proud of Wanja and Abdulla, who now legally own their land and have a fancy building. Trusting in Riera, the people of Ilmorog expect "**flowers** to bloom."

The disputes between Njuguna's sons show how the prospect of wealth can make people envious and destroy interpersonal relationships. It strikes an ominous note in this otherwise hopeful passage, where Wanja and Abdulla serve as an example of small businesspeople doing well—suggesting that perhaps capitalism can lead to "flowers," (i.e., an appropriate development and appreciation for regular Kenyan people's potential).

After five years' absence, Karega returns to Ilmorog and visits Munira. Munira ponders all that has happened in Karega's absence. Wanja has become a successful businesswoman in partnership with Abdulla—the only Ilmorog natives to become successful, as no one else had the capital to develop their land and had to sell to "outsiders." Though Munira hoped Wanja would resume a romance with him after Karega left, she didn't, and he felt she was intentionally tormenting him. He began drinking too much **Theng'eta** and reading horoscopes, applying each one to his life. For a while he carried on a sexual affair with an outwardly religious girl named Lillian who always pretended to be a virgin, but he ended things because he still wanted Wanja.

The capitalist development that Nderi wa Riera promised to Ilmorog led to the people's dispossession, because they didn't already have the money that would have enabled them to make more money. Under capitalism, economic mobility is mostly a myth for poor people—capitalism privileges the rich and makes the poor poorer. That Munira is using Theng'eta just to get drunk shows how commodification degrades traditional cultural practices. His sexual relationship with a religious girl who always pretends to be a virgin again represents religious people as repressed and hypocritical.

Walking around the changing Ilmorog, Munira sees former herdsmen and farmers turned into wage-laborers because land development ended their "hitherto unquestioned rights of use and cultivation." Suddenly, he has the idea to invent a hugely popular advertisement for **Theng'eta** and win Wanja's love by increasing her profits. One night, drunk, he stands up at the bar and yells out a slogan about Theng'eta making you more sexually energetic. Wanja is unmoved; everyone else treats it as a joke. He goes home with Lillian, but when she pretends to be a virgin he's raping, he beats her. They break up permanently.

Due to the imposition of systematic private ownership, the townspeople have lost their "hitherto unquestioned rights of use and cultivation"—or, their right to use the land for farming and grazing livestock. Capitalism has destroyed their traditional means of self-support and turned them into workers dependent on rich employers. Munira's idea to win Wanja's love by coming up with a Theng'eta advertising slogan shows how capitalism is commodifying the spiritual and cultural heritage that Theng'eta represents and how Munira sees Wanja as something he can 'buy' by increasing her financial profits. His breakup with Lillian underscores his hypocrisy: despite his own religious qualms about sex, he reacts violently to Lillian's pretense of religious purity.

Looking at Karega, Munira muses how the school-building is much larger now and full of teachers. Mzigo frequently visits, though that's more for his shop than the school. Nderi wa Riera and Rev. Jerrod also own shops in Ilmorog. Karega asks what happened to Joseph; Munira says he went to **Siriana**. There is a pause.

People who neglected Ilmorog or mistreated the people of Ilmorog—Mzigo, Riera, and Rev. Jerrod—now own the town, which shows that capitalist development benefits the already elite, not the rural poor. Joseph's matriculation at Siriana suggests that the cycle of Kenyan students being mentally colonized or punished by a white-supremacist education may continue.

Then Karega asks after Nyakinyua. Munira thinks of how he's still trying to come up with an advertisement to win Wanja—in the paper, he reads articles about the lawyer, who is now in Parliament calling for reform, but he mainly reads advertisements. Munira recalls how he was reading the newspaper, drunk on **Theng'eta**, when he came upon an advertisement for a public auction of Nyakinyua's land and property. Such auctions were common, as many farmers and herdsmen couldn't pay off their bank loans and were "driv[en] from the land."

Nyakinyua, among other farmers and herdsmen in Ilmorog, has lost her land due to bank loans. This fact emphasizes that "economic development" in a capitalist context tends to benefit the already wealthy. That Munira is getting drunk on Theng'eta while reading advertisements, meanwhile, emphasizes how commodifying Theng'eta has debased a culturally important substance. Thus, Theng'eta symbolizes capitalism's exploitation and debasement of Kenyan culture.

Going to commiserate with Wanja and Nyakinyua, Munira found people gathered in Nyakinyua's hut, wondering how a bank, which was "not a government," could take someone's land. They asked Munira to explain, but he could only babble about title-deeds. He went home, drank **Theng'eta**, and wondered what would happen to Nyakinyua, who was too old to become a wage-laborer like other dispossessed farmers. In the present, Munira bluntly declares to Karega that Nyakinyua died.

The townspeople can't believe that a financial institution that is "not a government" can repossess people's land, a disbelief that implies financial institutions have excessive political power in capitalist societies. Again, Munira is drinking Theng'eta to get drunk, showing how commodification has debased the drink's cultural meaning. Finally, this passage confirms that Nyakinyua has died.

Munira recalls how Nyakinyua tried to resist the bank's theft of Ilmorog's land. She walked all around Ilmorog trying to rouse the people to political resistance. Yet none of the people of Ilmorog were sure who they should oppose—the banks, Nderi wa Riera, the KCO, or something else. They ignored Nyakinyua or called her crazy. Nyakinyua declared that just as her husband had fought white colonizers, so she would fight "black oppressors." Yet before Nyakinyua could journey to the city to protest, she died in her sleep. To keep Nyakinyua's land from being publicly auctioned to outsiders, Wanja and Abdulla sold their own land rights to Mzigo, and Wanja used the money to buy Nyakinyua's land.

Nyakinyua has difficulty mobilizing the townspeople against the theft of their land because they don't know whose actions they'd be protesting. Their confusion suggests that economic institutions are more difficult to protest than political ones because economic institutions don't always have clear leaders to whom protestors can direct their appeals or their anger. Before she dies, Nyakinyua compares white colonizers to "black oppressors," (i.e., Kenyan capitalist elites), paralleling oppression under colonialism and under post-colonial capitalism.

Wanja changed after she sold the rights to the land where her business was located. Though she continued to run the business, she also began building "a huge wooden bungalow," with gardens and electricity, even though she already had a hut. Then, one night, as the band was playing at Wanja and Abdulla's bar, Wanja began to dance emotionally and sensually toward Munira. Then she got on stage; when the music halted, she told the customers that the county government had said the bar must close. She insisted, almost hysterically, that for that night the band continue to play, and that people continue to dance. Then she went over to Munira and invited her to come to her new house the next night.

This passage hints—though it does not say explicitly—that Wanja somehow lost the right to her bar when she sold her land. This shows the ripple effects of economic injustice: even though Wanja and Abdulla owned their land, the loss of Nyakinyua's land compelled Wanja to sell her rights. Previously, Wanja has shown angry contempt for Munira, who got her lover Karega fired and drove him out of town. Now she wants to seduce Munira. This sudden change suggests that Wanja, having lost the successful small business she ran with Abdulla, is returning to the devil she knows: having sex to get power, money, or other goals.

When Munira, excited, arrived at Wanja's new house the next night, she was wearing excessive makeup and a "flaming red wig." It reminded him of wig advertisements. Wanja, noting Munira's shock, asked whether he didn't want her—wasn't that why he got Karega fired? She said the county government had taken away her right to brew **Theng'eta**—the license was transferred to the new owner along with the land—and asked whether Munira knew who the new owner of Theng'eta breweries and the new tourist center would be. Without waiting for an answer, she took him to bed, stripped, and demanded 100 shillings, telling him that in Kenya, there were "no free things," and that he was "a guest at *Sunshine Lodge*." Though confused and humiliated, Munira paid Wanja and had sex with her.

Wanja's unnatural makeup suggests she is not being authentic with Munira, while her "flaming red wig" suggests fire, a symbol associated with out-of-control, violent emotion. What she says about the Theng'eta license reveals that the government and the brewery's new owner have conspired to restrict the production of Theng'eta, once a traditional homebrewed drink. This shows how capitalism appropriates cultural objects and practices not originally intended to be bought and sold. Wanja reacts to the loss of her brewery by building a brothel, the "Sunshine Lodge." Her long history of sexual and economic exploitation may lead her to believe that her sexuality will be commodified no matter what, so she might as well control the process as a self-employed sex worker.

Munira tells Karega about changes in Ilmorog. Most of the former farmers are now laborers on farms owned by rich men who hire managers to do the on-site supervision. The town has split into a rich neighborhood called Cape Town, and an impoverished neighborhood called New Jerusalem. In the middle of these two neighborhoods are Rev. Jerrod Brown's church and Wanja's Sunshine Lodge.

Cape Town is the legislative seat of South Africa, a country known for its longstanding regime of racial segregation called apartheid, which lasted until the 1990s. The novel may allude to Cape Town to compare Ilmorog's new, stark economic segregation to racial segregation. New Jerusalem is a perfect city that appears in the Biblical Book of Ezekiel; it represents the capital of the spiritual kingdom presided over by the Messiah. Since Ilmorog's New Jerusalem is impoverished, the name is ironic; religious prophecies cannot help the real poor people in Ilmorog.

Additionally, Nderi wa Riera owns a tourist village and Mzigo owns **Theng'eta** Breweries, which has expanded into a massive factory employing hundreds. The Theng'eta packaging carries an advertisement boasting that the drink makes people sexually powerful. Although a U.S./U.K. business group owns many of the breweries, Africans are high-up employees "and even shareholders." Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria have become "leading local personalities."

Kenyan elites who have exploited, abused, neglected, or otherwise wronged residents of Ilmorog—Nderi wa Riera, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria—get rich in town due to capitalist development, implying that capitalism leads to unjust social outcomes. That a business group based in the U.S. and UK owns many Theng'eta breweries suggests that international capitalism is colonialism all over again—white-majority Western countries just control Kenya covertly now, through economics, rather than overtly, through government.

Karega breaks into Munira's story and asks after Abdulla and Wanja. Wanting to hurt Karega, Munira offers to take him to see Wanja. As they walk, Munira tells Karega all about which rich people now own which parts of Ilmorog. Then he pauses by a "mud-walled" house partitioned into apartments and asks whether Karega wants to see Abdulla before Wanja. Karega agrees.

Munira's desire to hurt Karega, though neither man now has a relationship with Wanja, shows how unreasonable his jealousy and possessiveness are. His casual discussion of all the rich people who own Ilmorog emphasizes yet again that only the rich benefited from Ilmorog's development.

Munira knocks on a door and calls to Abdulla. Abdulla, sounding drunk, invites him in and offers him **Theng'eta**. When Munira and Karega enter, Abdulla doesn't recognize Karega. Munira explains who Karega is, and the men make halting conversation. Abdulla seems exhausted and discombobulated. When Karega asks to whom the house belongs, Abdulla says he rents from an "important person in authority" who owns 10 blocks and deputizes his bodyguard to take people's rent money. Karega exclaims that's "on top of his official government salary." Munira cynically suggests the man probably owns slums all over Kenya.

Abdulla as well as Munira now drinks Theng'eta while alone to get drunk. This sad, solitary drinking contrasts with the communal Theng'eta drinking Nyakinyua organized and highlights how Theng'eta's commodification has degraded its cultural meaning. The references to an "important person" and an "official government salary" suggest that Abdulla's landlord is Nderi wa Riera; the politician who should be helping Ilmorog's townspeople is squeezing them for rent instead, showing how greed corrupts people in power.

When Abdulla tells Karega that he now sells fruit by the road, Karega—perhaps trying to cheer Abdulla up—mention's Joseph's admission to **Siriana** and hopes he doesn't get expelled like him and Munira. Abdulla says that all poor people share the same fate and offers Karega **Theng'eta**, asking whether he's tasted it. Karega says he tried it in Mombasa, "surprised to see it on sale . . . but it did not taste the same." He suggests that alcohol is widely distributed to pacify and weaken the oppressed.

Karega's hope that Siriana doesn't expel Joseph seems to represent the hope that Kenyan education has changed—that elite schools no longer teach white supremacy, so students no longer have to protest. Abdulla's reaction, urging Karega to drink, implies that he believes nothing has changed. Karega's belief that Theng'eta doesn't "taste the same" now that it's "on sale" implies that commodification has changed not only the drink's meaning but its flavor.

Abdulla repeats that the same bad things happen to all poor people. Joseph is his only joy—Joseph who "isn't really" Abdulla's brother. When Munira asks Abdulla what he means, Abdulla becomes thoughtful and says Joseph is neither his brother nor his son, though he's like a son to him. Abdulla explains that after he was released from detention just before independence, he went to Limuru looking for his family and discovered British soldiers and Home Guards had massacred them all.

Up to this point, the novel has not made Abdulla and Joseph's relationship clear, though Abdulla does seem to be Joseph's guardian. Now readers learn that Home Guards—Kenyan paramilitaries who fought for the colonial government—murdered Abdulla's family during the Kenyan struggle for independence. This revelation underscores colonialism's violence, while making Joseph's relationship to Abdulla more mysterious.

Then one day, while moving goods with his donkey, Abdulla discovered a homeless child scrounging for food who told him he couldn't remember his own name and that his parents and brothers had all gone away, though he hoped they'd come back. Abdulla called the child "Joseph Njiraini" and told the child that he, Abdulla, was his brother. Though Abdulla couldn't tell whether Joseph believed him, Joseph stayed with him and did errands for him until Wanja convinced Abdulla to send Joseph to school.

Abdulla's story implies that Joseph, like Abdulla, lost his entire family—though whether they died due to colonial violence is not clear. Either way, Abdulla's decision to adopt Joseph after they both lost their families suggests that care for others—and ultimately perhaps political solidarity—arises when a person realizes others have suffered the same tragedies they have.

Without responding to Abdulla's story, Munira and Karega walk on to Wanja's wooden house. When they arrive, a girl serves them alcohol and plays music for them. On the walls hang English landscape paintings, Christian religious art, and "Akamba carvings of giraffes and rhinos."

The art in Wanja's brothel represents colonialism (English landscape paintings), Christian hypocrisy about sex (Christian religious art), and capitalist commodification of indigenous African cultures (the Akamba are an ethnic group native to Kenya). In sum, the art suggests that colonialism, religion, and capitalism are forces of exploitation similar to the sexual exploitation of poor women by rich men occurring at the brothel.

Wanja appears in a revealing dress and sophisticated makeup. She and Karega stare at each other, shocked; Munira savors their discomfort. In a halting way, Wanja asks Karega where he's been. Karega explains that after leaving Ilmorog, he worked for the lawyer, who had become a politician and was trying to help the poor despite KCO opposition. But though the lawyer and Karega agreed on the social problems that needed fixing, Karega thought the lawyer "had too much faith in the very shrines created by what he called the monster" and eventually left his employ.

Karega's belief that the lawyer "had too much faith in the very shrines created by what he called the monster" means that Karega thought the lawyer trusted the established political order too much. The "monster" is capitalism, which colonizers forced on Kenya; its "shrines" include the law, which protects private property, and status-quo politics, which reward corrupt moneymakers. Though Karega does not say so specifically, he may believe that the lawyer spent too much time at Siriana before independence, absorbing conservative, pro-establishment views against his better judgment.

After leaving the lawyer, Karega became a dockworker in Mombasa. When Wanja interjects that dockworkers are well paid with "responsible union leaders," Karega disagrees—too many union leaders are themselves businessmen, and "you cannot serve two opposed masters." After leaving Mombasa, he worked on plantations and tried to convince the impoverished, exploited workers to organize; inevitably, the owners would find out what he was doing and fire him.

The phrase "you cannot serve two opposed masters" is an allusion to the Gospel, Matthew 6:24, in which Jesus Christ argues that because people can't serve two masters equally well, they cannot serve both God and money. The novel thus connects the hypocrisy of union leaders who are also businessmen to that of Christian ministers like Rev. Jerrod Brown: though union leaders and Christian ministers are supposed to help workers and the poor, many sidestep that duty and enrich themselves instead.

Eventually, Karega began working in western Kenya for a sugar mill owned by the UK's McMillan sugar, which had land all over Africa. The company relied on immiserated indigenous farmers encouraged to grow sugar rather than food for themselves. In Kenya, Africans occupied McMillan's "middle-level managerial positions," while European workers took the high-level technical jobs and mistreated African technical trainees. One day, while Karega was helping an African trainee, a European worker came over and demanded something. When Karega told him to wait, the European worker called him a rude word in Swahili. Karega threw a bearing at the European's face and was fired, after which he decided to travel back to Ilmorog.

That a UK-based company owns land all over Africa again emphasizes that colonialism isn't over. It has simply transformed from a form of overt political control to covert economic control through international capitalism. Karega's story about McMillan giving Africans "middle-level" positions while reserving high-level positions for white people shows that large-scale European economic colonialism in Africa leads to racism at the level of companies and interpersonal relations.

Wanja and Munira sense Karega has somehow become unlike them. Wanja asks Karega whether he plans to stay in Ilmorog, and Karega says workers are homeless, traveling wherever employers buy labor. As Munira and Karega are about to leave, Wanja—struck by resonances between Karega's story and what has happened in Ilmorog since Karega left—asks them to stay. She tells them that "this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten." Then she says that she's longed for a child; when she went to Mwathi wa Mugo, he told her to confess—but she felt unable to tell him that she'd once been pregnant and had tossed her newborn into a latrine.

Here readers finally learn how Wanja's first baby died: she killed the baby. Though the passage doesn't immediately reveal why she killed the baby, her claim that "you eat somebody or you are eaten" implies that she thought—given her youth and poverty—she couldn't possibly care for both the baby and herself. Thus, Wanja's knowledge of her economic precarity and vulnerability to sexual exploitation led her to commit infanticide.

To the speechless Karega and Munira, Wanja says she can't excuse what she did, but she didn't know what else to do because she couldn't have supported a baby. Since then, she's prayed to God and hunted for real love, which she found with Karega—until he left.

Here Wanja makes explicit that she committed infanticide because she was too poor, with too few job prospects, to support a baby after Kimeria sexually abused her.

After Nyakinyua died, Wanja sold her business to keep ownership of her grandmother's land. She visited Nderi wa Riera at Ilmorog's tourist village and saw him with another owner—the German man who terrified Wanja one night in Nairobi. The German man didn't even recognize her. Afterward, she went to Mzigo to ask for help in getting another brewing license, and he admitted the government had given him a patent on **Theng'eta**.

The German man who terrified Wanja tried to rape her and may have been a sex trafficker. His involvement with the tourist village hints that it may be a cover for sex trafficking, a detail that links exploitative European tourism in Africa to more overt, violent exploitation of Kenyan women and girls by European men. That Mzigo was able to patent Theng'eta shows that capitalist political systems have no sense of shared cultural inheritance not 'owned' by any individual—they only know how to privatize what should be shared goods, like land and other natural resources.

Wanja knew Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria were the directors of the Kenya branch of **Theng'eta** Breweries. It infuriated her that Kimeria, who had been a Home Guard, impregnated her as an adolescent, and forced sex on her as an adult was the one making money off of Ilmorog's new prominence. She concluded that in the world as it is, women's only choices are marriage or sex work. Deciding to do nothing "for free," she built a brothel and procured various types of girls for men's various preferences. She used sex to get revenge against Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo—they all pay to have sex with her, and she pits them against one another. She declares she'll "never return to the herd of victims."

Kimeria, a collaborator with colonizers and an abuser, now helps direct the privatized brewing of Theng'eta, a traditional cultural product that symbolizes the potential of Kenya's land and people. This situation illustrates how rich Kenyan elites, with connections to former colonial powers, exploit and abuse the Kenyan people. Wanja believes she can exit the "herd of victims" by selling her own sexuality and making money from other women's bodies. Yet in the end, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria still have access to her body because they're rich, which suggests she is still a victim of capitalism.

Karega, believing Wanja doubts her words, examines her and sees "countless other faces" from Kenya. Though he's seen people across the country enact her dog-eat-dog view, he declares that there must be another way. If it's not possible in this world, they should make "another world, a new earth." Wanja scoffs. Munira declares that they have to go and bolts outside. Karega, following, glances back and sees Wanja seemingly dragged toward the earth by her heavy jewelry. He walks outside but doesn't see Munira. Back at home, in bed, Munira feverishly murmurs to himself Karega's words about a new world.

When Karega sees "countless other faces" within Wanja's face, it suggests that her sexual and economic exploitation represents the exploitation of "countless" Kenyan people by former colonial powers and Kenyan elites. Yet it also suggests that Karega, like other male characters, still has trouble seeing Wanja as an individual rather than as an object or symbol. When Wanja droops under her heavy jewelry, it hints that the money she makes does not empower her. Munira's repetition of Karega's words about "another world" and "a new earth," meanwhile, imply that Karega has inspired him.

CHAPTER 12

Two years after that conversation in Wanja's brothel, after Munira has been in jail for 10 days, Inspector Godfrey reads through Munira's written account of events and asks what the phrase "a new earth, another world" means. Munira explains that after he heard Karega say those words, they kept haunting him. He no longer enjoyed **Theng'eta**. He couldn't make sense of the world's evils and horrors that Wanja revealed in her story—how could she try to escape Kimeria, only to reencounter him in new and horrible ways? How could Abdulla fight for independence only to lose his store and become a drunkard?

Though Munira can be self-involved, sexist, and cruel, his speech to Inspector Godfrey reveals that he notices and cares about injustices around him, such as Kimeria's abuse of Wanja and Abdulla's poverty and addiction after fighting for Kenya's freedom. Because Munira does care, Karega's words about "a new earth, another world" resonate with him. After hearing them, he can no longer drown himself in Theng'eta—representing disillusionment with capitalist exploitation of Kenya's land and people.

Munira began attending the Rev. Jerrod Brown's Anglican church, but it seemed to him the same as church before Independence. He wanted to stand and accuse the Reverend of having turned him away as a starving traveler and demand spiritual food from him, but he thought the Reverend might be "stingy" with that too. Feeling that he had added to "Wanja's degradation and the evil of the world," he wanted forgiveness, wrote a letter to his wife Julia telling her to continue steadfast in faith, and then tore it up.

Munira's renewed interest in religion suggests he has interpreted Karega's words about "another world" religiously. Yet he cannot find comfort in the nearest established church, as it is conservative with a reverend who's a "stingy" hypocrite. Nor can Munira figure out how to make amends for his own poor behavior in the past. Knowing he's been cruel to Wanja and cheated on his wife, he writes out some religious advice for his wife but rips it up—suggesting that he is frustrated with his own hypocrisy but doesn't know how to move beyond it.

One day, news arrived that the lawyer had been assassinated. Horrified, Munira, Karega, Wanja, Abdulla, and Njuguna gathered and talked about the event. Munira wondered aloud why anyone would assassinate a good, charitable, unprejudiced man like the lawyer.

Since Nderi wa Riera vowed revenge on the lawyer earlier, readers can guess that he organized the assassination. The lawyer was assassinated while trying to achieve economic reform within the existing political system. His death suggests that when a political system is corrupt or violent, you cannot reform it from within—because if you have any chance of succeeding, powers invested in the status quo will kill you.

Munira stopped going to church, feeling an abrupt loathing for the Rev. Jerrod Brown. The next Sunday, he went walking—and came upon a religious group, dressed in white and playing drums, led by his erstwhile lover Lillian, preaching about "a new earth, another world" that included no social hierarchies and that didn't require "good works: just acceptance, in faith." Stunned by Lillian's transformation, Munira converted to her new Christian sect.

Lillian's group uses language similar to Karega's: "a new earth, another world." Some Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, believe doing good works is important to salvation. Others, like many Protestant denominations, believe in salvation only by religious faith—a doctrine often called "justification by faith alone." It is this doctrine that Lillian refers to when she talks about entering the new world solely through "acceptance, in faith." Since this new world requires no action on the part of believers to come about, this "new earth" is likely an afterlife, not a better political system on earth—which is presumably what Karega meant when he talked about "another world."

Inspector Godfrey has listened to Munira's story with interest. But now, signaling boredom, he sits back and asks why, if Munira had this religious conversion, he kept palling around with sinners like Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla rather than his fellow Christian Lillian. Munira says he was trying to convert his sinner friends. When Godfrey asks whether Karega also talked to the workers about a new world, Munira says he was trying to save Karega from that. Godfrey, getting excited, asks what Munira wanted to save Karega from. Munira says he wanted to save Munira from the sin of "pride," specifically of thinking he has the power to "change this world."

The rationale for believing in "justification by faith alone" is that human beings, evil and powerless, can't earn salvation —but if they have faith in God, he may give it to them for free. Munira's belief that Karega has no power "to change this world" and that it's culpable "pride" to believe otherwise is, therefore, a religious belief. Through Munira's religious beliefs, the novel is suggesting that religion—or at least a certain kind of Protestant Christianity—convinces people they are powerless and makes them passive in the face of injustices

Deeply annoyed by Munira's response, Inspector Godfrey asks how, specifically, Karega planned to change the world—other than by spouting "communist nonsense." What other evils might Karega be involved in? Munira says he wanted to save Karega from Wanja—he saw the two of them meeting at her hut about a week before the **fire**. After Munira says this, Inspector Godfrey gets excited and rushes for the door. Munira yells at Godfrey to stop and asks what he's done with Karega. Godfrey calls Munira a "fool" and leaves.

Munira's desire to "save" Karega from Wanja—by implication, from a sexual relationship with her—hints that his religious conversion has aggravated his misogyny and ambivalence about sex. Inspector Godfrey's annoyed conviction that Munira is a "fool" suggest that enforcers of the capitalist status quo don't really care about justice or religion. They only care about maintaining order.

Karega, jailed the same day as Munira, is angry because the authorities "banned" a strike the workers were planning and used Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria's murder as a pretext. Since he's only ever been arrested once before, during Ilmorog's delegation to the city, he's reminded of the lawyer who saved them. Despite the lawyer's psychic investment in "property," "social power," and "authority"—he believed his education, involvement in the Independence struggle, and wealth made him a better advocate for the poor, because no one could criticize him for anything, including self-interest. Karega believes he was a great man and mourns his death.

The banned strike makes clear that the brewery workers don't benefit from the murders, though they were struggling against the victims. The police have used the murders as an excuse to prevent workers from protesting—which illustrates, yet again, that the police are enforcers of the capitalist status quo. Karega thinks the lawyer was a flawed reformer because he saw his Eurocentric education, wealth, and social status as assets, not realizing that powerful people would still kill him if he got too close to effecting real change.

Karega barely remembers who he was when he first met the lawyer—he was so obsessed with Africans' past, not realizing that "the glory of their present strife and struggles" was equally important if not more so. In any case, the old world is gone. As soon as he returned to Ilmorog, he noticed it had completely changed in the 10 years since he first visited the town. He's seen this economic development and increasing poverty in many places; he believes private land ownership is wrong, just like one child "monopoliz[ing]" their parents' time is wrong, and so he's decided to struggle in solidarity with other workers.

Karega was interested in Africans' past in part because his Eurocentric education refused to teach African history. Now, having witnessed more examples of the exploitation of the poor in post-Independence Kenya, he has become more interested in "present strife and struggles" related to anti-capitalism. When he compares private land ownership to a single child "monopolizing" parents, it suggests both that people have a special, familial relationship with their land of origin but, precisely because of that special relationship, they shouldn't exploit the land or take individual ownership of it.

Karega rejects Wanja's dog-eat-dog philosophy and resolves to fight oppression "until a human kingdom came," thinking that if Abdulla can choose Joseph to be his brother, he (Karega) can choose all workers and all the oppressed.

The phrase "until a human kingdom came" is an allusion to the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus Christ teaches his disciples in Matthew 6:9 -13 and Luke 11:2 – 4. The prayer includes the wish that God's "kingdom come." Karega's wish that a human kingdom come means he wants not a heavenly afterlife but a political utopia in this world. His intention to fight for the world he wants contrasts with Munira's passivity, further emphasizing that religion hinders political action.

After his return to Ilmorog, Karega worked for six months in **Theng'eta** Breweries. He observed how workers from different linguistic and ethnic groups were divided against one another, and how male workers looked down on and sexualized female workers. Once Karega had determined "his line of attack and approach," pamphlets showed up all over Ilmorog arguing that workers should be united in that they were both parents to machines and children of machines. The main question was whether the workers, who produced machines, would get to control the products of their labor—or whether non-working owners would: "Every dispute was put in the context of the exploitation of labour by capital, itself stolen from other workers."

Karega's observations suggest that prejudice against women or people of other ethnicities and language groups divides workers, hampering effective political action for economic justice. The phrase about Karega's "line of attack and approach," coming directly before the political pamphlets show up, indicates that he wrote the pamphlets. Karega's belief that all "capital"—in this context, the wealth produced by workers' labor that employers have kept for themselves after paying workers' wages—is "stolen" comes from Marxist theory and shows Karega's allegiance to Karl Marx's (1818 – 1883) critique of capitalism.

Though only a few people knew who was writing the pamphlets, the pamphlets' content persuaded the workers by itself. The brewery workers went on strike and formed a union. The Board of Directors accepted the union, believing they could defang it, but fired Karega due to his history. Afterward the union elected him to a paid position, Secretary-General. After the brewery workers unionized, many other groups of workers in Ilmorog unionized as well. Worried employers tried to undermine worker solidarity: they stoked workers' ethnic and religious differences, promoted some workers to managers, and allowed other workers to buy a few shares in the company.

The rapid unionization of workers in different industries suggests that workers already wanted better conditions when they read Karega's pamphlets—the pamphlets simply gave voice to their sense of injustice. The tactics that the employers use to break up the unions suggest that economic elites consciously try to instill racism, religious bias, and other forms of prejudice in workers to keep them from banding together for economic justice.

In Karega's view, more dangerous than the employers was Lillian's evangelical Christian sect, which preached equality among all men but encouraged its members to treat the world as a Satanic delusion and to bow out of worldly fights. Many workers converted; some, expecting an apocalypse, left the union. Karega tried to convince religious workers they could participate in both religious and worldly movements, using the Gospel passage "Give unto Caesar," but he secretly believed "religion, any religion, was a weapon against the workers."

Apocalyptic religious beliefs entail that the current world will pass away. Thus, they disincentivize political action to improve the current world. Karega tries to manipulate workers with apocalyptic beliefs into staying in the union by alluding to an incident in the Gospels (Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26): Jesus, asked whether Jewish people should pay taxes to the Roman Empire, replies that they should give to Caesar (the Roman Emperor) what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. Though readers have interpreted this incident in various ways, Karega claims it means that Christians should participate in secular political life. His secret belief that "religion, any religion, was a weapon against the workers" echoes the oft-cited Karl Marx quotation, "Religion is the opium of the people," suggesting religion is a "painkiller" to cope with oppression, which by alleviating people's pain keeps them from fighting oppression.

As Munira kept trying to convert him, Karega discovered that Munira's religious movement receives funding from American churches that makes its congregations tithe, believes communism is Satanic, and "warned of the immediate second coming of Christ to root out all the enemies of freedom."

While Munira seems earnest in his new beliefs, his group's ties to anticommunist, jingoistic U.S. churches that believe Christ will "root out all the enemies of freedom" implies that hypocritical American conservatives are using religion to advance a pro-capitalist agenda globally.

Out of nowhere, one week before the fire, Wanja sent Karega a note insisting that he meet her at her hut. Now Karega, in jail, wonders how she's doing and whether she's healing from the **fire**.

By reminding readers that Wanja was injured in the fire, the novel also alludes to Wanja's previous experiences with fire: her aunt's death-by-arson and her own narrow escape from arson by sexist vigilantes when she was dating a Somali man. These reminders of misogynistic arson prompt readers to wonder whether the murdered men were the real target of the fire—or whether Wanja was.

After leaving Karega alone in jail for three days, Inspector Godfrey interrogates him. Godfrey establishes Karega's brother (Nding'uri) died during independence; Karega was expelled from **Siriana** for participating in a strike while Chui was headmaster; Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria had voted not to grant Karega's union's request for increased wages at the brewery; and Mzigo fired Karega from teaching. Godfrey also asks whether Karega and Wanja restarted a "cordial relationship" after Karega moved back to Ilmorog; Karega claims that he and Wanja haven't "really" interacted for two years.

Inspector Godfrey is implying that Karega has multiple possible motives for murdering Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo: Kimeria was involved in Karega's brother's death; Chui expelled him; Mzigo fired him; and all three men are paying Karega's former lover Wanja for sex. Inspector Godfrey's blatant suspicion that Karega is the murderer suggests that his status quo-bias and dislike of anti-capitalist protestors prevent him from investigating dispassionately.

Inspector Godfrey plays a recording of Karega talking at the last union meeting about "a New World." Karega is horrified that a union member has betrayed them. When Godfrey demands that Karega admit who committed the murder, Karega responds "acidly" that the police should have their own methods of figuring it out.

Inspector Godfrey seems to believe that Karega's "New World" means a world without Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo, when in fact Karega wants a world in which workers are not exploited. The Inspector's inability to understand Karega's ideals and his excessive suspicion prompt Karega to reply "acidly"—that is, with cutting sarcasm.

Inspector Godfrey interrogates Karega for the next eight days, sometimes depriving him of sleep before demanding answers. After Karega has been in jail 10 days, he tells Godfrey that he doesn't know who committed the arson and that he wouldn't assassinate people, since it's "the system that needs to be changed" rather than particular people within the system.

Sleep deprivation is a form of torture. Inspector Godfrey's torture of Karega again emphasizes that in corrupt systems, the police don't care about protecting the people or finding justice but about preserving the status quo. Karega's belief that murder is ineffective because "the system needs to be changed" implies that unless the system does change, other exploitative elites will just take Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria's places.

Inspector Godfrey asks whether Karega knew Wanja was having sex with Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria. When Karega admits he does, Godfrey asks whether Karega saw Wanja after the lawyer's assassination. Karega admits he did but says it wasn't "really a meeting." Then Godfrey asks whether Karega met Wanja a week before the **fire**. Karega admits that he did but refuses to talk about it because "it's personal." When Godfrey asks whether Abdulla attended the meeting, Karega denies it. Godfrey calls Karega a liar, hits him repeatedly in the face, and orders another policeman to take him downstairs for torture.

From Inspector Godfrey's questions, it isn't clear whether he believes Karega killed Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria out of jealousy or that Abdulla, Karega, and Wanja conspired to kill the men together. In either case, he clearly has a misogynistic view of Wanja's sexuality as a destructive, magnetic force. Inspector Godfrey's physical abuse of Karega and his call for more torture emphasize, once again, his corruption and indifference to real justice.

Abdulla has been in jail for nine days of interrogation, statement-taking, and some physical abuse. Yet he's relieved: another person has enacted his "wishes and fantasies," thereby "sav[ing] him." The only thing he worries about is Wanja's hospitalization. Mainly he thinks about his own history: his revolutionary ideals, which he lost as a shopkeeper and which Karega briefly revived and then dashed by leaving Ilmorog, and his happiness in Joseph's educational success.

Like Karega, Abdulla has suffered physical abuse in police custody—emphasizing that in corrupt political systems, the police tend to be violent enforcers of the status quo. When Abdulla thinks that someone else acted out his "wishes and fantasies," it implies he wanted to kill Chui, Kimeria, and/or Mzigo—and would have, if the murderer hadn't "sav[ed]" him by doing it first. His thoughts about his history suggest that engaging in capitalism (as a shopkeeper) damaged his ideals and that he believes in education's value despite the dubious politics of schools such as Siriana.

Abdulla has also found happiness in Wanja despite his dashed revolutionary hopes. She "accepted him" without "pity," and their business made Abdulla wonder whether their work and intelligence might be enough for success—whether that possibility might fulfill the revolutionary promise. It seemed to him that her strength was responsible for Ilmorog's economic development. Yet when they had to sell their business to buy Nyakinyua's land, it broke something in her and led to ruin.

Abdulla believes that Wanja is so strong, hardworking, and smart that if anyone could escape poverty in a capitalist system, she could. That his and Wanja's business failed due to capitalist exploitation of Wanja's grandmother Nyakinyua implies that poor people simply can't succeed under capitalism—the system is unjust and rigged.

After Abdulla and Wanja were forced to close their business, Abdulla wondered whether Nding'uri was "cursing" him for not taking revenge on Kimeria—but Abdulla has no opportunity to kill Kimeria, as Kimeria often has intermediaries handle his Ilmorog businesses. A week after their business closed, Abdulla went to Wanja's brothel and asked her to give up the brothel and marry him—they could live on the money he saved from selling their business. Wanja refused, saying that Abdulla was her friend but "from now onwards it will always be: Wanja First."

Inspector Godfrey has tried to establish that Karega has motives for killing Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo. But Abdulla too has a motive to kill Kimeria, who caused Nding'uri's death by betraying him to colonial police during Kenya's struggle for independence. Wanja's reaction to the loss of her and Abdulla's business is to double down on succeeding in an economically and sexually exploitative society. This reaction leads to loneliness and selfishness, epitomized in the phrase "Wanja First."

After Abdulla tries and fails to run other businesses, he becomes a roadside fruit vendor and a drunk. At a local bar, he spies on Kimeria—not planning to kill him, just marveling at his luck. At night he talks to the dead Nding'uri about the "wisdom" of Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui's exploitative behavior—and of Wanja, having sex with Kimeria again "because of money." Once Wanja gives him money in the street, and he tears it up—though he later regrets it, since he's aware she's paying Joseph's tuition.

Abdulla, like Wanja, reacts to failing within the capitalist system with despairing cynicism: he calls willingness to exploit others "wisdom" and praises Wanja's decision to have sex with her abuser for "money." Yet when he tears up Wanja's money, it isn't clear whether he resents her for succeeding or refuses to take money that she earned by submitting to Kimeria's abusive sexual pursuit. If the latter, it suggests Abdulla retains some idealism. His recognition that she is paying Joseph's tuition reminds readers that under capitalism, getting a prestigious education often requires a wealthy adult supporter—another way that education can perpetuate economic inequality.

Abdulla and Munira were drinking buddies—until Karega came back and Munira had his religious conversion. Abdulla, who believes in "no other worlds," thinks Karega's political ideals and Munira's religious ideals are stupid. In jail he explains this to the police to convince them he no longer wants revenge—but he omits that on one occasion, his desire for revenge returned as "an irresistible force."

Karega believes the world can change through political activism, while Munira believes it can change through God's power. Abdulla, in his cynical despair, believes that "no other worlds" are possible—that no good change can occur. Previous passages suggested that Abdulla did not commit the murders; when this passage states that his desire for revenge was at one point "irresistible," it suggests that he did take vengeful action, though it wasn't murder.

Abdulla lies because a week before, he got a letter from Joseph saying he'd come first in some school results at **Siriana**, and he decided to go tell Wanja as an apology for rejecting her money. Walking to Wanja's, he ran into Karega, who told him Wanja was at her hut. When Abdulla arrived, Wanja was crying, but Joseph's results made her happy again. Then Abdulla "took her and she did not resist," which made him "feel the old world roll away."

Joseph is doing well in Siriana; perhaps he will break the cycle of expelling students for justified protests against racist administrators. The way the novel describes Abdulla's sexual encounter with Wanja is odd. He initiates sex—he "took her"—while she doesn't "resist" but doesn't seem to participate. That her mere passive nonresistance doesn't bother Abdulla implies that despite his respect for Wanja, he sees her in sexual contexts as an object to be taken rather than an active participant. Though the passage does not reveal how Wanja viewed the sex, Abdulla finds it transformative: it makes "the old world roll away." Sex with Wanja means to him what activism means to Karega and God means to Munira.

After sleeping with Wanja, Abdulla was so overjoyed he stopped drinking. The next Saturday, she invited him to meet her at the brothel. He thought, "a woman is truly the other world." On Saturday, to pass the time until evening, he walked around Ilmorog—and saw cars belonging to Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui, presumably there to vote on the **Theng'eta** Workers' Union's demands. At the thought Kimeria might visit Wanja, Abdulla lost his sense of self, comparing himself to a dog, his own donkey, "Mobotu being embraced by Nixon," and "Amin being received by the Queen after overthrowing Obote." He hurried home and abruptly concluded he had to kill Kimeria.

Mobotu Sese Seko (1930 – 1997) was president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo/Zaire from 1965 to 1997. At times he championed friendly relations with former European colonial powers and with the U.S., including during Richard Nixon's presidency (1969 – 1974). Idi Amin (1925 – 2003) was the dictator of Uganda from 1971 – 1979. Early in his rule, he had friendly relations with the U.S. and the UK, the latter of which had colonized Uganda prior to its independence. Using these comparisons to African leaders aligned with Western and colonial powers, Abdulla implies that if he lets Kimeria live and continue exploiting Wanja, he is no better than Africans who have collaborated with oppressors.

Guessing Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui would go to the bar after their vote, Abdulla walked there. He saw the men arrive. After Chui and Mzigo left, Abdulla called out to Kimeria and asked whether Kimeria remembered him. When Kimeria claimed he did and tried to buy Abdulla a drink, Abdulla refused the drink and asked whether Kimeria remembered detaining Ilmorog's delegation at his house. Kimeria claimed the detention was a joke. Abdulla asked whether Kimeria remembered "another joke [he] once played on Nding'uri." Frightened, Kimeria pulled a handkerchief and a gun from his pocket, blew his nose, and put both objects back in his pocket. Abdulla laughed and left the bar.

When Abdulla approaches Kimeria threateningly, he mentions both Kimeria's detention of the Ilmorog delegation—when Kimeria coerced Wanja into unwanted sex—and Kimeria's betrayal of Nding'uri to the British colonial police. This indicates that Abdulla wants revenge on Kimeria for collaborating with colonizers and for abusing Wanja—and thus that Abdulla sees collaboration with colonizers and sexual abuse of women and girls as equally deserving of punishment.

Abdulla walked to Wanja's brothel carrying a knife and some matches. While he waited for Kimeria, he heard the news coming from a nearby hut: the Board of Directors had voted not to increase brewery workers' pay. Abdulla saw Kimeria's car—and then **fire** coming from the brothel. Screaming started. Moving as fast as he could, he approached the fire. While other onlookers debated what to do, Abdulla broke a window, reached in, unlocked the brothel door, and entered. He found a body, and—not knowing or caring whose it was, even if it was Kimeria's—pulled it out of the building before collapsing. The crowd then carried both Abdulla and the person he'd rescued to greater safety.

Fire represents shame and repression (political or sexual) erupting into violence. Abdulla brings matches to the brothel because his hatred of Kimeria, a collaborator with colonizers and a sexual abuser, is so intense that it too could lead to out-of-control violence in the form of arson. Yet when Abdulla sees the brothel on fire—a fire he didn't set—he tries to save whoever is inside. Abdulla's actions reveal that he is more altruistic and heroic than he is vengeful.

After Abdulla has spent 10 days in jail, Inspector Godfrey enters his cell in a fury. Godfrey admits that Abdulla has been truthful, even admitting that he wanted to kill Kimeria. Now Godfrey demands to know whether Abdulla conspired with Karega at Wanja's. Abdulla denies it, saying he and Karega disagreed about the relative importance of wage-laborers, farmers, unemployed people, and small businessmen. Godfrey, not caring, interrupts to ask whether Abdulla went to Wanja's. Abdulla says he visited her hut. When Godfrey asks whether Karega was there, Abdulla admits he doesn't know—Karega told him Wanja was in her hut, but Abdulla never asked how Karega knew.

Inspector Godfrey doesn't care about Abdulla and Karega's substantive disagreements about economics and politics. This indifference hints that he doesn't really care whether Abdulla or Karega might be right—he only cares about preserving the status quo from any change Abdulla and Karega might try to bring about. Thus, once again, the novel emphasizes that in corrupt societies like hyper-capitalist post-Independence Kenya, the police care about order and stability but not justice.

When Inspector Godfrey asks what Abdulla and Wanja talked about, Abdulla says it's "personal." After incredulously repeating the word "personal," Godfrey demands to know why Abdulla is protecting Karega. Abdulla says he isn't. Godfrey tells the other policemen to "give [Abdulla] medicine."

Abdulla thinks his conversation with Wanja is "personal" because it led to sex. Inspector Godfrey seems to consider the whole category of the "personal" ridiculous and focuses once again on pinning the murders on Karega. When Abdulla refuses to lie about Karega, Inspector Godfrey orders his underlings to give Abdulla "medicine," a euphemism for torture. Inspector Godfrey's obsession with blaming Karega, a union organizer, and his repeated decision to torture detainees show his pro-capitalist bias and his indifference to justice.

After Wanja has spent 12 days in the hospital, the hospital lets Inspector Godfrey see her. Due to the obvious terror the **fire** has caused Wanja, Inspector Godfrey doubts her involvement in the crime—yet he has discovered Wanja asked Mzigo, Kimeria, and Chui to come to her brothel the night of the fire, asked Abdulla to come as well, and gave the prostitutes and the guard a vacation day. He asks Wanja whether she suspects anyone of setting the fire. Wanja says no—fire has always haunted her family, from her aunt who was burned to death to the fire that drove her away from the bar where she used to work.

Wanja has experienced arson motivated by misogyny and political zealotry before: her cousin's husband's murder of her aunt and her own experience of nearly burning to death after vigilantes set her apartment on fire for avoiding the KCO oath and dating a Somali man. She interprets fire as a symbol of a cultural climate where misogyny and repression explode into violence. Because it's a widespread phenomenon, she doesn't know whom to blame.

When Inspector Godfrey asks whether she saw Karega and Abdulla the week before the fire, she admits that first one and then the other visited her. When Inspector Godfrey says both men refused to talk about the "personal" nature of the visits, Wanja claims that the visits were personal but not secret in any way. For Karega's visit, she dressed down, eschewing makeup and wearing only a little jewelry. When he arrived, it reminded her of the past, and she felt an agonized joy. As she made him tea, he wondered how someone so beautiful could have killed her infant and become a brothel owner.

Wanja's joyful reaction to Karega's visit suggests that she still loves him. Karega's musings, by contrast, show his harsh negative judgments on Wanja due to the infanticide she committed as a girl and her decision to do sex work—even though she made both decisions in reaction to the exploitative economic system Karega is fighting. Moreover, Karega finds it shocking that someone as beautiful as Wanja could do bad things, which suggests he has unreal, sexist expectations about attractive women's behavior.

Karega asked why Wanja kept the hut, and she said she didn't want to forget Ilmorog before the Trans-Africa Road. When he questioned the utility of that, Wanja pointed out Karega used to think the past was important. He replied that the past was important only insofar as it informed the present; he wasn't interested in returning to a past "world dominated by slavery to nature." When Wanja recalled how Karega used to listen intently to stories by Nyakinyua and other elders, Karega offered condolences for Nyakinyua's death—which he blamed on the "system of eat or you are eaten" Wanja espoused.

Karega has rejected his interest in history for history's sake because he doesn't want to encourage nostalgia for a "world dominated by slavery to nature." That is, he thinks that despite current capitalist inequalities, the present world is in some ways better than the past because technology has improved, protecting human beings from nature's dangers. When Karega blames Nyakinyua's death on capitalist self-interest—the "system of eat or you are eaten"—he may be right, yet it seems insensitive of him to blame Wanja's grandmother's death on a worldview he attributes to Wanja.

Wanja said Nyakinyua always believed Karega would come back to Ilmorog. They discussed him on Nyakinyua's deathbed, and Nyakinyua worried that when Karega came back, Wanja wouldn't be there to greet him. When Wanja said she wouldn't leave Ilmorog, Nyakinyua didn't answer.

The conversation between Wanja and Nyakinyua suggests that Nyakinyua wasn't worried that Wanja would leave Ilmorog before Karega came back. Rather, she was worried that Wanja's hyper-capitalist embrace of sex work would change Wanja so much that she wouldn't be herself when Karega came back.

Shortly before Nyakinyua's death, Wanja asked her how Wanja's grandfather died. Nyakinyua told her her grandfather was haunted by Kenya's colonization. When the colonizers first came, he was too young to fight. Later, when the time came to fight for independence, he was too old. He hoped his son, who'd fought in World War II, would want to fight—news of India and China excited him—but his son fled instead. One day, a man arrived in Ilmorog asking them to give up Ole Masai's resistance group. When they wouldn't, he ordered two young men shot and insisted two old men volunteer to dig their graves. Wanja's grandfather volunteered, went into his hut, came out with a gun, and pulled the trigger on the intruder. The old gun didn't fire, and Wanja's grandfather was hanged—but Nyakinyua was tremendously proud of him.

India was a British colony from 1858 until 1947, when it became independent. China became a communist republic in 1949 after the Chinese Communist Party defeated the nationalist Kuomintang party in the Chinese Civil War. Wanja's grandfather found both India's independence from Britain and China's turn to communism exciting, which implies that he wanted Kenya to be independent from British colonialism—and that he wanted Kenya to be a communist, not capitalist, state. This again implies that colonialism and capitalism are related oppressive systems. That the man who invaded the village ordered two young men shot to force civilians to collaborate with the hunt for freedom fighters emphasizes the colonizers' violence.

Wanja asked Karega how she could let the bank repossess Nyakinyua's land after hearing that story, even if it drove her to sex work. Karega reached out to her but then felt there was no point and took his hand back. He told her her grandfather's "tendency to act alone" could be a lesson to her—and immediately regretted his "tone" and "triteness." They both felt their relationship was finally and completely over.

Wanja wanted to save her grandmother's land because her grandfather died there fighting colonialism; her emotional link to the land drove her to sex work. Though Karega may be right that "act[ing] alone" doomed Wanja's grandfather, he realizes he's been insensitive (used the wrong "tone") and reacted with political platitudes ("triteness") to Wanja's raw emotion. While the novel may agree with Karega's political views, it represents him as flawed in how he treats people when expressing those views.

Wanja told Karega she'd asked him to visit him in order to warn him: KCO elites, including Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria, had decided to assassinate him like they assassinated the lawyer. They were trying to build up an organization based on tribal strife to consolidate their power. Karega replied that workers and the Kenyan people were too aware of their economic oppression by international white interests and Black elites to be fooled by the stoking of intertribal tensions now.

Here Wanja asserts what readers may already have suspected: the KCO, the pro-capitalist organization which Nderi wa Riera founded, ordered the lawyer's assassination. This assertion emphasizes that violence, not the people's preference, has kept capitalism the reigning economic system in Kenya. Karega's response suggests that capitalists from white colonizer countries and Kenyan economic elites allied to oppress Kenyan workers after independence.

Karega thanked Wanja for the warning and claimed it grieved him she was siding with "KCO and Imperialism." Infuriated, Wanja replied that she had fought them too, in her way—and as for her present circumstances, Karega brought them about by abandoning her. Abruptly softening, she asked him to stay the night—and then pleaded with him to impregnate her. Karega rejected her, arguing that they couldn't beat people like Kimeria by imitating them and that Wanja had chosen her side. He left her in the doorway, where a little later Abdulla found her.

As Wanja is trying to protect Karega from the KCO, his claim that she supports the "KCO and Imperialism" seems ungrateful. Yet it is true that, as a brothel owner, she's a capitalist employer who exploits the sexuality of the girls she employs for money. When she begs Karega to impregnate her, it suggests that their estrangement has destroyed their former, non-transactional relationship. Whereas before Wanja wanted Karega for Karega alone, she now wants him for what he can give her (a baby) and is willing to give him sex in exchange.

After sleeping with Abdulla, Wanja decided Joseph's education was the one good thing she'd accomplished—but also that Karega was right about her, since though Kimeria impregnated her as an adolescent, she'd also "chosen" and had killed her baby. She decided to change—starting by bringing Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo, and Abdulla to the brothel, telling them that Abdulla was "her rightful man," and revealing all Kimeria's crimes. That night, as the men arrived, she put each one in a separate room and told each one she was cooking him dinner. Kimeria came last. She greeted him with a knife she'd been using to chop vegetables. Wanja has told all of this to Inspector Godfrey—except the fact that she stabbed Kimeria to death before the **fire** started.

Wanja still believes in education despite knowing about Karega and Munira's bad experiences at Siriana, perhaps implying that education in general is good, though particular educations and schools can be bad. Wanja's belief that she had "chosen" when she committed infanticide implies that being exploited, oppressed, or harmed does not excuse harming other innocents. Victims have moral agency and can be held responsible for what they do. Wanja's plot to tell her rich clients that Abdulla is "her rightful man" suggests that she wants to leave sex work and perhaps close her brothel—which suggests, in turn, that Wanja sees being a sex worker and employing sex workers as participating in a morally bad form of capitalist exploitation. As fire symbolizes eruptions of repression and shame into out-of-control violence, Wanja stabbing Kimeria right before the fire starts implies that she didn't plan to kill him—rage simply overcame her.

In the jail, Inspector Godfrey asks whether Munira knows Chui. Munira repeats that he knew Chui at school and explains that while he saw Chui around Ilmorog, he didn't talk to him until one night when the Ilmorog Golf Club opened. After Munira reminded Chui who he was, Chui kept trying to get Munira to drink, but Munira stuck to ginger ale. Chui claimed people could get drunk on ginger ale and told a story about a woman who'd drunk ginger ale opening the front door, seeing a "ghost," screaming, and passing out.

The woman who saw a "ghost" at Chui's front door likely actually saw Munira, when he approached Chui's house seeking help while Ilmorog's delegation was traveling to Nairobi. That Chui tells this story without any awareness of its relevance to Munira illustrates how ignorant capitalist elites are about regular people's lives and problems.

Then Inspector Godfrey asks whether Munira knows Kimeria. Munira says he only knows what Kimeria did to Wanja and to Karega's brother (Nding'uri). Godfrey asks whether Karega ever talked about bringing about the new world; Munira begins to explain that he doesn't believe in Karega's vision but suddenly cuts himself off. Godfrey's demeanor abruptly changes. He asks what Munira was up to on the hill the day after the **fire**. Munira, examining Godfrey's face, asks whether he knows. Godfrey says he's going to charge Munira with arson and triple homicide. Then he asks why Munira did it. Munira claims he did it to save Karega.

Inspector Godfrey has spent much of the book seeking to blame Karega for the fire, which symbolizes out-of-control violence. At some point, however, he realizes that Munira, not Karega, set the fire. Munira's guilt suggests that the real violent threat isn't Karega's political progressivism but Munira's new religious zealotry. Given that Munira speaks of 'saving' Karega, it seems likely that he committed the arson due to some quasi-religious motive.


In a flashback, Munira follows all his friends around, Wanja, Abdulla, and Karega, hoping to save them. When he sees Karega entering Wanja's hut, he concludes they've been having a secret affair. He hears a voice telling him that Wanja is "Jezebel" and that he needs to save Karega. The next week, he sets **fire** to the brothel, walks up the hill, and watches the fire make a **flower**, "petals of blood," against the sky. As he watches, he feels he has transformed himself from an "outsider" to a being united with God's command.

Jezebel is an Old Testament Biblical figure, the non-Israelite wife of Israel's King Ahab. She convinces Ahab to persecute God's prophets and worship idols. Though Munira initially wants to save all his friends, including Wanja, he decides to kill her once he believes she and Karega are having sex. This shows his misogyny: he casts Wanja as a temptress from whom Karega must be "saved." Given that Munira's desire to kill Wanja may spring not only from religious delusions but also repressed jealousy and desire, the fire represents how misogyny and repression lead to out-of-control violence. Ironically, Munira helps Wanja in trying to kill her: he destroys the evidence that Wanja killed Kimeria (burning the body). Moreover, by killing three of the Kenyan elites who have been exploiting poorer Kenyan people, Munira opens a space of possibility for change. That possibility is why the fire looks like flowers, "petals of blood," which represent the potential of Kenya's people and land.


CHAPTER 13

Inspector Godfrey rides the train away from Ilmorog and thinks about the case he has just closed. He feels uneasy. He doesn't care about Karega. Godfrey loves order and believes capitalistic economic hierarchies are as "fixed" as the stars; for him, Karega might as well try to "push the sun or moon" from its place and is morally worse than a violent criminal.

Inspector Godfrey's belief that the stars are "fixed" is false. Solar systems (including ours) orbit the center of their galaxies, while the moon orbits the earth. When Inspector Godfrey compares capitalism to "the sun and moon" to prove that it is "fixed," the novel implies the opposite: capitalism isn't any more immovable than the sun or moon, which move all the time.

Yet it disturbs Inspector Godfrey that Munira, a religious man from a rich family, would commit murder. He tries to dismiss Munira as a "fanatic," but he can't deny that Munira correctly identified evil in Ilmorog—not so much Wanja's brothel, but the tourist village co-owned by Nderi wa Riera and the German man, which sells African women and girls as sex workers for European tourists—and sometimes sex-traffics them to Europe. Godfrey considers alerting his superiors to the sex trafficking—but then he remembers how many important people might be involved and decides to keep out of it, rationalizing that "moral questions of how and why" aren't his job.

This passage reveals that Riera and the German man are in fact trafficking Kenyan women and girls to European men. This revelation once again parallels rich people's exploitation of poor people and European exploitation of African people with male sexual exploitation of women and girls. Inspector Godfrey's decision to ignore "moral questions" reemphasizes that the police in corrupt societies do not serve morality or justice, only the status quo.

In bed in her hut, Wanja wonders why people choose the sides they do in conflicts, such as colonizers versus the people. She decides it's about what you love and hate. You determine what you love and hate by your choices, for example, whether you help the people or help colonizers oppress them.

Wanja's argument seems circular. She decides that if you love the people, then you will help them, but also that you choose to love the people by helping them. That is, you love them once *you've helped them. Her logic makes it unclear which comes first, loving or helping. Wanja's circular analysis shows how hard it is to analyze people's motives.*

Wanja concludes that she and her father ended up on the same side—small businesspeople siding with imperialists and capitalist interests. She recalls how she went to visit him, shortly before first traveling to Ilmorog. She was sick and asked her for money. When she reached into her purse, he began showering her with compliments—and she felt paralyzed, realizing that only money ever made him like her. She refused to give him anything, and he criticized her harshly. She left. Afterward, she heard he'd died of cancer, and she didn't cry.

Wanja's final break with her father shows how economic inequality and capitalist greed can poison interpersonal relationships. Due to his poverty, Wanja's father wants money so much that he can't value Wanja as a person anymore—he can only value her according to the money she can provide him.

Someone knocks on the door of Wanja's hut—and Wanja's mother enters, saying "**fire** again!" Both women cry. Wanja's mother explains that she only learned what Wanja suffered because an acquaintance asked her how Wanja was healing—a shock Wanja's mother could only endure due to her Christian faith. Wanja's mother stays with her for several weeks. Suddenly, Wanja tells her mother that she believes she's pregnant. When her mother asks who the father is, Wanja sketches a person, missing a limb, whose appearance contains elements of Kimathi and of the sculpture in the lawyer's house. Examining the sketch, Wanja's mother asks who the person is, and why he appears to have suffered so much and yet is laughing.

That Wanja's mother says, "fire again!" shows she doesn't see Wanja's near-murder as a one-off crime by a religious madman. Rather, she sees it as part of a pattern of male violence against women, which includes her own sister's murder by fire. Though the novel usually represents Christians negatively, as hypocrites or zealots who impede progress, here it shows Wanja's newly supportive mother gaining strength from her faith. Though Wanja was likely pregnant before she murdered Kimeria, she only realizes she's pregnant afterward; in symbolic terms, killing the abuser who impregnated her as an adolescent resolved her trauma so she could become pregnant again. The father Wanja sketches resembles Abdulla (the missing limb), famous Kenyan freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi, and the lawyer's freedom-fighter sculpture. Abdulla may be the baby's biological father, but the baby is figuratively the child of Kenyan freedom, made newly possible by the deaths of exploiters like Kimeria.

Abdulla and Joseph are sitting outside Abdulla's place in New Jerusalem. Joseph has Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* with him. He tells Abdulla that Chui's murder came at an odd time, since the students and some staff were planning a strike to protest Chui's neglect of the school in favor of his business interests. The students are still planning to agitate for ending "the whole prefect system" and a curriculum "related to the liberation of our people."

Sembene Ousmane (1923-2007), also called Ousmane Sembène, was a Senegalese novelist and filmmaker. His novel Les bouts de bois de Dieu *(1960), translated into English as* God's Bits of Wood, *critiques French colonization of Senegal. That Joseph is reading an anti-colonial African novelist suggests that he has surpassed Karega in decolonizing his mind at a young age; while Karega wanted Siriana to teach African literature, Joseph seeks it out himself. Joseph, like Munira and Karega before him, is planning a student strike at Siriana, which shows that the struggle to decolonize Kenyan education isn't over but is progressing; now, the students' demands are growing more radical, and they want not only Afrocentric lessons, but lessons related to "liberation."*

Abdulla, tuning Joseph out, thinks of elders he knew as a child who talked of Kenyan patriots and the dream of communal land ownership. He remembers Nding'uri and his own resistance fighting. Regretting his poor treatment of Joseph in the past, he wonders whether he should tell the boy that they aren't really related. Abruptly he asks for Joseph's forgiveness. Joseph, surprised, tells him "there's nothing to forgive." He says he's grateful to Abdulla, Munira, Wanja, and Karega; he wants to struggle for freedom when he grows up, like Abdulla did, and has been reading both about Kenyan independence and independence struggles around the world.

While Abdulla is apologizing to Joseph for yelling at him and keeping him out of school in the past, he was just thinking about his ideals and days as a freedom fighter—which hints that he's also apologizing to Joseph for not managing to make the world a better place. Joseph believes "there's nothing to forgive" and expresses a desire to continue the political struggle—which suggests that activists should be grateful for their forebears in resistance rather than resenting them for not accomplishing more. Joseph's independent reading emphasizes the importance of self-education to political development.

Abdulla, listening to Joseph, wonders whether people don't help history progress and then bow out for new generations who improve on them. He feels he's too old now to be historically relevant, but he's happy he saved Wanja on his way to murder Kimeria, and he hopes she thinks of him occasionally.

Abdulla has served history by fighting colonialism, and he's saved his friends by saving Wanja's life (this passage makes explicit that she was the person he pulled from the burning brothel). He is now ready to pass the torch to Joseph.

Munira's father Ezekieli, his mother, his wife Julia, and Rev. Jerrod Brown visit him in jail before his trial. When his mother demands to know why he committed the crime, Rev. Jerrod says he could have "helped." Disgusted by their hypocrisy, Munira tells them to repent and asks his father why he refused the Mau Mau oath but later took the KCO oath. Then he tells Rev. Jerrod that the Reverend once turned away a hungry traveling group that included a cripple and Munira himself. Munira, quoting the Bible, tells Rev. Jerrod he'll be punished for not helping "the least of these," who stand in for Christ.

Though Munira has been a hypocrite in the past, he clearly recognizes his father's pro-colonial political hypocrisy and Rev. Jerrod Brown's religious hypocrisy. The phrase "the least of these" comes from a Gospel parable often called the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31 – 46). In the parable, Jesus Christ says that at his Second Coming, he will tell the righteous that whatever they did to help "the least of these" (i.e., any poor person) counts in their favor as if they had done it for Jesus Christ himself.

Munira's visitors leave and go to church to pray for him. Rev. Jerrod says the evangelical sects should be illegalized. Ezekieli agrees but momentarily wonders whether he's being punished for trying to commit adultery with Mariamu, since her sons Nding'uri and Karega have caused him so much trouble. Then he dismisses the thought, deciding not to "question God's wisdom."

Rev. Jerrod wants to persecute evangelical sects using the law—implying a relationship between established religion and political repression in Kenya. Ezekieli briefly wonders whether Munira's behavior is his punishment for sexual sin. This poses to the reader a deeper question: whether Ezekieli's life as an abusive employer and hypocritical religious believer made his son Munira's violent breakdown more likely. Rather than scrutinize his own behavior, Ezekieli blames the trouble on "God's wisdom," thereby illustrating how superficially religious people can blame the results of their own actions on God's will.

Still in jail, Karega gets word that his mother Mariamu has died. Crushed that he was never able to improve her material circumstances, he thinks about all the poor of Kenya and Africa. Karega doesn't eat for two days. On the third day, the warden comes back, tells Karega he has a visitor, and tells Karega that some jailers think Karega's right about workers' solidarity—they only work in the jail because they have to eat. All the same, Karega wonders whether Wanja was right after all in her dog-eat-dog worldview.

Informed of his mother's death, Karega starts grieving for all poor people in Africa—seeing his mother as a representative of a type, not an individual. This reaction suggests that fighting against capitalist oppression has made Karega acutely aware of how social forces hurt individuals—yet at the same time, that awareness makes it harder for him to think about individuals as individuals, even when the individual is his own mother.

Outside, Karega sees through barbed wire a girl who introduces herself as Akinyi. She works in the **Theng'eta** factory. She says the other workers sent her to tell Karega that members of all the unions, the unemployed, farmers, and even some businesspeople are planning to strike and march. She also tells him a certain "very important person" was shot to death in Nairobi while collecting rents; the assassin is rumored to be a political revolutionary. Karega ponders how revolutionaries are "born every day among the people."

Theng'eta has represented the potential of Kenya's land and people—but also their colonial and capitalist exploitation—throughout the novel. Now the Theng'eta Breweries Union is organizing with other workers to generate new potential and hope, suggesting that Kenyan people's potential is on the upswing and their exploiters' power may be in decline. The "very important person" shot to death is likely Nderi wa Riera, since it was earlier implied that he was a slumlord who exploited poor renters. Karega's thought that revolutionaries are "born every day among the people" implies that heroic individuals don't matter—when one falls, another will rise up.

When Akinyi asks what's going to happen to Karega, he tells her they're going to hold him. Akinyi insists he'll be set free to the workers. For some reason, this pronouncement fills Karega with new revolutionary fervor and a vision of "the kingdom of man and woman." Akinyi repeats her claim that Karega will return to the workers. In her, Karega sees Mukami, Nyakinyua, Mariamu, and "the future." He feels that he's "no longer alone."

The phrase "the kingdom of man and woman" alludes to Karega's earlier wish that a "human kingdom come"—that is, his wish for a political utopia on earth. That he sees Mukami, Nyakinyua, and Mariamu in Akinyi suggests that he is appreciating the strength of Kenyan women as a group—but also that his political focus on organizing communities makes it difficult for him to relate to individuals as individuals. When he sees Akinyi, a union member, as the "future" and believes he's "no longer alone," it hints that after prison, Karega will find a loving community among other idealistic political activists.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Prendergast, Finola. "*Petals of Blood*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 3 Feb 2023. Web. 3 Feb 2023.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Prendergast, Finola. "*Petals of Blood*." LitCharts LLC, February 3, 2023. Retrieved February 3, 2023. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/petals-of-blood.

To cite any of the quotes from *Petals of Blood* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. Petals of Blood. Penguin Classics. 2005.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. Petals of Blood. New York: Penguin Classics. 2005.