

**IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: A STUDY
OF SELECTED NOVELS BY NGUGI WA
THIONG'O**

BY

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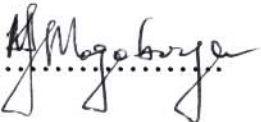
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DECLARATION

I, **MPHOTO JOHANNES MOGOBOYA**, declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of the North for the degree of Master of Arts in English Studies has not been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my own original work, and that all the material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

NGUGI'S NOVELS

TRB *The River Between* (1965)

WNC *Weep Not, Child* (1964)

AGW *A Grain of Wheat* (1967)

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CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS BY NGUGI WA THIONG'O

1.1 BACKGROUND

Spirited debates have been going on among African writers and literary critics about evolving literature which would be peculiarly African. This literature, they acknowledge, might be an offshoot from various literary traditions from different countries, but should embrace uniquely African elements. Moreover, these literary writers and critics have always believed that African literature will give Africans a sense of continental identity and belonging in that it will help them discover and proclaim 'loyalty to indigenous values' and 'on the one hand be set in the stream of history to which it belongs and so be better appreciated; while on the other be better able to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots' (Ngugi 1986: 95).

These African writers and literary critics acknowledge that African literature forms a central part of the struggle towards cultural, socio-economic, and political emancipation of the continent since cultural subjugation has, for a long time, been stifling Africa's economic development and human resource growth. This domination by external political forces has led to the erosion of African identity. Ngugi (1993: 42) notes:

... the subjugation of the entire labour power of other countries by the concentrated capital, or moneypower, of another country came to realize that the economic exploitation and the political domination of a people could never be complete without cultural and hence mental and spiritual subjugation. The economic and political conquest of Africa was accompanied by cultural subjugation and the imposition of an imperialist cultural tradition whose dire effects are still being felt today.

The effects of cultural subjugation which Ngugi talks about are experienced more in the area of identity. It is identity which defines a people as their cultural, social, political, and

economic strength depends on the way in which they see themselves as a unit which has defined roots. For Africans, these roots were, unfortunately, not allowed to grow and develop due to colonialism, something which led to identity crisis.

This quest for a peculiarly African identity, however, is not satisfactorily reflected in the African political sphere. For instance, many African states enjoy political freedom, meaning that political leadership is now in the hands of Africans, although the vast majority of the inhabitants of these states are, ironically, still languishing in harsh economic conditions. This paradoxical situation emanates from, *inter alia*, the ineptitude and avarice for power by most African leaders at the helm of governments and from the former colonizers' refusal to let go of their former colonies. Kariuki (2003: 19) aptly indicates that Africa's would-be democracy has been blighted and tarnished by the civilian and military dictatorships which are characterized by human rights violations in the form of torture, kleptocracy (rule by thieves), and genocide. Former colonizers still rule their former colonies indirectly through economic power, which in turn, affects these former colonies' cultural and social integrity. This study, therefore, endeavours to explore Africa's search for identity, which means her quest not only to define her roots, but also to develop and promote the totality of her socio-cultural existence. This is achieved by focusing on the following selected novels by Ngugi: *The River Between* (1965), *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *Matigari* (1987).

1.2 IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (1996: 669) defines identity as the state or quality of being a specified person or thing, which embraces who or what a person is. It further explains it as individual characteristics by which a person or a thing can be identified, which means that a person's or a thing's identity is his/her or its individuality and personality. Conversely, the *Millennium World Book Dictionary* (2000:1048) refers to identity as who a person is or what a thing is, which aspects form his/her or its individuality while *Ecarta Dictionary* (1999: 934) defines it as who somebody is or what something is, especially the name somebody or something is known by. Again, it may mean somebody's essential self or a set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as

belonging uniquely to himself/herself and constituting his/her individual personality for life. Castells (1997), in Bekker, Dodds, and Khosa (2001: 2), defines identity as referring to 'people's source of meaning and experience' and to 'the process of constructions of meaning on the basis of [culture]'. From these four definitions by these four internationally reputed source books, one may thus, legitimately purport that identity means, inter alia, all the qualities, beliefs, and ideas which make a person feel that he/she stands out from others. In identity, these sources harmonize, one finds a particular combination of features or qualities that make a person different from and differing with anybody else. It forms the outstanding features, traits, experiences, and attributes which serve as the tenets of a person or a thing. The word 'individuality', one might argue, serves as the thread that weaves through these three definitions.

Having outlined and expanded on the definitions of identity above, one might, therefore, safely contend that identity in African literature encapsulates all the aspects which help particularize and characterize African literature because in identity, there is originality which leads to uniqueness. Thus, African literature cannot be what it is and be named as such without possessing individual salient features which make it deserve the name. These distinctive features, which are its hallmarks, serve as the specific aspects which make it stand out from other literatures. Those African literary features are, among others, orality and commitment (Cloete 1996: 36). As it might be known that literature is a carrier of culture, this investigation on identity in African literature uses African culture as its fulcrum (cultural identity). Chabal, Augel, Brookshaw, Leite, and Shaw (1996: 4) mention:

Literature is a central component of the cultural identity of all modern nations-states, even when it is evidently much more than that. From this perspective, therefore, modern literature is best understood historically as one of the most important forms of cultural output in and through which a nation-state comes to be identified. We speak thus of Russian, French or Norwegian literature in a way which we all understand to be a reference both to a specific literature from a particular national cultural tradition. This seems straightforward enough but it is straightforward only because we already 'know' what Russia, France or Norway *and Africa* [my italics] are and because we accept that these countries do have a 'national' cultural tradition.

It should, however, be noted that though African literature is essentially different from other world literatures, it still shares certain general principles with them, thereby making it indebted to and interwoven with them.

A large number of African writers and critics, such as Ngugi, Achebe, and Ngara, consider identity in African literature as questioning what the nature of African literature is, its function in society, the approach which should be adopted when assessing it, and the role of language in African literature. It examines the content of African literature in terms of the value systems, the setting, the Africans' behavioural patterns, whether or not the language used exudes the African idiom, and the way in which the content can be efficaciously appreciated (cultural and socio-political collective selfhood as well as moral and cultural regeneration). Thus, the value system found in African literature differs from, for example, that in European literature in the same way as the needs and aspirations of Africans differ from those of the Europeans. This is because, in the words of Makgoba, Shope, and Mazwai (1999: x):

As African people we socialize, speak, dance, make music, make art, write poetry, and value and appreciate in manners that are distinct from those of Orientals, Europeans and Americans, by virtue of our history, experiences, exposure and socialization. Cultures are not fixed or stagnant entities. Our African culture has been affected and has benefited from interaction with others; but remains African.

In as much as the British literature is a sovereign literature which makes a unique contribution to the international community about the challenges which face mankind, so should African literature. In order for it to successfully carve a niche and compete effectively with other world literatures, people have to understand what its qualities are, where it emanates from, and where it is going, which means its identity. In its attempt to preserve the African heritage, African literature should, however, not compromise the global standards of literary excellence and thereby run the gauntlet of being ostracized. It should struggle to uphold and conserve values and needs which are special and integral to the African environments and societies. This will enable Africans, who are its primary

consumers, to gain insight into their heritage and culture, and thereby attain knowledge of who they are. This knowledge will resultantly make them confident and proud of themselves. Awareness of one's identity will make one shrug off feelings of inadequacy. Thus, if Africans are able to give their literature identity, they will be enhancing the chances of African prosperity because the world will start believing in and appreciating their culture, and consequently, their continent. Having said that, one can, therefore, argue that in order for African literature to be a credit to itself and its consumers, it should not ape other literatures, but should take its place in the world as what it is. Thus, identity in African literature embraces what Mokgoatšana (1999: 1) considers, firstly, as the identity of the text which is trapped in the network of others and struggles to disentangle itself, secondly, self or individual identity, which is epitomized by alienation and whose aim is to re-create and re-discover the self, and lastly a broader national identity which articulates the collective. It is these three types of identity which Ngugi strives to achieve in his works, and which this study sets out to investigate.

1.3 SHAPING INFLUENCES ON NGUGI'S PERSPECTIVE ON AFRICAN IDENTITY

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has emerged as one of the most distinguished and refined writers and critics East Africa has ever produced. He was formerly known as James Ngugi but because of his quest and struggle for self-identity as an African, he changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong'o (as did the Zimbabwean, Charles Marechera, to become Dambuzo Marechera and the Ghanaian, George-Awoonor Williams, to Kofi Awoonor). Cook and Okenimkpe (1997: 195) explain:

It was to vindicate his deepening commitment to indigenous African culture that, in 1970, Ngugi abandoned his Christian name, James. As Ime Ikiddeh relates in the Foreword to *Homecoming*, Ngugi had been rebuked by a church elder in his audience at his address to the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in March 1970, for the impiety and blasphemy of impudently denouncing the Christian church while he bore a Christian name as a testimony to his faith. Thereafter, Ngugi has permanently given up the name, perceiving its incompatibility with his increasingly radical turning away from an alien scale of values.

Born on the 5th of January 1938 at Kamiriitu village near Limuru in Kiambu District of Kenya's Central Province, which is the place where the Gikuyu people are situated, Ngugi grew up in a large family. His father had four wives. It was during this period that the British colonial powers were relocating Kenyans from their fertile and arable land, to the barren and dry land called Native Reserves that Ngugi, like many other concerned Kenyans, felt the traumatizing effects of the forced removals and land alienation. His father was an *ahoi* (tenant – at – will) in the fertile White Highland the British allocated to themselves and to a few collaborative and wealthy Africans. This land disinheritance caused disintegration and identity crisis in the Gikuyu people because of the value they attach to it. To them, land is a source of cultural pride, dignity, 'historicity and identity' (Gikandi 2000: 19). Kenyatta (1979: 21) adds:

In studying the Gikuyu tribal organization it is necessary to take into consideration land tenure as the most important factor in the social, political, religious, and economic life of the tribe. As agriculturalists, the Gikuyu people depend entirely on the land. It supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors 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 moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth (*koirugo*).

The fight for land repossession becomes one of the recurring themes (*motifs*) in Ngugi's works and therefore, a major shaping influence in his career. The Gikuyus were a nation that survived on subsistence farming and cultivation of cash crops such as tea and tobacco, and when the British took their land away from them, they felt as if they had squeezed life out of them in that their cultural identity was threatened, hence the fierce battle for land reclamation.

Ngugi began his schooling in the missionary schools in Kamaandura and Kinyogoori. These schools discouraged political activism and promoted the use of manual labour as a 'panacea for African indolence, slovenliness, and moral degeneration' (Mohamed 1983: 190). Kenyan cultural values were played down, particularly when the church of Scotland denounced female circumcision which is a vital Gikuyu religious rite, to the point where some of the culturally conscious Kenyan parents took out their children from those missionary schools and established their own Kikuyu Karinga school in which 'the traditional history of their people and their right to repossess the land' were emphasized (Mohamed 1983: 192). From the Kenyan independent school, Ngugi progressed to a missionary high school called Alliance, where he embraced Christianity and believed in what his teachers instilled in him which was that he and his schoolmates were going to be the future elites and leaders of Kenya. At this stage, Ngugi did not have an explicit and passionate understanding of the Gikuyu culture until he went to Makerere University where he started his writing career. This was during the perilous times of the state of Emergency declared by the British colonial powers, and at the height of the war for emancipation waged by the Mau Mau freedom fighters. From Makerere University, he proceeded to Leeds University in England where he came back with a full understanding of the role he should play as a writer in society. He started to correctly and consciously redefine his cultural identity in line with the masses by putting right the distortions which he blindly imbibed from his missionary teachers, which were that they were preparing him for black elitism and not for peasant redemption. His works are, therefore, an embodiment of the colonial and postcolonial experiences in Kenya and in Africa as a whole. They cry out for the recovery and rehabilitation of Africa's identity and total freedom from colonial and neo-colonial stranglehold. Thus, this study investigates Ngugi's quest for identity in his selected novels: *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Matigari*.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Africa has been under colonial rule followed by neo-colonial influences for centuries. During this period, Africans were dehumanized, enslaved, and oppressed to the point where they hardly had a say in the affairs of their continent. The imperial masters' aim

was to wipe out all the vestiges of African culture, to substitute African languages with theirs, and to cause Africans to feel inferior through the use of 'violent military and technological superiority' (Mohamed 1983: 186) which made the African apathetic and give in to hard labour imposed on him/her by the colonial administrators. Physical fatigue from famine and diseases rendered the African hollow inside until he/she could not pluck up courage to put up a fight against his/her tormentors lest he/she be killed. The colonizers instilled fear in him/her which gave birth to self-degradation and self-hate (Sartre in Fanon 1963: 13). This physical, psychological, and emotional torture was so excruciating that it left the African with no option but to develop strategies which would help him/her salvage himself/herself from the unsavoury situation.

Europeans colonized Africa under the guise of civilization but their primary aim was to expand their empire and to plunder her resources through a systematic historical and cultural distortion programme. Ngugi (1993: 130-131) exposes that one of the weapons they used to disfigure the African image was literature:

The literature that carried images of Africa and the African ranged from that depicting the self-effacing African as the real human being, or the fun-loving, always smiling type as the more sympathetic being, to that which showed the African resistance fighter as the very reincarnation of cruelty, cowardice, ignorance, stupidity, envy, and even cannibalism. The collaborationist African was glorified. The one who opposed colonialism was vilified. Of course it was not always so directly stated. It was simply the way the author guided the emotions of readers to make them identify with the African who saw no contradictions between himself and colonialism and to distance themselves from the African who argued back, the one who demanded his rightful dues, or the one who, in the banana plantations, plotted against the master.

The European invasion of Africa had the following negative influences on African identity:

At first, the African was condescendingly considered as a noble savage – a concept which implied that the African, by virtue of his/her alleged savage nature, was lazy, primitive, licentious, had no history, culture and language (he/she only spoke gibberish), was

unreliable and therefore, had no identity. Africa was then labeled as the dark continent infested with disease and ignorance. The Europeans patronizingly said the African was noble because he/she was hospitable, humble, and generous, but most regrettably, docile in that he/she unsuspectingly allowed them to usurp his/her land.

As time went on, the African started to rebel against European domination and to try and restore his/her identity, history, and culture by employing various methods: writers used the barrel of the pen to rebel, politicians used political rallies to sensitize their people while musicians and other artists used different talents to conscientise their people. As a result, the colonial powers started regarding Africans as cannibalistic brutal savages who deserved to be relegated to the bottom rung in the society. Carrol (1990: 4) contends:

The long debate over the human status of Africans provides an epitome of these contradictions. Although a papal bull stated officially in 1537 that non-Europeans (in this case South American Indians) were human beings with full spiritual rights, the Protestant countries of Europe were to prevaricate for several hundred years over the status of the African. At the two extremes of the whole spectrum of views were the noble savage and the depraved cannibal. The African noble savage was, for the eighteenth century, man in a 'state of nature', in perfect harmony with his environment. This essentially literary view, the product of the primitivistic myths of the time, was opposed by the doctrines of perfectibility and progress which, like that of the Great Chain of Being, placed the Negro lower down the human ladder than the white races. This relegation of the African found support both from the Linnaean classification of humanity into white, yellow, red and black races in the eighteenth century, and from Darwin in the nineteenth. If the fittest survived and developed, it was argued, then the Africans were backward because they were inferior.

The French and the British governments followed two diverse colonial policies in Africa. The French government used the policy of assimilation with which they would take brilliant African students to France for education with the hope that once these young Africans got educated, they would forget about their people, their culture and identity, and be absorbed into the French culture, but that was not to be. Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Marley (1997: 7) remark:

In the African context the word used to describe French colonial policy is 'assimilation'. The mission of French colonialism was to 'civilise' the Africans which in this case meant to acculturate and to 'Frenchify', to make them into Frenchmen by means of education. In order to become French, however, the African self had to be abandoned. To this end and under the sponsorship of the French authorities 'a large number of African students were sent to France in order to accelerate their adjustment to the norms and values of modern society'

Conversely, the British government pursued the policy of 'indirect rule' in Africa through which they would appoint an African to rule on their behalf and thereby continue to perpetuate their rule (Moore-Gilbert 1997: 11). In Nigeria, for example, the British government mainly used native chiefs to continue their rule while in Kenya, the British settlers owned the vast expanse of land from which they administered the natives. A few co-operative Africans were allocated pieces of fertile land which they in turn rented out to their fellow Africans, thereby rendering many Africans tenants in the land of their birth. Mutiso (1974: 17) compares the extent to which the French and British governments went in eroding African culture when he reveals the identity-search-reactions from the African intellectuals who received their education from France and Britain:

But this is only part of the story. From another point of view the phenomenon may not be as ironical as it seems. Perhaps because of the French policy of assimilation, the literati of that country's former holdings in Africa have been able to evolve a clear identity in their dissent from these alien and omnipresent philosophical and socio-political systems. The literati in the former English colonies, on the other hand – precisely because of the indirect and incomplete nature of the acculturation process they were subjected to – have suffered a continual crisis in their quest for identity both during and after the colonial period.

In their struggle to deconstruct these European preconceptions and rebuild Africa, African writers have realized the need to evolve literature which would epitomize Africa. They were spurred on by the belief that they could invent African literature free from European influence because Africa, like her literature, has her own traditions, models, and norms which make her distinguished from other countries. Thus, African literature

can be a sovereign field of study with an identity of its own. Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980: 4) note:

But African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constrains quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European. These facts hold true even for those portions of African literature which continue to be written in European languages.

This problematic situation gives rise to the following research question:

- What is Ngugi's contribution towards creating identity in African literature?

Subsumed under the above question are the following sub-questions:

- How does Ngugi handle identity in his selected novels (which have been mentioned earlier on in the chapter)?
- What role does language play in African literature?

1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 To revise and review past and present views on African literary criticism.

1.5.2 To conscientise Africans about their identity.

1.5.2 To critically analyse a selection of Ngugi's novels with the aim of attempting to gain insight into how he handles the concept of African identity.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In order to provide answers to the research questions (see 1.4 above), I used descriptive and interpretative forms of the qualitative research method. The following data collection methods and techniques were used:

1.6.1 Primary sources

I examined the following selected novels by Ngugi as my primary sources: *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Matigari*.

1.6.2 Secondary sources

I studied critical texts on Ngugi as well as texts on African literature which have relevance to identity. Anthropological books on Ngugi's Kenya were also consulted while information was drawn from internet navigation as well.

1.6.3 Interpretation of sources

I perused the above-mentioned sources (1.6.1 and 1.6.2) in order to juxtapose ideas against one another. I probed, critiqued, and synthesized ideas obtained from sources mentioned in 1.6.1 and 1.6.2. Thus, I used the interpretative technique to unlock and suggest opportunities for further research in the field.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.7.1 This dissertation is restricted to identity in African literature with reference to Ngugi's selected novels: *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Matigari*.

1.7.2 It examines African literary texts in order to conscientise Africans about their identity.

1.8 THE STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This research report consists of:

Chapter One

Background of the study, discussion of identity in African literature, shaping influences on Ngugi's perspective on African identity, problem statement, aims of the study, research design and methodology, limitations of the study, the structure of the research report and conclusion, are aspects which are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two details the theoretical grounding of identity in African literature by interrogating views by different literary writers and critics on identity in African literature.

Chapter Three

Identity in the following novels by Ngugi will be analysed: *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*.

Chapter Four

This chapter focuses on identity in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and *Matigari*.

Chapter Five

In this chapter, I give concluding remarks on identity in African literature in general and identity in Ngugi's selected novels in particular.

1.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the background to the research problem, an overview of identity in African literature, shaping influences on Ngugi's perspective on African identity, the aims of the study, the techniques and methods which were used when addressing the research problem, and the anatomy of the research report. The researcher has also indicated the limitations of this research report.

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: THEORETICAL GROUNDING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Early African narratives have always been seen as writing against colonial discursive practices in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism. Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian writer, called it 'an act of atonement' (quoted in Awoonor 1976, p. 251) – the process of returning to self or what Basil Davidson calls the reconstituting of a 'shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system' (1978, p. 155). Edward Said calls it restoring 'the imprisoned community to itself' (1994, p. 259). In literature, this process of restoration was marked by a strong sense of cultural nationalism.

(Ogude 1999: 1).

This chapter seeks to examine the way in which African literature attempts to release itself from the trappings of the network of others, particularly of the empire, and strives to assert its identity and a sense of difference from the colonizing powers of the center. It looks into identity in African literature as understood by different African writers and critics 'in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism', in the words of Ogude. It also explores the qualities and aspects which make African literature distinct and distinguished, while touching on the literatures which have helped shape it. A number of factors which qualify it and which are integral to it, are probed. Thus, an attempt is made at depicting African literature as a unique craft which has not emerged as an isolated entity, but as a bud of the global literary traditions.

2.2 IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

2.2.1 The Origin of African Literature

African literature derives its distinctive origin from story-telling and traditional oral poetry. In the African past, poems and stories were verbally transmitted and passed on

from generation to generation by word of mouth through either music, dance, myth, and dress, a point which makes it (African literature) 'people-directed and mass-consumed and therefore, people-centered and mass-based' (Ramogale 1995: 8). Finnegan (1984: 5) expands this view when she argues:

In many stories, for example, the characterization of both leading and secondary figures may appear slight; but what in literate cultures must be written, explicitly or implicitly, into the text can in orally delivered forms be conveyed by more visible means – by the speaker's gestures, expression, and mimicry. A particular atmosphere – whether of dignity for a king's official poet, light-hearted enjoyment for an evening story-teller, grief for a woman dirge singer – can be conveyed not only by a verbal evocation of mood but also by the dress, accoutrements, or observed bearing of the performer. This visual aspect is sometimes taken even further than gesture and dramatic bodily movement and is expressed in the form of dance, often joined by members of the audience (or chorus). In these cases the verbal content now represents only one element in a complete opera-like performance which combines words, music, and dance.

This oral transmission of cultural heritage to posterity attests to the indisputable truth that there is oral birth to any written work. It is mainly this 'great heritage of orature', as Ngugi (1993: 74) calls African oral literary tradition, which makes African literature autonomous and independent from other literatures. This does not, however, mean that it is not related to other world literatures. They are, in fact, related because they are all literatures but differ because they have different value systems enshrined in them.

Written African literature is believed to have evolved after the Second World War with Chabal, among the first ones to write in vernacular (Kiswahili), followed by Senghor and Césaire, among the French-speaking writers (Francophone). English-speaking writers (Anglophone) started coming into the picture in the late fifties with the Nigerian writers such as Achebe and Soyinka featuring prominently (Cloete 1996: 27-29). East African literature followed later on with, for example, Ngugi and Taban lo Liyong. Portuguese-speaking writers (Lusophone), such as Chabal (different from Chabal mentioned earlier on in the paragraph), also appeared on the scene with their literature. Black South African writing was an offshoot from missionary literature and influence, with Sol Plaatjie's

Mhudi (1978), which is arguably regarded as the first novel written by an African to be published in English, and Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1962) as cases in point.

2.2.2 Phases of African Literature

African literature is divided into three phases which are: Europe's Early Image of Africa, The Colonial Conquest and The Post-colonial Era.

2.2.2.1 Europe's Early Image of Africa

This first phase deals with literature written by the colonizers and imperial explorers about the colonized as, for instance, expressed in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Joseph Conrad was a Belgian Pole who exposes Europe's stereotypical understanding of Africa in his novel, *Heart of Darkness*. He metaphorically portrays Africa as a heart of darkness, which is one of the myths which the Europeans had about Africa, and which Conrad attempts to debunk. He depicts, in the novel, how the Belgian colonizers, led by the character Kurtz, invade the Congo and plunder her natural and human resources, undermining their identity in the process.

Marlow, who undertakes a journey from Belgium to the Congo to go and see the 'savages' and the 'pagans' of the dark continent for himself, narrates the novel. When he penetrates the interior in his voyage of discovery, he meets famished and harmless 'natives' who wearily look at him with a mixture of fear, hope, and appeal. As soon as he finds the Belgian settlers, represented by Kurtz, dehumanizing the 'natives', he starts realizing that what he has heard about Africa is a myth because he experiences that Africa is not an evil and dark continent as he was made to believe it is, but that Europe, exemplified by Kurtz, is. Thus, Marlow's expectations of Africa get shockingly reversed in that he goes to Africa expecting to find darkness only to be surprised by Kurtz who proves to be an embodiment of human evil. Thus, his journey into the African interior becomes an educational tour, a journey of self-discovery as he keeps on discovering Europe's unfounded assumptions about African identity. He goes to Africa being a racist

and comes back a transformed person with a deep insight into human nature, which implies that, given a chance, he could help Africa reconstruct her demeaned identity.

Marlow goes to Africa and comes back with valuable knowledge that the evil that exists on earth does not belong to a particular race, but to humanity at large. Thus, he acknowledges the fact that human nature, irrespective of race, colour or creed, is evil, and thereby confirming the wrong views Europeans of the time had about Africa and her identity. Carrol (1980: 3) observes:

This, then, is Africa, the dark continent of European imagination. It is an extreme stereotype, but one which clearly answers to a certain need in both writers and readers. We all require a symbol, myth and stereotype to order experience, and it is reassuring in this context to remember that the African devils are white. This particular stereotype has, however, a very long history and considerable stamina. We find the *Leo Africanus* in the sixteenth century announcing confidently: 'The Negros likewise leade a beastly kinde of life, being utterly destitute of the use of reason, of dexteritie, of wit, and of all artes. Yea they so behave themselves, as if they had continually lived in a forest among wilde beasts.' Closer to the present we can read the accounts of Africa left by explorers, traders and missionaries and witness the stereotype moulding and shaping their discoveries. Recalcitrant facts are invariably subdued: however elaborate the social institutions the explorers uncover, Africans remain children of Nature; however extensive and well-worn the trade routes they stumble upon, Africa is described as a tactless wilderness. The genius of a Conrad or a Mary Kingsley could transcend the restriction and security of the stereotype, but most writers found in Africa what they had been conditioned to find.

2.2.2.2 The Colonial Conquest

The following sub-phases comprise this phase:

- The first sub-phase deals with literature which was published 'under imperial licence' by the indigenous people (Aschroft 1989: 5). This kind of literature does not show any signs of protest and resistance against imperial cultural domination and identity erosion, hence its conformity to the status quo. It was a literature

written by Africans who were outcasts in their societies and sought solace in church thereby rendering Christianity ‘particularly beneficial to *them as* [my italics] the weakest members of the community’ (Omotoso 1996: 4). Thus, they were early converts to Christianity as the ‘modern’ and ‘redeeming’ religion. Mutiso (1974: 102) posits:

Beyond decrying the colonial experience, African writers attempt to discuss how the society reacted to colonialism. It is brought out in the literature that those groups which were traditionally outcasts in African societies were the very ones to identify themselves with the missionaries at the beginning. To the extent that they were ultimately accepted into the colonial establishment as cooks, labourers, clerks, catechists, etc., these African converts acquired money and their status rose. Thus they sort of developed a middle class mentality.

- The second sub-phase deals with literature of resistance and protest, hence its proclamation of independence and restoration of identity from the imperial powers. Emancipation in terms of history, language, and identity (cultural identity) serves as the *leit motif* (recurring theme) in this literature. Africans celebrate stories about themselves in the face of European conquest by asserting their sense of Africanness as depicted in, for instance, Okonkwo’s character in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Waiyaki’s in Ngugi’s *The River Between*. Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* and Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960) deal with the African’s quest for who he really is during the transition from colonialism to independence. Ngugi (1993: 61) observes:

The writing itself, during *this period* [my italics], whether in poetry, drama or fiction, even where it was explanatory in intention, was assertive in tone. It was Africa explaining itself, speaking for itself and interpreting its past. It was an Africa rejecting the images of its past as drawn by the artists of imperialism.

This second sub-phase also deals with individual identity versus group identity in the face of social and political change, and exposes the ways in which Africans grapple with these contradictions (Mutiso 1974: xi). Ngugi portrays these kinds of identity in *A Grain of*

Wheat, where characters are faced with the task of constructing new identities in the face of (identity) crises brought about by change.

In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Achebe affirms that there is a difference in storytelling between an African and an European in that Africans tell their stories from an African perspective while Europeans narrate theirs from their own perspective. In addition, the novel is a celebration of writing in English by an African because, despite its shortcomings, it clearly shows that Africans can write compelling stories in English as well.

An African character by the name of Okonkwo, fights colonial and imperial invasion in *Things Fall Apart*. This shows that an African is no longer a silent 'savage' who docilely accepts brutality meted out against him by the imperial powers. Okonkwo, the protagonist, becomes a symbol of resistance and an exponent of African identity, in that he fiercely opposes foreign culture. In a bid to protect his African identity, he kills a white messenger of court with a sword and thereafter sacrifices his life by committing suicide because he wants to break away from colonial dependency.

Things Fall Apart, in turn, portrays a clash of European and African cultures with the Africans rejecting foreign culture while the Europeans persist to impose it, as Carrol (1980: 38) notes:

More ominously, the author has introduced the aliens, white with no toes, who will before the end of the novel exploit this openness by introducing changes which the tribal structure will not be able to withstand. But for the moment the society is secure, stabilized by the questioning, modification, and adaptation which are part of the Igbo way of life.

2.2.2.3 The Postcolonial Era

This third phase in African literature deals with Africans who try to re-order and re-organize their lives and their identity after years of colonialism. It portrays corruption, multi-culturalism, reconciliation, decolonization, and freedom as delineated in Ngugi's

Matigari and Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966). In *A Man of the People*, for example, Achebe tries to show that though Africans attained political independence, they are culturally still enslaved by the colonial powers, which means that they are still in a state of identity crisis. Moreover, Africans face problems such as poverty, corruption, and ignorance in the post-colonial era as well. Odili is an enlightened young teacher who holds a university degree while Chief Nanga is a Member of Parliament and his former teacher, who believes in traditional African values. Nanga identifies with the poor by buying cheap popularity from them. Thus, Nanga serves as an example of a corrupt and incompetent politician whose constituency is blind to this weakness of his because, like him, they have lost their sense of African identity and morality. Odili, on the other hand, is aware of his African identity and attaches value to this awareness but is alienated and isolated from his people by Western education. Mutiso (1974: 26-27) aptly postulates:

Note that the values of the literati are always defeated in the literary works by traditional values ... Many of the literati, in an attempt to compensate for feelings of defeat, loneliness and uncertainty, become involved in work for the national government as a means of creating for themselves a collective self-identity. Yet even in joining the government, when they have the interests of the country at heart, they are dominated by the politicians in what they do. They become victims of the structure of their society, which places more value on politicians and politics than on the literati and intellectual leadership.

2.2.3 Views by different literary critics on identity in African Literature

Since the true nature of African literature and its identity have tormented the minds of African literary critics for some time, the need to discuss it has increased. This need was triggered by the fact that it is autonomous and independent from other world literatures and should, therefore, be indicated as such. Conference after conference have been held, as in Makerere and Fourah Bay, to formulate a serviceable definition which would encapsulate the essence of this branch of literature:

At another conference African literature was defined as creative writing in which an African setting is authentically handled or to

which experiences originating in Africa are integral (Ngara 1982: 3).

Ngara's definition is open and objective in that it explains African literature as not only consisting of works produced by indigenous Africans who profoundly understand the African milieu, setting, and experiences, but also includes works by white Africans who identify with Africa. This view, albeit fairly old, is still relevant today because of its reconciliatory tone. It concurs with Biko's (1987: 48) sentiments that being African is not a question of pigmentation but of consciousness. This means that works written by white Africans such as J.M. Coetzee, Alan Paton, and Doris Lessing are encompassed because they objectively address and confront African reality.

Chinua Achebe (1975: 56) views African literature as follows:

What all suggests to me is that you cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units – in fact the sum total of all national and ethnic literatures of Africa.

Achebe finds the definition of African literature so complex for the ordinary man to understand. He thus simplifies it as follows: when he talks of national literature, he means literature that is written in the national (official) language of a country. The idea of officialising national languages is difficult to bring to fruition because in many African states, it is still difficult to choose a national language because there exists a large number of indigenous languages to choose from as in, for example, South Africa, where eleven official languages vie for national status. Frequently, the ethnic groups to which these indigenous languages belong engage in battles and fights for their languages to be afforded the national status. By ethnic literature, Achebe refers to literature written in the indigenous African language which belongs to a particular group within a nation.

Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980: 13-14) contend that the following aspects should be considered when developing a uniquely African literature:

- the primary audience for whom the work is done;
- the cultural and the national consciousness expressed in the work, whether through the author's voice or through the characters and their consciousness, habits, comportment, and diction;
- the nationality of the writer, whether by birth or naturalization – a matter that a passport can decide; and
- the language in which the work is done.

Chinweizu *et al*'s ideas about African literature are, one may argue, comprehensive because they encapsulate some of the important issues about African literature such as, the type of audience African literature should address itself to, which other writers have not captured in their outline of African literary identity. As they see it, a writer should have a heightened cultural consciousness and awareness to be able to conscientise other people through his work. The question of nationality is crucial to African literature as well because even a person who is a naturalized African citizen, and profoundly understands the African milieu, can make a good African writer. Lastly, they talk of the language writers must use when writing. Surely, a good African writer should consider the type of audience he is writing for, a fact which will determine the style and register he should use. A good African writer should make himself explicit to his readers when he writes. African literature should be understood to be two-pronged: oral and written. Orature (oral literature) implies that African literature has been in existence since time immemorial because stories have always been told and passed on to posterity since the beginning of time. Africans have been involved in song and dance since they were born. Written literature is the art that was learned from the West. Thus, African literature, is not an offshoot from any literature from anywhere because it has originated on this continent as a product which got refined, modified, and complemented by some literary borrowings from other world literatures.

African literature should help Africans gain knowledge of who they are, why they are in the situation in which they are, where they come from as well as projecting where they are going. It should help Africans discover and rediscover Africa. Ndebele (1991: 35)

observes that African literature should not only expose social evils, but should also unveil where such evils come from and suggests ways in which they can be combated. In this way, consumers of African literature will grow intellectually and gain a deeper understanding of their identity. Ndebele thus contends:

Firstly, there is a danger here that critics might be accused of being unpatriotic simply because we do not agree with what they say. Secondly, does it mean that 'Black Conscious adherents' must uncritically rave enthusiastically about anything written by blacks? Nothing could be more dangerous to the struggle than the suppression of criticism. The two attitudes above are not only anti-intellectual, they are also essentially undemocratic. If we want to struggle towards a genuinely democratic future, then we must be prepared to subject everything to rigorous intellectual scrutiny followed by open and fearless discussion. Writers and critics can make their contribution too. The demands made on us by the future leave no room in which to feel sorry for ourselves.

2.2.4 The role of the African writer

African writers today play a role that is subtle and full of nuances because they are unsure about the nature of their audience. Because of the dilemma of being unsure of who their audience are, they find it difficult to make their readers establish a sense of purpose in life in terms of who they are. Achebe (1988: 40) remarks:

The final point I wish to address myself to is the crucial one of identity. Who is my community? The Mbari and the Afikpo examples I referred to were clearly appropriate to the rather small, reasonably stable and self-contained societies to which they belonged. In the very different wide open, multicultural and highly volatile condition known as modern Nigeria, for example, can a writer even begin to know who his community is let alone devise strategies for relating to it?

Achebe's words are a telling revelation of the identity crisis African writers find themselves faced with today. He sees Nigeria as a microcosm of Africa where the African society is fragmented by modernism which is characterized by urbanization, detribalization, and selfishness. He laments the rural and peasant African halcyon past which is fast getting eroded by civilization. Africa, he argues, should not completely go

back to her 'primitive' past because the past has its own imperfections, but should engage herself in a rigorous search for a new identity in the face of modernity which threatens her social order. Though current African communities display a glaring cultural confusion in the sense that they have one foot in the West and the other in Africa, Achebe contends that 'we can see in the horizon the beginnings of a new relationship between artists and the community which will not flourish like the mango-trick in the twinkling of an eye...' (1988: 41). As such, he acknowledges that we are a confused Africa who should search earnestly for new and unique relationships in terms of culture, religion, and economy which we can proudly call African. The function and role of the African writer which should distinguish him from others, is two-pronged today: he writes for personal gratification as well as for public satisfaction. In the traditional past of pure orature, the role of the poet was communal in that poets and storytellers (griots) recited and narrated their stories and poems for the benefit of their own communities. The duty of the poet was, therefore, to praise the heroes of the community, namely the gods, the king, the tribe, animals, and the strongholds of the community, such as mountains and caves, as well as their traditional tools, for instance, spears and calabashes. Their poetry may thus be regarded as a reflection of African historical identity in its diversity. Coupled with praise poems were oral narratives about tribal histories, oral performances, dramas, hunting lyrics, and dance songs. These forms of oral poetry served to entertain and teach people about their identity, thereby assuming a purely social and cultural role. Today, the African writer writes for both private and public contemplation. Achebe (1977: 43) asserts:

It is important to say at this point that no self-respecting writer will take dictation from his audience. He must remain free to disagree with his society and go into rebellion against it if need be.

Achebe's view is open in that he alludes to the writer's responsibility to his/her community while he also argues that the writer should write what he thinks is right by following the dictates of his/her conscience. Thus, his argument is solid because it caters for both sides; namely, the needs of the community and the writer's freedom of speech. He further postulates that African writers should help their societies get on their feet

again and attain their true identity by rediscovering their past in order to forge a true African identity:

What we need to do is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us (1977: 44).

Achebe argues that the African writer should, through re-education, assist his community regain its identity. This is because, as Mphahlele in his *African Image* (1974) posits, the African writer is supposed to be a sensitive point in his/her community, meaning that he/she should be a national conscience. Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980: 252) agree with Achebe about the writer being a communal voice when they posit:

For the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assumes a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings, and not preoccupy himself with his puny ego.

These African scholars differ with Achebe on the issue of the writer's freedom to write what he wants to express and that he should not be dictated upon by the community on what to write about. They (1980: 252) contend:

It won't do for him to claim that a writer has no mandate from anyone to write, therefore no one should advise him what to write about or how to write. One may ask such a writer why he bothers to make his writings public, why he uses public resources, lays claim to public attention, yet disdains all responsibility to society.

Chinweizu *et al* see no use in the writer publishing his/her work if that work is intended for himself/herself and not for the public. They point out that such a writer should rather keep the work to himself/herself as a private property. In an attempt to reconcile the above arguments, they argue that a good African writer should be committed to his/her craft, whether for his/her sake or for the sake of the public. Commitment, to them, can be defined as follows:

Artistic commitment as we see it, is therefore a matter of perceiving social realities and of making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of or change in, the society's norms and values (1980: 253).

This means that the writer should be committed to either changing the *status quo* or preserving it. A large number of African writers support the idea of changing the *status quo*. Committed African writers can be divided into three categories:

- First, there are those writers who only chronicle social injustice from a neutral position in that they do not offer readers their personal side of the story.
- Second, there are writers who report social evils without suggesting possible solutions to those evils.
- Third, there are writers who record social unfairness and suggest ways out of the morass. Ngugi and Achebe fall under this category because they attempt to conscientise their readers about their social plight as well as pointing a way to salvation. It is, however, unfortunate that in their criticism and protest against socio-political unfairness, some of these writers compromise artistic standards (Chinweizu *et al* 1980: 251-253).

Ngugi, in *Writers in Politics* (1981), supports Chinweizu *et al* when he says that every writer is a writer in politics in the sense that to him, politics, society, and literature are inseparable. His view is Marxist because he agrees that he writes primarily for the masses. He writes, as Fanon (1963: 28) would argue, for 'the wretched of the earth'. Ngugi (1993: 82) also believes that a writer should be committed to the truth:

The question is, how can he perform his role more effectively? The obvious answer, of course, is that he must always be committed to the truth – that is, be faithful to what he sees, what he hears, what he touches.

Ndebele (1991: 23-24) supports committed writing by adding that African writers should display artistic expertise because the function of literature is to expose social evil in an artistic way and not only to document events. He contends:

All this is because moral ideology tends to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good and evil, instead of leading us towards important necessary insights into the social process leading to those finished forms. Thus, showing no more than surfaces, writings influenced by an ideology tend to inform without involving readers in a truly transforming experience.

Ndebele notes that, regrettably, many African writers are not artistic enough in their craft hence they only write to inform and when one reads something which one already knows, the result is that one only recognizes it and this recognition causes one to have a *dejavu* feeling, thereby making them lethargic about re-discovering the crux of who they are. He contends that in order for readers to attain intellectual transformation, they should be exposed to the social processes which lead to the themes of the text which they are reading. This will enable them to gain new insights into the work and therefore, their identity. Thus, he calls for African writers to have artistic and intellectual rigour which are the hallmarks of excellent art. African writers should interrogate social evil and not merely report on it because that will be journalism masquerading as literature, and will, therefore, weaken their commitment to African identity.

2.2.5 The role of language in African literature

The role of language in African literary works is challenging in that African writers and critics are not agreed on whether to stick to using indigenous languages or European languages. This problem is caused by the fact that, on the one hand, Europeans used their languages as a weapon in their colonizing mission of Africa and in shifting her identity, while on the other hand, the majority of the people to whom African writers claim to be writing for when they use indigenous languages, are illiterate. Notwithstanding this, a large number of African writers are averse to writing in English because, as they correctly put it, language is a carrier of the people's hopes, aspirations, and identity, and

if they subscribe to writing in English, they will be perpetuating imperial culture. Europeans made use of their own languages, as in French, English, and Portuguese, to portray Africa as a dark continent inhabited by backward, uncultured, and uncivilized pagans while theirs was always depicted as a progressive one. Said in Moore-Gilbert (1997: 23) illuminates the difference between the European and third world countries:

As a consequence, the East is characteristically coded negatively in Orientals discourse as – variously - voiceless, sensual, female, despotic, irrational, backward. By contrast, the West is characteristically represented in positive terms, as masculine, democratic and progressive.

In their attempt to eradicate African culture, European writers declared their languages as media of instruction, thereby imposing their culture on the Africans through their (languages) use. The majority of African writers and critics have, however, tried to reverse the above language imbalance in their writing. Ngugi (1992: xiv) remarked as follows when he changed from writing in English to writing in his indigenous African languages, Gikuyu and Kiswahili:

This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way. However, I hope that through the age old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all.

Ngugi's main aim of writing his decolonizing work in indigenous languages may be ascribed to his wish to be accessible to his people. He agrees that one's cultural identity finds appropriate expression in one's language and that should he continue to write in English, he would be promoting the English culture in Africa. To him, writing in English is a perpetuation of neo-colonialism which African writers and critics are supposed to oppose. He, therefore, regards African writers who write in English as promoting the unwanted 'culture of apemanship and parrotry' of the colonial powers, thereby engaging in a self-denial exercise (Ngugi 1992: 2).

A great number of African writers such as Achebe, feel that English should continue to be used but be adapted to suit the African context (domestication of the English

language). These critics condemn the so-called standard language, which is English in this case, in favour of different varieties and dialects of English (world englishes) in an attempt to establish the 'English' which will express their identity. They argue that there should be 'non-repressive alternatives to imperialist discourse' if the process of decolonization is to run like a well-oiled machine (Brydon and Tiffin 1993: 12). Achebe, quoted in Walder (1998: 52) opines:

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience... But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding.

2.3 CONCLUSION

The above discussion grapples with the opinions, views, and perspectives of African literary critics and scholars on what they think African literary identity should encapsulate. These critics try to map out the decolonizing direction which this literature should follow by searching 'for a discourse of social renewal and ideological reorganization' (Taoua 2001: 196). This is, however, not a smooth route to traverse and they are fully aware of that. Thus, in order for African literary critics to constructively understand themselves in terms of who they are today and where they are going, they should do introspection and soul-searching. They should be prepared to stave many odds in their attempt to reconstruct their lives, which are among others, the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism. They also have a glaring threat in urbanization and globalization with their concomitant detribalization and individualization. Africans should help one another rehabilitate themselves by rekindling the positive aspects of their African cultural past, such as *ubuntu* (humanism), and fuse them with the good European cultural aspects, such as, advanced technological knowledge, in an endeavour to develop a new, well-enlightened, modern Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

IDENTITY IN NGUGI'S *THE RIVER BETWEEN* AND *WEEP NOT, CHILD*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The River Between, Ngugi's first novel, was originally entitled 'The Black Messiah', but became the second one to be published. *Weep Not, Child*, which was his second novel, was published first due to a number of publishing problems he encountered. At this point, Ngugi was still in his formative years as a novelist hence their structural simplicity. In these novels, Ngugi explores indigenous cultural aspects such as circumcision and ownership of land, which give the Gikuyu people, who symbolize African people, identity. Thus, he is concerned with 'identity politics' (Chapman 2003: 5). He also portrays resistance which the Gikuyu people unleash against European invasion into their land, thereby forcing them to battle against 'the politics of occupation' (Mazrui and Mphande 1995: 167). These novels explore, through the use of Gikuyuland as a microcosm of Africa, social and cultural conflicts between the Europeans and Africans, with the Europeans fighting to impose their culture on the Africans on the one hand, and Africans fighting fiercely to maintain their cultural rites, rituals, and customs on the other. This is because these cultural factors are important in the definition of their identity. These novels also veer in the direction of autobiography in that they reveal striking similarities with Ngugi's real life experiences of imperial destruction of his people's cultural treasures entrenched in the form of customs and traditions. Thus, they bear testimony to his life, and as a result, fall within the bounds of testimonial literature. Walker (1983: 35) remarks:

Micere Mugo points out also that there is a strong case to be made with regard to the autobiographical nature of his (*Ngugi's*) [my italics] novel of the Emergency period, *Weep Not, Child*, and *The River Between* [my italics], because of the parallels between fictional characters in the novel(s) and members of Ngugi's family. For example, the fictional Boro, like Ngugi's brother, becomes a forest fighter; the Ngotho-Howlands relationship in the novel mirrors the peasant-settler relationship of Ngugi's family and the

white settlers around the Kamiriithu. Additionally, Mugo points out the striking resemblance between the Siriana High School, first seen in *Weep Not, Child* and repeated in other Ngugi works, and the Alliance Boys High School at Kikuyu which Ngugi attended for four years under headmaster Carey Francis. Like Njoroge *and Waiyaki* [my italics] in the novel(s) Ngugi at one time believed in the concept of education as a salvation for Kenya and was thoroughly convinced that the Bible and Western education were the keys to African survival and independence.

Ngugi, in his novels, fictionalizes real life experiences in order to make his characters assume a true African identity. This also enables his readers (mainly African) to identify with the experiences depicted in these novels. He, in Sicherman (1990: ix) notes:

In my practice as a writer I often use real historical, geographical, and biographical references. For instance I might make a list of real mountains, or places, or names of persons. But among the list I often insert fictional ones. This device is meant to make the reader have an illusion that the fictional places and names are “real”. The device facilitates the reader’s “willing suspension of disbelief”, but it can sometimes create confusion among readers. I know of many readers who have tried to locate “Ilmorog”, the fictional setting of my novels *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, in the geography of Kenya simply because in making the journey to and from Ilmorog, I often make the reader pass through real places like Nairobi, Limuru, Nakuru, and the like. For such readers and for many others, Carol Sicherman’s book will help in sorting out the historical from the fictional. But in so doing she has also helped in a fuller reading and appreciation of my fiction and drama.

Ngugi extensively explores African literary identity in *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child* by portraying how Kenyan people passionately struggle to protect their cultural values. This struggle spills over into his other novels. He is committed to this cause of striving to preserve cultural values which Africans hold dear, as well as correcting the distortions the Europeans had about Africa. He does this by reconstructing the past with the view to redefining himself as an African, in other words his identity as an African. He attempts to assist his society find itself after years of subjugation by reclaiming, mainly, their African oral heritage as opposed to the Western written work. Mazrui and Mphande (1995: 160) note:

This juxtaposition of the Western-African divide on a dichotomous view of the orality-literacy continuum expectedly led to the emergence of a neonationalist school which sought to 'reclaim' orality as one of the many glories of the indigenous heritage of Africa. Oral literature came to be regarded as a hallmark, *sui generis*, of the African creative mind which needed to be 'conserved' and protected against the imperialist onslaught of the written word. Orality now came to be romanticized. It came to carry the entire weight of African civilization and its historical longevity. In some instances it came to help define the very soul of a preconceived Africanity. In Negritude circles, for example, the supposed oralness of the African societies came to be a mark of their humanism (Leopold Senghor, 1965: 84-85), in contrast to the supposedly detached and impersonal character of writing.

Since African tradition is oral, orality becomes the central factor in the transmission of African cultural identity to posterity. Thus, in his novels, Ngugi endeavours to make Africans 'have a dignified sense of African culture' through the use of the oral tradition (Gigandi 2001: 6).

3.2 THE NOVELS

In *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi asserts African identity in the forms of folklore, myths, songs, dance, to reclaim the indigenous African heritage as a means to authenticate African literature and identity. These cultural aspects (folklore, myths, songs, dance) are verbally handed down generationally. He also portrays his main characters as proponents of African cultural beliefs in the novels. This view is essentialist in that it assumes that the above-stated cultural aspects are indigenous to Africa, and therefore, unique to her. It posits that Africans are the chief custodians of the oral tradition. Kenyatta (1979: xiii) suggests:

The cultural and historical traditions of the Gikuyu people have been verbally handed down from generation to generation. As a Gikuyu myself, I have carried them in my head for many years, since people who have no written records to rely on learn to make a retentive memory do the work of libraries. Without note-book or diary to jot down memoranda, the African learns to make an impression on his own mind which he can recall whenever it is wanted. Throughout his life he has much to commit to memory,

and the vivid way in which stories are told to him and their incidents acted out before his eyes helps the child to form an indelible mental picture from his early teaching. In every stage of life there are various competitions arranged for the members of the several age-groups, to test their ability to recall and relate in song and dance the stories and events which have been told to them, and at such functions parents and the general public form an audience to judge and correct the competitors.

Like any other Gikuyu child, therefore, I acquired in my youth my country's equivalent of a liberal education, but while I lived among my kinsfolk there was no obvious necessity for writing it down. But during my anthropological studies and visits to various countries in Europe, I had the opportunity of meeting men and women who were keenly interested in hearing about African ways of life. I then realized the necessity to set down in black and white the knowledge which had hitherto remained in my head, for the benefit both of Europeans and of those Africans who have been detached from their tribal life.

In *The River Between*, Ngugi articulates African identity through the use of orality in the form of the myth of creation and existence, as depicted in the stories of Gikuyu (man) and Mumbi (woman), which gave the Gikuyus a sense of purpose in life during their moments of despair. Legend has it, in the story of Gikuyu and Mumbi, that at the turn of the sixteenth century, Gikuyu and Mumbi arrived in Gikuyuland and founded the Gikuyu nation, thereby bequeathing land to them. This legendary belief legitimizes their struggle for land recovery because, to them, land serves as a source of identity, unity, and inspiration. Ngugi (TRB: 1-2) argues:

It began long ago. A man rose in Makuyu. He claimed that Gikuyu and Mumbi sojourned there with Murungu on their way to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga. As a result of that stay, he said, leadership has been left to Makuyu. Not all the people believed him. For had it not always been whispered and rumoured that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno? And had not a small hill grown out of the soil on which they stood south of Kameno? And Murungu had told them:

'This land I give to you, O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity.'

The land was fertile. It was the whole of Gikuyu country from one horizon embracing the heavens to the other hidden in the clouds.

So the story ran in Kameno. Spiritual superiority and leadership had been left there.

Ngugi stresses the importance the Gikuyu people attach to land in *Weep Not, Child*. When the Europeans alienated them from their land, it felt similar to impoverishing them spiritually and physically because, to them, land dispossession is equivalent to complete erosion of their identity. Thus, land is integral to their identity, African identity, hence its multi-functional nature to them. It was used for economic and material needs such as in peasant subsistence agriculture and in the rearing of livestock. It was also used to build shelter on. Kenyatta (1979: 55) observes:

The land being the foundation rock on which the Gikuyu tribal economy stands, and the only effective mode of production that the people have, the result is that there is a great desire in the heart of every Gikuyu man to own a piece of land on which he can build his home, and from which he and his family can get the means of livelihood. A man or a woman who cannot say to his friends, come and eat, drink and enjoy the fruit of my labour, is not considered as a worthy member of the tribe.

A family group with land to cultivate is considered as a self-supporting economic unit. The group work harmoniously with a view to satisfying their immediate needs, and with the desire to accumulate wealth in the form of cattle, sheep and goats. These are acquired through effective tillage of the land, except in a very few cases nowadays where some people are able to get money in some other ways than selling their products.

Cook and Okenimkpe (1997: 52) agree with Kenyatta when they note:

Ngotho is at the centre of the protest from first to last. The protest is against the colonial which has allowed the land to be stolen while in the process a whole way of living and being has been undermined. As Chege tells the youthful Waiyaki in *The River Between*, the Gikuyu believe that Murungu bequeathed the land to them at the beginning of the world: and Ngotho hands down the myth to his children in *Weep Not, Child*. Land has thus from time immemorial been the key factor in the unity, cohesion and strength of the family, linking the living and the dead in an unbroken chain. Ngotho has been robbed of his very heritage:

These novels, too, portray a fierce clash of cultures, and the primary cause, again, is identity. Africans want to remain the way they are, to practise their customs and traditions the way they used to do without any interference while the Europeans have plans to the contrary. In *The River Between*, Waiyaki's father, Chege, tells him that he (Waiyaki) is the last in the line of seers, with Mugo wa Kiribo being the first, and that he is the one to lead his people to freedom. This is because Mugo wa Kiribo has prophesied a long time before that Waiyaki would be 'a black messiah' (TRB: 38). Thus, Ngugi uses prophecy as another form of expression of identity to 'legitimize the Gikuyu's claims to the land, justify their political protest, and give credence to its leadership' (Mazrui and Mphande 1995: 167). Ngugi (TRB: 2) contends:

Kameno had a good record to bear out this story. A sacred grove had sprung out of the place where Gikuyu and Mumbi stood; people still paid homage to it. It could also be seen, by any who cared to count, that Kameno threw up more heroes and leaders than any other ridge. Mugo wa Kiribo, that great Gikuyu seer of old, had been born there. And he had grown up seeing visions of the future and speaking them to the many people who came to see and hear him. They called him an impostor. Then one night, when people were asleep, he vanished from the hills. He was soon heard of in the land beyond; in Nyeri, Kiambu, Muranga; in fact all over the Gikuyu country. And he still spoke aloud his message and cried:

'There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies'.

These were the white men.

Ngugi also uses the myth of witchcraft and heroic stories of legendary Gikuyu warriors to depict African identity. Many young men looked up to these warriors and magicians for inspiration and many children aspired to be future magicians. He (TRB: 2) argues:

Or there was that great witch, Kamiri, whose witchery bewildered even the white men at Muranga. His witchery and magic, before he was overcome by the white men with smiles and gifts, had won him resounding fame. He too, it was said, had been born in Kameno. Like Mugo before him, he had disappeared from the hills to the country beyond. He could not be contained by the narrow life of the ridges.

Another was Wachiori, a great warrior, who had led the whole tribe against Ukabi, Masai. As a young man he had killed a lion, by himself. When he died, at the hands of a straying white man, he left a great name, the idol of many a young warrior.

Kenyatta (1979: xvii) endorses the Gikuyu people's belief in the magicians and ancestral worship when he remarks:

As for magic, I have witnessed the performance of magic rites many times in my own home and elsewhere. My grandfather was a seer and a magician, and in traveling about with him and carrying his bag of equipment I served a kind of apprenticeship in the principles of art. Besides this, I have lived in a place called Gaturi in Central Gikuyu, a district well known for its magical practices, and there came into contact with many magicians, or witch-doctors, and learnt a great deal about their ways. I have also had opportunities of meeting and discussing the subject with other magicians, both from coastal and up-country tribes.

The Gikuyu people further expressed their identity and oneness through the communal life which they led. In Gikuyu, no one had a complete ownership of the property as the property was considered to be the possession of the community. Since they collectively owned everything, prosperity was for the group and not the individual. Poverty was a word foreign to them because theirs was a life characterized by sharing, however little one had. They were a community that exuded hospitality, humility, and warmth which bordered on the principle of *ubuntu*. Respect for older people, other people's assets, and their customs was upheld. Every child was every parent's child, every man every child's father. This was during the halcyon days in Gikuyuland. Though the Gikuyu people's exposure to the world was narrow, this did not disturb the blissful and harmonious lives they lived in their villages. These, one is tempted to say, are the salient features unique to the Gikuyu people and other indigenous African people on the continent. They make their hearts tick. Kenyatta (1979: 309-310) opines:

The key to this culture is the tribal system, and the bases of the tribal system are the family group and the age-grades, which between them shape the character and determine the outlook of everyman, woman, and child in Gikuyu society. According to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him: first and foremost he is several people's relative and several people's

contemporary. His life is founded on this fact spiritually and economically, just as much as biologically; the work he does every day is determined by it, and it is the basis of his sense of moral responsibility and social obligation. His personal needs, physical and psychological, are satisfied incidentally while he plays his part as a member of a family group, and cannot be fully satisfied in any other way. The fact that in Gikuyu language individualism is associated with black magic, and that a man or a woman is honoured by being addressed as somebody's parent, or somebody's uncle or aunt, shows how indispensable kinship is at the root of Gikuyu ideas of good and evil.

Ngugi (TRB: 3) agrees with Kenyatta about how close to nature and to one another the Gikuyus were:

The ridges were isolated. The people there led a life of their own, undisturbed by what happened outside or beyond. Men and women had nothing to fear. The Ukabi would never come here. They would be lost in the hills and the ridges and the valleys. Even other Gikuyu from Nyeri or Kiambu could not very well find their way into the hills. And so the country of many ridges was left alone, unaffected by turbulent forces outside. These ancient hills were the heart and soul of the land. They kept the tribes' magic and rituals, pure and intact. Their people rejoiced together, giving one another the blood and warmth of their laughter. Sometimes they fought. But that was amongst themselves and no outsider need ever know. To the stranger, they kept dumb, breathing none of the secrets of which they were the guardians. *Kagutui ka Mucii gatihakagwo Ageni*; the oilskin of the house is not for rubbing into the skin of strangers.

The fact that when Ngugi wrote *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, he 'was a strong believer in Christian conversion and enlightenment' (Gigandi 2000: 47), and that Kenya's socio-economic problems would only be solved by Kenyans through the acquisition of education, is paradoxical in the sense that on the one hand, it opposes the white man's culture in favour of the conservation of Africa's cultural heritage, while on the other, it embraces the white man's Christianity and education. This indicates the extent to which European culture has plunged the African into the state of identity crisis by making him stand astride two cultures. In *The River Between*, Waiyaki, as the prophesied leader of the tribe, is sent to the European school, the missionary school, to go and acquire the white man's education and come back and 'fight for the tribe' (TRB: 38),

and therefore, deliver his people from the oppressive forces through the knowledge that he will have acquired. Ngugi also borrows the concept 'messiah' from the Bible, which indicates how torn between the two cultures he was when he was writing the novel. Omotoso (1996: 1) calls this 'Living on the Seam of Two Worlds'. Conversely, Ogude (1999: 89) does not regard this as an identity crisis but as an attempt, by Ngugi, to create 'cultural synthesis' which is indispensable to Africa today. Njoroge, in *Weep Not, Child*, sees no light at the end of the tunnel for Kenya without education. Both boys are regarded as saviours of their people by the prophesy postulated by the seer, but unfortunately, they become frustrated and alienated in their respective educational ventures and thereby begin to search for their real identity. This is because they had initially thought that their belief in European education and Christianity would set them free but that was not to be. They become tormented by identity crisis and as a result, torn between two cultures, because an estranged person is, conceptually, a person with a troubled self-esteem. Waiyaki becomes derailed by the intransigent ideological rift that exists between the two ridges, which are Makuyu and Kameno, in his attempt to broker unity among his people. Makuyu ridge comprises of passionately devout villagers who got converted to the Christian faith while Kameno, Waiyaki's ridge, is inhabited by the traditionalists who have a firm belief in indigenous culture which embody their identity. This symbolizes the identity crisis facing them. Waiyaki tries, in his messianic endeavour, as foretold by Mugo wa Kiribo, to be a reconciliatory figure and create cultural synthesis by falling in love with Nyambura, a girl from the Christian Makuyu ridge, but to no avail because his people do not approve of the relationship. To them, he is not like the river Honia, which used to unite the ridges in the traditional past, but he is, metaphorically, the river that is between the ridges and, therefore, divides them. They accuse him of the betrayal of the village oath, which is one of the ridge's esteemed customs, and for this offense, he has to pay with his life. This is because an oath was part of identifying oneself with one's culture, a way of firmly standing behind one's nation, one's identity. Gunner (1987: 38) accentuates the significance of oath-taking in Gikuyuland:

Oath-taking as a means of binding a group together and reinforcing loyalty amongst the members of a group is common in a traditional context among the Gikuyu and their neighbours the Kamba. In the Emergency in Kenya, all persons involved in the independence

struggle took an oath. Oathing still takes place and in the 1969 elections it had to be banned as some politicians were using oath-taking as a means of ensuring that people voted for them.

In the traditional Gikuyuland, oathing was done in front of the Kiama, which meant a council of Gikuyu elders who were responsible for judging cases in the community over which they had jurisdiction. These elders were seen as the carriers of the people's culture, knowledge, and wisdom. They embodied the cultural beliefs of the community. Normally, every ridge would have its own Kiama and only older men were eligible to sit on it (Gunner 1987: 38). Its aim was to enforce loyalty to the tribe. During the height of the struggle for emancipation, Kenyans used oathing as a pledge for unwavering support and loyalty to the course of liberation. Boro, in *Weep Not, Child*, tells his father to take an oath as a token of loyalty to the Mau Mau, and when the police arrest Njoroge, they firmly ask him whether he had taken the oath:

'What's your name?' the red beard asked, while the grey eyes looked at him ferociously.

'Njo-ro-ge.'

'How old are you?'

'I think 19 or thereabouts.'

'Sema affande!' one of the homeguards outside the small room shouted.

'Affande.'

'Have you taken the Oath?'

'No!'

'Sema affande!' barked the same homeguard.

'No. Affendi.'

'How many have you taken?'

'I said none affendi'

The blow was swift. It blinded him so that he saw darkness. He had not seen the grey eyes rise.

'Have you taken Oath?'

'I-am-a-school-boy-affendi,' he said, automatically lifting his hands to the face.

'How many Oaths have you taken?'

'None, sir.'

Another blow. Tears rolled down his cheeks in spite of himself. He remembered the serenity of his school. It was a lost paradise. (WNC: 116-117).

In *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge, like Waiyaki, pins his hope for Gikuyuland's future in the whiteman's education, in a way breaking apart his identity. He passes from a community-run primary school and progresses to a missionary high school, Siriana, to get further education with the hope of coming back and sensitize his people about their appalling socio-economic and political conditions. He sees the breaking apart of his identity as part of the answer to the preservation and continuation of his people's cultural beliefs. To him, education is liberating rather than limiting. This is still a continuation of the prophesy of the coming of the black messiah sounded by Chege in *The River Between*. Unfortunately, Njoroge's aspirations are shattered by the killing of Jakobo, his family's landlord, which leads to his withdrawal from school by the police because they accuse him of being an accomplice in the murder. Ngotho, like Ngugi's father, does not have land of his own hence his living as a peasant-tenant, *an ahoi*, on Jakobo's land. Jakobo and other Africans of his kind, have been chosen by the British imperial government in their policy of indirect rule, to control the people on their behalf in the land of their birth. The people, epitomised by Ngotho's family, feel cheated of their land, which is regarded as one of their most important cultural assets. They thus accuse Jakobo of acting in cahoots with the enemy, hence his murder. Gigandi (2000: 81) remarks:

We might begin by recalling that the central aspects of Ngugi's biography revolve around the love and devotion of the mother, the tenuous authority of the father, the hopes and expectations represented by the colonial school, and the concurrent terror and romance of "Mau Mau." As we saw in the introduction, Ngugi's parents were *ahoi*, landless tenants at will; and in a patriarchal culture in which authority was vested in male heads of households and notions of wealth and virtue were derived from the ownership of land, the state of radical displacement engendered by being a tenant was particularly hard on the father. Without the authority represented by ownership of land – which Kenyatta had already defined as the key to understanding the most important elements of Gikuyu identity, including notions of space, time, and self – heads of such households were condemned to states of doubt, recrimination, and guilt.

African identity is, in these novels, authenticated in the form of dance, song, and ritual, as in circumcision. This is realized through orality. When Waiyaki and Muthoni go for circumcision in *The River Between*, this process is accompanied by an elaborate dance

and song followed by the explanation of the importance of circumcision to the Gikuyu people. Ngugi (TRB: 41) notes:

The dance was being held at an open-air place in Kameno. Whistles, horns, broken tins and anything else that was handy were taken and beaten to the rhythm of the song and dance. Everybody went into a frenzy of excitement. Old and young, women and children, all were there losing themselves in the magic motion of the dance. Men shrieked and shouted and jumped into the air as they went round in a circle. For them, this was the moment. This was the time. Women, stripped to the waist, with their thin breasts flapping on their chests, went round and round the big fire, swinging their hips and contorting their bodies in all sorts of provocative ways, but always keeping the rhythm.

Kenyatta (1979: 138-139) emphasizes the importance of dance and song in the circumcision ritual:

The day before the physical operation is performed the girl is called early in the morning to have her head shaved by the sponsor. All her clothes are removed, she is given a massage, after which her naked body is decked with beads lent to her by women relatives and friends. About ten o'clock in the morning relatives and friends gather at the girl's homestead. Here a short ceremony of reunion with the ancestors of the clan is performed, and a leader is chosen to lead the procession to the homestead where the *irua* is to take place. The girl is provided with a bell (*kegamba*) which is tied on her right leg just above the calf, or sometimes above the knee, to provide the rhythm to the procession and also for the dance. The girl is put in the middle of the procession, which moves slowly, singing ritual songs until they reach the *irua*'s homestead, where the procession is joined by the other initiates who are accompanied by other processions of relatives and friends dressed in their best. The *matuumo* dances and songs begin at afternoon before the sun is overhead and continue the whole day. It takes place inside the homestead, but if the homestead is not large enough it is held on some convenient site which must be in close proximity to the homestead. The site is cleared and carefully examined to make sure that there is nothing on the ground that can hurt the feet of candidates while dancing.

To Waiyaki and Muthoni, and to their community, circumcision is not only about physical mutilation but is about a central element of belonging, that is, identity. It is also

about the passage of a person from childhood to adulthood, from girlhood to womanhood, and from boyhood to manhood. Muthoni tells her sister Nyambura that she wants to be circumcised because, she argues: 'I- I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges' (TRB: 26). When Muthoni talks of being 'a real girl, a real woman', she refers to a girl who can be identified with a certain group. In other words, identity is still a major issue. Waiyaki's father, Chege, says that Waiyaki will be 'initiated into manhood' (TRB: 38), when referring to his (Waiyaki's) circumcision rite, and will, therefore, be a full component of the community. Ngugi (TRB: 68) acknowledges that circumcision is an integral part of Gikuyu traditional culture and identity which deserves to be upheld:

But it was more than this. Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at 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. The cry was up. Gikuyu Karinga. Keep the tribe pure. Tutukwenda Irigu. It was a soul's cry, a soul's wish.

Thus, circumcision is the heartbeat of the identity of the Gikuyu tribe, hence its abolishment will diminish the soul of the tribe. It is small wonder that the Gikuyu people tenaciously clung to this cultural rite even at the time when the Scottish missionaries expelled female learners who had been circumcised from their schools because they considered it a 'heathen' and 'pagan' practice. This is despite the fact that this surgical operation had an important tribal significance in that it had educational, social, moral, and religious importance to the villagers as Kenyatta (1979: 134-35) indicates in the following passage:

The Gikuyu name for this custom of *rite de passage* from childhood to adulthood is *irua*, i.e. circumcision, or trimming the genital organs of both sexes. The dances and songs connected with the initiation ceremony are called *mambura*, i.e. rituals or divine services. It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom and that it symbolises the unification of the whole tribal organisation. This is the principal reason why *irua* plays such an important part in the life of the Gikuyu people.

The *irua* marks the commencement of participation in various governing groups in the tribal administration, because the real age-groups begin from the day of the physical operation. The history and legends of the people are explained and remembered according to the names given to various age-groups at the time of the initiation ceremony. For example, if a devastating famine occurred at the time of the initiation, that particular *irua* group would be known as “famine” (*ng'aragu*). In the same way, the Gikuyu have been able to record the time when the European introduced a number of maladies such as syphilis into Gikuyu country, for those initiated at the time when this disease first showed itself are called *gatego*, i.e. syphilis. Historical events are recorded and remembered in the same manner. Without this custom a tribe which had no written records would not have been able to keep a record of important events and happenings in the life of the Gikuyu nation. Any Gikuyu child who is not corrupted by detribalisation is able to record in his mind the whole history and origin of the Gikuyu people through the medium of such names as Agu, Ndemi and Mathathi, etc., who were initiated hundreds of years ago.

The Gikuyus viewed this rustication of their learners from the Scottish missionary schools as ‘an attempt to suppress and denigrate their customs and to prevent them from obtaining Western education’ (Gunner 1987: 39), hence the establishment of Gikuyu independent schools in which the Gikuyus practised their cultural rites without any fear of derision. In these schools they were sure that their African identity would not be undermined.

3.3 CONCLUSION

The above discussion shows the ways in which Ngugi attempts to raise his people’s awareness of their identity, that is, who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. He emphasizes the oral tradition as the main cultural aspect peculiar to African identity and to show his belief in this positive aspect of African tradition. Thus, in Ngugi’s novels, African oral customs ‘have been removed from anthropology and revalued as living, literary inheritance’ (Chapman 2003: 2). He portrays the Gikuyu’s struggle to preserve their cultural rites such as circumcision, the myth of creation and prophesy, song and dance, as well as ancestral worship, as depicted in Chege’s visit to the sacred grove to pay homage to the gods with his son Waiyaki in *The River Between*.

These are some of the cultural rites and beliefs central to Gikuyu identity and, therefore, African identity. However, Ngũgĩ acknowledges, as outlined in his early novels, that Africans should embrace Western education without losing the essence of their identity. Thus, Western education is welcome if it is for the benefit of Africa and Africans.

CHAPTER FOUR

IDENTITY IN NGUGI'S *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* AND *MATIGARI*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When I grew up I was very much aware of the physical confrontation between foreigners and Kenyans at Limuru. On one side of Limuru was the land controlled by the foreign settlers, and on the other side was the land controlled by peasants and Kenyan landlords. These two sides were divided by the famous railway line from Mombasa to Kampala. Now, the effects of European settlement were basically two. First was the forced removal of peasants from their land, which meant that now they were congested in very tiny dry areas, what the colonial government called African reserves. Secondly, this same act of forcing peasants from their land, and hence their divorce from ownership and control of the means of production, created the beginning of a proletariat Kenya.

(Ngugi in Sicherman 1990: 19)

A Grain of Wheat was written when Ngugi was pursuing Kenya's national identity through the use of political struggle for emancipation from colonial forces. Kenyans came together as a united front to fight for their liberation through the Mau Mau freedom fighters. As a nation, they identified fully with the freedom fighters. The fighters gave the nation in struggle hope for the future in which their identity would be preserved and respected. Their national unity and identity was further sustained by their communal tilling of the small pieces of land given to them by the British settlers for subsistence farming. This novel portrays the innocuous onset of moral decay and the disintegration of the traditional social and cultural fabric shortly before the dawn of independence. In short, the novel shows the struggle for political and social identity at the same time portraying the dawn of a new era in terms of identity. Walker (1983:51) notes:

Through an impressionistic, fragmented picture of a Kenyan village just prior to Independence, we witness the decay of the village society, the final destruction of the traditional culture. *A Grain of Wheat* is a compelling view of Kenyan society struggling

during the false optimism on the eve of Kenyan independence to rid itself of the colonial sickness which has affected its very entrails.

Matigari, on the other hand, continues the spirit of national identity which is recognizable when Kenyans rally together against post-colonial nightmares. It should, however, be added that, just like *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi eloquently wrote these novels (*A Grain of Wheat* and *Matigari*) in the vein of the oral tradition as the main facet of African identity. Mazrui and Mphande (1995:177) observe:

Ngugi's use of the griot (*oral*) [my italic] tradition is present in his early writings, too. In *The River Between*, for example, Ngugi describes Chege as knowing "more than any other person, the ways of the land and the hidden things of the tribe. He knew the meaning of every ritual and every sign. So, he was all the head of every important ceremony" (1965:7). In adopting the oral style of a griot, Ngugi, like Chege, wants to "guard this knowledge and divulge it to none but the right one(s)." Yet Ngugi's "right ones" become the children, students, farmers, and workers that he eventually discovers in his later works. As a 'master of eloquence' in his early novels, Ngugi chronicles Gikuyu genealogy and Kenyan history as portrayed by the deeds of the Mau Mau movement. This use of orality serves the purpose primarily of a master of the spoken word that also has the power to charm, to heal, to divine. Narrating the troubled history of his people, Ngugi offers a healing remedy for those wounded and betrayed by the Mau Mau.

African identity is encapsulated in the continent's cultural norms. These cultural values are passed on from generation to generation through orality which takes the forms of story-telling, myths, songs, and dance.

4.2 A GRAIN OF WHEAT

A Grain of Wheat, like all the other works by Ngugi, forms part of his commitment towards recording Kenya's history of the struggle for freedom from the beginning of European invasion to the attainment of *Uhuru*. This forms part of the identity of the Kenyan people as a nation. The novel opens four days before Kenya's independence from Britain, with Thabai villagers proudly organizing their ritual oral songs and dances which

benefit the magnitude of the ceremony. This imminent prospect of emancipation offers them a sense of national identity, oneness, and hope for the future as they sing 'Christian hymns mixed with traditional and Uhuru songs' (AGW: 187). African songs are mixed with the Christian ones here showing, in effect, that pure African identity no longer exists and that a middle ground has to be found. Soyinka (1979: xii) supports this view in the preface of his essays:

Nothing in these essays suggests a detailed uniqueness of the African world. Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other 'world' is unique. It possesses, however, in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity. To ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent.

Ngugi uses Jewish Christian mythology in this novel as, probably, the acknowledgement of the unavoidable presence of modernity in Africa, though this modernity has to be available on African terms. Cook and Okenimkpe (1997:80) write:

But unlike the restlessly moving, disruptive train, the railway station serves a dynamic, unifying purpose by attracting villagers of the neighbourhood to weekly gatherings on Sunday at which social issues and the future in general is discussed. The iron road is being deployed by the people as a point of reference in their own affairs. It is being absorbed into the communal framework, free of the menace of those who first brought it and made it a burden instead of amenity. *Ngugi is far from rejecting modernity for Africa – indeed he demands it: but on Africa's own terms, and for its own internal purposes and benefit* [my italics].

The novel reflects on the daring political exploits of the heroic character, Kihika, who, like the people of Makuyu and Kameno in *The River Between*, who derived sustenance from the myth of Gikuyu and Mumbi about their right to Gikuyuland, uses the Jewish biblical myth to draw courage in his battle for liberation. Thus, Kihika adapts the Bible to suit his quest for political identity.

Ngugi continues, in his search for identity, to use the recurrent theme of salvation and redemption in *A Grain of Wheat* through Kihika, who considers himself to be like the Biblical Moses who saved the people of Israel, who in this case are Kenyans, from the claws of Pharaoh (the British). As such, Kihika becomes the beacon of Kenya's new identity, the promoter of both the traditional ways and modernity. He, like Waiyaki in *The River Between*, deems himself to be the chosen one, hence the verses which were underlined in his personal Bible:

And the Lord spoke unto Moses,
Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him,
Thus saith the Lord,
Let my people go.

Exodus 8:1

(verse underlined in red in Kihika's personal Bible) (AGW: 29).

And the Lord said, I have surely seen the
affliction of my people which are in Egypt,
and have heard their cry by reason of their
taskmasters; for I know their sorrows.

Exodus 3:7

(verse underlined in red in Kihika's Bible) (AGW:113).

The verses highlighted by Kihika show his belief and determination to bring sanity and peace to his people. 'Let my people go' clearly indicates the rejection of those who were eroding his people's ways of life, customs, and traditions. The words 'affliction, cry, and sorrows', in the second verse he has underlined, are significant in that they clearly reveal the disintegration of his people's identity, the problem which was brought about by the European invasion.

Ngugi has taken the theme, 'the black messiah', as exemplified by Waiyaki in *The River Between* and Njoroge in the short story, 'The Martyr', which was later developed into the novel *Weep Not, Child*, from the story of Kenya's first democratically elected president, Jomo Kenyatta, who was closely identified with Moses during Kenya's fight for liberation. Kihika's life is also sacrificed for freedom in *A Grain of Wheat* and this martyrdom is not in vain because, like a grain of wheat which dies in order to germinate,

a leader dies in order for freedom to be attained. Kihika underlined the following verses in his Bible:

Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

St John 12:24

(*verse underlined in black in Kihika's Bible*) (AGW: 175).

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.

Revelation 21:1 (AGW: 175).

The first verse means that in order for Africa to forge a new identity, the old Africa has to die in order for a new one to be born. Thus, Kihika has to die in order for the idea of a new African identity to flourish. This is what Ogude (1991: 91) rightly regards as Ngugi's exploration 'of the possibility of creating a syncretic culture through a fusion of Christian mythology (read Western culture) and Agikuyu mythology (read African culture)'.

Though Mugo, whose name is the same as that of the old Gikuyu seer in *The River Between*, also considers himself as the saviour of his people, Ngugi depicts him as an uncommitted man who betrays Kihika, the leader of the liberation movement, to the British invaders. Like Waiyaki in *The River Between*, Mugo takes an oath of unflinching loyalty to the national liberation struggle of Thabai, but fails to honour it because he sells the country's freedom, which is epitomized by Kihika, to the enemy. Waiyaki goes back on his oath in *The River Between* by falling in love with Nyambura, a Christian girl, thereby incurring the wrath of the community who consider him to be an imposter and consequently, bay for his blood. Mugo suffers the same fate as Waiyaki because oath-taking is one of the crucial tenets of Gikuyu identity and anybody who reneges on it deserves, after appearing before the Kiama, which is a traditional court, to die. General R. (AGW: 206) remarks:

There is a knock at the door. Mugo did not answer it.
The door opened and General R., followed by Lt Koinandu

Came in.
'I am ready,' Mugo said, and stood up, without looking at his visitors.
'The trial will be held tonight', General R. pronounced, gravely.
'Wambui will be the judge. Koinandu and I will be the only elders present at the hearing.
Mugo said nothing.
'Your deeds alone will condemn you', General R. continued without anger or apparent bitterness. 'You – No one will never escape from his own actions.'
General R. and Lt Koinandu led him out of the hut.

Before the dawn of *Uhuru*, the villagers looked at Mugo with respect and admiration because they regarded him as an epitome of African political identity, not knowing that he has done the most despicable thing during the Emergency. Their expectations become painfully reversed when, during his independence speech, Mugo divulges that he is the one who has sold out Kihika to the enemy. To him, *Uhuru* becomes a period of identity-searching and moral-decision making. Before he reveals the truth to his fellow villagers, he has always had an in-depth soul-searching exercise and conflict of ideas about why he has betrayed the struggle for national identity. Uppermost in his mind has always been how to get out of this humiliating situation, as his life was a living nightmare. As such, he felt alienated and pessimistic about the coming *Uhuru*. Fear of possible retribution and reprisal by the villagers made him feel apprehensive about the imminent freedom because he had betrayed the brotherhood of the Thabaians. He finally convinces himself that it is only the truth that will set him free, as he believes that only the expiation of his sins would redeem him. This belief links with the Biblical Jewish mythology that in order for man to be reconciled with God, he has to confess his sins to Him. It also reinforces Ngugi's idea of a hybridized African identity. The following passage defines Mugo's confession (AGW: 193):

'You asked for Judas,' he started. 'You asked for the man who led Kihika to this tree, here. That man stands before you, now. Kihika came to me by night. He put his life into my hands, and I sold it to the whiteman. And this thing has eaten into my life all these years.'

Throughout he spoke in a clear voice, pausing at the end of every sentence. When he came to the end, however, his voice broke and fell into a whisper. 'Now, you know.'

Mugo's confession makes many Thabaians realize that they have been cherishing false hopes about *Uhuru* because it now proves to be 'an empty shell' (Gigandi 2000:98). Mugo epitomizes the monster which Kenya is going to be in the post-independence era, which is a new form of identity that is at war with the old African identity. Thus, his atonement shows that unless everybody who has done wrong during the liberation struggle confesses and reconciles with his/her past, his/her sins will always visit and torment him/her. This means that everyone in Thabai should strive to reconcile the old African identity with the new one in order to forge a new and acceptable African identity. Gikonyo (AGW: 202) agrees:

Wangari and Mumbi saw Gikonyo tremble so that the blankets that covered him shook.

'What is the matter?' his mother asked, thinking of the pain in his arm.

Gikonyo did not seem to have heard. He stared at the opposite wall, at something beyond the hospital. After what to them seemed a long silence, Gikonyo looked at the two women. He was more composed. His hard face had changed, almost softened. The scowl is gone. His voice when he spoke was small, awed, almost tinged with shame. 'He was a brave man, inside,' he said.

'He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a Chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at.' He paused and let his eyes linger on Mumbi. Then he looked away and said, 'Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I – we – too – in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at.'

Ngugi (1980:90) remarks that 'In the novel *A Grain of Wheat*, I tried, through Mugo who carried the burden of mistaken revolutionary heroism, to hint at the possibilities of the new Kenyatta', which means that he has moved from the problems of social identity to problems of political identity, exemplified by Kenyatta. Thus, Ngugi wants to show the readers that *Uhuru* is not as blissful a phenomenon as what people are made to think it is. Mugo is therefore, not the only character who has betrayed the oath, which is a symbol of African identity, in the novel. Gikonyo, Mumbi's husband, has, as he alludes, betrayed the oath of loyalty to the struggle in order to be released from prison and go home to his wife and family. On the other hand, Mumbi betrays her oath of loyalty to their marriage

vow by committing adultery with Karanja, who is her husband's archrival in the community. Karanja sold the cause of the struggle by joining the ranks of the enemy in fighting his fellow Africans. All these aspects are new forms of living in Africa, and, therefore, a new form of identity.

Ngugi is, nevertheless, not entirely pessimistic about *Uhuru* because at the end of the novel, Gikonyo reconciles with his wife, Mumbi, through the gift of a carved stool, which symbolizes African identity, which he gives to Mumbi as a token of rekindled love. This reunion symbolizes hope for the reclamation of African cultural values and artefacts, which were lost to Africa because of colonialism as well as post-colonial perils such as corruption and neo-colonialism. It also serves to valorize 'the idea of culture in the thinking of African worlds'. (Gigandi 2001: 7). Cook and Okenimkpe (1997:85) postulate:

This hope for a new beginning is epitomized in the final chapter in the reconciliation of Gikonyo and Mumbi. Their reconciliation is itself symbolized by the carved stool which will be Gikonyo's peace-offering to Mumbi. And in the stool, their reunion becomes an image for the unified strength of the whole society. The carving is to be an example of true traditional African craftsmanship.

4.3 *MATIGARI*

Ngugi first wrote *Matigari* in Gikuyu, his mother tongue, again, showing his quest to restore African identity. He was in exile in Britain, and therefore, away from his people and culture. And when one is displaced from the land of one's birth, one yearns for the things which made them who they are. While in Britain, he becomes culturally nostalgic, and this cultural nostalgia brings him closer to his roots. It rekindles deep feelings of love for his continent, his identity. Thus, in *Matigari*, Ngugi exposes that 'African literature, in its past and present configurations, is deeply aware of the traumas of dislocation and the search for a home' (Chapman 2003: 4). He yearned for his land, his customs, and values from which exile has estranged him. For him, *Matigari* becomes a journey towards the re-discovery of self-identity, a quest for belonging, in the face of a strange

country hence his nostalgia 'for the oral tales of his childhood' (Gigandi 2000:227). Gigandi (2000:228) further observes:

*But exile also provided a space of rethinking the terms of identity [my italics]. Between London and New York, liberated from the vagaries of the nation and the burden of its everyday realities, Ngugi could begin to rethink the three categories that the nation and the novel had brought into being – geography, time, and subject. As a novel produced in exile, and thus the furthest removed from its subject, *Matigari* could be interpreted as a work that reflects its author's self-consciousness about his distance from his cultural sources, his language, and his intended audience. It is sometimes tempting to read the novel as Ngugi's way of coming to terms with his heritage, his language, his culture, (*his identity*) [my italics].*

In *Matigari*, as in his other novels, Ngugi explores African myths, songs and dance, fabulous folklore (as in folklore full of fables), and tales as an integral part of African identity. Unlike in his first three novels, this time around he employs these forms of African identity with a great amount of dexterity and innovation in that he successfully marries the traditional African forms with modern European ones. This is clearly shown when he uses *Matigari* as a symbol of a resurrected saviour (European value) and fuses it with his search for a collective African political identity (African value). Thus, Ngugi is committed to forging a true African identity in which African culture will be promoted through the use of African languages. Gigandi (2000:228) notes:

We can perhaps understand this shift better if we recall that the realistic novel has traditionally been associated with the ideal of the nation and the discourse of nationalism. As a student of the European novel, Ngugi understood how realism had emerged as a formal category in order to represent the coming into being of the new nation and its bourgeois subject; as a teacher and critic, he was attracted to the realist novel because of its capacity to represent the totality of historical (national) experiences. During the heated debate on language that Ngugi initiated in Kenya just before his imprisonment, some of his political opponents and critics had tried to discredit him by arguing that in choosing to write in Gikuyu, the novelist's political commitment had increasingly moved away from nation to region or ethnicity. What these critics missed was how Ngugi remained committed to the 'truths' of the nation long after they had been discarded by other

post-colonial writers, and how what happened to be his turn to region or ethnicity was his desperate attempt to secure a center for national identity in an age of antinationalism.

Ngugi is committed to African national identity and not ethnic identity. He only uses his ethnic (Gikuyu) background as a microcosm of Africa and not as a quest for regional or ethnic identity.

Matigari opens with Matigari seen burying the weapons and girding up the peace-belt. He thinks that oppression and war are over, only to find that they are still prevalent in the community, disguised as African advancement (neo-colonialism). This is a new form of African identity which is nightmarish to the people. The people are conscious of this moral degeneration but they are lethargic about challenging it because they are full of 'fear, despair or resignation' (Cook and Okenimkpe 1997:134). Matigari starts to fight for the reclamation of his people's eroded identity by reviving their awareness about the values which exemplify their national identity. Cook and Okenimkpe (1997:140) observe:

We have already sketched in Matigari's fable-like symbolic quality linked with the depiction of the actuality of the lives of the wretched of the earth in such a society; and the satiric vein we have already discussed in some detail. The heart of the fable is Matigari's mission to reclaim 'his house', which is really a socialist claim on behalf of African workers for a share in the good life that 'sweat and blood' have produced.

In *Matigari*, Ngugi uses the Christian myth of the birth of Christ, His death by crucifixion, and lastly, his resurrection to symbolize the way in which the Mau Mau freedom fighters came into being in order to liberate Kenyans from oppression, and how, like Christ, some of the fighters were sacrificed. It is through Matigari that these heroes and heroines of the struggle are reincarnated to come and save the suffering masses from the claws of political graft, which is a new form of African identity. Unlike Mugo wa Kiribo, the Gikuyu seer of old who used to prophesy for the people and not with the people, Matigari fights side by side with his people. He struggles together with the masses, 'on country-roads, farms, political rallies, churches, courtyards and prisons'

(Mazrui and Mphande 1995:174), all in the name of collective African identity. He is ubiquitous. When people ask him whether he is the promised messiah, who according to Christian mythology, was born, crucified, and rose from the dead, he responds:

‘No,’ he answered them. ‘The God who is prophesied is in you, in me and in the other humans. He has always been there inside us since the beginning of time. Imperialism has tried to kill that God within us. But one day that God will return from the dead. Yes, one day that God within us will come alive and liberate us who believe in Him. I am not dreaming’.

In the above quotation, Matigari implies that justice and goodness are virtues everyone is born with and that ours is to rekindle them by listening to our conscience. In this way, he attempts to restore African identity in that the goodness and justice which he advocates are in harmony with *ubuntu* as one of the most important African value.

By making Matigari part of the fighting masses, Ngugi proves that he writes for them as his primary audience and that his literature is mass-consumed. This is true because when Ngugi wrote *Matigari* and all his other novels, except his first three, he had a full understanding of Kenya’s freedom fighting history by obtaining first-hand facts from interviewing primary sources about the Mau Mau and all the events which have influenced the fight for freedom. In this way, he was resuscitating the African oral tradition which is a key factor in defining Africans and their identity. This oral research of African history from ordinary Kenyans has, therefore, made the people own and identify fully with his work. When he wrote his first three novels, he was naïve in that he read Kenyan history from European-owned libraries. That history, which appeared to be exemplifying African identity, was distorted as it was narrated from the European perspective. Thus, in *Matigari* and his later works, he correctly re-writes the history of Kenya’s fight for independence, with the aim of restoring its national identity. Mazrui and Mphande (1995:165) remark:

By the time Kenya attained its independence in 1963, virtually all records on the Mau Mau movement that existed in writing could be described as colonial in perspective. The Mau Mau combatants were described as blood-thirsty terrorists and some of their leaders, like Kimaathi, as lunatics. Partly because most written sources

were colonial, and partly because of the mental colonization precipitated by both colonial and neocolonial education, the history written by Kenyans in the postcolonial period continued to assume a colonial character. Because of these twin factors, Ngugi came to regard most written sources on Mau Mau as highly unreliable, and the resort to oral sources became a compelling quest.

It, therefore, does not come as a surprise when Ngugi openly states that *Matigari* is an oral story in which its main character goes about asking people for direction. Thus, Matigari, like Ngugi, when he went about interviewing people about the true history of the Mau Mau movement, goes about asking for information in his search for the truth (a cure). Ngugi (*Matigari*: vii) remarks:

This novel is based partly on an oral story about a man looking for a cure for an illness. He is told of old man Ndiiro, who can cure his illness, but he does not know how to get to him. So he undertakes a journey of search. He meets different people on the way and to each he sings the same description of old man Ndiiro:

Tell me where lives old man Ndiiro
Who, when he shakes his foot, jingles.
And the bells ring out his name: Ndiiro,
And again: Ndiiro.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion indicates the ways in which Ngugi portrays African identity through the use of myths, songs, and dance, which were orally handed down to posterity, to authenticate African literature as a distinguished craft. African cultural identity is used as an indigenous force which has successfully managed to Africanize the novel 'to the point where we can now talk of the novel that is peculiarly African in style' (Mazrui and Mphande 1995:161). Thus, Ngugi uses identity in the forms of song and dance in his novels in order to charm, heal, and to uplift his people spiritually, in their struggle for total emancipation from colonialism and neo-colonialism. Ngugi (AGW: 189) notes:

People started singing, led by the youth band with drums, guitars, flutes and tins. Again they recreated history, giving it life through the words and voices: Land alienation, Waiyaki, Harry Thuku,

taxation, conscription of labour into the whiteman's land, the break with the missions, and, oh, the terrible thirst and hunger for education. They sang of Jomo (he came, like a fiery spear among us), his stay in England (Moses sojourned in the land of Pharaoh) and his return (he came riding on a cloud of fire and smoke) to save his children. He was arrested, sent to Lodwar, and on the third day came home from Maralal. He came riding a chariot home. The gates of hell could not withhold him. Now angels trembled before him.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study on identity in African literature testifies that Africa has a unique and autonomous identity, which can be divided into several identities, such as cultural identity, political identity, and social identity. These identities should be projected when Africa makes contribution into the international community. Though colonialism and neo-colonialism have plunged Africa into an identity crisis, which has led to Africans sitting astride two cultures, they (Africans) have managed to redefine themselves culturally, politically, and socially. It should, however, be acknowledged that the damage that colonialism has inflicted on the Africans runs deep. Thus, in order for Africa to develop, she should evolve strategies based on her experiences, and if she adopts development strategies from other countries, she should adapt and refine them to suit her own unique conditions. It is in this way that, on the one hand, indigenous African identity will be preserved while on the other, a new synthesized African identity can be forged.

Ngugi agrees that Africans should embrace Western culture without losing the nub of who they are. They should not be assimilated into Western culture, rather, they should be acculturated into it to the advantage of Africa. These views are clearly articulated in *The River Between* when Waiyaki goes to the European school to acquire education and comes back to enlighten his tribe through that education. Although his father, Chege, is depicted as a traditionalist who upholds the ways of the tribe, he allows Waiyaki to go to school. Chege cautions him though, that the education that he is going to get should be for the benefit of the tribe. In *Weep Not Child*, Njoroge also goes to school to obtain education in order to come back and lead his people. Though he does not complete his studies, like Waiyaki did, there is a co-existence of African culture and European culture in him.

Ngugi also depicts identity in African literature through the discussion of how Gikuyu people feel about their land. He uses the myth of origin, through Gikuyu and Mumbi, to show that Gikuyuland has been given to them by their Murungu (god). Land is an

important part of their identity in the sense that they earn their livelihood from it through subsistence farming. It is land which connects them to their ancestors because during ancestral worship, they pacify their gods by performing rituals on the ground. The graves in which their ancestors lie buried are on the land. Circumcision is one of the other central tenets of African identity which Ngugi explores. In *The River Between*, Muthoni argues that she wants to be circumcised in order for her to be a complete woman who will be a full component of the community. Thus, in Gikuyu culture, as in other indigenous African cultures, an uncircumcised person is not regarded as a complete member of the community. He/She is not allowed to attend ceremonies for adult people because it is assumed that he/she has not graduated from boyhood to manhood, and from girlhood to womanhood. Such a person is not even allowed to marry or be married. Waiyaki's father, Chege, wants his son to go to the mountain school in order for him to be a man who is well versed in the ways of the tribe. Ngugi also describes oath-taking as a key aspect of African identity, the betrayal of which can be punishable by death.

Cultural synthesis, which leads to a new form of identity, is prevalent in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Matigari* in that in *A Grain of Wheat*, Kihika uses European mythology in the form of Biblical verses to draw courage from in his struggle for national identity. This cultural hybridization leads to a new form of political and social identity which is not indigenous to Africa. Gikonyo commits adultery with Karanja and Mugo betrays Kihika to the enemy. In the African culture, adultery is an anathema, instead of men committing adultery and vice versa, they would marry as many wives as they can afford. Betrayal of an oath still rears its ugly head when Mugo sells out Kihika to the enemy, but he gets his just deserts. Matigari rises from the dead like Christ to come and fight for the liberation of his people from the claws of neo-colonialism. He symbolizes the Mau Mau, but he is alone, though collectively ubiquitous.

The foregoing discussion validates Ngugi's belief that in order for Africa to prosper alongside other nations, she must, as a starting point, restore her cultural heritage which includes, among other things, African indigenous languages, *ubuntu*, their rites and customs such as forms of worship, circumcision, oath-taking, the value they attach to land, and the manner in which stories are told (the oral tradition). Omotoso (1996: xiv)

concurr with Ngugi when he regards the following African rituals worthy of restoration – ‘birth, naming ceremony, food, drink, coming of age, marriage, managing success, growing old and death.’ To him, the African’s whole behavioural pattern forms part of his/her rituals.

Ngugi accepts that Africa should maintain her identity in this age of globalization. This means that Africans should enter the global world with the full knowledge and acceptance of their identity and participate as such. The main reason is that the world comprises of different nations with diverse identities which should co-exist in unity.

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