

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**  
**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA**

*FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES*

*DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH*

N°:



**DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION**

**CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT AND TRAGIC FAILURE**  
**IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *THE RIVER BETWEEN***

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Master's Degree**

**Candidate:**

Miss. Hanane ALLAL

**Supervisor:**

Mr. Bachir SAHED

**2017 /2018**

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## **DEDICATION**

*To my family and friends...*

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

*LC: The Location of Culture*

## ABSTRACT

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* is a significant milestone in the African literary canon. It has essentialised a cluster of salient issues and realities of African societies during and after the colonial epoch. The novel sheds light on the cultural clash not only between the native and alien realms, but also amid the natives; and how it leads to coin an ambivalent cultural identity in Kenya. It also explores how the arrival of the White man results in rising displacement and alienation among the indigenous people. The novel portrays the disruption of the Gikuyu cultural fabric embodied in the role of the main character Waiyaki and his aborted struggles to fight the colonial meddling in traditional life. Therefore, the novelist employs a Postcolonial counter discourse to protest Eurocentrism and to reclaim, celebrate and even restore the native cultural heritage of his people. The research, hence, aims at investigating the attitudes, actions, and thoughts of the colonized. The first chapter will be devoted to the theoretical framework of the work. The second chapter examines cultural displacement in the novel. While the third chapter examines how Ngugi depicts a new type of African traditional hero in his community, the tragic hero's characteristics and how his motivation led to his downfall. All in all, this research highlights the issue of cultural identity in postcolonial Kenya, and focuses on how the African culture is evolved and shaped in Ngugi's thinking through *The River Between*.

**Keys Terms: Postcolonial, Displacement, Culture, Colonialism, Heroism.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Literature is the creativity of the writer in portraying the real life of humanity and its surroundings. Literature is an art of cultural self-definition and from which the human ability arises out to create language. It is the expression of life in form of truth and beauty. It has the capacity of revealing the different social and cultural aspects. African literature, especially African literature written in colonial and postcolonial period, is a window on these realities which reflect the suffering of the colonial subject at the hands of European missionaries and colonizers.

The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose works are remarkable for their attempt to challenge Western cultural superiority, is one of the leading figures in African literature. Ngugi's non-fictional writings explore subject matter familiar to his novels, including the cultural and linguistic Imperialism of the West, the loss of traditional African culture, and the effects of Christianity on tribal communities. He has the ability to document the African heritage in its truest form providing several cultural insights on the culture through which he says, "*I write about people: I am interested in their hidden lives; their fear and hopes, their loves and hates and how the very tension in their hearts affects their daily contact with other men: how, in other words, the emotional stream of the man within interacts with the social reality.*"<sup>1</sup>

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has produced a number of novels, plays, and critical essays both in English and Gikuyu language with strong political tone, cultural, and literary ideas. He is best known as a postcolonial theorist and all of his works remain relevant to present-day Kenya exploring colonial rules, Christianity, and post-colonial abuses of Kenyan authorities. Ngugi's

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<sup>1</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Towards a National Culture* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1972), p.31.

writings always concern upgrading and advocating the Kenyan culture, heritage, and local languages, which have been marginalized and suppressed by colonial powers.

Ngugi, as an African writer, does not write to express his own feelings of loss, alienation, and displacement but also to depict the realities of his society. Most of his novels examine how social and political circumstances affect individuals' lives. His novels attempt to plot the status of exploitation, corruption, and cultural denigration under the colonial and neocolonial leaderships, and to present the truth about his past and his present. That is why a discussion of Ngugi's work *The River Between* will help in understanding Postcolonialism in general, and cultural displacement in postcolonial society in particular.

*The River Between*, published in 1965, is Ngugi's first attempt at novel writing. It is one of the best representative works in African literature that seeks to depict the Gikuyu community's life during the 1920<sup>s</sup> when the colonial power settled in, and how they brought radical changes, especially, to their cultural identity. This literary piece is at the heart of most African literature written in English. Ngugi clearly portrays his people's attachment to their land and their belief in the Gikuyu customs. The use of Kenya is a representation of other African countries which means that the impact of white imperialism on people's culture should not be completely localized in Kenya but rather should be generalized and used as a mirror reflection of other African countries.

*The River Between* introduces the first phase of Ngugi's artistic recreation of the cultural history of his community. It dramatizes the antagonism between two rival factions within the same clan, a rivalry which has its origins in the promises made to the Gikuyu people in their Creation Myth.<sup>2</sup> *The River Between* engages the early days of colonial intervention and depicts

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<sup>2</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his novel *The River Between*, uses this myth to establish how Murungu, the creator, has given the land of Kenya to Gikuyu and Mumbi, the father and mother of the Kenyan nation. According to the myth, Gikuyu and Mumbi did not buy the land but it was given to them and their posterity from the hands of

the tribal life during that period, primarily in Nairobi, notably in a river Honia. The latter joins and divides the two tribes, namely, Kameno and Makuyu, due to the practices of the white men and their exploitation of their culture. Moreover, the story deals with the cultural and religious clash between the tribe and the foreign invader. Waiyaki, the protagonist, is a young man who tries to reconcile the rival inhabitants of the ridges by believing that only through education, as a panacea of all the ills, they can equip themselves with the knowledge they need for political and cultural independence. This is not only Ngugi's own faith, but also of a whole coming generation. However, the author presents the power and the control of the indigenous tribal beliefs and the ability to change while preserving their cultural identity.

The novel's narrative style is a good example of the representation of the starting combination of Gikuyu and western culture. This is also reflected in his characters through combining elements from both the Gikuyu and the European culture. The setting is multicultural; it is a blend of different customs, traditions, and beliefs. This contact between cultures is what forms distinctive cultural identities, which result in distinctive societies. In this regard, Ngugi believes strongly in the preservation and promotion of African cultural values. However, the writer does not believe that culture is stable and must be preserved at all costs even though some aspects of it are obviously obsolete. The novelist is much aware of the dynamic nature of culture that is why he argues that,

Culture, in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment [...] but we must bear in mind that they are derived from a people's way of life and will change as the way of life is altered.<sup>3</sup>

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the creator himself, Murungu. This indicates that the land, for Kenyan people, does not just become the inalienable right of Kenyans but that there is a kind of religious bond between Kenyans and their land. Any attempt to get Kenyans out of this land means trying to take away their lives from them.

<sup>3</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Towards a National Culture*, p. 4.

The study highlights the diverse impact of colonization on Gikuyus and their tragic life. Indeed, the Gikuyu community witnesses several changes during and after colonization. Before colonization, native identity, rituals, and beliefs functioned in a formal and ordinary way without even identifying their places and/or showing any superiority to anyone. Thus, colonialism transforms and displaces everything in Ngugi's Gikuyu society. In this process, the colonizers' customs, faith, and cultural standards are forced upon the colonial subjects who find no alternative choice but to accept these new styles and ways of life. Here, the actual displacement of the colonized's traditional culture begins. Therefore, the study examines the native Kenyan culture and its marginalization after the coming of the white man and the Christian missionaries, and how they aspire to uproot the natives' cultural identity, which is well explained in Ngugi's novel *The River Between*.

Postcolonialism emerged as a literary theory to study literatures of the formerly colonized people. It deals with the colonial period and its aftermath. It also examines literature written by colonial writers who attempt to show the real life of the colonial subjects and depict their harmful experience and comment on the changes, mainly cultural changes that occurred during colonial period in postcolonial societies. Ngugi wa Thiong'o addressed the issue of identity and celebrated cultural identity. Ngugi attempts to defend the cultural identity of his postcolonial society through his narrative and to decolonize their literature and culture as a way to free them from imperial chains.

Postcolonialism is really a wide and controversial field. Its main concern is with postcolonial societies who have suffered from colonization and who have been alienated and displaced from their lands, lives, cultures, identities, and families, and how the postcolonial subjects are struggling and striving to define their status in society. Thus, the motivation behind dealing with this theme is because Ngugi's literary work raises undiscovered issues about the reality of colonialism and because it tells the plight of his people which is used as a

mirror reflection to all the countries of the world that were under the weight of colonialism. In a way, his work attempts to articulate and even celebrate their culture and reclaim them from the colonizers. Hence, it is very significant to study this literature produced in postcolonial era.

Furthermore, the research attempts to answer the following main questions: how does Ngugi depict the displacement of Gikuyu culture which has been replaced by the British ones? And how does he suggest a new form of African tragic hero, namely, Waiyaki and his failure?

In order to answer the above-mentioned questions, the study will endeavor to answer the following sub-questions: How can postcolonial discourse theory explain the politics of language, culture, and identity in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The River Between*? How does Ngugi wa Thiong'o portray cultural displacement in *The River Between*? How does Ngugi depict African heroism in the novel?

Many researchers have shown interest to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's works, especially *The River Between* which is concerned as one of the most powerful works for its reflection of the colonial subject's suffering from the encroaching British forces. Many researchers have carried out numerous research and studies for the more comprehension to the novel. Some of them are reviewed here.

Many researchers tried to discuss the problems issued in African society and present the division and hostilities emerged among the native as a result of colonization for Ngugi's tragedy. This aspect is shown in the work of M. Sivasipoorani and M. A. M. Phill's "Impact of Colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*,"<sup>4</sup> which portrays the influence

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<sup>4</sup> M. Sivasasipoorani, M. A, M. Phill, "Impact of colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*." Vol. 17, No. 2, (Feb, 2017), pp.415- 430.

of colonialism on the natives. This paper also paints a vivid picture about the main character of the novel, who is presented in an ambivalent attitude towards the elements of the culture of the white man. The work deals with the white exploitation of Africans and the adverse impact of colonization on their culture. The cultural clash brought about by the interaction of indigenous and colonial interest is clearly illustrated in this study.

On the other hand, Nasreddin Bushra Ahmed's study "Treatment of Colonization in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Novel *The River Between*"<sup>5</sup> deals with the investigation of the writer's portrayal of the havoc caused by Europeans in his Gikuyu community. Also, DR. Sharmao Waghmare's study "Colonial Impact on Native Culture"<sup>6</sup> explains how Gikuyu culture is alienated from the young native's minds, mainly due to the practices of the new missionary, and further emphasizes how they aspire to finish native culture through the introduction of education.

Other essays focused on reviewing the main and the very important ideas related to the topic under investigation. However, it is clear that all the above underlying works are devoted to the cultural conflict with one aspect relying on the major character's failure in ending these conflicts.

This research is significant in terms of dealing with Ngugi's work from different perspectives. The work is a focus on cultural displacement and the trauma generated from it. In this case, it results in the disorder and the disturbance of the native's community; it is here that the alienation of vision and the special identity crisis comes into being, where one can feel the sense of belonging to nowhere, the sense of feeling unaccepted, complicated relationships and different experiences in the African lands. All of these revolve around one

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<sup>5</sup> Nasreddin Bushra Ahmed, "treatment of Colonization in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* Vol. 2, No. 03, (Sep, 2014), pp.59-66.

<sup>6</sup> Sharmao Waghmare, "Colonial Impact on Native Culture." *An International Journal in English* Vol. 2, Issue 3. (May-June, 2016), pp.1-3.

major feature of postcolonial literature which is cultural displacement. Moreover, the study focuses on the African hero Ngugi addresses in his novel. It aims to discover the tragic failure of the hero, Waiyaki, and how this motivation leads to his downfall.

The research will deal with the textual analysis based on the theoretical framework of the postcolonial theory. Focusing on the theme of Cultural Displacement and Tragic Failure, the thesis will deal with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *The River Between*.

Since the research is going to analyse Ngugi's *The River Between*, the study will use postcolonial approach. Focusing on this theory, the thesis aims at highlighting how Ngugi uses his text as an effective prototype to inner issues and struggles of the natives in preserving their cultural identity through the ideas and the works of postcolonial theorists notably Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi that are related to this study. To this end, the selected theories will be used to guide, evaluate and clarify the ideas identified in the text.

The research aims at investigating the attitudes, actions, and thoughts of the colonizer in relation to the colonized. In particular, the study focuses on the psyche of the main character and determines his personal identity, attitudes, and the way he pursues his own motivation and beliefs to succeed in uniting the two antagonist groups "kamen" and "Makuyu", and how this motivation leads to his downfall. Furthermore, this thesis will explore the available data and sources both primary and secondary for the research that hopes to respond to the research question and meet the set objectives.

The main aim of this research is primarily to highlight and apply postcolonial discourse theory in general, and Bhabha and Said's theories in particular to the novel understudy. Then, it provides an examination to the psyche of the hero and determines his own plight in uniting the two factions and the factors that helped to shape his personal identity, attitudes, and

motivation. Added to this, it aims at exploring how the colonizer succeeded in destroying the cultural and social peace of the Gikuyu community.

The present work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, entitled Theoretical Framework and Socio-Historical Context, will be devoted to the theoretical background of Postcolonialism. It explores and defines its tenets, development, and major critics, as well as its roots by analyzing both of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi's challenging books, and how they have developed their critical ideas. In addition to that, the chapter pays particular attention to the modern postcolonial criticism with notable postcolonial theorists; Edward Said's critique of representation, Gayatri Spivak's analysis of marginalization and Homi Bhabha's understandings of ambivalence, hybridity, and mimicry. One needs to have a clear idea about this field to clearly understand the aspects of postcolonial discourse so as to apply them to the novel under scrutiny. Understanding the rise of Postcolonialism will facilitate the understanding of the work's theme. The chapter, then, discusses Ngugi's process of cultural decolonization. During the sixties and the early seventies, the postcolonial subjects attempt not only to free their lands but also their cultures. Once independence is restored, the process of decolonization begins; then, the cultural identity of the natives started to be explored and analyzed. Last but not least, the chapter presents a socio-historical background of the British occupation of Kenya and how they gained their independence.

The second chapter will deal with how Cultural Displacement is represented in Ngugi's novel and how he depicts the disruption of Gikuyu life at the hands of the European missionaries and colonizers. This chapter aims to highlight the epic cultural and social struggle of Gikuyu people against the white man and amid the natives, and how the coming of the white missionaries had a great impact on their life. One of these effects is on the natives' identity in a postcolonial society. That is, how Ngugi's characters, mainly his protagonist Waiyaki, are conflicting with their identities and are suffering in-betweenness. Then, this

chapter discusses the theme of alienation in *The River Between*, where the characters become alienated not only from their lands but also from their families, lives, and minds. Furthermore, the chapter will explore the Gikuyu myth of Kenyans and how it is important for them; the decline of Gikuyu culture will also be discussed. The chapter culminates with the analysis of the novel by applying both of Said and Bhabha's theories of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry and otherness, that is, postcolonialism in tribal community.

The third chapter is entitled African Heroism in Ngugi's *The River Between*. This chapter will examine how Ngugi creates a new type of African hero in his community. Ngugi's narrative is clearly tragic; hence, there will be an analysis of the characteristics of Ngugi's protagonist, Waiyaki. Moreover, the chapter will discuss the tragic failure of the African hero and how his motivation leads to his downfall; and how he is rejected by his own people despite his good intentions and the immense contribution that he makes towards the provision of an affordable education for his people. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss the idea of the black messianic savior. This typical Christian concept "messiah" is collateral with the white; Ngugi, however, uses the messiah as a black. The story is messianic; it traces the origin of a prophecy that envisions the possibility of a messiah coming from the hills to save the Gikuyus from the effects of colonization. This messianic character is Waiyaki who sees himself as the promised messiah and feels responsible for saving his people. The chapter will be concluded by the concept of the contestation of leadership. This idea is so significant that it becomes the central part of power struggle and eventually leads to the downfall of the novel's hero.

In writing the present thesis, the purpose is to investigate the way the message is conveyed as a way of helping the readers of *The River Between* grasp the message contained in the novel. That is, Ngugi utilizes his novel to show his pride in his own culture, the extent of his people's closeness and loyalty to such tradition and beliefs, and most importantly to send a

message that Kenya is their land and no stranger has the right to take it away from them or to move away from it. Moreover, this research paper aims to analyse Ngugi wa Thiong'o's politics of language and culture, and his own perception of cultural identity by applying the postcolonial theories of both Said and Bhabha. It further examines how cultural displacement is portrayed, and how does Ngugi depict African heroism in the novel. The purpose of selecting this novel for research is that it is related to African history. It is a window on the events of story and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Hence, in Ngugi's works one may find literature that records and promotes African culture and its traditional heritage without forgetting to present true and honest facts. It is; therefore, in Ngugi's view, knowing one's history is demanded action in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past on one hand, and to get inspired by the dignified achievements and experiences recorded in the past events.

Indeed, Ngugi can sculpt an identity that is distinctive to him through the use of oral art forms in a genre that is neither new to the world nor African in origin. The writer uses various narrative tools in his Postcolonial discourse to determine the plight of his people as a result of the white man's settlement. He deliberately selects words to convey certain images, attitudes, or ideologies that create a certain effect in the reader's mind. These images tell us a great deal about their creator, his society, and attitude to the situations and peoples so represented. He, effectively, portrays the African life and achieves cultural revitalization.

## CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The River Between*, published in 1965, is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's first attempt at novel writing. His main focus in the novel is to show how colonization brought radical changes to the Kenyan culture and society. *The River Between* depicts the division and hostilities that emerged among Africans as a result of colonization, where African culture is disrupted by the introduction of the colonizer's culture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o narrates the dilemma of the central character Waiyaki, a young Kenyan teacher, whose attempt to unite the two antagonist tribes, namely Kamen and Makuyu, has failed.

Ngugi views culture as a set of values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors shared by a group of people, "*the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and ritual.*"<sup>7</sup> Hence, cultural identity is embedded in the language that people speak, the names they carry, the ways they wear clothes, the food they eat, their oral tradition with its rich proverbs, and their customs and rituals. In *The River Between*, Ngugi presents characters who are struggling with their identities in the wake of colonization.

In this regard, the dissertation will focus on African writing as a way of demonstrating how African cultural identity has evolved and has been shaped by African writings. This chapter presents a summary of postcolonial discourse theory, its perspectives and roots, as well as its theorists notably Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri C. Spivak. The chapter also highlights Ngugi's process of cultural decolonization. Undertaking cultural decolonization, postcolonial writers try not only to liberate their native lands but also their native cultures.

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<sup>7</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming*, p. 4.

Moreover, this chapter will give a brief summary of Kenya's colonial history, and how it has been affected by the disruptive changes that followed the British conquest at the turn of the twentieth century. Besides, it includes the reasons that have led to the Kenyan colonization. This historical review starts with the Berlin Conference of 1885.

## 1. The Rise of the Postcolonial

Postcolonialism is presented as a reaction to colonialism. It is an academic discipline for explaining, analyzing the imperial effect on both the individual and the society. It further emphasizes the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized and how the latter resisted and responded to the cultural legacy of the oppressor.<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Depika Bahri, Associate Professor at the English department at Emory University, in her article "Introduction to Postcolonial Studies" (1996), asserts that postcolonialism is a reaction against colonialism which exercises power on natives to abuse their wealth.<sup>9</sup> The colonizers tried to take control over, not only the land and the wealth of the colonized, but also the culture of these peoples. They confiscated the lands of the local population and forced them to work as slaves in their own lands, and to defraud their natural resources for their benefit.

Postcolonialism is concerned with the study of colonization, decolonization and neo-colonization. Hence, it is both a body of theory and a study of cultural and political change. In fact, postcolonialism started simultaneously with colonialism theory, as the critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin state, "*it is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being.*"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Berrin Chatzi Chousein, "Postcolonialism." *World Architecture Community* Vol. 26, No. 38, (Aug 11, 2013), p. X. <https://worldarchitecture.org/architecture-news/pgmgz/postcolonialism.html>. Accessed in 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Depika Bahri, "Introduction to Postcolonial Studies." (Online. Postcolonial Studies at Emory Pages), (1996), Sept, 2010), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 177.

Nevertheless, the theory of Postcolonialism began with the challenging publications of the earliest writers such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Arschof, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha. Those writers and critics effectively contributed to the emergence and the development of the theory. In other words, postcolonialism emerged with “*writers who expressed the quest for an identity which had been submerged by the colonial impact.*”<sup>11</sup>

Growing interest in Postcolonialism is consolidated by the appearance of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in 1989. According to them, postcolonial “*is all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.*”<sup>12</sup> Postcolonialism deals with the transformation brought out by European colonization and the struggle of the colonies to retrieve the cultural identity prior to colonization. In addition, postcolonialism analyses many issues prevalent in societies that have undergone colonization: the ways in which colonized writers and artists attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonizers; the dilemmas of developing a national identity in the wake of colonial rule; the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized people have been appropriated to serve the colonizers’ interests and how this knowledge system is neglected and destroyed through the introduction of alternative systems; the ways in which the literature of the colonial power is used to justify, support, confirm and even fortify the perpetuation of colonialism through portraying the stereotyped images of the colonized as inferior, barbarous, and uncivilized to the colonizer; and the ways in which the colonizers assume the role to civilize the “barbaric” communities.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 01 Apr, 2006), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (Routledge: New York, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Berrin Chatzi Chousein, “Postcolonialism.” *World Architecture Community* Vol. 26, No 38, (Aug 11, 2013), p. X. <https://worldarchitecture.org/architecture-news/pgmgz/postcolonialism.html>. Accessed in 2018.

Postcolonialism does not simply seek to tell the story of what happened after decolonization but also examines the social and cultural changes that exist in both periods during and after colonialism, which affected the identity of the colonized. Furthermore, postcolonial theory discusses colonizers' superiority exercised on the colonized people. This entails damaging their self-identity under the myth of civilization and human development, which led postcolonial writers to write against it and attempt to reinforce their identity. Postcolonial theory also deals with complexities like hybridity, ethnicity, and multiculturalism.<sup>14</sup>

Besides, the concept of the postcolonial is one of the most powerful means of re-examining the historical past and re-configuring the contemporary worldwide cultural concerns. Postcolonialism, more than any other concept, has facilitated the gradual disturbance of the Eurocentric dominance of academic debates and has empowered postcolonial intellectuals to redirect discussion towards issues of direct political relevance to the Eastern world.

## **2. The Roots of Postcolonial Criticism: Fanon and Memmi**

In his works, namely *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon analyses colonial subjects' psyche. As a black postcolonial thinker, Fanon explores the psychology of racism and its problematic effects. His ideas have helped the critics to understand the harmful psychological effects, racist policies, and marginalization which exist in the colonized society especially amongst the blacks. However, Fanon also focuses on the psychology of the colonizer, or the white man.

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<sup>14</sup> Asma Cheriet, "Postcolonial African Literature and the Identity Question-A Special Reference to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Ideological Pronouncements." Thesis, (Mohamed Khider University -Biskra, 2014/2015), p. 42.

Fanon's work *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961, is a foundational postcolonial literary text. It has impacted the people worldwide, especially, those who were colonized by colonial powers. Furthermore, *The Wretched of the Earth* was translated and published in America in 1966. It became one of the most popular books within the prison system, where the majority of black radicals often found themselves. Its impact on the black movements is instantaneous. According to Cleaver in *Soul On Fire*, as well as the books on Malcolm X, *The Wretched of the Earth* was one of the most popular books being read by inmates at the time.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses the conditions of colonial realities and its effects on both the oppressor and the oppressed. In doing so, he focuses on the dynamics of violence that comes with decolonization. Violence, for Fanon, plays an entirely different role. It is the psychic and physical force that allows the colonized to be. In this context, he defines violence as “*the substitution of one species of mankind by another.*”<sup>16</sup> He states that because of the aggressive nature of decolonization “*you don't disorganize a society [...] if you are not determined from the very start to smash every obstacle encountered.*”<sup>17</sup> He means that the colonizers have made this agenda as a driving force and that they have been prepared for violence.

Fanon further urges the colonized to adopt violence against their oppressors in order to free themselves from colonial grip. Then, he sheds light on what a newly independent nation might face when the process of constructing native cultural and political identity is held after the overthrow of colonial powers. The colonizers deal with the colonized as subordinate and submissive, and when the colonized discover their humanity, here, the conflict begins to take shape as the colonized fight their oppressors for freedom. This fight is first individually and

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969), p.98.

<sup>16</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

then turns into a group fight, as the colonized realize that they will be massacred or else they will be saved. For Fanon, colonization is itself a violent act. Thus, the only language the colonizers understand is violence.

Frantz Fanon furthers his argument by saying, “*because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: “Who am I in reality?”*”<sup>18</sup> Fanon suggests that colonialism leads to psychological problems. Colonialism tells the colonized that they are barely human. This takes away the very ground on which they can have a sense of reality. The doubt, self-questioning, and the inferiority complex of the colonized make them develop a number of psychiatric symptoms.

*Black Skin, White Masks* is another significant postcolonial literary work, which deals with the psychological effects of colonial domination and disempowerment. This clinical book examines what goes through the minds of the blacks and the whites under colonial rule and the strange effects that it has, especially on the oppressed. In other words, colonialism fosters mentally disturbed behavior.

Accordingly, cultural assimilation is a process that occurs when the colonized’s native culture is replaced by the culture of the colonial power. This process, Fanon argues, damages the colonized subjects. This damage occurs in several ways; first, the colonialist’s culture prevents the colonized to develop an independent sense of identity, which in turn has a negative impact on their psychological development. Second, Western culture equates whiteness with courtliness, goodness and purity, and blackness with impurity and evil. The colonized then internalize how to equate blackness with evil. Thus, they grow up aspiring to be like them, to be white.

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<sup>18</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 182.

This effort, to assimilate the culture of the white and to negate their own identity, has deeper psychological repercussions. It results in a sense of alienation, a sense of doubt of who they actually are, and with whom they should identify. Then black colonial subjects realize that they have no viable identity as they learn that to be black is to be subhuman. At the same time, their aspiration to be white is never going to happen as a black person can never become white. Fanon sets out his discussion with the intention of showing the “*various attitudes the Negro adopts with white civilization;*”<sup>19</sup> the result is that the colonized are both unable to celebrate their native culture, and unable to achieve equality within colonial culture.

There are a few examples of how this process takes place. Fanon uses the instance of the black people encountering their white colonizers for the first time to illustrate the nature of black inferiority complex. He states,

Every colonized people – in other words every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country the colonized elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, colonial culture implies that the only way to be human is to be white. The colonized internalize this in their mind, and then will try to appropriate and imitate the culture of the colonizer which pushes them into an agonizing and a bitter psychological position. Since they are not white, they are forced to see themselves as subhuman.

Hence, Frantz Fanon demonstrates that the colonized suffer from what he refers to as inferiority complex. He theorizes that this inferiority complex derives from the forced imposition of colonial power on the native to embrace a culture and civilization that coincidentally rejects them, which ultimately leads the colonized to assume a colonial identity.

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<sup>19</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Fanon uses the Antillean and French relations to illustrate his idea, “*the Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is; he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct relation to his mastery of the French language.*”<sup>21</sup> This inferiority complex is brought into existence through the interaction with the Europeans and is reinforced by the colonized themselves. In fact, in a provocative quote on the opening page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon summarizes his analysis of White-Black relations, “*at the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man.*”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the fact that Fanon points that his reflections and observations were concerned with Antilles and Algeria, his works effectively inspired many as they have the right to commit violence in order to gain independence, particularly in the African continent. Furthermore, Fanon’s works deal with the mechanics of colonialism and its huge effects, these two works have made Fanon a prominent contributor to postcolonial studies. In reading his books, one can notice that his tone suggests that racial oppression must be fought. The readers not only gain an insight into colonization, but they also feel its agonizing effects.

Like Aime Cesaire, Malcolm X, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and so many others of the mid-twentieth century anti-colonial movements, Albert Memmi is interested in exposing the crippling psychological effects of the colonial relationship for all involved. His standpoint as a Jew in the middle of French North Africa allows him an inside and outside perspectives which help him to interpret the worlds of both colonizer and colonized.

Like Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi reveals the truth about the colonial situation and explores social costs and the psychological damage of colonization. His book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, published in 1974, is one of the foundational texts of postcolonial theory. This book is particularly important because it shows how subjugation is not just economic but

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<sup>21</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 18

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

also psychological and cultural. More importantly, its analysis of colonialism is a reversible, historical process, and its focus on the role of the French within the system of subjugation. Memmi dissects the structure of the colonial system, which is established by violence, and requires the constant use of actual or potential violence to sustain dominance. Colonialism is not an involuntary spasm. It is not a glitch in an otherwise altruistic and philanthropic imperial system, something that might right itself.<sup>23</sup>

Albert Memmi's writing is a doubling, or more specifically hybrid, as he is both the colonizer of being a European, and the colonized of being a Tunisian, "*I was sort of a half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged completely to no one.*"<sup>24</sup> Thus the work is based on his experience as a Tunisian Jew. Memmi describes his work as a detailed portrait of the two protagonists of the colonial drama, which are the colonized and the colonizer, and the relationship that they share. Although his analysis is addressed to North African experience, he argues that the dynamics he describes are similar to any colonial system. In this regard, Memmi states that "*the colonial system is one variety of Fascism.*"<sup>25</sup> Despite colonizers' ideology of more noble objectives of religious conversion or civilization, colonialism is based on economic privilege. Memmi assumes that colonialism's key apparatuses are racism and terror. Racism is deep-rooted in the spirit of every colonial action and institution, and establishes the sub-humanity of the colonized. Thus, since the colonized natives are looked down as subhuman, they are left without protection to cruel forces.

By using terror to suppress any reactionary rebellion, the colonizers strengthen fear and submission. In order to keep the incomes of the colonizers high and their cost of living low, there must be high competition among the native workers; hence, the colonial system favors population growth. The bitter fact is that all resources go to the colonizer in spite of the

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<sup>23</sup> Garnette, Oluoch-Olunya, "Contextualising Post-Independence Anglophone African Writing: Ayi Kwei Armah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o compared." PhD Thesis. University of Glasgow, September 2000, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Souveni Press, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

growing colonized population's need for those increasing resources. Thus, the standard of living of the colonized certainly goes down.

Albert Memmi discusses the issue of colonization and its effects on the Third World countries, just like the British colonization of Kenya. He further portrays the colonizer as a mediocre who would have little future in the mother country. He goes on to state that the colonizers, in the colony, have succeeded in rewriting the history, making rules and laws all of which for their own benefit. Therefore, the colonized are exploited for the benefit of the Master. They are dehumanized since they have no power to change their conditions. Memmi states:

Colonialism denies human rights to human beings whom it has subdued by violence, and keeps them by force in a state of misery and ignorance that Marx would rightly call subhuman conditions. Racism is ingrained in actions, institutions, and in the nature of the colonialist methods of production and exchange. Political and social regulations reinforce one another.<sup>26</sup>

Memmi argues that there are three factors that characterize any European in a colony: profit, privilege, and usurpation. He points out that the main aim of colonization is to make profit from the indigenous society. A colony, for the colonizers, is a place where they earn more and spend less. They can live a more comfortable life. However, "*the colonialist knows that in his own country he would be nothing; he would go back to being a mediocre man.*"<sup>27</sup> Hence, the colonizers are privileged, they know that their privileged is illegitimate, and therefore they are usurpers. It is also very important to note that those arrivals would confront the horrors of colonialism. This confrontation results in two kinds of colonizers; Memmi asserts, "*there exist the colonizer who refuses.*"<sup>28</sup> The latter faces enormous challenges thus recognizing the colonial system as unjust. And may withdraw from the

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<sup>26</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

conditions of privilege or remain to fight for change as they are living the same conditions as experienced by the local natives. Such kind of colonizers on one hand enjoy the privilege of their status, and yet they feel sorry for the colonized.

Memmi assigns the term “colonialist” to the colonizers who accept their role and class as usurpers and of their illegitimate privilege. They seek to *legitimize* colonization, by making their position explicit. They demonstrate the merits of their culture the natives’ culture. Under this approach, the colonialists do not worry about the debilitating impact of their actions on the natives. The colonizers assert their cultural superiority and attempts to “*falsify history, he rewrites laws, and he would extinguish memories. Anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy.*”<sup>29</sup> Memmi argues that the more the colonialists put the oppression on the colonized, the more they realize that their role is very bad. They even want the colonized to vanish because their existence leads them to act in that way. Yet, the colonizers are fully aware that the colony without the colonized has no meaning.

According to Memmi, the colonizers’ rewriting of history to his glorification removes the colonized from history. This is the most dehumanizing aspect of colonialism where the colonized are taught what the colonizers want them to learn and not the history of their own country. Under colonization, the colonized are just objects of history. They are conditioned that their inadequacy is what makes them unable to assume a role in history. Albert Memmi argues that this undemocratic colonial system is unsuitable, which will lead to its own destruction. Hence, the colonized have two answers to this system. The first option is that assimilation is impossible since it is an undemocratic system. The other option is the revolt in which the colonized express their rejection and refusal for the colonizer’s existence.

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<sup>29</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 96.

Both Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi emerged as influential literary figures whose writings changed opinions and attitudes and inspired supportive action. They lived long enough to engage in scholarly debates about colonialism and would see the end of the “civilizing mission” of European imperialism. Their theoretical works have made them prominent contributors to postcolonial studies.

### **3. Modern Postcolonial Criticism: Said, Bhabha and Spivak**

Modern Postcolonial criticism is led by the Palestinian-American literary and cultural theorist Edward Said, Indian literary theorists Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Each one of them is different and important for the contributions she/he has made to the field. Their critical ideas are applicable to the works of colored writers. Their purpose is to fight the harmful consequences of colonial oppression against third world countries by reflecting on a postcolonial past and how they are surviving a new way to create and understand the world. They attempt to enunciate and even glorify their cultural identities. They thereby sought to build on anti-colonial and self-liberation literature by combining their emancipatory themes and ideas with the theories and methods of French critical theory and post-structuralism. These figures work to forge connections between various formalized fields of academic study and their own experiences of colonial and postcolonial conditions.

Said, Bhabha and Spivak’s knowledge and methods lay heavily on the poststructural theorists like Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault. They have exercised a profound influence on almost all that has happened in literary theory in recent times. Their critical and challenged ideas have helped in giving voice to those who had been previously marginalized. These key developments enable postcolonial theorists to borrow and adapt critiques of institution, culture, discourse, representation, and signification to their own causes.

All of Said, Bhabha and Spivak use the methods of deconstruction, destabilization and decentering as ways to question colonial culture, discourse, and philosophy. Their works consider knowledge and culture as mechanisms for exerting power and political subjugation over colonized subjects. Said, Spivak and Bhabha, drawing on poststructural theory, focus on the hierarchical logic of imperialism whereby binaries of colonizer/colonized, beautiful/ugly, civilized/primitive, white/black, good/evil, and human/bestial are perpetuated as the ideological foundations underpinning the colonial dominance over the “*subjected others*.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, it is in response to these concerns that Edward Said writes what is often regarded as the first formalised text of postcolonial studies.<sup>31</sup>

### **3.1. The False Image of the Orient**

Postcolonial studies gained its prominence in the 1970<sup>s</sup> with Edward Said. His book *Orientalism*, published in 1978, is considered the foundational work in postcolonial theory. Many major theorists and critics have acknowledged the importance of Said’s work in shaping and defining the postcolonialism. For instance, Homi Bhabha argues that Orientalism “*inaugurated the postcolonial field*.”<sup>32</sup> Gayatri Spivak views *Orientalism* as the “*source book in our discipline*.”<sup>33</sup> Said believes that in order to grasp an idea of postcolonial literature, one must look at the world from a metropolitan point of view. He examines the stereotypical boundaries between the East and the West. Said focuses especially on the stereotypes of Middle-East. Thus, the main contribution of the book is the exploration of the impact of colonization and how the Westerners perceive the colonized countries which Said argues to be created by the Western society. He further argues that the study of the Orient “*was ultimately*

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<sup>30</sup> David Theo Goldberg, & Ato Quayson, *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Oxford Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. xii.

<sup>31</sup> Bart Moore Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

*a political vision of reality whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the familiar Europe, the West, 'us' and the strange the Orient, the East, 'them'.*"<sup>34</sup>

The main idea of *Orientalism* is that all the Eastern societies are similar to one another and dissimilar to Western societies. This fact, Said argues, is not generated from reality, but from preconceived knowledge which establishes the East as an antithesis to the West. Such knowledge is generated by the limited understanding of life in the Middle-East.

The Westerners consider the Orient to be naturally inferior; therefore, it is required to be dominated and to be ruled. Their self-proclaimed superiority over them led the Western scholars to claim that they understand them more worthily than the Easterners themselves. Said continues to claim that the West uses its own terms in defining and analyzing the Orient, and applying concepts that are unknown to their subjects. This is how key concepts about the Orient were developed by and for Western eyes.

Said opens his book stating that "*the Orient was almost a European invention*";<sup>35</sup> that the Western structured the world as made of two opposing forces "theirs" and "ours". These oppositions were more epistemological rather than just geographical ones. Said states, "*Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'.*"<sup>36</sup> He further goes on to explain that "*the Orient has helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.*"<sup>37</sup>

The idea of the "Orient" is a kind of myth produced by Western thought as Said questions, "*but where is this sly, devious despotic, mystical oriental? Has anyone ever met anyone who meets this description in all particulars?*"<sup>38</sup> In many ways, Said's aim is to dismantle this

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<sup>34</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

myth, and to identify Orientalism as a discourse. In his portrayal of this discourse, Said underlines the principle of binary oppositions according to which Europe always emerges as superior to “the Other”. He further argues that the language is very important in constructing the imagenary “Other”:

It hardly needs to be demonstrated again that language itself is highly organized and encoded system which employs many devices to express, indicate, exchange messages and information [...] the value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend on the Orient as such.<sup>39</sup>

It is worth noting that Said explores similar themes and ideas in his later works, such as *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) in which he states that one cannot look at imperialism without looking at culture. Ashroft and Ahluwalia assert that, “*the role of culture in keeping imperialism intact cannot be overestimated, because it is through culture that the assumption of the ‘divine right’ of imperial powers to rule is vigorously and authoritatively supported.*”<sup>40</sup> Said also distinguishes and at the same time links between imperialism and colonialism. Here, Said defines imperialism as “*thinking about, settling, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others.*”<sup>41</sup> Thus, arguing that imperialism has survived the disappearance of colonial Empires, Britain, France, and USA.

Though in *Orientalism* Said questions the misrepresentation of the Eastern World. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he explores the complex and the ongoing relations between white and black, West and East, colonizer and colonized. Indeed, the insights of Said’s works influenced notable postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, who have also been crucial to founding the field’s key principles and methods.

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<sup>39</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (2<sup>nd</sup>ed). (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 7.

### 3.2. A Critical Reflection on Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theories

Homi Bhabha, a major figure in contemporary postcolonial study, is best known for his contribution to the development of the postcolonial theory. Bhabha's works *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (2003) are considered as foundational texts on which postcolonial theory is developed. Bhabha, then, is one part of the "Holy Trinity"<sup>42</sup> of postcolonialism, alongside Said and Spivak. Anthony Elliott and Charles Lemert state that,

Homi Bhabha is one of the most influential postcolonial theoreticians of diasporic culture and multiculturalism, and has sought to deconstruct various narratives of nationality that serves to naturalize Third World countries as subordinate to the West.<sup>43</sup>

*The Location of Culture*, published in 1994, is one of the most notable and recent works in Postcolonial criticism. Homi Bhabha provides a collection of critical essays in cultural criticism. The work is organized into sections and is summarized concisely at the end. He uses long, comprehensive sentences with lots of descriptive words to show and explain his point.

At the very beginning of his book, Bhabha argues that history is not what happens, but how it is represented, occasionally, Bhabha says, "*history is happening*" not on battlefields or barricades, but "*within the pages of theory, within the systems and structures we construct to figure the passage of the historical.*"<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in *The Introduction to The Location of Culture*,<sup>45</sup> Bhabha argues that members of society as well as literary critics should try to understand cultural differences as being based on a process of hybridization. Bhabha suggests that cultures come after the hybridizing process, rather than existing before. Bhabha proves

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<sup>42</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Elliott, and Charles Lemert, *Introduction to Contemporary Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1), p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* [abbreviated as LC hereafter], (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "The Introduction" to *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1- 18.

that, in colonial relationships, this is just as true of the colonizer as of the colonized. He argues that cultures are part of an ongoing process. He further suggests that majority liberal cultures in the West must view themselves through the postcolonial perspective. Bhabha points out that minority cultures have tended to be ignored or, alternatively, asked to assimilate.

Bhabha establishes a fundamental theoretical language in which postcolonialism could express itself, as Gillian Rose, in “The Interstitial Perspective”,<sup>46</sup> states:

Bhabha’s work engages with complex theoretical issues in tangential rather than systematic ways, and the essays in his collection are written in a style which is quite ostentatious in its elaborateness of theoretical reference and awareness of poststructuralist techniques.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike Edward Said who divides the world into binary oppositions, Bhabha makes a deconstructionist approach to postcolonialism. He also sees postcolonial cultures as “hybrid” identified by their own people as well as by the colonial power.

Bhabha’s insight into postcolonial experience really demands attention as he has contributed a set of challenging concepts we are familiar with, such as: Mimicry, Hybridity, Ambivalence, Otherness, and the Uncanny. All of these and other concepts reflect how the colonized resist the oppression of the colonizers, the generation of these terms helped in undermining the polarization of the world into two separate, oppositions. Bhabha further states that the Western civilization is not unique, and that no one is superior to the other in the presence of different cultures. Bhabha attacks the Western production of certain boundaries of binary oppositions, such as: enlightened/ignorant, civilization/savagery, and central/ marginal.

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<sup>46</sup> Gillian Rose, “The Interstitial Perspective: A Review Essay on Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*“. *Environment Planning D. Society and Space* Vol. 13, issue. 3,(1995).

<sup>47</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs taken for wanders: Question of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817“, in *LC*, pp. 102- 122.

According to Bhabha, once the binaries are destabilized, as the first term of the binary is allowed to unthinkingly dominate the second, cultures can interact and the colonized and the colonizer's identities can be structured. Hence, Bhabha refers to this process as "Hybridty", which was first used in his essay "Signs Taken for Wanders,"<sup>48</sup> he clearly thought of hybridity as a subversive tool whereby colonized people might challenge various forms of oppression. This concept, according to him, is very useful in breaking the wrong conceptualization about the colonized's culture being monolithic.

This concept is very crucial and has become one of the recurrent concepts in postcolonial cultural criticism. Robert Young, in his work *Colonial Desire: Hybridty in Theory, Culture, and Race*, states:

A hybrid is technically a cross between two different species and that therefore the term hybridization evokes both the botanical notion of inter-species grafting and the 'vocabulary' of the Victorian extreme right which regarded different races as different species.<sup>49</sup>

Young refers to the term Hybrid as a cross between two different species. But he further states that it is both the botanical notion as well as an inter-species grafting. Moreover, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in their definition of the concept of 'hybridty', state that:

One of the most employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory, hybridty commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. [...] Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political...<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Homi k. Bhabah, "Signs Taken For Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under A Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817." in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 102- 122.

<sup>49</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridty in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature* (Routledge: New York, 1998), p. 10.

In this sense, hybridity is used in postcolonial theory to refer to linguistic and intercultural space, space of in-betweenness. It implies a direct contact between Self and Other or their fusion in a single, mixed and impure culture.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is very important for the postcolonial critics. Christopher Bracken suggests in the following words that,

For Bhabha, the human subject is not grounded in a fixed identity but rather is a discursive effect generated in the act of enunciation [...] The hybrid postcolonial subject negotiates the interstices of Western discursive systems, operating in-between the dichotomies of colonizer and colonized, self and other, East and West. Once a mode of Western discursive is altered through repetition [...]it loses its "Westernness" and exposes itself to difference.<sup>51</sup>

Bracken, rightly suggests that Bhabha's term of 'hybridity' opens up the possibility of an international culture of hybridity as stated in the above quotation. It is worth to mention that Bhabha's concept of hybridity is important. It suggests that cultures come after the hybridizing process, rather than existing before. Bhabha suggests that cultures are part of an ongoing process. He proves that, in colonial relationships, this is just as true of the colonizer as of the colonized.

Mimicry, like hybridity, is another critical term in Bhabha's criticism of postcolonial literature. Bhabha discusses this concept in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse."<sup>52</sup>Mimicry is the act in which the colonized people imitate the colonizer; Bhabha refers to as an exaggerated copying of language, dress, manners, and ideas. In this regard, Bhabha argues that "*mimicry is a process by which the colonized subject is represented as almost the same, but not quite.*"<sup>53</sup> He asserts that the colonizers want to make the colonized like them; in that sense, the colonized become almost

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<sup>51</sup> Christopher Bracken, *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History*, reviewed by Kerry Abel, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Apr, 1999), pp. 533-534; 509.

<sup>52</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and, Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-92.

<sup>53</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimcry and, Man," p. 86.

the same as the colonizers, but in a way that still maintains a clear sense of difference. In that sense, the colonized become “almost the same” as the colonizers, but never quite fit in with the hegemonic cultural and political systems that govern both of them.

According to Bhabha, the colonizers’ assertion of authority over the colonized helps in the emergence of this notion. That is, mimicry is the result of Western domination, diplomacy, manipulation, and ignorance to the colonized who feel dispossessed of their identity. Homi Bhabha further asserts that mimicry can be taken as a way of eluding control that also gives rise to postcolonial analysis by subverting the colonial master’s authority and hegemony. However, Leela Gandhi explains the term “mimicry” differently:

But mimicry is also the sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience [.....] In effect, mimicry inheres in the necessary and multiple acts of translation which oversee the passage from colonial vocabulary to its anti-colonial usage. ‘Mimicry’ inaugurates the process of anti-colonial self-differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation.<sup>54</sup>

The above discussion indicates a little difference in the term mimicry that Homi Bhabha has given. Moreover, mimicry is one response to the circulation of stereotypes; Bhabha makes it clear that “mimicry” is central to colonial discourse. He defines colonial mimicry as,

The colonial desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference.<sup>55</sup>

Bhabha wants to say that the colonizers expect the colonized to be like them or identical, and that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. Hence, colonial mimicry is not a slavish imitation or complete assimilation, but is an exaggerated

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<sup>54</sup> LeelaGhandi, *Postcolonial Theory: An Introduction* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 149-150.

<sup>55</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and, Man,” p. 86.

copying of culture, manners, language, and ideas. It is a form of mockery on the part of the colonized, and the comic quality of mimicry is vital because it undermines the ongoing pretensions of superiority of the colonizers and their “solemn” purpose to educate and improve the colonized. Mimicry is itself an ambivalent phenomenon, that is, neither the colonized have identity which they are betraying through mimicry, nor do the colonizers have absolute pre-existing identity which can be mimicked. Hence, this results in the undermining of the colonizer’s original identity. M. S. Nagarjan, in his book *English Literary Criticism and Theory*, says that:

This colonialist ideology created colonial subjects who have behaved in the way the colonizer had programmed. They willingly accepted the superiority of the British and their own inferiority. It produced ‘cultural cringe’ so to speak.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, this difference of the natives from the superior colonial masters forced them to imitate, and this phenomenon of imitating the West, for Homi Bhabha, is called “mimicry“.The feeling of superiority of the colonial masters over the natives leads the colonized people to look at themselves as the inferior human beings. Thus, it automatically establishes the belief that the West is always educated, civilized, reformed, disciplined, and knowledgeable, while the East is illiterate, barbaric, primitive and ignorant. “Mimicry” seems to be a method of copying the person in power. This suppresses one’s own cultural identity and leaves the person to an ambivalent and confused state. Bhabha says that “*the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence.*”<sup>57</sup>

Otherness is another concept generated by Bhabha in postcolonial theory. The “other” is a term which promotes difference, and perceived inferiority between an individual from the West and East. This term is used by many theorists, notably Sartre, Derrida and Lacan in their

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<sup>56</sup> M. S. Nagarjan, *English Literary Criticism and Theory* an Introductory History (Orient Black Swan: New Delhi, India, 2006), p. 187.

<sup>57</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and, Man,” p . 86.

writings. In Bhabha's essay, "The Other Question: The Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism",<sup>58</sup> he emphasizes how the colonized is taken as "Other". The term as used by Sartre suggests the relation between "Self" and "Other". On the other hand, Jacques Lacan makes a distinction between "Other" and "other". The latter refers to the other who becomes aware of his self as a separate being, while the former refers to the great other in whose gaze the subject gains identity. However, to Homi Bhabha, the "Other" makes the colonial subject conscious of one's identity. This allowed Gayatri Spivak's coinage of the term, "othering" which means that the empirical centre creates its "others". In other words, the colonizing "other" gets established when the colonized "other" are treated as subjects.

Bhabha further states that the important feature of colonial discourse depends on the ideological construction of "otherness" which, according to him, gives rise to "the stereotype".<sup>59</sup>

It is worth to mention another cornerstone of Homi Bhabha's work which is *Nation and Narration*. In fact, the term "Nation" is very important in the discussion of colonialism. The idea of nations means the forms of nationalism involved in anti-colonial struggle and postcolonial reconstruction. Many writers have shown that oppressed people have identified with clear national identities. So nations have been seemed a vital organizing principle for many writers in postcolonial studies. However, Homi Bhabha rejects the well-defined and stable identity associated with the national form as he wants to keep this identity an open one. He claims that nations have their own narratives, but very often a dominant or official narrative overpowers all other stories of minority group. He further states that a nation is not just a singular entity comprising a single purpose, but it is also a product of multiple societies, multiple ways of life.

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<sup>58</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66- 84.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Like many thinkers, Homi Bhabha is impressed by Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983), to start thinking about the concept of "Nations". Anderson has developed a concept of 'imagined community' in his book to analyze nationalism. He depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Bhabha begins his book with the exploration of this idea of the correlation between nation and narrative: "*Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myth of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye.*"<sup>60</sup> Bhabha observes that the nations and narratives have simultaneous origin. According to him, nation is a metaphor synthesized from political thought and literary language of any age. In addition, Bhabha seems to be impressed by Walter Benjamin as well, who like him states that even in the most testing historical moments, the nation hangs together, utterly simultaneous, and at one with itself. He further states that in this process of simultaneity, those are excluded that do not fit in that.

In addition to that, nation, as a term, is both "new" and "historical". That is, it refers to both the modern nation-state and something more ancient and nebulous. People can neither neglect its historical emergence as a nation-state nor blind their eyes to its cultural antiquity. The formal universality of nations shows it more as a socio-cultural concept. Nations share this ambivalence with its narratives also. Hence, the narratives of the nation take up pluralistic hybridized forms; forms appropriate to convey the ambivalent structures of the nation. In this regard, Timothy Brennan's reference to British cultural historian Raymond Williams in "The National Longing for Form" is significant:

'Nation' as a term is radically connected with 'native'. We are *born* into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and 'placeable' bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from

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<sup>60</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 1.

that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial.<sup>61</sup>

This perplexity between nation and nation-state is familiar among the theorists of nationalism. They are often caught between the nationalists' perspective of the subjective antiquity of nations and that of the historians' perspective of their objective modernity. There is an ambiguity and ambivalence in the concept of nation. So, the idea of a nation is twofold; it has a conceptual and an objective aspect. This ambivalence in the idea of the nation is evident in the writings of many modern theorists. Bhabha details this ambivalence in the context of the modern nation-states:

It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.<sup>62</sup>

The ambivalence arises from the conflict between the historic view of nation and its cultural temporality, an attribute it acquires recently. Bhabha's creative work has secured his place as one of the fathers of postcolonial studies.

### **3.2. Asking the Question: Does the Subaltern Have a Voice?**

Gayatri Spivak is an Indian scholar and feminist critic. She is considered as one of the most effective postcolonial thinkers with her prominent works and challenging ideas. Though Said's work is primarily based on the systematic discourse of the power of colonialism, Spivak's work has focused primarily on the colonized's experiences and their successors in the neo-colonial era.<sup>63</sup> Gayatri Spivak, through her large body of cultural and critical theories, has challenged the legacies of colonialism with specific attention to the ways Western culture

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<sup>61</sup> Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form". *Literature in the Modern world: Critical Essays and Documents*. Ed. Dennis Walter (New York: Oxford, 2004), pp. 211-225. (Cited in Bhabha, 45)

<sup>62</sup> Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Henry Ray, Schwarz, and Sangeeta, *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 452.

and literature have marginalized minority groups. Furthermore, Spivak's critical interventions encompass a range of theoretical interests, including Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonial theory and cutting-edge work on globalization. Spivak, like Said, has focused on the examination of colonialism and its ideological and cultural structures, also the consequent material and discursive effects. She also focuses on the cultural texts of those people who are often marginalized by dominant Western culture.

Spivak's work has focused mainly on women, the working class, the new immigrant, and the postcolonial subject.<sup>64</sup> She introduces herself as a radical critic whose criticism is concerned with how marginalized cultures are hegemonized and not given a voice. In order to be heard, they must conform and to speak the language of the oppressor. Her discussion extends double colonization through her reinterpretation of subalternity. She writes about the difficulty of non-elite people mainly on the Third World, unorganized peasant labor, subsistence farmers, as well as prisoners, women, tribal communities and places of unemployed on the streets or in the countryside, having their voices heard in an undistorted way.<sup>65</sup>

Just like postcolonial feminists, Spivak is well-renowned for her essay entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The work is difficult to read yet repeatedly interpreted. This landmark essay, first published in 1988 and after twenty-three years of its public debut at the conference on *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, remains an inspiration for feminists, as well as a heated debate among postcolonialists. In her seminal text, she raises and discusses issues about "the Subaltern's voice" in rebellion against the colonizers and the authenticity of their voice. Furthermore, she criticizes the ways in which Western cultures investigate other cultures based on "universal" concepts and frameworks. The subaltern is a term first

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<sup>64</sup> Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 66 -111; p. 84.

introduced by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci to refer to the working class, and used and popularized by Spivak in the postcolonial context. Gramsci uses the term of the Subaltern to describe European subordinate or marginalized groups in relation to class positions, whereas, Spivak uses the term to encompass and cover a broader spectrum of experiences, or more specifically to refer to the unrepresented group of people in the society.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the subalterns are those of society who are inferior to the ruling hegemony and could form any group which is denied access to society.<sup>67</sup>

Borrowing the methodological strategies from Freud, Spivak describes the problematic ways that Western intellectuals and the world of academia have attempted to take on roles of speaking for the conditions of the subaltern instead of allowing them to speak for themselves.<sup>68</sup> She claims that this has resulted in hierarchical class divisions and the subsequent “silencing” of the subaltern. The subaltern, for Spivak, is a way of considering the lived experiences of these marginalized people. In the Indian cultural context, the term “Subaltern” acquires more significance as the people have struggled hard for Indian independence.

Moreover, Spivak draws her attention to subaltern women; she sees them as most problematic in the ways they are represented. As she answers, “*clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways*”,<sup>69</sup> and if they speak, the men in their community do not even look at them. At the same time, women also do not look in a man’s face because for them this is a brazen thing to do. Here Spivak means that the idea of the poor black women “getting it in three ways” indicates that a person can experience more than singular or double oppressions. Spivak examines the example of the Hindu tradition of Sati; the Hindu funeral tradition in which the widow performs selfimmolation. This Indian act is practiced by a widowed woman

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<sup>66</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Trans. And ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. (Chennai: Orient Longman, 2004), p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies*, p. 209.

<sup>68</sup> Bart Gilbert-Moore, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> Spivak, “Can The Subaltern Speak,” p. 90.

either voluntarily or by use of force or coercion commits suicide as a result of her husband's death. The best known form of sati is when a woman burns to death on her husband's funeral pyre. However other forms of sati exist, including being buried alive with the husband's corpse and drowning. This pre-independent Indian practice is considered as part of a barbaric culture by the Western World.

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak suggests a theory of subalternity and further vindicates the limitations of the subalterns, asking "Can the Subaltern Speak?" She goes on to add that in the context of colonization, the subaltern has no history, therefore, cannot speak. Beside, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow.<sup>70</sup> Spivak further explains the controversial statement "the subaltern cannot speak" as:

It means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That's what it had meant, and anguish marked the spot.<sup>71</sup>

However, Spivak's conclusion that "the subaltern cannot speak" has litigated flames of controversy in the postcolonial context. Her statement is actually a one stop answer for all the questions. It is an outcome of her lifelong search for the truth and it is being formulated on the basis of socio-cultural backgrounds. Spivak makes it clear that the subaltern can speak but others do not have the patience to listen to them. Spivak is questioning how can the Third World's subject be studied without cooperation and collaboration with the colonial policy. She devotes her life for works that attack such misconceptions.

Through these ideas, Spivak paves new ground for the field of postcolonial studies and opens up critical discussions of the postcolonial subject. Spivak's usage of the term "subaltern" has given new definitions and explanations of postcolonial experiences that

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<sup>70</sup> Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak," p. 287.

<sup>71</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Mac Lean (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 292.

accounted for the complexities of postcolonial experiences in relation to debates about feminism, representation, and distinctions between First and Third World feminisms. Furthermore, Spivak has been able to give voice to the marginalized by applying the methods of Western philosophy in addition to her own postcolonial experiences.

Above all, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha are said to make “the Holy Trinity” of postcolonial theory. This “first wave” of postcolonial theory provides the first practical and material accounts dealing with the complex experiences of colonized peoples and cultures. Each of them is different and important for the contributions that they have made to the field. On the one hand, Said’s main contribution to the field is the concept of “orientalism”; the attempt on the part of the West to establish the East as inferior, lazy, deceitful and barbaric. Spivak, on the other hand, answers the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Finally, Bhabha’s key theories have great contributions to the field of postcolonial theory. Thus, through Said’s critiques of representation, Spivak’s analysis of marginalization and Bhabha’s strategies of hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry; they have revealed and disrupted existing binary relations and revealed the fundamental contradictions of prevailing systems of colonialism.<sup>72</sup>

#### **4. Ngugi’s Process of Cultural Decolonization**

Decolonization refers to a process where colonized people reclaim their traditional culture, redefine themselves and reassert their distinct identity. In Postcolonialism, this process does not imply only the decolonization of lands but also the decolonization of cultures and the loss of identities. Cultural decolonization involves a radical dismantling of European codes, and a postcolonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses.

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<sup>72</sup> Marcel Daniels, *Ambivalent Realities: Postcolonial Experiences in Contemporary Visual Arts Practice*, Master’s thesis, (Queensland University of Technology, 27 Feb, 2014), p. 19.

In addition, decolonization is an active resistance against the exploitation of minds, bodies, lands, cultures, and the realization of indigenous liberation by despising colonial structure.<sup>73</sup>

During the sixties and the early seventies, there was an impulse to resist the cultural incorporation in African writing which has been continued in projects aimed at the decolonization of African culture, and in the desire to return to precolonial languages and cultural modes.<sup>74</sup> Ashcroft (1989) affirms this idea as he observes that Ngugi puts forth arguments according to which decolonization must involve a much more radical movement away from European values and system, including the English language, which carries these values.

Wilson argues that one of the first steps towards decolonization is to question the legitimacy of colonization. Once a person realizes the truth and the injustices, he will think about ways to challenge and resist the colonial institutions and ideologies. These steps are revitalization and practice of culture dismantled by colonialists.<sup>75</sup> In fact, the question of decolonization within the African continent continues to draw a great deal of attention.<sup>76</sup>

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's conception of decolonization is one of the most radical to be conceived on the African continent.<sup>77</sup> His project of decolonization is a result of his long study of the dynamics of colonialism. He is a leading figure in postcolonial studies. His works are greatly respected and taught all over the world. Not only is Ngugi one of Africa's foremost creative artists but he is also a formidable theorist of culture and has published several books on questions of class, race, and imperialism. He has inspired many writers

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Yellow Bird, Ed. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson. *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* (School of American Research, SAR Press. 2005), p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Bill Ashcroft, et al, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 126.

<sup>75</sup> Angela. C. Wilson, *Reclaiming Our Humanity: Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge*. In D. Mihuseuah and A. Wilson (Eds). (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2005), pp. 69-87.

<sup>76</sup> Messay Kebede, *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization*, (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), Quoted in Sanya Osha and Mammo Muchie, "Innovation in Cultural Theory". (Tshwane University of Technology South Africa), p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Sanya Osha, *KwasiWiredu and Beyond: The Text, Writing and Thought in Africa* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2005), Quoted in Sanya Osha and Mammo Muchie, "Innovation in Cultural Theory". (Tshwane University of Technology South Africa), p. 1.

across the world. In Africa, Ngugi's book *Decolonizing the Mind*, published in 1986, is widely considered his most important work. The book has immensely contributed to the discourse on postcolonialism. This non-fictional work is a collection of essays through which Ngugi proposes a programme of radical decolonization; in doing so, he focuses on the question of language. According to him, language, for the colonial powers, is the medium to control the psychic space of people, so he wants to help his community to return back to the roots through a linguistic break.<sup>78</sup>

Ngugi makes a radical and controversial decision by giving up using the English language and henceforth has committed to write in African indigenous languages. His choice to write his literary work in his Gikuyu mother tongue is to counteract the imperialistic and pervasive postcolonial suppression of indigenous languages. Ngugi has once argued that language is at the centre of decolonization, and warns people to use English and yet to not let English use them. He also argues that having knowledge of English without knowledge of your mother tongue is akin to servitude and enslavement. Ngugi wants to emphasize the importance of learning the mother tongue and local cultural histories. For him, the real empowerment is when you know your mother tongue and add it to all other languages.

Ngugi has rejected the use of English and calls African writers to do the same. Though he does not deny that the English language has helped him build his career as a novelist, this does not make him forget who he really is. Hence, he starts questioning the fact that he uses a European language to write an African literature that already has language. He believes that writers and other intellectuals from marginalised cultures and languages have the duty and responsibility of making themselves visible in their languages. He insists that African writers must write the correct stories of their people in their native languages using African forms so

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<sup>78</sup> Indranee Borkar, "Abrogation of Language in Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind*." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* Vol. 7, Issue VI. (Dec 2016), p. 220.

that future generations learn the true traditions that existed. However, many African writers have not supported him including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sembene Ousmane, Agostino Neto, Sedar Senghor and several others.

Ngugi criticizes those writers who advocate the Africanizing of the English language to express African experiences and submit themselves to the hegemonic language. Those who continue to write in a European language, in Ngugi's view, are merely creating "*another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature.*"<sup>79</sup> Ngugi further argues that an effective postcolonial voice can only be found in the total rejection of the European languages and a "*return to the roots.*"<sup>80</sup> In fact, the language question denotes the struggle of African writers to free themselves from the restrictions of colonialism and imperialism not only politically or economically but also culturally and psychologically. In this context, Ngugi writes, "*I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples.*"<sup>81</sup>

According to Ngugi language exists as culture and it is inseparable from the community of human beings; therefore, the loss of the former results in the loss of the latter. Because it is through language that culture develops, articulates and transmits itself from one generation to another. For him, to control the culture of the people is to control their tools of self definition in relationship to others.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, in "The Language of African Literature"<sup>83</sup> Ngugi argues that language is the carrier of culture and using a foreign language can harm the native culture and, even, can alienate people from their indigenous culture. Therefore, language acts as a carrier of culture and culture carries orature and literature, but forced and imposed colonial

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<sup>79</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>80</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 53.

<sup>81</sup> Christian Mair, *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial cultural studies* (Amsterdam-New York: NY, 2003), p. xvii.

<sup>82</sup> *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. 16.

<sup>83</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Language of African Literature". In *Decolonizing the Mind* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1987), pp. 4-33.

language stopped oral literature, in Kenyan languages.<sup>84</sup> Ngugi believes that the only way of liberation from colonization is writing in African languages, specifically languages of the African peasantry and working class, which is a necessary step toward cultural identity and independence from centuries of European exploitation.

Language is interwoven with cultural identity and has been viewed as “*storehouse for ethnicity*,”<sup>85</sup> which, according to Ngugi, will create unity, a sense of belonging and kinship bonds. He further illustrates the centrality of language during the colonization in Africa which he describes as having been a means of “*spiritual subjugation*.”<sup>86</sup> The dual nature of language as a mode of communication and embodiment of culture is underscored in his seminal work *Decolonizing the Mind*. He interrogates the systematic subordination of African languages, and makes a strong case for decolonization of language, emphasizing the fact that decolonization is a psychological process, advocating freedom rather than geographical freedom.

Ngugi, often labelled the founding father of decolonization discourse, assures that when someone erases a given people’s language, he erases their memory. And people without memories are rudderless, unconnected to their own histories and culture, mimics who have placed their memories in a “psychic tomb” in the mistaken belief that if they master the language of the colonizer, they will own it.<sup>87</sup> Ngugi claims that language is a key to the colonizers’ quest to obtain and maintain power. If language is the medium of memory, the erasure of language is pertinent to the defacement and obliteration of memory. The colonialists aim to distort, destroy, disrupt, and disfigure the past memories; thus, they attack the native languages. One of the humiliating situations in Ngugi’s memory was the bad

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<sup>84</sup> Wa Thiong’o, “The Language of African Literature,” p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> Joshua A. Fishman, *Handbook of Language and Ethnicity* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Rasna Warah, “Ngugi wa Thiong’o: Still Decolonising the Mind.” *Mail & Guardian Online* Vol. 1, pp. 1-99. (accessed 07 Feb, 2007).

treatment and punishment of the students who were speaking Gikuyu instead of English, “*the culprit was given corporal punishment –three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks –or made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID OR I AM DONKEY.*”<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, the father of decolonization discourse has rejected the colonizers’ culture in order to establish African indigenous culture. He has changed his Christian name James Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong’o, in order to show his commitment towards his Gikuyu culture. Ngugi’s philosophy of cultural decolonization is not only a powerful symbolic form of cultural empowerment but it is also an articulate socio-political counter-discourse to hegemonic notions of culture.<sup>89</sup>

While *Decolonizing the Mind* is regarded as Ngugi’s magnum opus, his recent work *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, published in 2009, is another important masterpiece which explores various critical issues, from Africa’s economic, historical, and cultural fragmentation by slavery, colonialism, and globalization. In this book, Ngugi explores the critical importance of language to culture, and how the African indigenous languages have continued to be sidelined over the years. He argues that African languages have often been associated with shame and subjugation while English is associated with sophistication and science. Thus, *Something Torn and New* is a *cri de coeur* to save Africa’s cultural future.

In fact, all that Ngugi wants is to restore not only Africa’s past, language, wealth, and cultures but also Africa’s genius writers. By this restoration, Ngugi means the coming back to one’s native language and thus identity. For this, Ngugi considers that language is an effective element in the shaping of one’s identity; he believes that for achieving self-definition as

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<sup>88</sup> *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Russell Al Farabi, “Decolonizing the Mind of the Oppressed: A Critical Analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Paulo Freire”. *Scholarly Research Journal’s For Interdisciplinary Studies* Vol. 3, No. 18, (May-June, 2015), p. 69.

related to the homeland, one has to identify with the language he uses. Thus, Ngugi is calling to come back to one's original identity through knowing who really he is. Also, he argues that when a writer is not using his mother tongue in his works, he is, for sure, hybridizing literature through creating a new identity that is neither African nor European.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *The River Between* is based on his own experience in which Kenya had a profound impact and inspired his writing. Ngugi's work reflects how the British exploited the natives and how their arrival led to many social, economic, and cultural changes especially on their identities. Ngugi's novel does not only portray the conflict between the colonizer and the colonized, but the internal conflicts of the natives themselves. The novel's opening situates the narrative conflicts within the Kenyan landscape:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kamenno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kamenno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke [...] A river flowed through the valley of life. The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-life [...] they became antagonists [...] like two rivals ready to come blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, Ngugi's novel is based on a real experience and depicted Kenya in colonial era and he has succeeded in portraying cultural conflict and change accurately as a result of the white invaders. In a way, the novel reflects Ngugi's lived experience where he found himself living in a middle position, *between his culture* and that of the *colonizer*. Thus, this novel clearly depicts colonial Kenya and the ambivalent attitude towards the native and foreign culture.

Ngugi's works concentrate on contemporary Kenyan politics. It records the ills of the society, their exploitation at the hands of the white and their struggle for freedom. As an artist,

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<sup>90</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 1.

he believes that it is his duty to serve humanity; to help the exploited people and provide them moral direction and to illuminate some problems like repression. Ngugi says:

Like all artists, I am interested in human relationships and their quality. This is what I explore in my work. Human relationships do not occur in a vacuum. They develop in the context of ecology, economics, politics, culture, and psyche. All these aspects of human society affect those relationships profoundly [...] As an artist you examine the particular to explore the interconnection of phenomena to open a window into the human soul. The material of life opens out into the spirituality of human life.<sup>91</sup>

All in all, Ngugi is a committed writer, and his creative works contribute to revolutionary change and transformation. Ngugi effectively articulates his community's struggle. In this regard he states, *"I believe that African intellectuals align themselves with the struggle of the African message for a meaningful national ideal [...] The African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind the struggle."*<sup>92</sup>

## **5. African Experience Under Colonialism: The Case of Kenya**

Colonization is undoubtedly one of the most horrible periods in human life. History has shown that religious and cultural conflicts resulted in various and catastrophic problems. Colonialism, in its plain sense, can be understood as a seizure of other people's possessions such as land and goods, by means of invasion, conquest and control. Even though the colonial powers often justify their act of domination by putting their hegemonic act of oppression concealed in a mask of civilizing the barbarous folk; they used pseudo-cultural phrases like "the white man's burden" or "the civilizing mission". But in reality, political subjugation and economic exploitation have been the real motives of the colonizers. During that period, Africa

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<sup>91</sup> Michael Alexander Pozo, "Political Discourse- Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism: An Interview with ngugi wa Thiong'o", (St. Johns University, 22 June 2004).

<sup>92</sup> wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming*, p. 50.

had been occupied by different predators so that they could confiscate their land, force the natives to work as slaves in their own lands, and to defraud their natural resources.

African literature written in English is essentially a by-product of colonialism. However, African writers who were trained and educated in colonial schools reflected the suffering of colonial subjects who were under the encroaching European powers. Therefore, they were obliged to speak out against injustices inflicted their people. One of such writers is Ngugi wa Thiong'o whose novels, essays, and plays are embodiments of anti-colonial discourse. This argument is further demonstrated by Reddy, when he says,

Ngugi is a committed writer believing in class war and in the seizure of political power by workers and peasants through violent struggles. He is an uncompromising champion of African identity and culture and stands for the decolonization of mind from all traces of subservience and enslavement that smack of the white man's hegemony in areas of culture, language, Eurocentred values, Capitalistic, imperialistic, economic, and political domination.<sup>93</sup>

The above discussion makes it clear that the works of Ngugi are remarkable for their attempt to challenge the dubious civilizing claim of the colonizers, that their culture is highly superior and civilized than that of the natives.

## **5.1. The British Imperialism in Kenya**

The British presence in Kenya dates to the Berlin Conference of 1885, when East Africa was primarily divided into territories amongst European power rivals. Even before Kenya, also known as East African Protectorate and/or East British Africa, was officially a British colony in 1920. The British government opened "the fertile highlands" to white settlers in July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1895, with Sir Arthur Harding as a first governor to establish a formal British

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<sup>93</sup> Indrasena K. Reddy, "Struggle Motif in the Major Novels of Achebe and Ngugi: A Note." *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, (1992), pp. 76-8; 79.

administration.<sup>94</sup> Gradually as Leys asserts, the colonial administration established itself through several sets of legislations most of which aimed at protecting the interests of the state officials and those of the white settler farmers.<sup>95</sup> The white men even were allowed a voice in government, unlike the Africans who were banned from direct political participation and were confined to local government. Under the reings of Queen Victoria, who was the monarch from 1895 to 1901, then King George V who was the monarch from 1901 to 1920, Kenya was established as a British protectorate giving Britain complete control and protection over the state of Kenya.

The British colonized Kenya for several reasons. Economically speaking, Kenya was a potential source of wealth. The British main focus was exploiting the resources of Kenya for its own gain. This would help the British industry as they could trade their products. Moreover, Kenya increased the British power and gave them prestige in their competition with other countries in enhancing their status as a world power. So it was, by no means, a competitive process. In addition to the reasons already mentioned, Great Britain had nowhere or no way to expand its political or economic power without colonization.

However, the seventy years of colonial rule in Kenya were marked by submissive social, economic, and political policies. Most outstanding among these policies include harsh labor laws forced the natives to work with lower wages, continuing land alienation for white settlement, in addition to heavy taxation. These policies were meant to make troubles amongst the indigenous people just to maintain its power. But the most deucedly among these policies was racial discrimination.

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<sup>94</sup> Nassim Nickolas Talib, "Colonialism and Colonial History of Kenya." Soft Kenya, Jan 2018. Online: <https://softkenya.com/kenya/colonial-rule-in-kenya/>

<sup>95</sup> Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1975).

All of these attitudes led to an urgent need to fight for their freedom. For this aim, political associations emerged, from the early 1920<sup>s</sup>, including the Young Kikuyu Association, North Kavirondo Association, East African Association, Taita Central Association, and East African Association.<sup>96</sup> The Mau Mau Movement started as a rebellion against British colonial rule and an oath of National Sovereignty, with its famous leaders, who had a great role in the struggle for independence, Jomo Kenyatta then Dedan Kimathi. As a result of this uprising, Kenya was put under a state of emergency. Also, thousands of Kenyans were confined in detention camps.

Nevertheless, this state of emergency intensified political independence and the Kenyans were allowed to directly elect their representatives in the Legislative Council for the first time in 1957. In December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1963, Kenya gained its independence and in the following year it became a Republic with Jomo Kenyatta as its first president.

The English had been in Kenya and had ruled the land for many years, British rule in Kenya was suppressive and dictatorial at times. The colonialist's belief of being superior to the natives has resulted in the harassment towards them. This fact of imposed superiority that the colonizer exercises on colonial subjects led to the increase of the colonized's sense of inferiority and damages their self-identity. That is what the postcolonial writers try to show and to cover through their works. Ngugi wa Thiong'o effectively relates the nation's history to his novel.

He successfully examines the social and cultural changes that occurred during and after colonialism and which affected the identity of the colonized. Therefore, postcolonialism is not only concerned with the decolonization of nations, but also the decolonization of cultures and how the colonial subjects' identity gets affected and thus changed.

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<sup>96</sup> Nassim Nickolas Talib, "Colonialism and Colonial History of Kenya." Soft Kenya, Jan 2018. <https://softkenya.com/kenya/colonial-rule-in-kenya/>

## CHAPTER II: CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT IN *THE RIVER BETWEEN*

Displacement, or the separation of people from their native culture either through physical, or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture, is one of the most formative experiences of our century.<sup>97</sup> Cultural displacement is among the prominent subjects that postcolonial literature deals with. This process happens by the outsiders who try to change and disestablish the traditional cultural life of the Africans. As Fanon emphasizes:

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to oversimplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women.<sup>98</sup>

The narrative of Ngugi is mainly concerned with the issues of occupation of Gikuyu lands and the displacement of their culture with the British culture. Such issues have dominated the African novels. Ngugi, as beginning African writer, attempts to show the political and social issues through his novel as this work reflects what the writer witnessed in his childhood. He uses his novel to represent and comment on those social and political issues, and he vividly depicts the colonial intervention and disruption of the idyllic Gikuyu life at the hand of the European missionaries.

The focus of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *The River Between* is on the diverse colonial impact on Kenyans. He reveals what has been lost to Africa through the European settlement, their rule, and experience. Thus, he wants to show how the traditional African society is disrupted in many ways. Colonialism has loosened traditional ties and people are alienated from their traditional communities.

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<sup>97</sup>Angelika Bammer, *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. Xi.

<sup>98</sup>Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture", in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p.190.

So, this chapter will deal with some elements that forge cultural displacement and how it is pictured in Ngugi's novel *The River Between*. How this process happened, and how people internalize this, also how they are displaced from their culture, lands, families, communities, identities, and their minds. Then, there will be a discussion about the sense of displacement in the characters' lives and, especially its protagonist, Waiyaki, as well as the representation of the cultural and social conflict. The chapter also aims to discover the dilemma of identity in postcolonial society and how Ngugi portrays Gikuyus as living in-between two worlds. And how they are struggling hard to stick to their cultures and traditions, but at the same time they cannot escape the new elements that the modern world imposes on them. Moreover, the chapter will explore alienation in *The River Between*. Besides, the light will be shed on the exploration of Gikuyu Myth and the decline of Gikuyu culture.

Last but not least, the chapter extensively deals with aspects that forge identity such as language, hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, and otherness in Gikuyu society. These aspects have been targeted by the colonizing forces to erase the native identity and replace it by a new one to facilitate their control over those people.

## **1. Representation of Cultural and Social Conflict**

African fiction during the colonial period reflects the cultural upheavals that African societies have to undergo and the ongoing reality in fictional terms also to enlighten the readers outside Africa. Charles Larson identifies five categories of novels:

The novels portraying the initial exposure to the west, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or James Ngugi's *The River Between*, commonly concerned with the African confrontation with western religion and for the initial stages of colonial government; novels concerned with the problems of adaptation to Western education [...] novels of urbanisation [...]

concerned with the problems of politics or nation-building [...] novels concerned with a more individualised life style.<sup>99</sup>

The first category of novels is concerned with the clash of cultures and faiths; the second category deals with promoting new values of life. While the third category talks about the urbanization and loss of ethos. In the fourth category, the novel speaks of the political struggle for freedom and social justice in the pre-independent and post-independent situations. The last category deals with the problems of the individuals in modern society.

One of the main concerns in Ngugi's novel *The River Between* is the cultural and social struggle and the clash between African and English cultures in the African society during colonization. This conflict is presented in their ways of living, educational system, and their belief system too.

The novelist attempts to show the 'great historic divide' that had begun before he was born and that shaped his childhood and youth experiences, and his own identity. He aims at presenting the state of his country during that serious period by capturing the cultural and social conflicts between the Christians and traditionalists namely Gikuyu culture, one of the Kenyan ethnic groups, and amid the natives. The novel portrays the disintegration of an African culture as a result of European intervention.

The Christians have introduced their values through the missionaries as a way to eradicate the traditions of the natives. They also desire to uproot their culture and begin condemning aspects of Kenyan culture by instilling in their minds that they are inferior and their tradition, heritage, and rituals are also primitive. For instance, Livingstone stands against the ridges' rituals such as circumcision which is an important rite for them. This tradition is practiced by Kameno people to educate the young people about the tribe's ways to be initiated into

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<sup>99</sup> Charles R. Larson, *The Situational Novel: The Novels of James Ngugi to the Emergence of African Fiction* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1978), p. 114.

manhood or womanhood and, hencefore become marriageable. This ritual is commonly accepted by all as it proves woman's purity and improves strength.

*The River Between* is a story of conflicts as reflected in the simple description of the antagonism that existed not only between the Christians and Africans, but also in the ridges of Gikuyu clan, namely Makuyu and Kamenno, who become divided. It is not, however, about "conflict based on difference, but on a variation from a common background."<sup>100</sup> This division further leads to the loss of their union, freedom, land, and even have taxes imposed on them and, therefore, cannot fight against the injustices.

The novel shows that the inhabitants of Makuyu have converted to the new faith and a church has been built alongside with the spread of their education led by Joshua, the newly Christian convert. The village has been established as a center of their different activities. On the other hand, Kamenno, led by Chege, who belongs to a long line of seers, remains true and faithful to their traditional religion. Their residents establish themselves as the defenders and the depository of the tradition of their ancestors in the face of the missionaries despite their prohibitions. "Makuyu was now home of the Christians while Kamenno remained the home of all that was beautiful in the trible. Who would ever bring it together?"<sup>101</sup>

The opening of Ngugi's novel shows the conflict and the effects of the white invaders:

The tow ridges lay side by side. One was Kamenno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kamenno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. [...] A river flowed through the valley of life. The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-life. [...] They became

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<sup>100</sup> W.J. Howard, "Themes and Development in the Novels of Ngugi." *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*. Ed. Edgar Wright (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 97.

<sup>101</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p. 54.

antagonists [...] like two rivals ready to come blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region.<sup>102</sup>

The utter confusion between the two villages is so big that even the river Honia which once was the valley of life turns to be a spiritual and physical sign of ideological separation. In the middle of this disintegration stands a very young missionary, educated, local leader, Waiyaki who is trying to reconcile the opposing faction through cohabitation of their tradition and western education which he believes to be the only solution for ending this fight, and will later benefit them in their struggle against the white man's encroachment and hegemony. The same thing for his father, Chege, who feels that the British are not going away, "*when the white man came and fixed in Siriana, I warned all people. But they laughed at me. May be I was hasty.*"<sup>103</sup> Hence, he sends his son Waiyaki to the Missionary School and orders him to learn their ways, their magic, to know their weaknesses and strengths at the same time remains truthful to his Gikuyu tradition. Chege recognizes that in order to combat an enemy effectively, they must know their tactics and secrets. At this point the missionaries deny access to the circumcised boys and girls to school, but for the Gikuyu people, "*circumcision was an important ritual in the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more.*"<sup>104</sup>

This ritual is the creation of culture; thus, their bodies get marked by cultural identity and this is how culture is related to nature and how human history gets naturalized by cultural artifacts. This is further demonstrated during Waiyaki's own circumcision, "*Blood trickled freely to the ground, sinking into the soil. Henceforth a religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth [...] The son of Chege had proved himself.*"<sup>105</sup> As Waiyaki goes through the motions of

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<sup>102</sup> *The River Between*, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

his own circumcision, a sense of victory overcomes Waiyaki as his initiation into manhood is complete.

Chege's decision to send his son to the missionaries is similar to that of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, who sends his son Oduche to the church and tells him,

The world is changing. [...] I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying 'had we known' tomorrow.<sup>106</sup>

Following Chege's words, Waiyaki acquires the western education and soon finds some positive values in the British culture,

For Waiyaki knew that not all the ways of the white man were bad. Even his religion was not essentially bad. Some good, some truth shone through it. But the religion, the faith, needed washing, cleaning away all the dirt, leaving only the eternal. And that eternal that was the truth had to be reconciled to the traditions of people.<sup>107</sup>

Eventhough, he still convinced that "*a religion that took no count of a people's way of life, a religion that did not recognize the spots of beauty and truths in their way of life, was useless.*"<sup>108</sup> He struggles to educate his traditional followers and to acquire the knowledge without repudiating their knowledge so they could resist the power of the British government. Yet, he is unable to make his people recognize the beauty and positive values of the European's religion, and at the same time, he is unable to define his ambivalent attitude towards them; thus, he becomes the hostage of the opposing sides which finally consume him.

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<sup>106</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (London: Hienemann, 1964), pp.45-46.

<sup>107</sup> *The River Between*, p. 141.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

Waiyaki believes fervently that formal education is the key to the salvation of his people, but others fear that education will rather corrupt the youth. He becomes obsessed with the idea of education as it is the panacea and the cure for all the tribe's rifts, but he does not realize how can this help. Moreover, this process takes him away from his rituals and customs. Ngugi himself remarks that,

Education was not an adequate answer to the hungry soul of African masses because it emphasized the same Christian values that had refused to condemn the exploitation of the African body and mind by the European colonizer.<sup>109</sup>

He further believes that western education has done worse than good as it works to weaken their culture. He further comments on the Christians influence on the African life,

Christianity as an organized religion is corrupt and hypocritical: besides acting as an agent of imperialism. It exercised a highly disruptive influence on African life and was the chief villain in alienating the African from his culture.<sup>110</sup>

In fact, Waiyaki misunderstands his community's desire that all they want and need is their land which is their source of livelihood. For them, acceptance of Western education inevitably entailed a conscious or unconscious acceptance of Western values which then make resistance to the imported culture difficult to sustain.

In *The River Between*, Ngugi gives importance to the land, his description of the river, the river-bank, the ridges, the sacred tree, and the sacred grove all of which serves to remind the readers that their Gikuyu identity is closely linked to landscape. According to James Ogude, it is a metaphor for native identity,

Ngugi's earlier texts bear that powerful evocation of land, both as a signifier of a glorious past in which man and woman were in harmony with nature and thereby presupposing a stable

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<sup>109</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1972), p. 32.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

identity associated with landownership, and land as a signifier of loss whose recovery would imply the recovery of identity.<sup>111</sup>

This fertile land basically belongs to the Kenyans who believe it to be their God's gift. Ngugi raises the issue of the land because he understands what land means to all the Africans as this importance is further underscored by Kenyatta:

Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried, the Gikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine months while the child is in her womb. [...] But it is the soil that feeds the child through a lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirit of the dead.<sup>112</sup>

This emphasis is further strengthened when Ngugi uses a myth in which the creator "Murungu" gave the land to the Gikuyu, this highlights that there is a religious relationship between the Africans and their lands, and the dispossession from their lands is by no means taking away their lives from them. As they mean that the introduction of the white man's culture will pave the way for confiscating their land. The missionaries try to project new culture, to suppress the native one, as Chinua Achebe notes,

How can he [the white man] when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers. He [the white man] came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer be like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.<sup>113</sup>

Both Livingstone and Joshua, the first convert to Christianity, try to Europeanize the native culture. Joshua has been also assigned a duty to quieten the native and to introduce missionary ideas in society. Livingstone considers traditional customs as "satanic" works and further calls the Gikuyu God "the prince of darkness" and the Africans as "the children of

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<sup>111</sup> James Ogude, *Ngugi's Novel and African history: Narrating the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1999, web), p. 46.

<sup>112</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Heinmann Educational Books, 1979), p. 21.

<sup>113</sup> Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart* (William Heinmann: Nigeria, 1958), p. 162.

darkness.” At Siriana it was taught “*those who refuse him are the children of darkness, these sons and daughters of evil one, will go to Hell; they will burn and burn forever more, world unending,*”<sup>114</sup> while the defenders of the purity of the Gikuyu cultural heritage consider their culture as “good and beautiful.” For them maintaining these traditions mean more than just following their ancestors’ path, but also maintaining their identity.

Ngugi clearly shows how his community is torn between two different worlds. On one hand, the missionaries have imposed a new way of thinking, education, and belief that totally contradicts with their own belief. On the other hand, they cannot forget about their belief as if they are obliged to hold faithful and true to their customs and traditions – the Gikuyu loyalist versus the Gikuyu tribalist.

This contradiction is clearly manifested in the novel and shows the everlasting disunity between the ridges, “*when you stood in the valley, the two ceased to be sleeping lions [...] they became antagonists [...], like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for leadership of this isolated region.*”<sup>115</sup> This quotation indicates the starting and the continuation of conflict and antagonism between Makuyu and Kameno as will be seen in the course of the narrative.

Ngugi’s narrative of this rivalry is framed in a much older ancient Gikuyu myth and prophecy, this age-old conflict lies in what side of the river is for them as Murungu told them, and accordingly the two tribes can claim spiritual superiority and leadership. Chege, the last in the line of Gikuyu seers, takes his son to the top of the hill and stand under the tree of Murungu, and see the ridges living in peace. Chege tells Waiyaki that he is the last line of Mugu’s posterity:

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<sup>114</sup> *The River Between*, p. 29.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

I am old, my time is gone. Remember that you are the last in this line. Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites... And keep on remembering, salvation shall come from the hills. A man must rise and save the people in their hour of need.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, he reveals the prophecy to his son. He wants him to learn the secret messianic prophecy of a savior that it comes from the hills, especially, after he finishes his initiation into manhood which is considered as his second birth, as women of the tribe shout, "*old Waiyaki is born. Born again to carry the ancient fire.*"<sup>117</sup>

Waiyaki struggles to reunite and rebuild the divided tribe, but he finds it difficult in which the ideological and social differences make it impossible for resolution. On the one hand, he is sent by his father to Siriana to learn the white man's wisdom in order to save his people. On the other hand, he does not want to forget his own cultural values. His encouragement to his followers to take western education further worsen the situation and prevents him from giving himself "*to the dream in the rhythm*"<sup>118</sup> of the tribe's ways. Therefore, he becomes unable to join the rivals since he has something inside him that keeps him aloof, and prevents him from fully joining the stream.<sup>119</sup> In a way, he starts to lose his hegemonic control that he has inherited from his ancestors, as stated by Ngugi, his absence from the hills has kept him out of touch with the tribes matters.<sup>120</sup> This contradiction and the losing of touch with the people have led Waiyaki to his own failure as a leader and the defender of the community's cultural heritage.

Just like Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura, daughters of Joshua, want to reconcile the two factions, where each of them faces difficulty of choice. Jennifer Evans states that in Ngugi's novels, women become the "*strongest symbols of cultural identity, community,*

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<sup>116</sup> *The River Between*, pp. 20-21

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

*and continuity.*"<sup>121</sup> Muthoni craves for the beauty and womanhood's preservation as contemplated by the Gikuyu tradition. Her craving for cultural preservation is shown by her self-exile from her tribe, Makuyu, to Kameno. She wants to mediate between the new faith and the preservation of the Gikuyu cultural tradition. Besides, she wants to be circumcised to be a woman, because she believes she can participate in rituals and still be a Christian, as she confesses to Wiayaki, "*I say I am a Christian [...] I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe.*"<sup>122</sup> This acknowledgment shows the inner conflicts and contradictions on the individual and the entire community as well. Muthoni believes that to be a woman, she must be fully initiated into the ways of the tribe. She does not see why circumcision can prevent her from being a Christian once her parents have done it, and they are still Christians. That is why she asks her sisters:

Why! Are we fools? She shook Nyambura. Father and Mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful, to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes the Whiteman's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills that you and I know.<sup>123</sup>

Muthoni's decision to indulge herself in the ceremony of circumcision demonstrates a desire to retain tribal identity and unity, but unfortunately this desire costs her own life. She dies achieving her quest for reconciliation, and to tell Nyambura that she sees Jesus, that she is a beautiful woman in the tribe. This act is considered sinful by the Christians, both Joshua and Livingstone see the ceremony as evil and fight against Gikuyu customs and rituals. For Livingstone, her death simply confirms the barbarity of the tribal Gikuyu. But for the tribe it is "*a warning to all to stick to the ways of the land to its rituals and songs.*"<sup>124</sup> While for

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<sup>121</sup> Charles Cantalupo, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Texts and Contexts* (New Jersey: AfricaWorld Press, 1995), p. 310.

<sup>122</sup> *The River Between*, p. 43.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Chege, circumcision is the tribe's moral practice and the symbol for unification. Chege felt that it is a punishment to Joshua and the people of Makuyu and a warning to the people who follow the new faith to stick on to the ways of the tribes. Her father, Joshua, does not show any reaction, as she rebels against him and against their belief. For him Muthoni's death is God's wrath and God punishes the rebel who goes against parents and the law of God. To Waiyaki, Muthoni's death brought serious thoughts about the split between the two tribes. He knew that it would be a difficult task to bring about reconciliation.

Muthoni is compelled to the idea of becoming "a real girl" of circumcision; she really wants to be a beautiful woman in the tribe. Her quest has lost the purpose. Instead of deriving the two ridges together, it becomes another problem as it further arises antagonism between them and further reinforces the difficulty of cultural reconciliation, "*each of them seems more arrogant, insolent, and more vigorous and each is confident in itself than ever.*"<sup>125</sup>

Joshua's obduracy and inflexibility further leads to the loss of his other daughter Nyambura whose viewpoint gets altered as she aspires for a substitutive religion, religion of love, peace and forgiveness. Since her thinking on Christianity, as shown in the novel, "*came to stand between a father and his daughter,*"<sup>126</sup> Nyambura is a Christian and uncircumcised; therefore, unclean according to the Kiama, the legislative and cultural arm of the tribe. Suddenly she falls in love with Waiyaki as described in the novel "*her black Messiah sent from heaven after Muthoni's death to come and rescue her from disintegration.*"<sup>127</sup>

However, throughout the novel's narrative, the opposing forces' conflict becomes greater as Waiyaki cannot deny his love to the uncircumcised daughter of his enemy, Joshua, which leads to his failure. Although Waiyaki himself considers his affair as "*integral part of his*

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<sup>125</sup> *The River Between*, p. 114.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*,

*battle*”<sup>128</sup> and would bridge the gap between the two communities. He also wants to demonstrate that their mutual relationship transcends the hostilities and the division between the opposing cultures. But female circumcision is an integral part of Gikuyu tribal organization, Kenyatta forcefully argues:

No proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa.[...] The initiation of both sexes is the most important custom amongst the Gikuyu. It is looked upon as a deciding factor in giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Gikuyu community.<sup>129</sup>

Ngugi tries to warn against what he refers to as the “*maim of a man’s soul*”<sup>130</sup> as can be noticed in Joshua’s reaction to his rebellious daughters. He is portrayed as crude and soulless. He is unable to understand what his daughters are doing and why they are doing so. Miriamu, Joshua’s wife, even decides to hide her true feeling and shows a superficial or outward conformity.

Despite Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni’s desires and efforts, they failed to reconcile the polarization and are consumed by their efforts to mediate between Gikuyu conservatives and Christian converts. Moreover, the three characters represent the same genesis of hybrid and ambivalent attitudes, and both Christianity and traditional cultural Gikuyu values are presented as contrasted to each other and the characters have to choose between the two. Thus, the invasion of the white man spreads rifts and violation in the Gikuyu society, “*in the past years, things were changing; the pattern of reasons was broken. It no longer rained [...] the sun seems to shine for months and the grass dried [...] the soil no longer answered the call and the prayers of the peoples. Perhaps, it had to do with the white man.*”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *The River Between*, p. 143.

<sup>129</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), pp. 132-133.

<sup>130</sup> *The River Between*, p. 141.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Indeed, *The River Between* clearly shows and evaluates the contradictions and antagonisms of cultural and social change that are presupposed by the introduction of Western religion, culture, values, and education. The narrative about the social and cultural conflict is what makes the novel worthwhile. Ngugi emphasizes that colonialism destroys the entire social and cultural peace. *The River Between* is Ngugi's cry for the cultural, glory and heritage loss.

## 2. The Dilemma of Identity in Postcolonial Society

The process of colonization results in one of the most controversial themes in postcolonial literature which is identity. Identity is very significant to any nation as it plays a crucial role in indicating its people's behavior and shaping its international relations. It is affected by colonial history which leads to the emergence of spatial and cultural elements which really affects the postcolonial identity. This fact is what push the colonized to rebel against European power, especially, after feeling of an important part of their cultural and social being— their identity. Stephen Slemon asserts that “*to continue the resistance to neo-colonialism through a deconstructive reading of its rhetoric to achieve traditions [...] as principal as of cultural identity and survival.*”<sup>132</sup> Thus, it becomes clear that postcolonialism comes to highlight that postcolonial identity is different from that of colonialism.

In fact, the question of identity causes a crisis in all postcolonial communities. The reminiscence of colonialism, the diasporic culture, multiculturalism, hybridity and Othering often result in the colonized's search for their cultural identity. This forms one of the central concerns in postcolonial literatures, as Sheoran states, “*the major themes in the works written in postcolonial period have been the fragmentation and identity crisis experienced by the once*

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<sup>132</sup> Stephen Slemon, “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for Second World.” *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Ashcroft Bill. Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 64.

*colonized peoples and the important impacts of colonialism on the indigenous.*"<sup>133</sup> Besides, identity is divided into two main types that of which, according to Hawley, viewed by constructionists who think that identity is shaped by external factors including society which in itself causes split in the identity; and that which is viewed by essentialists who considered that the nationalists who go for the establishment of a pre-colonial identity on a specific racial basis that is harmful to individual differences.<sup>134</sup>

One of the most crucial subjects that postcolonial literature deals with is identity, which is changed and altered by the colonial presence together with the individual's traditional experience. Traditional life and modern are mixed together making the current identity of postcolonial society. The colonizer tried in many ways to reconstruct a new identity to the colonial subject so that they can be easily controlled. For instance, through making them feel a sense of inferiority, or educating them to ensure maintenance of their control over them even after independence, also through displacing them from their lands, families, and culture.

Couze Venn states that, identity is an entity that emerges in relation to another or others; that is to say, otherness is a key element in defining the postcolonial identity, as has been discussed in the first chapter, how the colonizer and the colonized see each other, how the west perceives the rest and even how the colonized subjects see themselves within their community.<sup>135</sup>

Identity in postcolonialism makes a large disagreement among the theorists, as Van Starlen argues, for most of them postcolonial identity is the product of imperialism and the

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<sup>133</sup> Found in Saman Abdulqadir Hussein Dizayi, "The Crisis of Identity in Postcolonial Novel." *Proceedings of INTCESS15- 2nd International Conference on Education and Social Sciences* (PhD. Student at Istanbul Aydin University, Turkey, 2-4 Feb 2015), p 1003.

<sup>134</sup> Hawely, Jhon Charles, ed. *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 240.

<sup>135</sup> Couze Venn. *The Postcolonial Challenge Towards Alternative Words* (London: Sage Publication Ltd, 2006), p. 2.

strategy of subjugating the culture and identity of the natives.<sup>136</sup> They further assume that identity becomes “false” when it is created and shaped by the colonizer. Chew and Richard argue that the colonialists caused distortions in many aspects of the colonized’s lives. Colonization took the freedom and the liberty of the natives and even destroyed their “*essence of identity*” through the generation of a “*form of mental illness.*”<sup>137</sup>

According to Ninkovich “*an identity crisis is a period of disorientation in which values and relationships once taken for granted are thrown into question. Questions of self-adjustment that bedevil individuals caught up in an identity crisis like “who am I?” and “where do I belong?”*”<sup>138</sup> Ngugi tries to explore how his characters lost their identities in the midst of this process.

Most of the characters in *The River Between* suffer an identity crisis. This novel portrays the dilemmas of the Gikuyu community caught between two worlds: the traditional one, this community used to live in, under its own rules and mindset, and a new world, shaped by new sciences and new power relations, whereby the land was expropriated and a monetary tribute was levied. The ancient Gikuyu prophecy that identifies Waiyaki as the one who will save his people and the one to lead them to restore the tribe’s lost land and cultural purity and this is what leads him to live in a dilemma. His internal and external conflicts are best and successfully brought home by Ngugi as a “crisis of identity” suffered by the person in any colonial process. Even for the very fustiest for the tribe’s customs, religion and values, Chege unconsciously converts to the new faith when he sends his son, Waiyaki, to the mission school to learn their wisdom. Following his father’s orders, Waiyaki is no longer the same, as the western education plays a great role in changing his attitudes towards the colonizer. The

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<sup>136</sup> Van Starlen Hans, *Choices and Conflicts: Essays on Literature and Existentialism* (Brussels: PIE-Peterlang, 2005).

<sup>137</sup> Shirly Chew, & Richard David, *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature* (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 10-11.

<sup>138</sup> Frank A. Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), p. 16.

values of the British culture lead him to import such values to his people's lives. As the narrative describes Waiyaki's absence from the land, while he is learning in the white school forbids him from the real understanding of what it means to be a Gikuyu individual and the traditional use of their knowledge. His absence from the hills has kept him out of touch with the things that matter to the tribe.<sup>139</sup> In other words, waiyaki feels embarrassed about the tribe's ritual, "*something inside him prevented him from losing himself in this frenzy.*"<sup>140</sup> Waiyaki even wonders about Livingstone reaction if he sees him at the venue of the dances.

It is not until his circumcision that he experiences a tribal identity, where he becomes very happy of the tribe's rite and he goes through this rite of circumcision without flinching. Waiyaki is the novel's hero and the symbol of the continuation of the indigenous cultural traditions. As the narrative shows, Waiyaki mediates between the two ridges and is committed to unity, reconciliation, and tolerance, but he is caught up in the middle course. On the one hand, his responsibility to protect and preserve Kameno's tradition as a savior; and on the other hand, his assertion of the positive values of the white man's education and his secret relationship with Joshua's daughter, Nyambura. This leads Waiyaki to live in a struggle between his personal convictions and his national duty.

Waiyaki is influenced by the British education. He sees the white man's education as an instrument of enlightenment and advance, if it is used well. Hence, he tries to educate his people and at the same time preserve their identity, but unfortunately his dream dies and he further fails to preserve the community's tribe. Yet, he is in a dilemma as he acquires their education and learns the positive values of the white man, but he remains convinced as "*a religion that took no count of a people's way of life, a religion that did not recognize spots of*

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<sup>139</sup> *The River Between*, p.39.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

*beauty and truths in their way of life, was useless.*"<sup>141</sup> Waiyaki is neither able to convince his Gikuyu people to see the spots of beauty and truths of the white man's religion, education and culture, nor he is able to show his position or clearly define his ambivalent attitude towards them. Thus, he becomes a hostage between his loyalties.

This contradiction of Waiyaki's saving mission, his learning and his apparent ambivalence towards the British culture cause him to face a dilemma of identity and further lives in isolation as Gikandi notes, *"he is torn between his wish to become a full-edged member of Gikuyu culture and demand placed on him by the colonial rule."*<sup>142</sup> Waiyaki cannot make a choice; therefore, he experiences *"a half-willed, stumbling exile"*<sup>143</sup> as Andrew Gurr puts it.

In fact, Chege's advice to his son, Waiyaki, to learn the white man's wisdom is a sign that the British education by itself can change the identity of a person, but instead Gikuyu people want just to learn the enemy's values, without losing their culture.

Waiyaki realizes that *"if the white man's religion made you abandon a custom and then did not give you something else of equal value, you become lost."*<sup>144</sup> This indicates that he does not object to stop the practice, but his obsession with education has caused more harm than good. Gikuyu people do not need only the western education, but also they need their land which is their source of livelihood. In a moment of self-criticism Waiyaki realizes: *"oh, there are so many things I did not know. I had not seen that the new awareness wanted expression at a political level. Education for an oppressed people is not all."*<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *The River Between*, p. 141.

<sup>142</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 60.

<sup>143</sup> Andrew Gurr, "The Forth Novel: Ngugi's *Peatls of Blood*", *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arlond Kettle*. Eds, Douglass Jefferson & Graham Martin (Milton Keneys: Open Up, 1982), p. 97.

<sup>144</sup> *The River Between*, p. 142.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Muthoni is another victim of identity crisis; she is among the characters who are not sure where they really belong. She is raised as a Christian and lives under her father's strict rules and orders. Muthoni is unsatisfied with that life and not satisfied with their God, she wants to be a real, true, and beautiful woman. Despite being Christian, she partipates in Gikuyu rites and lost her life, "*I want to be a real woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges [...] the white man's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more.*" She runs to Kameno in order to be circumcised and to learn all the "*ways of the hills and the ridges.*"<sup>146</sup>

Thus, following her desire of seeking self-salvation, she runs to the hills in order to be circumcised. Before Muthoni's death, she justifies her action:

No one will understand. I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe. How can I possibly remain as I am now?<sup>147</sup>

Therefore, she fails to cause change in either communities. On the contrary, her death further accelerates the conflict and things have gone from bad to worse. In the novel, Ngugi uses Muthoni's death to prophesy the inevitable failure of Waiyaki's dream of reconciliation between the two opposing tribes. Hence, Ngugi indicates the perils of biculturalism.

Muthoni's actions are her personal conviction; unlike Waiyaki who has a wider social significance as he sees himself as an instrument of unification between the warring ridges. Muthoni's story really affects Wiayaki in which he contemplates that: "*Muthoni had tried. Hers was a search for salvation for herself. She had the courage to attempt a reconciliation of the many forces that wanted to control her. She had realized her need, the need to have a*

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<sup>146</sup> *The River Between*, p. 26.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

*wholesome and beautiful life that enriched you and made you grow.*”<sup>148</sup> His father Chege, too, has tried to reconcile the two ways, not in himself, but through his son. Waiyaki is the product of that attempt. Waiyaki’s sentiments and emotions further clash when he sees Muthoni’s bravery and how she stands against her father’s instructions, *“he thought that if he had been in her position he would never have brought himself into such pain. Immediately he hated himself for holding such sentiments. He was of the tribe. He had to endure its ways and be inside the secrets to the hills.”*<sup>149</sup> This feeling of being alone and isolated causes him to live in confusion about his place in the society, at times *“he felt stranger, a stranger to his land,”*<sup>150</sup> his Siriana background makes him develop an isolated mindset on both ridges. This confusion is maybe due to Ngugi’s own lack of social vision of the future.

Waiyaki’s opinion about circumcision changes, which causes him to live in isolation and to feel weird and aloof during the rituals, *“Waiyaki still felt uneasy. Something inside him prevented him from losing himself in this frenzy.”*<sup>151</sup> Moreover, this is due to his thinking of Livingstone and takes his opinion into account as he wonders what Livingstone will say if he finds him *“or if he saw the chaos created by locked emotions let loose.”*<sup>152</sup>

Ngugi tries to draw the story of Muthoni for Waiyaki to learn from; in a way, her fate foreshadows that of Waiyaki and the fact that it’s very difficult to achieve reconciliation as Gikandi argues *“Muthoni is more aware of the personal risks involved in cultural syncretism and is therefore able to prefigure Waiyaki’s dilemma.”*<sup>153</sup> Gikandi further describes the difficult position that Waiyaki inhabits within the community when he says:

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<sup>148</sup> *The River Between*, p. 142.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong’o* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 62.

Ngugi's narrative language in the early stories is structured by a simple trajectory: rejected by their families and communities because they cannot – or are unable – to fulfill their assigned cultural functions, the main characters decide to embrace their loss and displacement as the enabling conditions for a new identity; but at the end of the story these subjects come to realize that there is no identity outside the locus of community.<sup>154</sup>

Similar to the above characters, Joshua's wife Miriamu continues her life to have double identity as she is Christian in response to her patriarchal society led by her husband, but spiritually, remains true traditional Gikuyu woman. The same goes for her daughter Nyambura who can no longer remain a Christian even though she is realizing that she will not be accepted by Kameno's people. The disruption of the missionaries of the peaceful life of the natives makes them confused about their cultural practices. They cannot connect themselves to Christianity and cannot cut themselves off their tribal folklores. Hence, it leads to chaos and confusion. They are caught in a dilemma of whether to go with the missionary preaching or to obey their tribal Gods.

The narrative shows and represents Ngugi's inner struggles. By doing so, Ngugi popularizes his ideas and justifies their validity. Waiyaki's ambivalent attitude towards Christianity represents Ngugi's response to Christianity during his youth. Therefore, his novel holds a mirror to his personal and social vision.

### **3. Alienation in *The River Between***

Ngugi believes that colonialism is responsible for the mental indoctrination and personality displacement in the colonized's mind; "*The worst colonialism was a colonialis of*

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<sup>154</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, p. 45.

*the mind, a colonialism that undermined one's dignity and confidence [...] for anyone of whatever country to be content with alien rule, however sweet, is to be less than human.*"<sup>155</sup>

Closely linked to the dilemma of identity is the one of alienation. The most important thing for the colonizer's domination is the mental domination of the colonial subject for which Ngugi argues two things; destruction or undere valuation of people's art and culture, or the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer.<sup>156</sup> This results in the dissociation of the sensibility of the native from his cultural, social and political milieu as what Ngugi terms "colonial alienation."

*The River Between* can be said to be a fictional examination of consequences of the individuals' alienation from their lands as well as from their spiritual lives. Colonialism has degenerated traditional ties; the characters tend to be alienated from the traditional community, and seek either re-entry into the traditional milieu or integration with the intruder community. Ngugi, in *The River Between*, shows that the contact of the Gikuyu individuals with western education and Christianity led to their alienation from their traditional community. The cultural differences between the Christians and the Gikuyu community which resulted in social timorous and estrangement among individuals, most of the characters become alienated from the community or end up losing their lives.

Alienation in *The River Between* takes two main dimensions; material and social. Material alienation is seen through the loss of their ancestral lands. This property is lost to the Siriana mission and the Government Post: "*there was indeed a growing need to do something. This feeling had been strengthened by this most recent alienation of land near Siriana forcing*

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<sup>155</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "As I See It: Respect Will Come When We Are Self sufficient." (*Daily Nation*: Nairobi, 17 Mar, 1963), p. 29.

<sup>156</sup> Anoj Kumar, "Displacement and Alienation in *Things Fall Apart*." (*International Journal of Research (IJR)* V. 2, Issue.2, (University of Jammu, India, Feb, 2015), p. 3.

*many people to move from places they had lived in for ages, while others had to live on the same land working for their masters.*”<sup>157</sup>

Colonial usurpation of ancestral Gikuyu lands and the impoverishment of indigenous farmers by the white settlers are at the heart of conflict in *The River Between*. This massive seizure seems to be the first impulse of colonization, as it is identical to disruption of the colonized subject’s identity because land is transformed into a chronotope, a “*space for cultural and political contestation.*”<sup>158</sup> People are now landless and aliens after losing their own farms, more than that, they become helpless and unable to defend or even preserve themselves against this alienation since they are culturally different:

More so, deep disaffection was created in them because it [...] was on the land that their ancestors lay. The alienation of land meant that the Agikūyū had been deprived of their right to practice their traditional religion.”<sup>159</sup>

Jomo Kenyatta further emphasizes the importance of land in Gikuyu culture. He argues that land is inextricably linked to Gikuyu identity and:

When the European comes to the Gikuyu country and robs the people of their lands, he is taking away not only their livelihood, but the material symbol that holds family and tribe together. In doing this he gives one blow which cuts away the foundation from the whole of Gikuyu life, social, moral, and economic.<sup>160</sup>

The alienation of their land is, henceforth, bound to cause riot among the Gikuyu people:

Take the Siriana Mission for example; the men of God came peacefully. They were given a place. Now see what has happened. They have invited their brother to come and take all

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<sup>157</sup> Wa Thiong’o, *The River Between*, p. 73.

<sup>158</sup> James Ogude, *Ngugi’s Novel and African the history: Narrating the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1999. Web), p. 47.

<sup>159</sup> Njenga Kariuki, “Inculturation of the Gospel among the the Agikūyū of Kenya.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 2 No. 17, (September 2012), p. 55.

<sup>160</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Heinman Educational Books, 1979), p. 22.

the land. Our country is invaded. This Government Post behind Makuyu is a plague in our midst. And this hut tax.<sup>161</sup>

This quotation clearly explains what was happening over the ridges and how the settlers prepared the ground for occupation. Siriana Mission School is a perfect tool of the colonial administration alienating people's minds from their Gikuyu culture with an exhortative aim of skepticism towards their belief systems. As Gikandi notes: "*this loss of land was proportionate to the loss of cultural identity and authority and was foundational for Ngugi's sense of cultural separation in his novel.*"<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, people are obliged to pay taxes which is an additional burden on Africans already lost their ancestral land to the British. This phenomenon of paying taxes breaks families ties, causing deep disaffection, suffering, and misery for them; therefore, they become separate from each other and from the environment in which he/she was born.

Individuals of the same tribe, in both Kameno and Makuyu, have been torn apart as rift exists between them. Waiyaki's attempt to bridge the gap, for instance, leads to his alienation from the ways of the people due to his contact with the white man's education, "*Waiyaki felt himself standing outside all this. And at times he felt isolated.*"<sup>163</sup>

Similar to this, Muthoni and Nyambura are also alienated from both factions. Joshua excludes both Nyambura and Waiyaki from his gatherings and are additionally rejected by the Kiama-led community and ritually executed because their relationship is considered as a forbidden relationship. This is because both of them have a different religion. On the other hand, Muthoni dies in a personal attempt to unite Christian and traditional beliefs. Moreover, the "*destructive views*"<sup>164</sup> of Joshua alienates him from his family and society. Though it is

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<sup>161</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p. 64.

<sup>162</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, p. 18.

<sup>163</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p. 69.

<sup>164</sup> Jamie S. Scott, & Paul Simpson-Housley. *Mapping the sacred: religion, geography and postcolonial literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 233.

true that his wife remains obedient to him, still her relationship with him is characterized by fear and submissiveness. Besides, his only two daughters rebel against him, each in her own way. Muthoni runs to go through circumcision against her father's strict orders and the obedient Nyambura escapes with Waiyaki in a moment of bravery. Joshua is also isolated from most of the people of the ridges and his neighbors. His new religion leads him to cut off all his previous relationships with those who do not follow the new faith. Later, his new faith becomes his only guide and source of consolation to the lack of friends; he does mind losing lose all of his people if that means satisfying his God.

Sometimes the individuals have no clear idea about their alienation, about what has been lost but feel the loss nonetheless. These "parasites" as Ngugi calls the settlers, prevent the African from realizing the full potential of his mental and spiritual growth, by the imposition of an alien culture and language upon them. Ngugi himself have been uprooted and alienated from his Gikuyu roots by his encountering to colonial forces. He is forced to search frantically for his past, his history. Simon Gikandi finds in Ngugi's works,

A struggle to account for his own emplacement in the colonial tradition and his displacement from his ancestral culture. In reading Ngugi's works, then, we are about to encounter an important confluence of emotion and range in which the novelist, in an attempt to analyze and mediate his imprisonment in colonial culture and the postcolonial dictatorship, falls back on the emotions generated by his experiential situation.<sup>165</sup>

Above all this, the people are helpless; they cannot unite to defend themselves against this alienation because of their cultural differences. Thus, they are outsiders and their ideological and moral perception may be right but out of tune with the wishes of larger society. They are rejected or in the case of Waiyaki destroyed.

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<sup>165</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thing'o*, p. 60.

#### 4. Gikuyu Myth and the Decline of Gikuyu Culture

The opening pages of the novel reveal the Gikuyu myth of origin. It is one of the most recurring themes in Ngugi's novels because of its substantiality in pre-colonial Kenya. The Gikuyu myth is based on the belief that the land is offered as a gift for Kenyans by Murungu, the Gikuyu God, and it is their own and for no one else. As it is clearly identified by Ngugi,

The creator who is also called Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountain. He took them to the country of ridges near Siriana and there stood them on a big ridge before he finally took them to Mukuruwe waGathanga. But he had shown them the land – yes, God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land told them: This land I hand over to you. O man and woman. It's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God under my secret tree.<sup>166</sup>

Gikuyu and Mumbi are mythical founders of Gikuyu tribe. The land has been originally bequeathed to them by God and this even stressed in different Mau Mau songs and Prayers forms:

Gikuyu was told by Murungu  
'Do you see all this land?  
I want you and your children's  
Children to dwell in it for ever.'  
Even if you oppresse us  
This country belongs to us  
We were given it by Murungu  
And we shall never abandon it.  
Mwene Nyaga in the millioins of it  
We will drive the foreigners out of the country  
And we the African people,

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<sup>166</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964), p. 24.

Will remain triumphant

Since this is our country.<sup>167</sup>

The Gikuyu myth of origin is the cornerstone of Ngugi's narrative and it occurs almost in all his novels. For instance, it is first mentioned in *Weep Not Child* (1964) which has more dramatic immediacy and remains more impressive than it does in *The River Between*, it comes in the form of hearthside story told by householders, Ngotho, to all his children. The significance of these myths is assured by their oral transmission through generations. Such oral forms are applied to enhance the protagonist's mission of change and to force the ideology of the text. Ngugi utilizes native myths in his narratives to show his pride in his own culture, the extent of his people's closeness and loyalty to such beliefs and most importantly to send a message that Kenya is their land and no stranger has the right to take it away from them.

The legendary Gikuyu couple has a close association with Mount Kenya, possibly the small hill to which Chege takes his son Waiyaki to reveal to him the secrets of the tribe.<sup>168</sup> The Mount becomes the center of Gikuyu universe and the place of their creator Murungu, also called Ngai or Mwenenyaga.

The novel's beginning presents the happiness, peace, and the unification in Kenyans' life without any crasher from the outside. The people are closely linked together by their traditional and ancient customs and their land. It is not until Murungu's promise of the white man's coming, which has been prophesied by Mugo Wa Kibiro, a great Gikuyu sage: "*there shall come a people with a clothes like betterflies,*"<sup>169</sup> but the peoples' ignorance and their strong belief in the inscrutability of the hills pave the way for the whites to come and settle

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<sup>167</sup> Tabitha Kaongo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-1963* (London: James Curry, 1987), pp. 150-151.

<sup>168</sup> James Ogude, *Ngugi's Novel and African the history: Narrating the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1999. Web), p. 86.

<sup>169</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p. 2.

down with their religious missionary at Siriana, “*who from the outside can make his way to the hills?*”<sup>170</sup> People, then, accept the reality of the prophecy; the myth also produces the messianic prophecy that propels Waiyaki to be the savior of the tribe. Waiyaki learns and understands the ways of the tribe and their religion through his father, Chege, to whom he transfers the tribal religious myth and knowledge of the herbs and their tradition. Chege asks his son to learn the whites’ wisdom and save his people from ignorance.

As mentioned previously, Chege takes his son Waiyaki on a journey to a place where they can see all the lands of the Gikuyu people. He tells Waiyaki that they are descendants of Mugo Wa Kibiro, the seer who had foretold the coming of the white man, and that Waiyaki is the last in the family line. He tells Waiyaki that he has a task, to heed the prophecy and to save his people, and Waiyaki realizes this although he is still a young boy.

In *The River Between*, the myth is found in the form of symbols and metaphors. Waiyaki quickly understands his social duty, and struggles to educate his followers about the new colonial situation of the country.

Waiyaki refers to us as the “Black Messiah” and “the teacher” as he is trying to connect between the old world, the one that produces the prophecy, and the other new world of the white man. That is, between the traditional belief and Christianity. Waiyaki’s relationship with the community is always defined within traditional forms, despite the fact that he derives his power from Western education and advocates education as the tool for Gikuyu renovation. He touches the people because his voice is similar to the great old Gikuyus. The Kiama ultimately rejects Waiyaki because he proves incompatible with their goals of recapturing the tribal “purity” of the old times, utilities by Christianity and colonial behavior.

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<sup>170</sup> Wa Thiong’o, *The River Between*, p. 9.

Waiyaki, filled with the best of intentions, fails because he cannot live up to the community's imposed image of a traditional savior. As Waiyaki realizes, too late, "*the truth had to be reconciled to the traditions of the people. A people's traditions could not be swept away overnight.*"<sup>171</sup> The momentum of tradition drives the people to condemn Waiyaki, even though many are uncomfortable with it: "*They went away quickly, glad that he was hidden by the darkness. For they did not want to look at the Teacher and they did not want to read their guilt in one another's faces.*"<sup>172</sup>

The protagonist's journey for salvation is not accomplished as Kamau intensifies his political activities because Waiyaki loses the love's battle for Nyambura. This is another negative impact that the conflict between tradition and colonialism put on the youth especially. They represent the attempt to compromise between old traditions and Christian integration, but the fact that they all fail when trying to bring unity to the two belief systems.

Religious conflicts often bring calamity and rift among different nations. Similarly, the introduction of Christianity in the Gikuyu region led to the confusion and chaos among their own people and furthers their destruction and division. The novelist even implicates that the introduction of Christianity to the Gikuyu region is just a front to mask the fact that the Europeans meant to take control of their land and life.

The harrowing story of the clash between two villages in the Gikuyu region over the maintenance of the traditional Gikuyu belief system versus the integration of Christianity by colonial white settlers is a main theme of the novel. Both Waiyaki and Chege are correct about the importance of unifying the tribe to defend themselves against colonial hegemony, but the tribes cannot see their own personal conflicts to do so.

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<sup>171</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p. 141.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

However, these distractions and disagreements are ultimately what lead to the civil unrest among the Gikuyu people. The introduction of Christianity and Western education provides a new ground for contestation, which unfortunately disturbs the community's established cultural identity, and questions social and historical structures. Readers are able to fully understand the confusion and disarray that come with the British colonization of Kenya. Ngugi wa Thiong'o paints the ugly side of the conflict through the breaking of family ties and friendship, and disagreements amid them. He uses these tragic events to convey his idea that they might have been more unified and able to defend their land. Mixing myth with reality, he effectively illustrates the division that the introduction of Christianity brought to the people of Gikuyu during the colonial period.

## **5. Postcolonial Clash in a Tribal Community**

*The River Between* is an exemplary text of the ambivalence that characterizes the works of those who have lived under the pressure of colonialism in the 1920<sup>s</sup>. They have lived inside a society that struggles to maintain its own culture and at the same time to take what is best from the colonizer. There can be a way in which the natives can learn from the advancement of other societies while being loyal to the culture to which they belong. Ngugi is one of them; he has grown up with that attitude in his mind. In his illustration of this instance, Gikandi states that: "*the more ambivalent portrait in the early works, especially, The River Between, seems to be closer to the historical records. Both colonizer and colonized were engaged in acts of cultural translation, trying to invent their traditions and selves in relation to the realities of the other.*"<sup>173</sup>

Ngugi's *The River Between* displays some traces of hybridity. The novel features hybrid aspects through names of characters, places, and ideas as well as through inclusion of songs in

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<sup>173</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, p. 17.

vernacular languages. In fact, the style of the novel and the representation of its characters combine elements from both the Gikuyu and the European culture. For instance, the main character is Waiyaki. The author translates the name literally as a figure of salvation for the Gikuyu people and the patriots for their liberation war and freedom. Other characters with native names include Chege, Kinuthia, Muthoni, Wa Kiriro, and Kamau. By including native names in a text that is predominantly in English, the text serves as a means of providing dialogic process between English and Gikuyu languages which in the long run renders the text to the notion of intertextuality. Through intertextuality, the “past-present” becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.<sup>174</sup> By using Gikuyu words in a text that is predominantly in English language, the author shows that he belongs to the past Gikuyu and English cultures. However, the author is not fixed to a remote past, neither is he to the present or future. His cultural identity is in the process of “becoming as well as being.” The insertion of Gikuyu words in English language utterances; therefore, demonstrates Bhabha’s theory of ambivalence that “*disrupts any simple relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.*”<sup>175</sup>

Some of the novel’s characters are presented in an ambivalent attitude towards several elements of the culture of the white man. Ngugi shows that this position is the most dominant form by projecting his main characters under that light. However, he tries, simultaneously, to present the two different extremities; one is the holding rigidly to everything belonging to the tribe and the other is the clinging to whatever brought by the white man. In fact, the original name of *The River Between* was *The Black Messiah*, a name that is enough in itself to indicate the infusion of two cultures in the novel. This title is startling as it combines two contradictory parts. This title is an anecdote to the notion of “in-betweenness” in which the river Honia finds itself in the middle of two conflicting identities. Besides, the book’s language is another

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<sup>174</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 7.

<sup>175</sup> Ashcroft et al, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 13.

method of demonstrating Ngugi's hybridity. The style of the novel in itself is a way of expressing its author's attitudes, reflecting, at the same time, the inner messages and happenings of the text.

Ngugi's portrayal of his characters is significant in its ability to articulate different attitudes toward the tribal customs as well as the modernization brought about by the colonizer. Therefore, the characters can be divided into three categories; the intermediates, represented by Chege, his son Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura; the traditionalists, headed by the Kiama; and the modernists on whose top is Joshua. The fact that the main characters of his novel are projected in ambivalent attitudes highlights Ngugi's attitude. His ideals are characterized by a tolerance towards the elements of modernity as well as maintenance of traditional values. Gikandi eloquently explains: "*indeed, one of the central themes in Ngugi's early work is the tension between his desire for modernity and the pull of what appears to be an intractable past.*"<sup>176</sup> He adds that "*the idea of culture among the educated classes in Central Kenya did not entail any practical return to the past; on the contrary, culture was being reinvented as a project in which Gikuyu beliefs and European systems were brought into a syncretic relationship.*"<sup>177</sup> Ngugi seems to reject what is fanatical, rigid, and sturdy in all various shapes. For him, it does not matter whether that shape is clothed in traditions or in modernization. In fact, Ngugi's ideology reminds his readers of Said's concept of culture which "*is never a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures.*"<sup>178</sup> Accordingly, Waiyaki plays the role of Ngugi and represents his attitudes towards many issues. Waiyaki's ambivalent attitudes is translated into a longing for reconciliation between the two antagonistic ridges, and finding a way of

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<sup>176</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>178</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 217.

molding the two contradicted cultures; he does not like to be identified with either side as he is committed to reconciliation. Waiyaki dreams of a future where there is peace, unity, and love.

However, Waiyaki's attempts are faced with failure as he applies them during the colonial period. This period is characterized by a strong stiffness in regard to one's own culture. Thus, the situation does not help Waiyaki to achieve the kind of unity that he has been longing for. This instance is perfectly demonstrated by Ogude's words: "*the modernizing project that Waiyaki embraces is totally at variance with the desires of a community polarized by the advent of colonialism. He has of necessity to be constituted through a series of ambiguities and ambivalences.*"<sup>179</sup> So, the protagonist's tragic failure with which the novel ends illustrates how the novel "*is permeated by Ngugi's recognition of the tragic ambivalence of the modernization process.*"<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, Waiyaki's hybridity finds a place in his emotional life. This is reflected in his love for Nyambura, the daughter of Joshua who embodies the full absorption of the foreign ways. Although his love for Nyambura is something beyond himself, this love does unintentionally stem from his longing for reconciliation and unity between the two ridges.

Another instance to which Waiyaki is reacting ambivalently is the Gikuyu tradition of circumcision. The novel's narrative shows how Waiyaki longs for the day in which he will be circumcised and enters into the world of manhood. However, his Siriana education results in some changes in his attitude. The novelist describes the idea of circumcision for Waiyaki when he says that "*Not that Waiyaki disliked the idea of circumcision. [...] In fact, he considered Livingstone, for all his learning and holiness, a little dense in attacking a custom whose real significance in the tribe he did not understand and probably never would*

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<sup>179</sup> Ogude, *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*, p. 69.

<sup>180</sup> Charles Cantalupo, ed. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Text and Contexts* (Trenton: African World Press, 1995), pp. 102-103.

*understand.*”<sup>181</sup> This discussion indicates that Waiyaki is well aware of how important circumcision is for his society and he rejects the colonizer’s oppressive way of eliminating it. For him, circumcision does not lie in the operation itself but in its spiritual reflections on those who undergo it. Hence, Waiyaki does not object to stopping the practice, his opposition relies on the way that its prevention would be applied.

Christianity, too, has its place in the mind of the protagonist. Waiyaki is closer to the colonizers’ religion. In contrast to his tribe, Kameno, he loves some Christian teaching and he is not against its concepts: *“the element of love and sacrifice agreed with his own temperament. The suffering of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and his agony on the tree had always moved him. But he did not want to betray the tribe.”*<sup>182</sup> These lines reveal Waiyaki’s conviction of some Christian elements. However, his commitment to his people and the burden of decolonizing them prevent him from turning his admiration into an actual embrace of those elements. In fact, Waiyaki rejects the method of those who preach religion strictly without any consideration to the roots that bound people to their traditions. It is clear that Waiyaki likes Christianity and does not mind embracing some of its elements; nevertheless, he does not believe in a blind absorption. His philosophy bears a tolerant attitude, mixing positive factors from the white man’s religion with his own roots and traditions. Williams explains Waiyaki’s assumption of how a society should act with a foreign faith that *“rather than merely passively accepting the alien elements [here Christianity] the community will take it, extract what is worthwhile, and mould it in ways which fit the needs of the people – and their pre-existing cultural traditions.”*<sup>183</sup> This wish of importing and integrating Christian elements and ideas into the Gikuyu traditions appears in Waiyaki’s language that is full of Christian references and symbols. This fact is reflected in Gikandi

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<sup>181</sup> *The River Between*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>183</sup> Patrick Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 31.

words: “*Waiyaki’s uniqueness lies in his unconscious ability to speak eloquently about Gikuyu traditions and histories in the figural language of the King James version of the Christian Bible.*”<sup>184</sup>

Ngugi utilizes his narrative and its hero to represent his own experienced inner struggles. He popularizes his own ideas and justifies their validity through Waiyaki’s story. Ngugi, as an ambivalent writer, draws the readers’ attention to the price that tolerant individuals have to pay in a given society.

Another character who shows ambivalent attitude is Muthoni. Through representing her conflict, Ngugi shows his ability to project the different forms of cultural hybridity. Muthoni performs the same job just as Waiyaki who tries to mingle his traditionalist values with Christian values. Muthoni is Christianized but her new faith does not stop her from being attached to her tribe. She demonstrates another form of cultural hybridity through importing a Gikuyu tradition to her newly embraced religion. She is an instance of what Homi Bhabha calls a colonial mimic figure. In her view, there is no contradiction in such an act; on the contrary, this act is what gives her an identity to which she can hold on firmly. Based on Bhabha’s definition of colonial mimicry, already mentioned in the first chapter, Muthoni’s difference or slippage is her insistence to be circumcised against the teachings of colonialism. She believes in a strong attachment to her culture, she has the courage to attempt a reconciliation of the many forces that wanted to control her. In a way, she searches for salvation for herself. Her strong resolution on undergoing circumcision emerges from her conviction that everybody should go through it; even her parents have done that despite their embrace of Christianity. It is, for Muthoni, the only way in which a girl can be transformed into a woman and become marriageable. This solid Gikuyu background prevents Muthoni from seeing an alternative choice.

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<sup>184</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, p. 70.

Compared to Waiyaki, Muthoni is seen as foil. Though both of them share qualities of hybridity, Muthoni's resolution is more firm; her speech and actions are characterized by certainty, insistence, and confidence. Throughout the novel's narrative, there is no one instance in which Muthoni is encountered by doubts or questions; she goes on her way following her belief. This description is perfectly illustrated here: "*The conviction of young Muthoni's personal vision easily surpasses the dogmatic Joshua's vociferous proselytization.*"<sup>185</sup> Even in her final moments, Muthoni is shown as courageous as always; her words on a deathbed convey her deep conviction of her method and that her trip is ended with ultimate triumph: "*tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe.*"<sup>186</sup> Unlike Waiyaki whose journey is haunted, from the beginning, with fears and doubts; he goes on his mission uncertain of what he does or where he belongs.

Nyambura, Muthoni's sister, features her hybridity at the end of the novel. The narrator draws some hints that under her Christian appearance, there lies a typical Gikuyu girl. Nyambura, in her deepest self, is longing to be circumcised. She is jealous of the girls in her age who are going to be circumcised and perhaps she regrets the fact that her religion prevents her from undergoing this practice. However, unlike Muthoni, Nyambura is less certain; she experiences conflicts between her origin and the new faith she has embraced.

Nyambura demonstrates her humility and submissiveness to her father by trying to convince her conflicting soul that circumcision is an awful ritual that she must abandon. Even thinking about it makes her guilty and she envies her sister for not having a thought about it. Muthoni's circumcision does not separate the two sisters. Instead, Nyambura continues visiting her sister till she dies. Even after her death, Nyambura never stops thinking about her.

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<sup>185</sup> Gikandi, *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature: Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, p. 22.

<sup>186</sup> *The River Between*, p. 53.

This is also evidence that Nyambura does not oppose circumcision at all; it is only her fear from her father that prevents her from doing it.

Nevertheless, it is Nyambura's love for Waiyaki that constitutes the full form of hybridity. She sees him as her savior, her black messiah, and the only one who can lead her into the light. This presents Nyambura as another mimic colonial figure. Just as circumcision makes a source of identity and belonging to Muthoni, also Waiyaki does occupy this place in Nyambura's soul. Waiyaki represents a passage towards her culture; he is the shape in which Nyambura can find reconciliation.

In addition, the attachment of Nyambura to her traditions appears in her replacing the river with the church. At the bank of the river, Nyambura finds consolation and she performs her prayers with more freedom and comfort. In contrast to the church, the river bestows her with feelings of identity and closeness to her land. However, her prayers for God to help her in keeping on her father's side and not rebelling demonstrate the difficulty of following him. Nyambura's significant words alert the audience to the difference between her religion and that of her father. She calls the attention of the readers to the true meaning of religion and how it should be practiced; the religion of love and forgiveness should not separate a father from his daughter and his tribe because when it does then it is inhuman. A religion is supposed to unite, to bring peace, and to hold people together. Thus, Nyambura rebels against the uniformity of her father and she joins her sister in the anticipation of hybridity. Amoko points that *"each of the children [Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni] caught up in the crossfire articulates and enacts, if unsuccessfully in all three cases, a vision of communal reunification and renewal."*<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Apollo O Amoko, "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 36, No.1, (2005): pp. 34-50; 43.

Joshua, on the other hand, embodies the full absorption of the foreign ways. He is the representative of modernity in its fullest form. He is one of the first converts to the white man's religion. This religion works on Joshua until it comes to possess him wholly. He has complete embrace of the new faith and disclaimer of any sign of belonging to his own native culture. In fact, his name is a clear sign of his ideology as he is the only character in the novel who does not carry a Gikuyu name.

Joshua's acceptance of Christianity is characterized by blindness; he follows and obeys whatever instructions given by the white man believing that it is his duty, as a Christian, to do so. He harshly rejects all the practices and beliefs that his people have. Furthermore, his absolute consent to the unfair law of paying taxes is an evidence of his naive consumption of what is implied by the white man. Joshua ignores his Gikuyu religion; for example, he often thinks about the Christian seer who prophesied the coming of the messiah and compares him to Mugo Wa Kibiro who has never told of something as great, which points to his ignorance of the Gikuyu's prophecy of a savior for the land. Scott and Housley argue that "*Joshua's theology is too rigid to permit any openness to the traditional ways.*"<sup>188</sup>

Joshua has been even criticized by Waiyaki. His criticism does not rely on his conversion to Christianity because he likes some Christian elements, but his point of criticism is that Joshua has clothed himself with a religion that is not his own. And that he renounces his past and cuts himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe. Joshua often prays for God's punishment to those who prepare for circumcision, though he does know how significant this celebration is. As Palmer points out "*Joshua is as bigoted a religious fanatic as ever existed. In Joshua we see the dangerous consequences of a blind and uncritical*

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<sup>188</sup> Jamie S. Scott & Paul Simpson-Housley, *Mapping the sacred: religion, geography and postcolonial literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 233.

*acceptance of an alien ideology.*"<sup>189</sup> Joshua's religion is a religion of war; tolerance and forgiveness are not among its agenda. Hence, he has dedicated himself wholly against his culture; Losambe comments on this: "*Christian doctrine is translated into reflex actions and mechanical of behaviour. The bigoted and fanatical Joshua accepts the alien ideology blindly, uncritically and naively.*"<sup>190</sup>

The mimicry of the Christianity of Joshua's family is extended to his wife Miriamu. Eventhough Miriamu is a static character who remains passive throughout the novel's events, Ngugi draws some hints that her embrace of the new religion emerges from her submissiveness to her husband rather than from an actual conviction. Ngugi contends that a Gikuyu woman lies under the Christian guise of Miriamu. Thus, it is her fear that forces her to go on the ways of her husband. In her mind, this is not a matter of what religion she would embrace, what she most cares about is having a peaceful family that lives harmoniously without any problems. Thus, the true religion of Miriamu is obedience and submissiveness to patriarchy; this is the faith that she embraces with deep passion and certainty. As Ngugi puts it:

She was a peace-loving woman and she never liked unnecessary tension in the house. Her injunction to her children was always: 'Obey your father.' She did not say it harshly or with bitterness. It was an expression of faith, of belief, of a way of life. 'Your father says this-' and she expected his children to do that, without fuss, without resentment.<sup>191</sup>

Even in the most difficult situations, Miriamu remains passive. She does not utter one word of opposition to Joshua's disclaimer of his daughter despite the hurt it causes to her heart. In addition, when she hears about Nyambura's love for Waiyaki, she warns her saying: "*Waiyaki is a good young man. But people can talk, you know. We do not want any more*

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<sup>189</sup> Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 14.

<sup>190</sup> Losambe, p. 57, found in *The River Between: A Cultural Approach* by Najla Fahad Al-Yabis. Master Thesis. (Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 2010), p. 43.

<sup>191</sup> *The River Between*, p. 34.

*trouble in this house. I cannot bear it. Not after Muthoni.*”<sup>192</sup> Although she knows that Waiyaki would be a perfect husband for Nyambura and she likes him for what he did for Muthoni, still she tries to persuade Nyambura to move away from him because their accompanying will end in a dilemma. Miriamu seems to be a very weak character compared to her daughters’ courage; the courage that makes her choose the path she likes. Consequently, she can be described as an ambivalent character whose choice is made by fear and not preference.

However, the novel demonstrates the difficulty of accomplishing a whole consumption of an alien culture because in this way one will lose touch with his identity and feel lost among his people. That is why many of those Christianized Africans are slipping back to their old customs and traditions since the new culture does not provide them with an alternative, making them void with a decision to go back and embrace their customs that give them true identity.

Otherness, in *The River Between*, exists entirely in Gikuyu tribal structure, in its fissures, by virtue of the geographical fact that there are two ridges, Kameno and Makuyu, separated by Honia River. This means each is an ‘other’ from the other’s perspective. Cultural difference is manifested in intra-tribal rivalries, confrontations, and a sense of Otherness between tribesmen and missionaries. The widespread practice of circumcision, for instance, is an important cultural practice and a step to adulthood for Kameno people. In other words, from Gikuyu perspective, getting rid of circumcision is tantamount to cultural death; whereas from Makuyu’s perspective this ritual is a “satanic” work. The Christians consider this act as sinful and in a way it confirms the barbarity of the tribal Gikuyu. So the white man here is the real Other in Kenya and the tribe “others” together see the Western culture as an “Other.”

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<sup>192</sup> *The River Between*, p. 115.

In addition to that, Otherness occurs within the framework of an ideological contestation between Gikuyu religion and Christianity, Kabonyi and his followers versus Joshua and the Christian converts; Kabonyi versus Waiyaki; Kiama versus the church; a tribal circumcision versus Christian conversion. It is also symbolized in the delineation of the major characters. Therefore, Kabonyi considers Waiyaki as a traitor, though Waiyaki perceives himself as a symbol of modernism and progressive ideology. On the other hand, Kabonyi is a representative of the past, from Waiyaki's perspective. That is hybridity reinforces the feeling of Otherness within a society that supposedly shares the same beliefs, the same traditions, and culture.

Moreover, Siriana and Mariosioni schools are binary oppositional structures, and so are the Gikuyu and British, within a framework of cultural racialization. Also, the sister rivals, Nyambura and Muthoni, in contexts of parental loyalty/disloyalty; resignation/liberation, submissiveness/courage. Also both of them represent timidity/rebellion; inaction/action and female docility/female emancipation and liberation, respectively.

Waiyaki himself is perceived as the "other" in the view of his people. He is the one who has been educated in Western institutions, just like Ngugi, and as Woode asserted, "*the alterity within his identity creates a colonial desire to displace the "other", the white man, by using Western education, "the white man's magic" [The River Between] to create a position of privilege for himself in society,*"<sup>193</sup> a thing that can be reflected on the person of Ngugi himself when he wants to displace the "Other", colonial language, using his novels, white man's magic, to regain his status in his society. Alienation is another aspect that deepens the feeling of Othering. Ngugi shows that Waiyaki does not like to be identified with either group; as he is now committed to reconciliation. Thus he becomes alienated and has been

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<sup>193</sup> Edward Winston. B, Woode, "Alterity and Hybridity in Anglophone Postcolonial Literature: Ngugi, Achebe, p'Bitek & Nwapa. Diss. (The University of Oklahoma, 2001). Dissertations and Theses: Full Text, ProQuest. Web, (6 May. 2012), p. 36.

perceived as the “other” to his people. In other words, instead of trying to belong to any of the tribes, Waiyaki prefers to create his own world, a world of “reconciliation” with tradition and bearing of the new identity.

Thus, the feeling of Otherness is implanted into the colonized’s mind by the colonizer so as to perpetuate the idea of the distinction between center, being the West, and periphery, being the “rest”. Of course, the West perceives the rest as Other. Harish Trivedi in *Peripheral Centres, Central Peripheries* argues that Ngugi has dealt with this issue of centre and periphery “not only because he has as double perspective on his home country and the west, [...] but also because he is the only truly bilingual writer among all the postcolonials.”<sup>194</sup> Indeed, Ngugi is one of the postcolonial writers who has devoted his writings to such issue of center and periphery.

One of the outcomes of colonization is cultural displacement, where the postcolonial society is affected by the culture of the colonizer. This process begins at the first contact and interaction of both the colonized’s culture and the colonizer’s culture who then are forced to absorb the foreign culture in a subtle way and this influences their perceptions. Colonization takes place through the missionaries’ activities of re-educating the natives and erasing their own knowledge, projecting new culture, to suppress the culture of the native and further showing negative images of the colonized for being inferior, dark, evil, primitive, and barbaric.

The continuous suppression and marginalization of their culture induce a lack of self-confidence and their identity is then affected. They find themselves obliged to adopt the foreign traditions and belief system, they do no longer value their original tradition or

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<sup>194</sup> Harish Trivedi, “Postcolonial Centre, Postmodernist Periphery: Reversing a Discursive Hierarchy.” *Peripheral Centres, Central Peripheries: India and its Diaspora(s)*. Ghosh-Schiihorn, Martina, & Vera Alexander, eds. (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), pp. 95-96.

heritage; thus, they lose their identity. The characters in Ngugi's *The River Between* find themselves struggling between their original identity and the new identity of the Western.

However, Ngugi tries to resist the influence of the colonial regime. He, as an African indigenous writer, communicates the African experience and presents to the world what the real African identity looks like and what are the factors that affect it. He shows how the African culture is lost in embracing the Western values; this fact of adopting the Western culture leads to hybridity and multiculturalism which are inevitable to see in Ngugi's characters who try to figure out their in-between position in their community as they do not want to split from their origins, but at the same time they are affected by the Western culture.

### CHAPTER III: AFRICAN HEROISM AND TRAGIC FAILURE

*It's exciting to see something emerge out of Africa. Even though they're supposed to be fictional, they give us hope. They are African superheroes, so we can be superheroes too.*<sup>195</sup>

Every culture has its own heroes, those it defines as worthy of nobility and honor: warriors, leaders, kings, rulers, holy ones, ordinary people, and those who are acting in a heroic attitude when they are confronted with an unexpected challenge. Though most heroes undertake different journeys, the desire is often the pursuit of greatness to help them deliver their society from which they identify themselves. In the stories and artifacts of ancient culture, the hero is usually portrayed as God or as the courageous and victorious warrior returning from battle. These stories seem to be familiar, but are there other dimensions of an African hero that can speak to our time?

Ngugi in his novel, *The River Between*, is suggesting a new form of African heroism which makes his narrative interesting and worthwhile. In the light of this, the chapter focuses on the African hero Ngugi addresses in his novel. There will be a discussion on Ngugi's heroic novel in traditional Gikuyu life; in addition to identification of the hero's characteristics.

The chapter also aims to discover the tragic failure of the hero, Waiyaki, and determining his personal attitudes and the way he pursues his own motivation and beliefs for the success in uniting the two antagonist groups "Kameno" and "Makuyu", and how this motivation lead to his downfall. It is appropriate to point out that, culturally speaking, the modern African tragic hero is uniquely different from the Western hero. The African does not see tragic misfortune as a dishonorable but rather as a means to regeneration and self-reformation.<sup>196</sup> The African

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<sup>195</sup> Akosua Asamoah (qtd in Tessa Pijnaker, "African Heroes." (master thesis, 17 Aug, 2015).

<sup>196</sup> Asuamah Adade-Yeboah, Edward Owusu, "The Tragic Hero of the Modern Period—The African Concept." *English Language and Literature Studies* Vol. 3, No. 4, (2013), pp. 35-47.

hero is portrayed to be optimistic in his tragic suffering. However, he is portrayed as having moral flaws and therefore responsible for his fall. The modern African tragic hero conforms to a dualistic pattern of life which creates a conflict in him and this serves as his tragic situation.

Ngugi's novel also reflects an intriguing example of the creative appropriation of Christianity in African literature to develop the idea of the black Messiah in the context of colonialism, which will be the focus of this chapter. Moving on, to shed light on the contest for leadership among the native people, and how they are caught in between life and death for the sake of leadership. This contention is so significant that becomes the central part of power struggle and eventually leads to the downfall of the novel's hero.

## 1. Heroism in Traditional Gikuyu Life

*The hero is an instrument of destiny not only its object, but also its subject.*<sup>197</sup>

Heroism is one of the central themes in literature, especially in European or even American literature such as *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *Song of Roland*. In Western literature, heroism is found in books that "*chronicle the heroic deeds of great warriors like Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas and celebrate the life of warfare.*"<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, heroism is not limited to Western literature. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o employs this literary theme in his novel *The River Between*. The heroic figure in the African novel becomes clearer when contrasted with its Western counterpart.

Heroism takes many facets throughout various genres and literatures. There are two forms of heroism in African literature. According to Ralph Austen there are "normative heroes and deviant heroes." He states that "*the normative or 'culture hero' creates historically durable*

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<sup>197</sup> Daniel P. Kunene, "Journey in the African Epic." *Research in African Literature* Vol. 22, No. 2, (1991), p. 208.

<sup>198</sup> Paul A. Cantor, "The Politics of the Epic: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Romantic Redefinition of Heroism." *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 3, Special Issue on Politics and Literature (Summer 2007), p. 375.

*public values; he [and it is inevitably a male] has problematic relations with the domestic sphere but ultimately serves as its defence against far greater threats from outside the community.*"<sup>199</sup> Whereas, the deviant hero or anti-hero is quite the opposite:

The deviant hero [or anti-hero] appears in traditional African literature and thought as a trickster or even a genuine witch. He [or quite often she] creates a private career on an episodic, transient basis; the public behaviour of these figures directly threatens domestic values; and they operate on the boundaries between domestic society and the alien world without resolving any of the tensions between them.<sup>200</sup>

He further states that "*the deviant and normative heroes cannot be fully distinguished but nonetheless the focus of the novel is on the normative hero.*"<sup>201</sup> However, in modern African works, "*the African cultural values take on a different accent as they assume the role of deviant to combat the European influx and post colonial strife.*"<sup>202</sup> The novel shows human nature as it truly is for each hero has his flaw and even his downfall. In *The River Between*; however, the heroes include Waiyaki, and perhaps even Muthoni.

Waiyaki is the first to be known as a hero and stands as such throughout the novel. His heroism is defined by his words and actions throughout the book. In the beginning, even when he is a young man, he is known as a man of natural actions. From his childhood, Waiyaki is bestowed with qualities of leadership. He is depicted with a strong personality that drives him naturally and instinctively to command his mates who are older than him. His physical abilities make him a successful leader, and his eyes are portrayed in a manner that shows his strength. In African epics, a great man, a true hero is the one who is able to use his unnatural powers to achieve extraordinary deeds and actions. As Arthur Ashe puts it, "*true heroism is*

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<sup>199</sup> Ralph A. Austen, "Criminals and the African Cultural Imagination: Normative and Deviant Heroism in Pre-Colonial and Modern Narratives." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 56, No. 4, (1986), p. 38.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 386.

*remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost.*”<sup>203</sup>

Ngugi’s hero is a modern, progressive, and idealistic character. Smith and Emezue argue that “*the characterisation of Waiyaki in The River Between blends the qualities of traditional legendary heroism and Christian saviour-leader.*”<sup>204</sup> One can notice that it is the struggle against the white man and the Gikuyu prophecy that create for Waiyaki the occasion to realize his ideals for both himself and his people. Waiyaki proves himself to be a man of great deeds and noble qualities. He becomes a savior for Kenyan freedom and eventually falls a martyr to his own convictions. Waiyaki is a brave boy who commands respect from a very early age and from his natural actions and reactions to situations. His bravery and education earn him the admiration of his fellows, and he becomes an inspiration for them.

Waiyaki is clearly a hero in the eyes of both the Gikuyu people and in those of the implied readers. He tries to establish a middle ground between the polarizing worldviews which later becomes “*his source of power and marginalisation.*”<sup>205</sup> He is addressed by the people as a “teacher”; he strikes to live up to the prophecy of unifying the ridges as they confront to the changing social and cultural realities. Ngugi presents the picture of a Gikuyu hero whose intelligence and progress at the institution is keenly observed by the white missionaries who visualize in him a “possible brave Christian leader of the church”. The enthusiasms with which his followers swarm round him and sing his praises make him a jealous target for his opponents. The people call him a savior and see in him the messiah who has been sent to redeem from the suppression of the white man. Hence, Waiyaki’s heroic actions and sacrifices are venerated and he is remembered as a man of great action. He becomes the part of the

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<sup>203</sup> Arthur Ashe, “*Black History Month.*” 2009.

<sup>204</sup> Charles Smith, and GMT Emezue, *New Black and African Writing: Volume 2, Volume 2.* (Nigeria: Handel Books, 7 oct. 2015) p. 171.

<sup>205</sup> James Ogude, *Ngugi's Novels And African History: Narrating the Nation* (London: Pluto Press), p. 126.

legend of his people, and the writer introduces him in folk-heroic terms by exploring similarities between the role he is asked to play as Savior corresponding to Christ against a legendary history which reveals a strong association between Gikuyu and Christian creation myths, thus making him, by definition, a hero. In fact, the hero in *The River Between* is a type of leader who arises in response to a colonial situation; “a ‘hero’ is described as one called to watch over; protect; show strength and courage in battle; be admired for courage, nobility, or exploits; and any person admired for qualities of achievements and regarded as an ideal or model.”<sup>206</sup>

## 2. Characteristics of Waiyaki as a Tragic Hero

The great philosopher, Aristotle defines the tragic hero when he says: “*The change in the hero’s fortunes be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary, from happiness to misery, and the cause of it must not lie in any depravity but in some great error on his part.*”<sup>207</sup> Ngugi clearly portrays his protagonist as a typical tragic hero usually portrayed in the Western culture. The characteristics of Ngugi’s tragic hero are very typical to those of the Western tragic hero:

The tragic hero evokes our pity and terror if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly evil but a mixture of both. The tragic hero evokes our pity because he is not evil and his misfortune is greater than he deserves, and he evokes our fear because we realize we are fallible and could make the same error.<sup>208</sup>

Moreover, Aristotle identifies that there are four basic characteristics of a tragic hero: nobility of birth, a tragic flaw, a downfall, and a realization that his downfall is his own doing. In addition, the tragic hero can serve as a leader, and the fact that the hero’s fate must already

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<sup>206</sup> Jacqueline Haessly, “A Hero for the Twenty-First Century.” *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* Vol.I, pp. 1-10; p. 3.

<sup>207</sup> Aristotle, “Poetics,” Trans. S.H. Butcher. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. Ed. Bernard F. Dukore. (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1974), web, p. 38.

<sup>208</sup> Aristotle, “Poetics,” Trans. S.H. Butcher. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*, p. 40.

be sealed. In an exploration of the different categories of heroic forms often used in African literature, Joanna Sullivan identifies “*the tale hero, the epic hero, the tragic hero, and the comic antihero.*”<sup>209</sup> As is evident, most of these characteristics can be applied to Waiyaki.

To begin with, the life of Waiyaki changes abruptly from happiness to misery. At the novel’s beginning, Waiyaki is a young man and he is admired by most of the people in his village. He is described as “*tall for his age. He had a well-built, athletic body;*”<sup>210</sup> he happily joins in the dances for the young boys. Also, the narrative shows Waiyaki as so intelligent compared to his age and to both Kamau and Kinuthia who are older than him and he “*made quick progress and impressed the white missionaries.*”<sup>211</sup> As an adult, Waiyaki is successful; his people admire, and respect him. They like his talk, his mingle character, his smiling for all, and they even call him “The teacher”. In fact, the people’s reaction to Waiyaki’s speech, at the end of the novel, before the disastrous end, shows a huge amount of love and respect he entertains from them as their leader. They listened to him, to their savior, as if they shall never give him up. Thenceforth, “*Waiyaki’s fame spread. The elders trusted him. They talked about him in their homes and in the fields.*”<sup>212</sup> Waiyaki becomes happy as he gains respect from his people. Nevertheless, at the novel’s ending, all of this joy and glamour go away in one moment. The amount of love, respect and admiration that he receives from his community are suddenly transferred into hatred and a desire for vengeance. This dramatic change from happiness to misery is one of the factors that make Waiyaki’s designation as a tragic hero valid.

Moreover, the downfall of the hero is caused by a fault on his part. The fact that Waiyaki is prophesied of being a savior is what pushes him forward without knowing where. Instead of

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<sup>209</sup> Sullivan, Joanna, “Redefining the African Novel.” *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 37, No. 4, (2006): 177-188. (Indiana University.Web. 01 September 2014), p.182

<sup>210</sup> *The River Between*, p. 6.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

leading an active resistance to liberate their land from the colonizer's hand, he thoughtfully founds an educational movement and envisions it as the miraculous tool of achieving unity and reconciliation. His belief in the magic of education as a panacea for all the ills in his community leads him to resign from his high position in the powerful council Kiama and to give this chance to his adversary, Kabonyi. In an insightful instance, Kinuthia wonders if *“Waiyaki knew that people wanted action now that the new enthusiasm and awareness embraced more than the mere desire for learning. People wanted to move forward.”*<sup>213</sup>

Other causes for Waiyaki's downfall include the rising power of the Kiama and his unawareness of the importance of his name. This lack of awareness is neatly tied to a tragic hero's possession, in his character, of what Aristotle calls the tragic flaw, an inherent weakness in character. Aristotle describes this as 'hamartia', a false step which apparently pulls Waiyaki closer to his tragic end. He acts autonomously, neglecting the plans that are set against him by his antagonists. Although Waiyaki's mother and Kinuthia's warnings, Waiyaki goes on his way, disregarding of the danger that lies in front of him:

Be careful, Waiyaki. You know the people look up to you. You are the symbol of the tribe, born again with all its purity. They adore you. They worship you. You don't know about the new oath. You have been too busy. But they are taking the new oath in your name. In the name of the Teacher and the purity of the tribe. And remember, Kabonyi hates you, hates you. He would kill you if he could. And he is the one who is doing all this. Why? The Kiama has power. Power. And your name is on it, giving it even greater power. Your name will be your ruin. Be careful.<sup>214</sup>

The above quotation foreshadows the disastrous end that will ultimately face Waiyaki. In the last chapters of the novel, his mother tells him: *“fear the voice of the Kiama. It is the voice of the people. When the breath of the people turns against you, it is the greatest curse that you*

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<sup>213</sup> *The River Between*, p. 118.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

*can ever get.*"<sup>215</sup> These great mistakes that Waiyaki has committed eventually lead to his tragic downfall.

Another quality that distinguishes Waiyaki from the other characters in the novel is nobility of birth; he is a descendant from the long line of the famous seer Mugo Wa Kibiro, a sign of nobility for the Gikuyu people. Belonging to future seers in a superstitious society is regarded as a blessing. Also, his father, Chege, is a well-known elder in Kameno which is another source of pride for him. In fact, though Waiyaki is not described as an aristocratic descendant, he can be seen as a noble leader from the perspective of his native society.

In addition to Waiyaki's nobility, he is bestowed with qualities of leadership from his childhood. From the first appearance in the novel, Waiyaki is depicted with a strong personality that drives him naturally and instinctively to command his mates who are older than him. His physical abilities make him a successful leader, and as mentioned previously, his eyes are portrayed in a manner that shows his strength: "*if the boy gazed at you, you had to obey. That half-imploring, half-commanding look was insisting, demanding. Perhaps that was why the other boys obeyed him.*"<sup>216</sup> Following his will, Waiyaki establishes the first national school in his country and he becomes its headmaster. He pays much labor and hard work to achieve that goal. Next, Waiyaki becomes known all over the ridges; children, men and women hail him as "Our Teacher". Kinuthia, his friend, knows that Waiyaki is the best man to lead people, "*not only to a new light through education, but also to new opportunities and areas of self-expression through political independence.*"<sup>217</sup>

Muthoni's death prefigures the tragic end of Waiyaki. Muthoni tries to incorporate her new Christian beliefs with those of her tribal practices against the wishes and the orders of her

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<sup>215</sup> *The River Between*, p. 123.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

father and community makes her similar to Waiyaki who, too, works on that mission with different strategies and tools. Her death represents the failure of such an attempt and serves as a warning for those who think about following that path. Hence, Ngugi prepares the readers for a sad ending. As Gikandi puts it, "*Waiyaki's journey into the thicket of cultural crisis is, of course, foreshadowed by Muthoni's narrative, a story that is often read as a commentary on the tragedy of biculturalism in a colonial situation.*"<sup>218</sup> Once again, Western tragic elements appear in the novel.

This tragic end that faces the hero arouses feelings of both pity and fear, and attracts "*our sympathy by externalizing through action his internal being.*"<sup>219</sup> Because of Waiyaki's sincere and true intentions, readers will naturally sympathize with him in what is referred to as "catharsis". This sympathy for the hero is mostly evoked by the perception "*of a heroic affirmation of an uncompromising human will to freedom,*"<sup>220</sup> and as an expression of concrete human possibilities.

It is true that Waiyaki makes a mistake and surprises his people of his love for an uncircumcised girl in spite of his taking an oath to keep the purity of the tribe; however, that mistake does not deserve the cruel punishment and denial from those who are closest to him. All the joy, love, and respect that Waiyaki receives from his people will, in an instance, turn into hate and that all the labor and hard work that are achieved by him will be wasted instantaneously. This feeling of distress is experienced by Waiyaki at the end of the novel when his people start to accuse him, "*he looked beyond and saw the children he had helped in their thirst for learning; the teachers who were coming; Kinuthia.*"<sup>221</sup> This story stirs feelings of fear in the audiences' hearts. Waiyaki's mistake is not evident and any person is subject to

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<sup>218</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 66.

<sup>219</sup> Langbaum, Robert. "Aristotle and Modern Literature." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol.15, No. 1, (1956): Wiley. (Web. 22 Sept 2014), p.83.

<sup>220</sup> Kwaku Labri Korang, "Making a Post-Eurocentric Humanity: Tragedy, Realism, and *Things Fall Apart*." *Research in African Literature* Vol. 42, No. 2, (2011), (Indiana University. Web. 10 Mar, 2014), p. 14.

<sup>221</sup> *The River Between*, p. 151.

such a fault. Therefore, readers comprehend the possibility of experiencing a similar situation and increase their identification with the protagonist. The choice of Ngugi to end up his novel endows the story with a sense of woe leaving its readers full of sorrow. No hero is really as pure as the readers like him to be but, nonetheless, they are still worthy of honor and devotion.

Like most tragic heroes, the recognition of Waiyaki's own fault comes too late. Only after his downfall from the sacred hill, Waiyaki realizes that he really needs a political understanding, and not a sacred prophecy to succeed. This tragic recognition emerges from his inability to derive inspiration from the sacred grove anymore, "*the sacred grove had not lit the way for him. He did not quite know where he was going or what he really wanted to tell his people.*"<sup>222</sup> In contrast to his early image of success, Waiyaki changes his mind from ignorance to knowledge as "*the recognition of oneself not as an idealized figure of the imagination controlled by supernatural forces but rather as a subject of social forces.*"<sup>223</sup>

Waiyaki's self-knowledge is constituted suddenly, "*and all at once Waiyaki realizes what the ridges wanted. All at once he felt more forcefully than he had ever felt before the shame of a people's land being taken away.*"<sup>224</sup> Yet, this recognition comes too late and the novel concludes tragically. In the same way, the tragic flavor of the novel aids the interrogation of social, cultural, and historical issues that influence the destiny of the postcolonial African society.

Indeed, *The River Between* expresses the ambivalence that characterizes Ngugi's works in his mingling of Western and Gikuyu elements. The Western elements include tragedy, Christianity, and nature description, while the Gikuyu include the myth of origin, concepts of

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<sup>222</sup> *The River Between*, p. 142.

<sup>223</sup> Mark Mathuray, "Resuming a Broken Dialogu: Prophecy, Nationalist Strategies, and Religious Discourses in Ngugi's Early Work". *Research in African Literature*, Vol.40, No. 2, (2009) web, pp. 53- 54

<sup>224</sup> *The River Between*, p. 142.

prophecy, savior, and other stylistic features. Besides, the novel's style in itself is a way of expressing its author's attitudes, reflecting, at the same time, the inner messages and happenings of the text.

### 3. The Tragic Failure of the African Hero in *The River Between*

Ngugi, in his novel, artfully and cleverly uses a tragic narration as a way to clearly examine and to reflect the cultural, social, religious, and historical conflicts through the representation of the tragic circumstances of the hero. The novel as described by Amoko "takes the form of a tragedy, since its ill-fated hero is burdened with the weight of an unrealizable but authoritative prophecy."<sup>225</sup> According to Aristotle, the tragedy is the representation of the characters' actions, "who necessarily display certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought [...] the two natural causes of actions."<sup>226</sup>

Therefore, the African novel is primarily identified by the uniqueness of its central characters regardless of the issues the novel does represent, as argued by Sullivan, "the modern African novel seems to consistently generate four categories: the tale hero, the epic hero, the tragic hero, and the comic antihero."<sup>227</sup> Ngugi's use of tragic form is what makes the discourse more distinctive through the plot narration, characters behavior, and motifs.

Geoffrey Brereton states that a tragic narrative is a composite structure that is constituent of elements such as disaster, failure, irony, and status which can be best discussed through elements such as character, plot, motifs, and point of view. According to Brereton, tragedy is both a literary and a philosophical evaluation of human circumstances, and the human reaction to these circumstances, that "tragedy is not easily associated with trivial

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<sup>225</sup> Apollo Obonyo Amoko, "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 36, No. 1, (2005), web, p. 38.

<sup>226</sup> Aristotle. "Poetics." Trans. S.H. Butcher. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. p. 39.

<sup>227</sup> Joanna Sullivan, "Redefining the African Novel." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 37, No. 4, (2006), (Indiana University. Web. 01 Sep 2014), p. 182.

*personalities.*"<sup>228</sup> The novel attempts to declare Waiyaki's nobility which is demonstrated by his admission into the secrets of the sacred grove. At a very young age, Waiyaki inherits boundless authority, command, and influence. For instance, when he finds his friends Kamau and Kinuthia fighting, his authority makes Kamau tremble and shudder. As the narrative recounts, "*he [Kamau] quickly looked up and met the burning eyes, gazing at him. Meekly he obeyed the unspoken command [although Waiyaki was] quite young; not of Kamau or Kinuthia's age. He had not even gone through his second birth.*"<sup>229</sup>

In addition, Waiyaki's nobility is further demonstrated by the declaration of his community as explained through the narrative's description, "*not a man knew what language the eyes spoke. Only, if the boy gazed at you, you had to obey.*"<sup>230</sup> Besides, the uniqueness of Waiyaki lies not in his status but in his eyes as the narrative admits,

Waiyaki was now a tall, powerfully built man who struck people as being handsome. Even so this was not the most striking thing about him. It was his eyes. They looked delicately tragic. But they also appeared commanding and imploring. It was his eyes that spoke of that yearning, that longing for something that would fill him all in all.<sup>231</sup>

In fact, it is the prophecy that attributes Waiyaki's fate and destiny and that according to Bascom's words, "*results to either death or deposition,*"<sup>232</sup> and what Northrop Frye refers to as "*the myths of fall, of the dying God, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero.*"<sup>233</sup> This isolation is the result of both destiny and the choices made by the individual tragic hero, in Waiyaki's case, isolation results from the different social and cultural conflict among Makuyu and Kameno people, and from his own evaluation of these social and cultural

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<sup>228</sup> Geoffrey Brereton, *Principles of Tragedy*. (Florida: Miami Press, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>229</sup> *The River Between*, p. 6.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>232</sup> Bascom, William, "The Myth-Ritual Theory." *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 70, No. 276, (1957). (10 June 2014) pp. 103-114; 110.

<sup>233</sup> Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature." *The Kenyon Review* Vol.13, No. 1, (1951). (12 March 2014), p. 104.

issues as well. As the narrative tells, “*where did people like Waiyaki stand? Had he not received the white man’s education? And was this not a part of the other faith, the new faith?*”<sup>234</sup> This quote exposes the reasons of Waiyaki’s isolation, ideologically, socially and psychologically; not only this but he also plays into the hands of a tragic ending. As Sullivan shows that in African fiction, the tragic heroes are a product of such polarization and that “*the tragedy of their stories speaks to the complicated social dynamics arising from the clash of modernity with traditional values.*”<sup>235</sup>

According to Ian Glen, Waiyaki’s unawareness of the impossibility of the antagonistic tribes’ unification, and his awareness of his role as a mediator, as the one who is going to save the two ridges, puts him in a “*social dilemma*”<sup>236</sup> that paves the way to his tragedy. As Norlim see it, “*Waiyaki’s tragedy springs also from his trying to belong both to the ‘devil’s’ party [...] and to the ‘angel’s’ party,*”<sup>237</sup> referring to both parties as those who follow the white man’s civilizing mission, and those who respect the culture and the religion of the tribe.

Besides, Waiyaki’s enemies and their jealousy and evil further enhance the tragic effect against the hero who according to Whitmore “*seeks either to avoid evil when he should face it or to turn it to his own ends,*”<sup>238</sup> and whatever choice he makes, brings him closer to his fate and disaster. And as Newton admits “*the tragic effect depends on the protagonist accepting that the values that define his or her sense of self cannot be reconciled with the situation with which he or she is faced.*”<sup>239</sup> Waiyaki’s emotional relationship further deepens his

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<sup>234</sup> Northrop Frye, “The Archetypes of Literature.” *The Kenyon Review* Vol.13, No. 1, (1951). (12 March 2014), p. 69.

<sup>235</sup> Joanna Sullivan, “Redifining the African Novel.” *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 37, No. 4, (2006): (Indiana University. Web. 01 Sep 2014), p. 182.

<sup>236</sup> Ian Glen, “Heroic Failure in the Novels of Achebe.” *Institute for the Study of English in Africa* Vol. 12, No. 1. (1985). 01 Sept. 2014, p. 23.

<sup>237</sup> Charles E. Nnolim, *Approaches to the African Novel: Essays in Analysis*. (3rd). (Lagos State: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010), p. 51.

<sup>238</sup> Charles E. Whitmore, “The nature of Tragedy.” *Modern Language Association of America* Vol. 27, No. 3. (1919): *JSTOR*. (Web. 28 May 2014), p. 347.

<sup>239</sup> Ken M. Newton, *Modern Literature and the Tragic*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 23.

predicament, in which according to the Kiama, he betrays their ideals, and this is a direct consequence to his tragic failure. They accuse him of betraying the oath. Thus, his own people, whom he tries to help, betray him “*he is someone divided between the modernising and traditional society and [he is] misunderstood and punished by both.*”<sup>240</sup> In fact, the hero’s desires to play the role of the tribe’s prophesied savior, to reconcile between Kamenno and Makuyu, and his romantic attraction to Nyambura become the genesis of Waiyaki’s tragic flaw, which apparently haul Waiyaki to his tragic end. Thus, the hero’s destruction results from “*fate or external evil,*” and where “*the hero’s action is guilty from one point of view and innocent from another*”<sup>241</sup> in the words of McCollom.

McCollom further demonstrates that the hero’s downfall can be the result of his choices, particularly his ambivalence that largely exposes him to external evil and reactionary forces, in his society, that seek his destruction. A close examination reveals that Waiyaki is tragic just like Nguni, Ngugi’s hero in *Weep Not, Child* (1964). He is really an impressive hero, whose downfall is caused not only by the forces against him, but also by his own weaknesses and his lack of awareness or knowledge which contributes to his downfall.

However, the failure of Waiyaki cannot be entirely blamed on his personal failures. His tentativeness may be attributed to cultural and social conditions prevalent at the time. Hence, the African tragic hero is a social impediment. David Cook and Michael Okenimpe observe that Waiyaki’s actions are informed by his pure naivety and who is “*asked to solve the problems of society long before he can solve the problems of his own identity.*”<sup>242</sup> Waiyaki is thrust into an unfamiliar world of the prophecy; yet, he is ideologically unprepared for this responsibility that is on his shoulders. This lack of grounding leads Waiyaki to tragic failure

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<sup>240</sup> Ken M. Newton, *Modern Literature and the Tragic*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 23.

<sup>241</sup> William G. McCollom, “The Downfall of the Tragic Hero.” *National Council of Teachers of English* Vol. 19, No. 2 (1957): 51-56. *JSTOR*. (Web. 25 June 2008), p. 53.

<sup>242</sup> Cook, David and Michael Okenimpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: An exploration of his Writings* (2nd ed). (New York: Henemann, 1997), p. 31.

as Connolly argues that this process is characterized by “*an extreme instance of difficult decision or choice*” where the hero’s actions “*go progressively out of his own control.*”<sup>243</sup> The readers perceive the events that affect Waiyaki’s tragic circumstances as a result of social and historical conditions that are out of his control. He is involved into a disputed historical ancestry, he is confronted with the demands of the prophecy at an early age, and he finally finds himself in the midst of conflicting forces that contributes to his downfall.

Waiyaki, as the tragic hero of the narrative, and whose failure to reconcile not only the leadership of the ridges but also the social and cultural debate, demonstrates the difficulty of the conflicting worldviews. Waiyaki’s tragedy is an express result of his commitment to a visionary cultural position that will resolve, in his opinion, some of the contradictions arising out of the opposing cultures. As Newton states, “*if [the hero’s] commitment is threatened by the world beyond the self, the hero refuses to compromise as his commitment is identified with a core of self that must remain intact. If one allows that core to be breached then one’s human identity becomes vulnerable.*”<sup>244</sup> In this way, the tragic hero is used to represent the most rational but unpopular way of resolving emerging conflicts.

With the failure of Waiyaki at the end of the novel, Ngugi seems to portray the defenseless people of Kenya whose land will be occupied by the imperialist. No solution is offered as the novel closes as far as the fate of the nation is concerned. The writer leaves his readers “*afloat in uncertainty as to where Kenya would go.*”<sup>245</sup> Waiyaki’s tragic story is used as an allegorical representation of the various contradictory forces and influences whose miscomprehension may lead to the destruction of the new national history and identity; Ngugi uses the tragic form to evaluate the changing social, political, and economic realities.

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<sup>243</sup> Peter R. Connolly, “Tragic Life and the Art of Tragedy.” *St. Patrick’s College* Vol. 41, No.9, (22 September 2014), p. 552.

<sup>244</sup> K. M. Newton, *Modern Literature and the Tragic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008), p. 40.

<sup>245</sup> Ram Prasansak, *Imagining Kenya in Ngugi’s Fiction*, (Oregon State University, 2004), p. 33.

According to Phyllis Taoua, Ngugi novelistic discourse “*contemplate[s] all the ambiguities inherent in the process of decolonization*”<sup>246</sup> and as such examines the social and historical conditions of the postcolonial society. The tragic form helps the writer to represent the social and cultural attitudes and experiences that shape human relationships, and eventually question the implications of the past to the present and the future.

#### **4. Waiyaki, The Black Messianic Saviour**

Even though Ngugi has changed the original name of his text *The Black Messiah* into *The River Between*, it is clear that his novel has a strong messianic motive, “*one such symbol that reverberates in Ngugi’s stories is the messianic character.*”<sup>247</sup> The novel features a messianic character who is initially rejected by the community and is then later seen trying to keep unity amongst “the people”. Indeed, most of Ngugi’s works include different western elements and Christian concepts:

It is a common place to note that in his fiction Ngugi fuses Mythological tropes from the Gikuyu and Christian religions. In all of his novels, be it part of the narrative strategy or in the language spoken by his characters, Biblical language, symbols and narratives are ubiquitous.<sup>248</sup>

Ngugi uses Christian concepts and apply them to his Gikuyu culture. According to Killam, “*the life in his [Ngugi’s] novels is shaped by the presence of Christianity and his first novel The River Between was written when he was a devout Christian. Christianity is a major influence in both the colonial and neo-colonial novels of Ngugi.*”<sup>249</sup> For instance, the typical Christian concept “messiah” is collateral with the white; here Ngugi uses the Messiah as a

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<sup>246</sup> Taoua, Phyllis, “The Postcolonial Condition.” *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Ed. F. Abiola Irele. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), web, pp. 215-216.

<sup>247</sup> Charles Smith, and GMT Emezue, *New Black and African Writing: Volume 2, Volume 2*. (Nigeria: Handel Books, 7 oct. 2015), p. 171.

<sup>248</sup> Mark Mathuray, “Resuming a Broken Dialogu: Prophecy, Nationalist Strategies, and Religious Discourses in Ngugi’s Early Work,” *Research in African Literature* Vol.40, No. 2, (2009), web, p. 44.

<sup>249</sup> G.D. Killam, *An Introduction to the writings of Ngugi* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1980), pp.7-8.

black. And after Mugu Wa Kibiro, the Gikuyu seer, have foretold the arrival of the white man, later in the novel the readers learn that, before he dies, he has also whispered an ancient Gikuyu prophecy filled with messianic hope, “*salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people.*”<sup>250</sup> This is emphasized when Chege takes, Waiyaki, to the sacred place telling him that he is a descendant from the long line of seers, Mugo, and delivers to him the secret of his being a savior which makes the prophecy more authentic. Chege says to his son,

I am old, my time is gone. Remember that you are the last in this line. Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites. [...] And keep on remembering, salvation shall come from the hills. A man must rise and save the people in their hour of need.<sup>251</sup>

In this way, Waiyaki learns about the secret messianic prophecy of a savior coming from the hills and who may fulfil it. Hence, a sense of messianic masculinity is infused in him. Ngugi describes, in the days after the event Waiyaki “*felt a heaviness making him a man. In body, he was still a boy.*”<sup>252</sup> This is completed through the ceremony of the second-birth and a complete initiation into manhood. Only after this ceremony which “*echoes the Christian sacrament of baptism, including the ideas of being made a new to fulfil a spiritual vocation,*”<sup>253</sup> Waiyaki’s messianic mission can begin. This gives Waiyaki force that pushes him with confidence and helps him to move assured in his mission; thus, he becomes popular among his people as he is similar to the Christ. Mugo’s prophecy of salvation echoes Old Testament messianic prophecies that Christians believe to refer to Jesus Christ; the prophecy

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<sup>250</sup> *The River Between*, p. 24.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>253</sup> Trevor James, “Theology of Landscape and Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *The River Between*“, in Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley (eds.), *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures*, (2001), p. 235.

advances the plot and creates a world of anticipation within the readers who wonder about the possibility of realizing it.

Ngugi further builds his novel on the concept of the “savior” in which Kenyatta states that the Gikuyu people have a shared belief of “savior” in what he calls the “*miraculous elders*” who are endowed with powers beyond those of ordinary human beings. They “*are held to be in direct communication with Mwene-Nyaga who gives them instructions generally during their sleep.*”<sup>254</sup> According to Ngugi’s beliefs, “[i]n the African way, the community serves the individual. And the individual finds the fullest development of his personality when he is working in and for the community as a whole.”<sup>255</sup> Waiyaki assumes the role of a savior which is outlined for him by his ancestral lineage. This role is attributed to him after his father Chege introduces him to Mugo’s prophecy. However, the savior motif becomes the cause of the primary tragic conflict in the novel. Also, the savior motif includes the female characters. When Muthoni decides to combine her Christian belief and the original Gikuyu tradition, she attempts to reconcile the opposing cultures. And when Nyambura realizes Waiyaki’s attempt to reconcile tribal and Christian biases, thus they both think in savior pattern.

The prophecy is another proof that makes him closer to the Christ. It is clear that Chege’s struggle and hope are not for a savior that will defend the insecure traditional culture of the tribe, but for a hero who will save the people and their land, additionally, due to Waiyaki’s education, he becomes even more suitable for the role of the anticipated Black Messiah. This is shown in the course of the novel’s narrative, as the narrator argues “*shepherd of his people*”<sup>256</sup> and “*the teacher.*”<sup>257</sup> Besides, when Kinuthia hides himself in the crowds so that he

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<sup>254</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of Gikuyu*. Intro. B. Malinowski. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953, web), P. 242.

<sup>255</sup> James Ogude, *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 15.

<sup>256</sup> *The River Between*, p. 96.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

cannot be identified to Waiyaki is similar to that of Jesus whom is denied by his friend Peter as Christians believe.

Waiyaki considers himself as a Christ, especially when he sees Nyambura by the river and thinks as “*if she and he were together standing on an altar ready for sacrifices.*”<sup>258</sup> Nyambura realizes that Waiyaki is her savior, her black Messiah and he is the promised one who can save her. Also, Waiyaki’s destiny and tragic end of the novel is similar to that of the Christ; they are judged by their community and are tried. Ngugi projects Waiyaki to reflect the life story of Jesus Christ in Western tradition, while he fulfils a mission similar to Christ’s.

Indeed, Ngugi creatively combines Gikuyu religious traditions with biblical language and the Christian messianic tradition in his depiction of Waiyaki. He effectively plays with the theme of the black Messiah and the saving mission, as this is a recurring theme in postcolonial literature: “*the relationship between missionary Christianity and traditional African cultures was a prominent theme in postcolonial literature during and for many years after the era of decolonization. [...] At least as early as the 1950s*”<sup>259</sup>

After establishing the protagonist as a black Messiah “*who would unify the people, by his stated commitment to reconciliation,*”<sup>260</sup> and contribute to the development of the indigenous people with his teachings, Ngugi meaningfully ends Waiyaki’s mission in an inopportune manner. This is obvious in the final words of Waiyaki, when he concluded that “*now he knew what he would preach if he ever got another chance: education for unity. Unity for political freedom.*”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> *The River Between*, p. 104.

<sup>259</sup> F. Hale, ‘The Critique of Gikuyu Religion and Culture in S.N. Ngubiah’s *a Curse from God.*’ *Acta Theologica* Vol. 27, No. 1, (2007), p. 47.

<sup>260</sup> *The River Between*, p. 125.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

## 5. The Contestation of Leadership

One of the prominent features in *The River Between* is leadership. This latter is so significant that becomes the central part of power struggle and eventually leads to the downfall of the novel's hero. Ngugi tries to explore and to show his characters as important leaders. Williams asserts that, "*The mention of the contest for leadership on the first page of the novel is so significant.*"<sup>262</sup>

The novel is centered on the conflicts that take place among those antagonists. It expresses the dilemma encountered by people who are caught in between life or death for the sake of leadership. This is achieved through the narrative's focus on the conflicts of the individuals that are nurtured by social interactions. This postcolonial conflict is what KwakuLabriKorang refers to as "*infrasocial*"<sup>263</sup> which is between individuals and their interpersonal conflicts. These individuals are living in the same social and communal organization.

The narrative makes it clear that there is rivalry among characters who are working to protect and/ or preserve the community, but not all of them because leadership, in *The River Between*, is a great problem since each leader seeks something different from the other. For instance, both Joshua and Kabonyi's struggle is personal rather than collective; while Waiyaki believes in cultural unification, he thinks that it is his duty to protect this divided society, but he lacks historical base.

The protagonist, Waiyaki, is the first one who presents a problem of leadership. The novel's opening shows Waiyaki as an educated man at SirianaSchool in response to the order of his father to heed the prophecy and to learn the white man's wisdom as a way to fight them back. He believes in his dream and thinks that he can bridge the gap between the ridges and

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<sup>262</sup> Patrick Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 25.

<sup>263</sup> Kwaku Labri Korang, "Making a Post-Eurocentric Humanity: Tragedy Realism, and *Things Fall Apart*." *Research in African Literature* Vol. 42, No.2 (2011), (Indiana University. Web.10 Mar, 2014), pp.1-29; 13.

further can make a balance but he is faced with many problems; the antagonism between the ridges, between Gikuyu traditional values and Christians values, between Gikuyu and colonialists, tradition versus modernity, between himself, his personal love and his people. His own people betray him and he loses touch with them and his aim of reuniting the divided community is destroyed.

Apart from Waiyaki, Joshua, the fanatical Christian convert, appears not only as an intermediate leader but also a religious leader as he embraces the new faith,

Joshua had clothed himself with a religion decorated and smeared with everything white. He renounced his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe. And because he had nothing to rest upon, something rich and firm on which to stand and grow, he had to cling with his hands to whatever the missionaries taught him promised future.<sup>264</sup>

He is against all the ways of the tribe and hates every thing related to his African culture, Williams states that Joshua,

Hopes for the power of the white man's order to work through him, and in this way he becomes a classic indigenous intermediary, serving as a conduit of one of the central forms of colonial control, believing that in some sense he holds power but in fact acting as a means of its deployment against his own people.<sup>265</sup>

He has been assigned a duty to quieten the natives and facilitate missionary ideas in the society, and preaching the people to believe in the new faith and give up their tradition. Joshua's preaching really influences the Gikuyu traditional beliefs.

Joshua's name is a clear sign of his ideology; he is the only character in the novel whose name is not Gikuyu, "*the new faith worked on him till it came to possess him wholly. He renounced his tribe magic, power, and ritual. He turned to and felt the deep presence of the*

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<sup>264</sup> *The River Between*, p. 141.

<sup>265</sup> Patrick Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 25.

*one God. Had he not given the white man power overall?*”<sup>266</sup> Joshua’s blind acceptance of Christianity makes him obey any instruction given by the colonizer, “*he knew it was his duty as a Christian to obey the government, giving into the Caesar the things that are God’s. This was what he wanted every Christian to do.*”<sup>267</sup>

It is very pathetic to see Joshua dedicating himself to the new religion neglecting his own culture; Losambe criticizes Joshua’s attitude as “*Christian doctrine is translated into reflex actions and mechanical of behaviour. The bigoted and fanatical Joshua accepts the alien ideology blindly, uncritically and naively.*”<sup>268</sup> Taking all the ways of the white man, he harshly rejects all his tribe’s beliefs and practices; Scott and Houseley comment that “*Joshua’s theology is too rigid to permit any openness to the traditional ways.*”<sup>269</sup>

However, Joshua’s actions and attitudes are his own conviction, whereas Kabonyi’s and his son Kamau’s extrem hate is stimulated by their jealousy and greed. Kabonyi, on the other hand, is also an early convert to Christianity alongside Joshuan but he renounces the religion when he recognizes that he cannot achieve what Joshua has achieved. He becomes the enemy to Waiyaki and he is competing with him because he, according to Chege, may know about the prophecy of the Mugo Wa Kibiro and who indeed throughout the novel is competing with Waiyaki because, he considers himself to be “*the saviour for whom the people waited,*”<sup>270</sup> and hopes to be like Chege, the promised savior. After Chege’s death he becomes the leader of Kameno. As its leader, he declares that he is that savior and contested against Waiyaki’s programme of spreading education, “*a mission that had the strength of a political*

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<sup>266</sup> *The River Between*, p. 29.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>268</sup> Losambe, p. 57. (qtd in “*The River Between: A Cultural Approach.*” by Najla Fahad Al-Yabis. Master thesis, university of Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic, 2010, pp. 1-58.

<sup>269</sup> Jagmes Scott, and Paul Simpson-Houseley, *Mapping the Sacred: religion, geography and postcolonial literatures*. Ed. (Amstreadam: Rodopi, 2001. Web), p. 233.

<sup>270</sup> *The River Between*, p. 144.

conviction.”<sup>271</sup> His son, Kamau is against his father’s conviction since he is also educated at Siriana just like Waiyaki, but still they want to demonstrate the inability of Waiyaki to maintain the tribal cultural identity and raise doubts about Waiyaki’s actions.

According to Kamau-Goro, this conflict “*revolves around the identity of the saviour foretold in the ancient prophecy,*” but “*more fundamental, there is a conflict over the interpretation of the prophecy and the strategies to face the colonial threat.*”<sup>272</sup> Kabonyi wants to be the prophesied saviour and he no longer bears the thought of Waiyaki to be that savior, for him this conflict is personal and one-sided. Although Waiyaki’s authority and popularity among his people whom they call “the teacher”, Kabonyi seeks to undermine this power. Unlike Waiyaki, Kabonyi’s main aim is to protect the social, political, and cultural aspects of the tribe. He also calls for a total rejection to everything related to the white man, even for Joshua and his followers. Williams says, “*Kabonyi’s nativist or traditionalist model predicated on strict adherence to tribal custom and the maintenance of cultural purity.*”<sup>273</sup>

Despite the fact that Kabonyi and Joshua have different reactions to colonialism; both of them are united in the hate of Waiyaki who is considered as threat. He seeks negotiation and plays a mediatory role trying to reconcile the oppositions. Thus, it becomes clear that Waiyaki is a sympathetic leader:

Waiyaki appears to represent a more sympathetic style of leadership. The emphasis that he places on education leads to an advocacy of non-violent methods of political resistance, and his ambitions to overcome local divisions through the promotion of tribal unity stands against the masculinist creeds of competition and self-aggrandisement.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> *The River Between*, p. 117.

<sup>272</sup> Nicholas Kamau-Goro, “African Culture and the Language of Nationalist Imagination: The Reconfiguration of Christianity in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*.” *Studies in World Christianity* Vol. 16, No. 1, 2010), p. 14.

<sup>273</sup> Patrick Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o* (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 30.

<sup>274</sup> Andrew Hammond, “Ngugi wa Thiong’o & the Crisis of Kenyan Masculinity”, in Lahoucine Ouzgane (ed.), *Men in African Film & Fiction* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2011), p. 116.

When Waiyaki tries to warn the Christian leader Joshua about the intended violence by Kabonyi and his followers against Christianity, he treats him badly and orders him out of the church telling him, “*you have always worked against the people of God.*”<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, when Kabonyi realizes that he is not that savior, he decides to work hard in order to gain more power in the clan. Besides, he even wishes his son, Kamau, to occupy it, to be the prophesied just like Chege or Waiyaki. Kamau-Goro argues that the conflict between Waiyaki and Kabonyi, “*revolves around the identity of the saviour foretold in the ancient prophecy but more fundamentally, there’s a conflict over the interpretation of the prophecy and the strategies to face the colonial threat.*”<sup>276</sup>

Kabonyi builds a secret society called “the Kiama” and administers it to “*rid the country of the influence of the white man. He would restore the purity of the tribe and its wisdom.*”<sup>277</sup> The Kiama asks people “*to take an oath of allegiance to the purity and to get harness of the tribe,*”<sup>278</sup> and punishment is given to any violator. Kabonyi wants to undermine Waiyaki’s abilities as a leader through making the people doubt the utility of Waiyaki’s educational mission, and that he is younger to hold all of this,

Was the white man’s education necessary? Or do you think the education of our tribe, the education and the wisdom is, in any way, below that of the white man? Do not be led by a youth. Did the tail ever lead the head, the child, the father or the cubs the lions?<sup>279</sup>

He wonders what Waiyaki and the people want to do with the education plan. This passage strongly shows Kabonyi’s radical outlook of being more effective. Even though the novelist wants his readers to advocate the political view of the protagonist and sympathize

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<sup>275</sup> *The River Between*, p. 113.

<sup>276</sup> Nicholas Kamau-Goro, “African Culture and the Language of Nationalist Imagination: The Reconfiguration of Christianity in NgugiwaThiong’o’s *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*”, *Studies in World Christianity* Vol. 16, No. 1, (2010), p. 14.

<sup>277</sup> *The River Between*, p. 95.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

with him by presenting Kabonyi's fastest anticolonial activity as his own ambition and jealousy.

However, throughout the novel's narrative the Kiama endorses Waiyaki's project, but uses a different path which is more conservative. Moreover, the severity of the Kiama leads to accuse Waiyaki of treason because of his love for the enemy's daughter, Nyambura. This leads to more division and hatred between the leaders. The opposing forces become stronger as Waiyaki cannot deny his affair because this would imply giving up the mission and also demonstrate that their relationship encroaches the hostilities and the division between the opposing cultures.

Waiyaki's relationship with Nyambura further worsens the situation and leads to his and her own destruction. Both of them know that their union is very important as it will bring happiness and reconciliation to both tribes; eventhough, they are sure that this will bring fury over both Joshua and Kabonyi. Both of Nyambura and Waiyaki are not accepted by both tribes. On the one hand, Nyambura is uncircumcised and thus not accepted by the Kiama. The elders interpret Waiyaki's intention to marry her as unfaithful to them. On the other hand, Waiyaki is circumcised and thus Joshua, Nyambura's father, hates him. He considers their love affair as violation to both him and to the Christ.

However, Muthoni's death has helped Waiyaki to define his purpose. He opens an Independent School and continues to organize many more schools around the region. It is his attempt to use education as a medium of unification of the rivals. Following his purpose, Waiyaki succeeds in gaining popularity and becomes a powerful figure among his people. This induces Kabonyi's jealousy who would take every chance he gets to undermine his ideology as a young leader. Similarly, Kamau's hatred increases through his jealousy of Nyambura's love for him. He has fawns her but she has rejected him for Waiyaki. This

presents Kamau's disappointment who later on wishes to destroy Waiyaki in every possible way, as if "*this was no longer a personal battle, but a war between the tribe and Waiyaki;*"<sup>280</sup> this is further indicated by Amoko's words, "*Kamau and Kabonyi represent the powerless and marginalized within the traditional Gikuyu community as Ngugi depicts it.*"<sup>281</sup>

Hence, Joshua's inexorable way becomes better justified than that of Kamau and Kabonyi. They want to control the people through their manipulative political thought and deceit, whereas Waiyaki is supposed to submit himself to the tribe. He is portrayed as a natural leader with a fire in his eyes that makes people obey. The novels conclude with the victory of Kabonyi's claim against education that will ultimately add to the existing division in the land, and Waiyaki's own people leave his fate in the hands of Kabonyi's Kiama.

Despite the fact that Kabonyi has succeeded in completely destroying Waiyaki, he does not show any valuable alternative to him. The novel shows that these leaders fail in doing their duties or betraying them. It closes with no solution as well as for the country's fate and leaving the reader "*afloat in uncertainty as to where Kenya would go;*"<sup>282</sup> this is also suggested in Ngugi's Novel,

The land was silent. The land was now silent. The two ridges lay side by side, hidden in the darkness. And Honiariver went on flowing between them, down through the valley of life, its beat rising the dark stillness, reaching into the hearts of the people of Makuyu and Kamenno.<sup>283</sup>

Ngugi, in *The River Between*, powerfully reveals the unresolved tensions that will continue even after the novel ends.<sup>284</sup> This is further suggested by Dathome, "*Ngugi offers*

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<sup>280</sup> *The River Between*, p. 133.

<sup>281</sup> Appolo Obonyo Amoko, "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimcry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. *Research in African Literature* Vol.36, No. 1, (2005), web, p. 47.

<sup>282</sup> Ram Prasansak, *Imagining Kenya in Ngugi's Fiction*, Unpublished Thesis. (Oregon State University, 29 July, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>283</sup> *The River Between*, p. 152.

<sup>284</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 211.

*little hope or no alternatives in this novel.*"<sup>285</sup> This may appear to be so because the writer himself does not suggest any viable solution to this impasse of Christianity versus tribal ways. The portrayal of Ngugi is very realistic in the representation of African mental states under colonization. He allows the readers to perceive more fully the motives and moral choices of his characters.

*The River Between* helps readers understand the African sense of heroism as well as the realities of human condition. This novel is clearly a tragic novel with Waiyaki as its typical tragic hero, whose downfall can be attributed to certain flaws in his character as noted above. The tone of the story is, in effect, so sad and that has crept into the hearts of the people. *The River Between* is a cultural novel that depicts the texture of life of the Gikuyu people in central Gikuyu land of Kenya in the 1920<sup>s</sup>. Their struggles and divisions were recurrent at the time of its publication. This depiction focuses on the clashes that take place within the cultural domain.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes his novel in a Western style and mixes it with Gikuyu elements in a reflection of the hybrid teaching that he received. He, in a fascinating way, merges his Gikuyu indigenous religious traditions with Christian idioms to create and to develop the idea of the black Messiah in the context of colonialism and Christian missionaries. The failure to fulfil the prophecy is narrated in such a way to suggest that it is neither the fault of Waiyaki, nor of the messianic quality of the prophecy, but it seems to be the fault of the "tribe's" implacability.

Moreover, Ngugi's portrayal of his characters reveals his preference of the ambivalent individuals who try to mix the two ways with flexibility and tolerance. He clearly reveals their ambitions, desires, fate, and fear of failure. Ngugi's novel epitomizes his genius and talent and his ability to carry deep ideas in a highly symbolic language and to picture the Gikuyu

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<sup>285</sup> O. R. Dathome, *African Literature in the Twentieth Century*. (London: Heinmann, 1976), p. 128.

community as it is in reality. Ngugi makes a great contribution to the African perspectives on life, culture, and history. This earns him a well-deserved reputation that marks him out as a writer of the protest literature.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has investigated postcolonial discourse, and its perspectives, roots, and theories, specifically those of the most notable theorists such as Said, Bhabha and Spivak. It focused on how African culture and identity are shaped by the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial experiences of postcolonial communities. Postcolonialism as a notion has been controversial and difficult to define. Some critics claim that Postcolonialism symbolizes the historical period after independence, while many others affirm that it deals with all that concerns the postcolonial communities since the moment of colonization until the present day.

Postcolonial writers have produced literature that totally negates the notions of imperialism and marginality, because those writers come from postcolonial backgrounds and share the same experience and have a common background. Their writings concern all that is related to identity in a way or another. They oppose the colonial legacies not only because they oppress their communities, but because they distort their cultural identity.

Therefore, cultural identity happens to be of a paramount importance to postcolonial literature. Cultural identity has been shaped by colonial experience. In the process of colonialism and imperialism, the postcolonial subjects often find themselves in a dilemma as on which side to stand; on the side of the traditional cultural identity which cannot fit the new world order, or on the side of western ways which are alien to them. Hence, automatically these societies are torn between two worlds; that which incorporate western identity and that which resists it. Thus, maintaining a pure identity is difficult in either way.

It is true that people are living in a globalized world, a world that is full of new changes, a world which is prevailed by the notions of mobility and multiculturalism. So, postcolonial subjects will find themselves senselessly reshaping their identities so that they can fit into the

new world order. However, even though postcolonial subjects embrace the new western identity, they always maintain contact with their beliefs and traditions. This ultimately results in a dilemma of identity in the postcolonial world.

Before colonization, the colonized had their traditions, beliefs, and their land to identify with; they knew exactly who they were. However, with the coming of the colonizers everything fell apart. The colonizers started to disrupt the native beliefs through the introduction of Christianity to gain their support. After that, this colonial power deprived the natives from their lands so they lost their sense of belonging because of the process of displacement. In addition, colonialism emphasized the use of European to influence young natives and instil loyalty to the colonizer. All these processes have contributed to the postcolonial subjects' alienation from their own people and from the world. Furthermore, these processes led the postcolonial subjects to make new identities which are neither completely original nor western.

All these facts have created a distortion in the cultural identity of the postcolonial individuals. Postcolonial literature tries to depict this notion through addressing the elements that make up this cultural identity in the characters. Elements like language, hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, and otherness which are of a great importance in framing their society's culture.

The issue of language has been a very crucial element since it indicates the hybrid and multicultural nature of postcolonial societies. The latter is certainly a very important element in Ngugi's writing in which he assures that writing African fiction in a foreign language is submissive to the local culture. For Ngugi, using a European language to express the African experience will make it difficult for the readers to understand the real authentic tradition of Africa. Furthermore, this process will empower the western literatures and does nothing but

alienate more postcolonial societies. This fact becomes the main focus of many African writers, especially after independence.

Language, to Ngugi, is culture and Africans cannot promote African culture and values when they do not encourage the use of African languages in their writings. For him, it is not appropriate to promote the use of English, which embodies the British culture at the expense of African languages and culture. Actually Ngugi's decision to write in his African indigenous language is a clear sign to show his belonging to his Gikuyu community and to Africa. Although Ngugi has been opposed by many other writers including Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, he contends to produce writing that communicate to the African people and aid them to determine their status in their society and in the world as well.

All the formerly discussed constituents in this dissertation could be portrayed through Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. He argues that postcolonial writers and subjects struggle to find out their place in their society and the world. This dilemma is due to the imperialists' effect on their societies, he also suggests some solutions to this problem; among which is the return to the native language and the rejection of any kind of literary or cultural oppression by colonial powers.

The primary goal of the colonizer is to change the culture of the colonies so that it becomes easy for controlling them. This colonial process leads to confusion in the use of the mother tongue, the displacement of their culture and hence the loss of their sense of belonging, the hybridization and the mimicry of cultures, which leads to division and thus to the notion of otherness.

Ngugi in *The River Between* has introduced the importance of land in the lives of the Gikuyus, and how his characters have a cultural bond with it. The loss of their land means the loss of their culture. Ngugi depicts how people need to have a place to identify with and

call home. However, colonizers have disrupted and deprived colonies from their lands and changed their way of life. Thus, colonies become displaced and lost because they no longer have a place to identify with. In addition, Ngugi perfectly portrays how important is the land for Africans. He portrays that if one does not have a place, he will be forever wondering who he is? And where does he fit?

However, most of Ngugi's characters reflect the marriage between tradition and modernity, between African ways and European ways. Besides, they present their in-betweenness, and also their quest to find a status in the new ways of life as a way to escape marginalization. In doing so, they are no longer perceived as "other" to the western world, but they perceive each other as "Others" as it is portrayed in Ngugi's novel between Gikuyu tribal structure, Kameno and Makuyu, separated by Honia river. This means each is an "other" from the other's perspective. This Binary process is the heart of postcolonial literature and contradiction is very explicitly expressed in this work which clearly delivers the issue of Otherness.

Ngugi through depicting this very crucial theme of cultural identity is revealing his own quest for identity. Waiyaki is largely allegorical for Ngugi's own sense of lost identity and, in general, the identity crisis of the Kenyan people. Through his work, Ngugi voices his longing to regain his cultural identity and his need to reconstruct a link between himself and his origin. Besides, he criticizes those who try to embrace the new Western traditions, which is another attempt to reconstruct the link between his people. Postcolonial subjects are of a hybrid multicultural nature; this shows that it is not easy to regain a pure culture in the new rapid change of societies.

The present study is based upon the examination of Ngugi's novel *The River Between* in the light of postcolonial theories. *The River Between* is a postcolonial novel which transmits

the idea of preserving one's culture with the possibility of change. It has demonstrated that the arrival of the missionaries have caused rifts among the natives.

*The River Between* reflects social and personal views and reviews the picture of the African society. Ngugi has recreated the disruption and the dissolution of the African society during colonial time and the subsequent African struggle to regain their culture. His description of the individuals' psychological trauma as a result of colonization compels a compassion response from the readers. Through such characters as Waiyaki, Muthoni, and Nyambura, Ngugi captures the dubious and the baffle experience of the African individuals in their disrupted society, and their strong desire to save it.

*The River Between* is a tragic novel with Waiyaki as its typical tragic hero and whose downfall can be traced back to certain flaws in his personality as already mentioned. In effect, the novel's tone is so sad especially the last paragraph of the novel's ending that greatly resembles a funeral dirge. Ngugi is presumably elegising the passing away of a free nation as the European imperialism tightened its grip on the land.

Clearly Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of Africa's nationalist committed writers and one of its powerful spokes persons for the re-assertion of African cultural identity. He, more than any other African writer nowadays, has given a powerful and compassionate expression to the postcolonial subjects' experiences. He is not just a staunch supporter of the promotion of African culture and its values and heritage but he also wants to prove that such forms and values of culture can be promoted.

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## الملخص:

تعتبر رواية *النهر الفاصل* (1965) للكاتب الكيني نجوغي واينغو إحدى الركائز الأساسية في الأدب الإفريقي الحديث إذ عرّجت على جملة من القضايا والحقائق البارزة في المجتمعات الإفريقية إبان وبعد الحقبة الإستعمارية بأسلوب متميز. تسلط الرواية الضوء على ماهية التصادم الثقافي القائم بين المستعمر والمستعمر من جهة، وبين السكان الأصليين فيما بينهم من جهة أخرى الأمر الذي أدى إلى تشكيل وبلورة هوية ثقافية مزدوجة في كينيا. كما بينت أيضاً دور الرجل الأبيض وتسببه في إزاحة الثقافة الأصلية و التسبب في استلاب الأفراد من جذورهم الثقافية الضاربة في عمق التاريخ. وبالتالي فالرواية تصف كيف قام الاستعمار بتدمير النسيج الثقافي وعرقلة استمراريته ويتجسد ذلك في دور البطل واياكي وكفاحه العقيم من أجل وضع حد للتدخل الاستعماري في الحياة التقليدية. و عليه وظف الروائي الخطاب ما بعد الإستعمار المناهض للصورة النمطية التي روجت لها أوروبا حول المجتمعات الإفريقية بغية إسترداد وترميم إرث شعبه ومجتمعه الثقافي. يتمحور الجزء الأول حول الإطار النظري للعمل ويعالج الجزء الثاني موضوع الإزاحة الثقافية باعتباره محرك أساسي للبحث بينما يتناول الجزء الثالث كيفية تصوير نجوغي نوعاً جديداً من البطولة الإفريقية التقليدية في مجتمعه ، وخصائص البطل المأساوي ، وكيف أدت دوافعه إلى سقوطه. وعليه فما يمكن استخلاصه هو ان هذا البحث يبرز بوضوح إشكالية الهوية الثقافية في مجتمع عانى ويلات الاستعمار وكيف اثر ذلك على بلورة وتطور رؤى الكاتب في روايته.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** ما بعد الاستعمار، الإزاح، الثقافة، الاستعمار، البطولة.