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## *The River Between*: A Cultural Approach

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# Table of Contents

# Acknowledgments …………………………………………… 2

# Synopsis (English) …………………………………………… 3

# Synopsis (Arabic) ……………………………………………. 4

# *The River Between*: A Cultural Approach:

# Introduction ………………………………………….. 5

# The Style of the Novel ………………………………. 7

# Attitudes toward Culture …………………………….. 25

# Controversial Cultural Elements …………………….. 48

# Works Cited ………………………………………………….. 55

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Synopsis

*The River Between* is one of the best representatives of the ambivalence toward the native and foreign cultures in the 1920s. It is concerned with the divisions and hostilities that emerged among the natives as a result of colonization. Ngugi himself lived in a middle position between his culture and that of the colonizer. Therefore, his first written novel came as a reflection of the state that he experienced. The style of the novel and the representation of its characters combine elements from both the Gikuyu and the European culture. Also, the important characters are presented in an ambivalent attitude toward the elements of the culture of the white man. Ngugi worked to show his preference of this position by projecting his protagonists under that light. However, he tried, simultaneously, to present the two different extremities; one is the holding rigidly to everything belonging to the tribe and the other is the clinging to whatever brought by the white man. Many cultural elements are emphasized in the novel in order to show the depth of the differences between the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer. It is through the characters' attitudes and reactions toward these elements that we can see the various positions held by the Gikuyu people toward those drastically diverse cultures. In fact, Ngugi bases his novel on the incidents that arise from cultural prejudices in order to show the bad consequences of such prejudices and how they can disrupt the harmonious unity that a given society entertains.

خلاصة

تعد رواية *النهر الفاصل* من أفضل الروايات التي تمثل الازدواجية بين ثقافة الْمُسْتَعْمِر والثقافة المحلية في عشرينات القرن الماضي حيث تعنى بالانقسامات والعداوات الناشئة بين السكان الأصليين و الناتجة عن الاستعمار. وقد اتخذ نقوقي موقفا متوسطا بين ثقافته وثقافة الْمُسْتَعْمِر ولذلك ظهرت روايته الأولى كانعكاس لحالته. في هذا العمل، حاول نقوقي أن يدمج أنماطا مستمده من الأدب الغربي ومن ثقافته المحلية، كما قام بتقديم شخصياته الرئيسية في مواقف ازدواجية تجاه العناصر المختلفة لثقافة الرجل الأبيض، بطريقه تقنع قرائه بموقفه الشخصي. في نفس الوقت، لم ينس نقوقي تقديم صورة لطرفي النقيض المتمثلة في التعلق بكل ما يتصل بالقبيلة من جهة وفي اعتناق كل ما يرد من الغرب من جهة أخرى. ولتوضيح عمق الاختلافات بين ثقافة الْمُسْتَعْمِر وَالْمُسْتَعْمَر، قام العمل بإبراز بعض العناصر الثقافية التي تبين من خلال المواقف الشخصية المختلفة، وجهات النظر المتنوعة التي يتبناها الكينيين حيال هاتين الثقافتين المتغايرتين. في الحقيقة بنى نقوقي روايته على الأحداث الناشئة عن الصراعات الثقافية المتحيزة ليحذر من عواقبها السيئة وليشير إلى دورها في تفريق المجتمعات المترابطة.

*The River Between*: A Cultural Approach

1. Introduction

*The River Between* is an exemplary text of the ambivalence that characterizes the works of those who lived under the pressure of colonialism in the 1920s. Living inside a society that struggles to maintain its own culture and simultaneously take what is best from the colonizer, Ngugi has grown up with that attitude in mind. In his illustration of this instance, Gikandi states that: "the more ambivalent portrait in the early works, especially, *The River Between*, seems to be closer to the historical records. Both colonizer and colonized were engaged in acts of cultural translation, trying to invent their traditions and selves in relation to the realities of the other" (17). Also, the different sources of education that Ngugi got helped him in developing an ambivalent attitude toward the Western culture and provided him with a hybrid background. An account of the influences on his writing career is provided by Gikandi:

Ngugi began his writing career under the pressure of three powerful cultural institutions in colonial Kenya: the Protestant church, which was the major conduit for modern identities in the colonial sphere; the mission school, which through its valorization of literacy as the point of entry into the culture of colonialism, promoted new narratives of temporality and identity; and Gikuyu cultural nationalism, which manifested itself in the tradition of independent schools that the novelist attended in his youth (Gikandi 39).

This explains the startling combination of the Gikuyu and Western culture in Ngugi's writings. Ngugi's belief was that one should be true to his country and its culture but that does not mean that fanaticism is the best solution. There could be a way in which a native can learn from the advancement of other societies while being loyal to the culture to which he/she belongs. Later, Ngugi's writing career was marked with a transition from a Christianized view to a Marxist position. Such transition divides Ngugi's works into two stages which are usually referred to as the early and the later phases. The focus of this paper will be on the reflection of culture on *The River Between*, the first novel by Ngugi, as an example of the early phase.

The central conflict of *The River Between* does not revolve around the struggle between the colonizers and the colonized, but rather around that among the natives themselves, as a result of the divisions and rifts created by colonization. Said notes that "in Ngugi the white man recedes in importance- he is compressed into a single missionary figure emblematically called Livingstone- although his influence is felt in the divisions that separate the villages, the riverbanks, and the people from one another" (211). The style of the novel and the representation of its characters combine elements from both the Gikuyu and the European culture. Also, some of the characters are presented in an ambivalent attitude toward several elements of the culture of the white man. Ngugi worked to show that this position was the most dominant form by projecting his main characters under that light. However, he tried, simultaneously, to present the two different extremities; one is the holding rigidly to everything belonging to the tribe and the other is the clinging to whatever brought by the white man. Many cultural elements are emphasized in the novel in order to show the depth of the differences between the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer. It is through the characters' attitudes and reactions toward these elements that we can see the various positions held by the Gikuyu people toward those drastically diverse cultures. In fact, Ngugi bases his novel on the events that arise from cultural prejudices in order to point to their bad consequences and their function in disrupting the harmonious unity that a given society entertains.

1. The Style of the Novel

*The River Between* was written in the early sixties while Ngugi was still a student at Makerere. The text, along with the other early texts, in Amoko's words "embody the contradictory impulses of Ngugi’s early aesthetic education: on the one hand, they seem to affirm Gikuyu (and African) culture; on the other, they appear to attack traditionalism and endorse Christian doctrinalism" (36). The style of *The River Between* is a good example of the ambivalence between two cultures; it derives from the Western cultures elements of tragedy, nature description and Christianity while at the same time maintains indigenous components that endow the work with originality and rootedness.

The novel as described by Amoko "takes the form of a tragedy, since its ill-fated hero is burdened with the weight of an unrealizable but authoritative prophecy" (38). Ngugi's portrayal of his protagonist is tragic. Many of Waiyaki's characteristics resemble those of the typical tragic hero that is usually portrayed in the Western culture. Before applying the qualities of the tragic hero on Waiyaki, its definition will be presented at first. The most well known definition of a tragic hero comes from the great philosopher, Aristotle. When depicting a tragic hero in his *Poetics*, Aristotle states that "The change in the hero's fortunes be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary, from happiness to misery, and the cause of it must not lie in any depravity but in some great error on his part" (38). He, moreover claimed that "The tragic hero evokes our pity and terror if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly evil but a mixture of both. The tragic hero evokes our pity because he is not evil and his misfortune is greater than he deserves, and he evokes our fear because we realize we are fallible and could make the same error" (40). In addition, Aristotle explains the four basic characteristics of a tragic hero: nobleness of birth, a tragic flaw, a downfall, and a realization that his downfall was his own doing. There are other accepted requirements as well, such as the character serving as a leader, and the fact that the hero’s fate must already be sealed. As is evident, most of these requirements can be applied on Waiyaki.

First of all, Waiyaki's life changes dramatically from happiness to misery. At the beginning of the novel, we see him young and admired by most of the people in his village. Physically, he is described as "tall for his age. He had a well-built, athletic body" (Ngugi 6). Also, "He joined in the dances for the young boys and felt happy" (Ngugi 13). Mentally, Waiyaki is intelligent; in Siriana: "almost by miracle, he was joined by Kamau and Kinuthia" who were older than him and he "made quick progress and impressed the white missionaries" (Ngugi 21). As an adult, Waiyaki was successful, loved and respected by his people; in the school meeting: "People admired him. They liked the way he so freely mingled and the way he talked. He had a word for everyone and a smile for all. He pleased many" (Ngugi 92). After he finishes his speech, people shout for him in one voice: "The Teacher! The Teacher! We want the Teacher!" (Ngugi 86). Later in the novel, "Waiyaki's fame spread. The elders trusted him. They talked about him in their homes and in the fields" (Ngugi 97). The respect that Waiyaki receives from people makes him happy: "he had still his joy when an old man, a woman or a child stopped him and shook hands with him, a smile of trust on their faces" (Ngugi 110). However, at the end of the novel, all of this glamour goes away in one moment. The huge amount of love that he receives from people is suddenly transferred into hatred and a desire for vengeance. This dramatic change from happiness to misery is one of the factors that make Waiykai's designation as a tragic hero valid.

Secondly, Waiyaki's downfall is caused by a fault on his part. Amoko's words describe his hubris [an excess of ambition or pride, ultimately causing a character's ruin]: "Waiyaki’s vision … is endowed with self-assurance and finality. Communal unity is preordained, and Waiyaki is its natural author. The vision articulates no material, political, economic, or ethical basis for unity" (41). This assured vision that Waiyaki has leads him to go on a certain direction without being able to connect it with his final destination. The fact that he is prophesied to be a savior is what pushes him forward without knowing where. Instead of leading an active resistance to liberate the land, he enthusiastically founds an educational movement and envisions it as the miraculous instrument of achieving unity. His belief in the magic of education leads him to resign from his high position in the powerful Kiama and to give this chance to the person who hates him most. In an insightful instance, Kinuthia wonders "if Waiyaki knew that people wanted action now, that the new enthusiasm and awareness embraced more than the mere desire for learning. People wanted to move forward" (Ngugi 118).

In addition, Waiyaki's lack of realization of the importance of his name and the rising power of the Kiama are other causes for his downfall. This lack of realization makes him act spontaneously and neglect the plans that are set against him by his adversaries. In spite of the warnings that he receives from his friend, Kinuthia, and his mother, Waiyaki goes on his way, unaware of the danger that lies in front of him:

Be careful, Waiyaki. You know the people look up to you. You are the symbol of the tribe, born again with all its purity. They adore you. They worship you. You don't know about the new oath. You have been too busy. But they are taking the new oath in your name. In the name of the Teacher and the purity of the tribe. And remember, Kabonyi hates you, hates you. He would kill you if he could. And he is the one who is doing all this. Why? The Kiama has power. Power. And your name is on it, giving it even greater power. Your name will be your ruin. Be careful. … (Ngugi 112)

This warning by Kinuthia along with another by Waiyaki's mother foreshadow the disastrous end that will ultimately face Waiyaki. In the last chapters of the novel, his mother tells him: "Fear the voice of the Kiama. It is the voice of the people. When the breath of the people turns against you, it is the greatest curse that you can ever get" (Ngugi 123). Consequently these great mistakes that are committed by Waiyaki lead to his tragic downfall.

Foreshadowing is also used tragically in the novel. Muthoni's death prefigures Waiyaki's tragic end. The fact that she tries to merge her new Christian beliefs with those of her tribal practices against the wishes of her father and community makes her similar to Waiyaki who, too, works on that mission with different tools. Muthoni's death represents the failure of such an attempt and serves as a warning for those who think about following that path. Thus, readers are prepared for a sad ending because of Muthoni's failed attempt. As Gikandi puts it, "Waiyaki’s journey into the thicket of cultural crisis is, of course, foreshadowed by Muthoni’s narrative, a story that is often read as a commentary on the tragedy of biculturalism in a colonial situation" (66). Once more, Western tragic elements appear in the novel.

Moreover, the tragic end that faces Waiyaki does arouse feelings of both pity and fear. A reader will naturally sympathize with Waiyaki because his intentions are sincere. It is true that he makes a mistake by surprising his people of his love for an uncircumcised girl in spite of his taking an oath to keep the purity of the tribe; however, that mistake does not deserve the cruel punishment and denial from those who are closest to him. It is truly touching that all the glamour and the love that Waiyaki entertains from these people, will, in a moment, turn into detestation and that all the labor and hard work that are conducted by him will be wasted in an instance. This feeling of bitterness is experienced by Waiyaki at the end of the novel when his people start to accuse him: "He looked beyond and saw the children he had helped in their thirst for learning; the teachers who were coming; Kinuthia…" (Ngugi 151). On the other hand, Waiyaki's story stirs feelings of fear in the hearts of its audience. His mistake is not evident and any person is subject to such a fault. Therefore, readers apprehend the possibility of experiencing a similar situation and increase their identification with the protagonist. Ngugi's choice of this situation to end up his novel endows the story with a sense of grief leaving its readers full of sorrow.

Nobleness of birth is another quality that distinguishes Waiyaki from the other characters in the novel. The famous seer Mugo wa Kibiro is one of his ancestors, a sign of nobility for the Gikuyu people. Even Waiyaki himself "Stood as if dumb. The knowledge that he had in him the blood of the famous seer, who had been able to see the future, filled him with an acute sense of wonder" (Ngugi 19). Belonging to future seers in a superstitious society is regarded as a blessing. Also, "Chege, his father, was a well-known elder in Kameno" (Ngugi 6) which is another source of pride for him. In short Waiyaki, though not described as an aristocratic descendant, can be seen as a noble leader from the perspective of his native society.

In addition to his nobility, Waiyaki is bestowed, from his childhood, with qualities of leadership. From his first appearance in the novel, he is depicted with a strong personality that drives him instinctively to command his mates who are older than him. He has the physical abilities of a successful leader. His eyes are portrayed in a manner that shows his strength: "if the boy gazed at you, you had to obey. That half-imploring, half-commanding look was insisting, demanding. Perhaps that was why the other boys obeyed him" (Ngugi 10). Moreover, his strong will leads him to establish the first national school in his country and to become its headmaster. Thus, "Waiyaki, though young, was considered the unofficial leader of the education movement that would inevitably awaken the ridges" (Ngugi 6) and he pays much labor and hard work to achieve that goal. Later, Waiyaki becomes "known all over the ridges. Children knew him and hailed him as 'Our Teacher'. Old men and women also called him the Teacher" (Ngugi 91). His friend, Kinuthia, who knows him very well "was convinced that Waiyaki was the best man to lead people, not only to a new light through education, but also to new opportunities and areas of self-expression through political independence" (Ngugi 118). The people's reaction to Waiyaki's speech at the end of the novel, before the disaster befalls him, shows the amount of love and respect he entertains from them as their leader: "They listened to their Teacher, their savior, as if they would say, We shall never give you up" (Ngugi 149). In consequence, in spite of the fact that Waiyaki does not occupy a high leading position, his people regard him as their unnamed leader.

As most tragic heroes, Waiyaki's recognition of his fault comes too late. Only after descending from the sacred hill, Waiyaki does realize that he needs a political understanding, and not a sacred prophecy to succeed. This tragic recognition emerges from his inability to derive inspiration from the sacred grove anymore: "The sacred grove had not lit the way for him. He did not quite know where he was going or what he really wanted to tell his people" (Ngugi 142). Waiyaki's *anagnorisis* [the startling discovery that produces a change from ignorance to knowledge] is demonstrated by Mathuray as "the recognition of oneself not as an idealized figure of the imagination controlled by supernatural forces but rather as a subject of social forces" (53-54). Throughout the narrative, Waiyaki perceives his destiny as predetermined out of his belief in the prophecy. Even his idea of building schools, is colored with supernatural elements: "he could not understand how this idea had borne fruit so quickly. He saw it as something beyond himself, something ordained by fate" (Ngugi 67). In addition, Waiyaki's perception of his love to Nyambura is mystical; he imagines that they are "held together by something outside themselves" (Ngugi 76). Eventually, when Waiyaki becomes the subject of his society's judgment, he realizes the futility of his supernatural convictions. Therefore, the message that Ngugi wants to deliver consists of a refusal to a legendary understanding of the human choices and a privileging of a more realistic and mundane vision of the world. Waiyaki's recognition is constituted suddenly "And all at once Waiyaki realized what the ridges wanted. All at once he felt more forcefully than he had ever felt before the shame of a people's land being taken away" (Ngugi 142), in contrast to his early image of success when he foresees the educated "acknowledging their debt to him" (Ngugi 87). Yet, this recognition comes too late and concludes the novel tragically.

Another aspect of the novel's application of Western techniques is Ngugi's utilization of nature to reflect the inner happenings of the novel. This technique was popular in the nineteenth century novels, especially in Hardy and Lawrence's works. Mathuray's description of Ngugi's application of this technique is genuine:

In many of Ngugi’s novels, trees and rivers, mountains and plains, and elements of the weather appear repeatedly and seem not to function as mere background to the unfolding of events or as reflections of characters’ mental states. Their significant literary treatment gestures outside the use of detail as unit of exchange in the realist reception process … They tend to acquire the status of symbol. (45)

At crucial moments in *The River Between,* "the narrator appears to link the rhythms of the natural world to those of the human world … the narrator seems to be suggesting that the human world derives its founding authority and fundamental legitimacy from nature" (Amoko 39). Consequently, the novel's representation of nature should not be looked at as mere figurative but as symbolic scenes that contain deeper connotations.

First, the opening lines of the novel which offer a description of the ridges and the river are highly symbolic. They function to prepare the readers for the division and antagonism that has already occurred between the two villages about which the story unfolds. At the beginning, the ridges were described as indifferent: "The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu … They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept, the big deep sleep of their Creator" (Ngugi 1). These lines give the impression of the indifference of nature. However, they imply that under the guise of indifference, there might be some danger. Those passive and unresisting villages might arise at any moment and launch a lion's attack against any intruders. Thus, nature description at the beginning of the novel matches its people's passivity and submissiveness which wait for a stimulus to wake up and face the colonizer. In the same page, the narrator suggests the possibility of conflict and strife between the two villages, when looked at from the valley: "When you stood in the valley, the two ridges ceased to be sleeping lions united by their common source of life. They became antagonists. You could tell this, not by anything tangible but by the way they faced each other, like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region" (Ngugi 1). Amoko comments on this natural phenomenon saying "Far from being unnatural, the conflict between Kameno and Makuyu is, the narrator now suggests, inscribed legibly onto the natural world" (39). However, this dividing image is contrasted when the ridges are seen from the sacred grove: "Kameno and Makuyu were no longer antagonistic. They had merged into one area of beautiful land, which is what, perhaps, they were meant to be. Makuyu, Kameno and the other ridges lay in peace and there was no sign of life, as one stood on the hill of God" (Ngugi 16). This extended and contemplative depiction of the ridges reflects the hero's vision; that unity is essential and his people are destined to unite. They just have to go back to their origin and think about their shared place and culture. On the other hand, if each village insists on its rigidity then the division will go on. Moreover, the narrator's choice of the valley as a place to view the ridges antagonism is because of its association with the tribal rituals, mainly circumcision, which is one of the central causes of division whereas the sacred grove's function of reconciliation implies that people should overlook the small details and should have higher aspirations by concentrating on their sources of commonality. Accordingly, Ngugi's portrayal of his landscape is not arbitrary; on the contrary, it plays a huge role in illustrating the characters' perspectives.

Honia, the separating river has its significance in the narrative, too: "the river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-to-life … Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It joined them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were united by this life-stream" (Ngugi 1). The meaning of the river's name explains why rituals of circumcision are celebrated on its banks. The meaning "bring back to life" can be linked to the native's conception of circumcision as a device for being initiated into manhood or womanhood. Asked why he chose The *River Between* as a title for the book, Ngugi answered: "in the novel itself there is physically a river between two hills that house two communities which keep quarrelling but I maintain, you know, that the river between can be a factor which brings people together as well as being a factor of separation. It can both unite and separate" (Pieterse 135). Although the river can be seen as a natural means for dividing two places from each other, the narrator focuses on its unifying function. The view of the river joining the two villages foreshadows its witnessing of unification moments:

it is here, on the banks of Honia, that Muthoni-a Christian from Makuyu- is made a woman of the tribe through circumcision, and here again that Waiyaki from Kameno and Nyambura from Makuyu come together in their embrace. Honia River is the site of these two symbolic acts of the coming together of the tribe and the Christian religion, and is itself, a symbol of that unity. (Jones 64)

Again Ngugi deliberately employs his description of natural elements to further the development of his novel and to demonstrate his themes.

In addition to the landscape, the complex description of the rain occupies a considerable position in the narrative. At the beginning, the drops of the rain represent the people's attempt to restore the land. Their competition resembles that among the natives. Also, the image of the rain conveys the persistence and hard work that is employed by people in regaining their land. Just as the rain can revive the land: "the grass outside, which for a long while had been scorched and sickly, was now beginning to wake up refreshed" (Ngugi 61), also the people's dedication can return their land back . The fury of the falling rain reflects the anger and enthusiasm experienced by the colonized in their fight for cleansing the land. The misty clouds reflect the armies that people are awaiting. At the end of that scene, "the dripping stopped and was replaced by jets of water from the roof. They carried on the race" (Ngugi 61). This refers to the colonizers who invaded the land and deprived the natives of the goods of their country. In another instance, Waiyaki's impression of the rain embodies his attitude to the colonizer:

Suddenly he became angry, not with the white man or Kinuthia. He was angry with the rain. The rain carried away the soil, not only here but everywhere. That was why land, in some parts was becoming poor. For a time, he felt like fighting with the rain. The racing drops of the water had turned to filth and mud. He subsided. He felt like laughing heartily. Even here in this natural happening, he could see a contradiction. The rain had to touch the soil. That touch could be a blessing or a curse. (Ngugi 66)

This passage portrays Waiyaki's realization of the unpleasant realities behind colonization. The protagonist feels angry with the rain because it reminds him of what the white men has done to his land. They stripped Kenya, along with other African countries, of its wealth leaving the land impoverished. This association arouses feelings of irritation in Waiyaki making him long to fight. The filthy drops are a reflection of the colonizers who dirt their hands by stealing their country's resources. In addition, the arrival of the English to the country has a double effect; at moments a blessing, at others a curse. The blessing is seen in the building of schools and hospitals while the curse is their stripping the country of its wealth. In consequence, readers should not overlook the novel's description of small details because such details carry with them the author's message. The employment of these depictions is another instance in which the influence of Ngugi's Western education becomes clear.

Moreover, darkness has deeper associations in the novel. In many occasions, it is associated with the Kiama. This association anticipates the organization's workings in the dark against the protagonist. When Kamau calls Waiyaki before the Kiama, the narrator notes: “And the two stepped out in the dark night” (Ngugi 123). Waiyaki, himself, is alarmed for being called at this time and feelings of horror haunt him: “He looked around in the darkness and felt a terror of nothing visible pursue him” (Ngugi 124). When he reaches the meeting, Waiyaki links the members of the Kiama with darkness, showing his awareness of their bad intentions. He describes the *Kiama* as “figures lurking in the edges of darkness” (Ngugi 124). Waiyaki's vision of the Kiama is emphasized in their destructive acts, such as burning the hut and intending to force circumcision. Also, Waiyaki's association of the Kiama with darkness reflects Joshua's binary opposition between Christians, as forces of light, and pagans, as powers of darkness. When he preaches, he talks "of those who had found the light yet now walked not in the light" (Ngugi 86). Ngugi's method tends to privilege Joshua's description and reflects Waiyaki's attitudes.

Christian concepts and Biblical references are other Western elements that color most of Ngugi's works among which is *The River Between*. "It is a commonplace to note that in his fiction Ngugi fuses mythological tropes from the Gikuyu and Christian religions. In all of his novels, be it part of the narrative strategy or in the language spoken by his characters, Biblical language, symbols and narratives are ubiquitous" (Mathuray 44). The novel is full of Christian references that integrate Christian ideas and terms with the Gikuyu culture. Ngugi has claimed that “The Gikuyu society is somewhat lacking in mythological background” in a justification of his Christian borrowings. These borrowings are appropriated and conditioned to his indigenous culture: "The Bible conveniently provides one with a relevant framework ... The Gikuyu people have had similar experiences. Biblical mythology is widely known and has the advantage of being easily understood by most audiences" (interview with Githae-Mugo, cited in Meyer 41). Initially, the original name of *The River Between* was *The Black Messiah*, a name that is enough in itself to indicate the infusion of two cultures in the novel. This title is startling as it combines two contradictory parts. Messiah is a Christian term that is associated with the whites but here the messiah is described as black. So, from the first moment, readers realize how Ngugi is going to direct his work. This messianic motive as described by Scott and Housley "allows various associations" (230) as will be discussed here.

Moreover, the myth of origin and the Gikuyu claim to land are other examples of the infusion of the western culture with that of the Gikuyu. At the beginning of *The River Between*, Chege shows Waiyaki, his son, their land and tells him"It was before Agu; in the beginning of things. Murungu brought the man (Gikuyu) and woman (Mumbi) here and again showed them the whole vastness of the land. He gave the country to them and their children and children of their children, tene na tene, world without end" (Ngugi 18). The basic Gikuyu beliefs are described in the novel with relation to Christianity. Thus, Murungo is portrayed in the same form of the Christian God, Gikuyu and Numbi in the form of Adam and Eve. The Christian prophets have also their place in the narrative by presenting the Gikuyu elders teaching and conveying their wisdom to the younger generation. These examples illustrate one of the most important techniques that Ngugi applies in the novel which is using Christian concepts and applying them to his Gikuyu culture in a way that reflects the hybridity of his education.

Furthermore, Waiyaki, the protagonist is projected in a Christ-like picture. At the outset, he descends from a line of seers, among whom was Mugo wa Kibiro. This fact endows Waiyaki with popularity among his people and makes him similar to Christ. In addition, the prophesy that is told to him by his father about his being a savior for his people is another attribute that makes him closer to Christ : "Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people" (Ngugi 20). These poetic lines and Biblical language in which Chege delivers to his son the secret of his being a savior gives that prophecy holiness and makes it more authentic. Besides, the development of Waiyaki's character underscores his similarity to Christ. For example, Waiyaki is called "Teacher" (Ngugi 107) and "Shepherd of his people" (Ngugi 96). The capitalization of these adjectives is inviting. Also, when Waiyaki was in a desperate need, he was denied by his friend Kinuthia who "sought to hide himself in the crowd as if he did not want to be identified with the teacher" (Ngugi 149). This situation is similar to the story of Jesus in which he was denied by his friend Peter as Christians believe. Waiyaki himself feels that similarity and he does compare himself in the novel to Christ. One of these moments appears when he sees Nyambura by the river and imagines as "if she and he were together standing on an altar ready for a sacrifice" (Ngugi 104). Also, the fact that “The suffering of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and His agony on the treehad always moved him” (Ngugi 100) shows his identification with Christ. Finally, Waiyaki's fate at the end of the novel is the same of that of Christ; both are judged by their followers and were tried. Therefore, Waiyaki is seen by Ngugi as a Christ and his story is foretold in Biblical language.

On the other hand, *The River Between* combines Gikuyu elements with those of the West. Oral tradition forms a major influence on Ngugi. He is one of those who have introduced oral tradition as an essential part of academic literary studies in Africa. In an interview with Egejuru, Ngugi revealed this native source: "In so far as the oral tradition is part and parcel of one's cultural upbringing, it is bound to affect one's narrative technique" (81). The novel is full of myths and legends that are drawn largely from the Gikuyu oral tradition. Vuiningoma states that Ngugi establishes an "oral universe" that "carries the reader into a world of magic, spiritual and mystical powers with myths and legends ... integrated into the text" (66). In its attempt to demonstrate the African culture and the native's close relationship to it, *The River Between* employs elements from the African oral tradition such as the myth of origin, prophecy and seers, saviors, rumors and gossip and other stylistic features.

The opening pages of the novel reveal the Gikuyu myth of origin. It is one of the most recurring themes in Ngugi's novels because of its substantiality in pre-colonial Kenya. From the very first page, readers are made aware of the historical rivalry between the two ridges that emerges from their contradicted myths of origin:

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 had 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. (Ngugi 1–2)

Murungu is further described as having a "seat on the mountain of He-who-shines-in-holiness" (Ngugi 17). Kameno and Makuyu share the same belief but the difference in their versions of the story relies on the place in which their fathers stopped as a sign of their political struggle. The myth further indicates that Mount Kerinyaga is the holy place in which Murungu rests, thus explaining the sacredness of the hills for the natives. Like the myth of divine origin, the myth of Demi na Mathathiprovides an evidence of the Gikuyu's claim to land: "Demi na Mathathi were giants of the tribe. They had lived a long way back, at the beginning of time. They cut down trees and cleared the dense forests for cultivation. They owned many cattle, sheep and goats and they often sacrificed to Murungu and held communion with the ancestral spirits" (Ngugi 10). In Mathuray's account: "*Demi na Mathathi* refer to the first two generations of the Gikuyu: the *Demi* (the “cutters” who cleared the forests for cultivation), and the *Mathathi* (the generation that protected the gains made by the preceding generation)" (50). The significance of these myths is assured by their oral transmission through generations. Such oral forms are applied to enhance the protagonist's mission of change and to force the ideology of the text. Ngugi utilizes native myths in his narratives to show his pride in his own culture, the extent of his people's closeness and loyalty to such beliefs and most importantly to send a message that Kenya is their land and no stranger has the right to take it away from them.

Prophecy, too, occupies a huge significance in the text. "The history of prophecy in East Africa reveals its significant role in anti-colonial resistance and the contestation of traditional forms of authority" (Mathuray 58). The narrative's representation of the country's defeat contends that it happened as a result of disregarding the prophecy that is told by Kibiro who "a long time back prophesied the invasion of Gikuyu country by the white man" (Ngugi 7) but "People did not believe him" (Ngugi 19). The intended message stresses the importance of prophecies and the danger of discarding them. A minor prophecy is about Waiyaki's being a savior for his people. "Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people" (Ngugi 20). Waiyaki's conception of himself as the prophesied savior forms a driving force that pushes him forward to labor and sacrifice. It bestows him with confidence and helps him to move assured in his mission. The prophecy is what moves the events of the novel and creates a world of anticipation within the audience who wonders about the possibility of realizing it. Moreover, it constitutes one of the links that tie the novel with its indigenous atmosphere.

The concept of "savior" is another source from which Ngugi builds his novel. Kenyatta, in *Facing Mount Kenya*, states that the Gikuyu have a shared belief of "savior" in what he calls the "miraculous elders" who are "endowed with powers beyond those of ordinary human beings". They "are held to be in direct communication with Mwene-Nyaga who gives them instructions generally during their sleep" (242). The brilliance of Ngugi's application of this concept relies in his juxtaposition of Christian and indigenous savior narratives. Joshua's belief of a white savior matches Chege's prophetic foretelling of an African savior: "Isaiah, the white man's seer, had prophesied of Jesus. He had told of the coming of a messiah. Had Mugo wa Kibiro, the Gikuyu seer, ever foretold of such a savior? No Isaiah was great. He had told of Jesus, the saviour of the world" (Ngugi 33). This is one of the most obvious instances of combining the two cultures and showing that the Gikuyu have a counterpart to some Christian elements.

By constructing two different versions of the villagers' myth of origin, Ngugi brilliantly draws the attention of his audience to the big role that rumors play in their society. The fact that even the essential issues of the tribe, such as its origin myth, are vitiated by rumors explains the large influence that these widespread rumors play in the society. These rumors are portrayed ironically to show the author's scorn of this destructive phenomenon. When Muthoni runs away from her father to undergo circumcision, "In some villages people couldn't believe this. They said that Joshua had a hand on it, probably to appease the angry gods of the outraged hills. Was it not known that Joshua took beer secretly? Strangely, nobody had ever seen him drinking. But they said they knew" (Ngugi 41). This highly ironic commentary on the natives' employment of their personal conclusions as facts demonstrates the author's critical attitude. Also, when Muthoni dies, it has been whispered that "she had been poisoned by the missionaries. Indeed, one of the boys who had taken her there had seen this" (Ngugi 58). Such statements expose the exaggeration that rumors create in order to enhance their credibility. The people's fascination of spreading rumors and believing them leads to Waiyaki's tragic end. The gossip that people exchanged interpreted his trips to Siriana to get teachers as carrying "secret dealings" between him and Joshua and the white men (Ngugi 26). Also, his being seen by Kamau entering the church and meeting Nyambura were all taken in a negative way through rumors. Ngugi projects this indigenous element in a negative light to demonstrate his objectivity by presenting the advantages and disadvantages of his community.

In addition to these concepts, the novel operates some of the stylistic features that are attributed to orality. For example, some nouns have symbolic implications such as "the mountain of He-who-shines-in-Holiness" which refers to mount Keninyaga (Ngugi 20). Also, the protagonist is named after a historical resistant fighter who struggled for the freedom of Kenya. He is characterized by "his championing of non-violent methods of resistance, and this is also the approach adopted by his fictional counterpart" (Williams 28). In addition, the name of Livingstone symbolizes his harshness and inhumanity in matters concerning the tribe, especially that of circumcision. Hence, symbolic names are one of the characteristics of the African oral tradition and they are used by Ngugi as a native technique. Furthermore, the text abounds in various examples of alliteration, which is employed in oral tradition to highlight major conceptions. One instance of this application appears in Waiyaki's feelings of uneasiness because of his father's revelation of his being the expected savior: "he felt a [strange sensation](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Strange+Sensation) of suspension in his stomach" (Ngugi 34). The apparent employment of this technique stresses these emotions and puts the readers in the same mood. Consequently, these stylistic oral features endow the novel with a Gikuyu touch and universalize the African art.

Before concluding this part, a brief description of Ngugi's use of language will be provided. In his *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi reflects that "the only question which preoccupied us was how best to make the borrowed tongues carry the weight of our African experience by, for instance, making them 'prey' on African proverbs and other peculiarities of African speech and folklore" (7). He quotes from Chinua Achebe his notion about the language: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings" (8). These schemes of language usage are reflected in Ngugi's English novels, among which is *The River Between*. It is true that the book is written in English; nevertheless its language appropriation to the African culture is clear. For instance, the characters' statements of greeting and farewell are reported in a typical African custom: "is it well with you" is used in greeting and "Stay well. Remain in peace." is a farewell expression. Moreover, the words that kids use in insulting each other such as "Cow" and "Hyena" reflect their strong relation to nature (Ngugi 4-5). Also, the native's tendency of calling the English as the "white men" demonstrates the ability of language to reflect the foreigners' attitudes. In addition, the text offers some Gikuyu proverbs that are translated into English such as: "you could more readily trust a man than a *Kihii*, an uncircumcised boy" (39). Furthermore, the parents' special method of teaching their kids is brilliantly expressed in phrases such as: "Beat them hard. We want them to learn" (Ngugi 68). Even typical Gikuyu songs are translated into an English that is full of native references: "Father / The war of shields and spears / Is now ended / What is left? / The battle of wits, / The battle of the mind. / I, we, all want to learn" (Ngugi 94). Hence, Ngugi's use of language is considered to be conditioned. His genius is reflected in his appropriation of English to his culture without affecting the accuracy of the origin.

In short, *The River Between* embodies the ambivalence that characterizes the works of Ngugi and his contemporaries in its mingling of Western and Gikuyu elements. Such Western elements include tragedy, nature description and Christianity, while the Gikuyu include the myth of origin, concepts of prophecy and savior, rumors and gossip and other stylistic features. In addition, the language in which the book is written is another method of demonstrating Ngugi's hybridity. The style of the novel in itself is a way of expressing its author's attitudes, reflecting, at the same time, the inner messages and happenings of the text.

1. Attitudes toward culture

*The River Between* was written at a time when:

The British colonial authority- with the help of Christian missionaries- sought to reorganize the Gikuyu according to the central doctrines of colonial modernity, positioning them in a cultural grid which emphasized white supremacy and the benign authority of colonization. The Gikuyu, in turn, carefully remade and rewrote their cultural narratives and moral economy to fit into the structures privileged by colonialism, creating an identity for themselves as a "tribe," valorizing centralizing narratives of common descent, calling attention to a common mythological pantheon, and privileging histories and temporalities that would put them, morally and conceptually, on equal terms with their colonizers. (Gikandi 17-18)

Thus, the novel reflects Ngugi's attempt to convey the conflicts that his African contemporaries suffered. It works to create an anti-colonial atmosphere by exposing the disruptive effects that colonization generates. Achieving an anti-colonial nationalism is presented in the novel as impossible without, first, mending the divisions between the Gikuyu communities; the Christian Makuyu and the traditional Kameno. "In fact, for the period covered by *The River Between*, culture … constituted the battleground between the colonizer and the colonized and among the colonial subjects themselves" (Gikandi 23-24). Therefore, the narrative aims at arriving at a middle ground in which a reconciliation of the natives can be realized.

Ngugi's portrayal of characters is significant in its ability to articulate different attitudes toward the tribal customs as well as the modernization brought about by the colonizer. Hence, his characters can be divided into three categories; the intermediates, represented by Waiyaki, his father, Muthoni and Nyambura; the traditionalists, headed by the Kiama; and the modernists on whose top is Joshua. Ngugi's portrayal is realistic in its representation of the mental states of the Africans, and especially the Gikuyu, under colonization. The fact that the main characters of his novel are projected in ambivalent attitudes highlights the actuality of Ngugi's attitude. His ideals are characterized by a tolerance towards the elements of modernity as well as maintenance of the main traditional values. "Indeed, one of the central themes in Ngugi's early work is the tension between his desire for modernity and the pull of what appears to be an intractable past" (Gikandi 39-40). Gikandi adds that "the idea of culture among the educated classes in Central Kenya did not entail any practical return to the past; on the contrary, culture was being reinvented as a project in which Gikuyu beliefs and European systems were brought into a syncretic relationship" (24). What Ngugi rejects is fanaticism and rigidity in its various shapes; whether that shape is clothed in traditions or in modernization does not matter. In fact, Ngugi's ideology reminds his readers of Said's concept of culture "Culture is never a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures" (217). Accordingly, Waiyaki, the protagonist, plays the role of Ngugi and represents his attitudes towards many issues.

Waiyaki translates his ambivalent attitudes into a longing for reconciliation between the two ridges. He often dreams of a future time where there is unity, peace and love. "It was the vision of a people who could trust one another, who would sit side by side, singing the song of love which harmonized with music from the birds, and all their hearts would beat to the rhythm of the throbbing river" (Ngugi 137-138). Waiyaki's ability of tolerating the two contradicted cultures and of finding a way of molding them into oneness finds expression in his continuous attempts for bringing the different communities closer to each other. "Waiyaki did not like to be identified with either side; he was committed to reconciliation" (Ngugi 110). However, such attempts are faced with failure as Waiyaki applies them during the time of colonization that is characterized by a strong stiffness in regard to one's own culture. The situation does not help Waiyaki to achieve the kind of unity that he has been longing for. This instance is perfectly demonstrated by Ogude: "the modernizing project that Waiyaki embraces is totally at variance with the desires of a community polarized by the advent of colonialism. He has of necessity to be constituted through a series of ambiguities and ambivalences" (69). Thus, the protagonist's doom with which the novel ends illustrates how the novel "is permeated by Ngugi's recognition of the tragic ambivalence of the modernization process" (Cantalupo 102-103).

At the beginning of the novel, Waiyaki is educated at Siriana in response to his father's order to heed the prophecy by learning the wisdom of the white man in order to acquire the best tools for fighting him. His education plays a large role in changing his attitude toward the colonizer; it opens his eyes to the positive elements in their culture and convinces him that such components could be imported to the life of his community. Such belief leads Wiayaki, throughout the novel, to follow a middle course between the two antagonistic positions. Although he plays the role of the nationalist redeemer, the new ideals that he acquires in Siriana cause him to live in a struggle between his national duty and his personal convictions. Before going to Siriana, he embraces all the details concerning his culture without questioning, however, after returning, this position is changed. Questions about the prophecy, told by his father, and about circumcision start to rise in his mind. He wonders about his being a savior for his people and if that is a mere old man's illusion. Also, Gikandi explains that "while education has not softened Waiyaki, it has changed him, that his relation with "tribal" rituals and secrets is marked by distance" (57-58). So, his education alienates him from his people during the rituals of circumcision, making it difficult for him to participate in its dances: "Waiyaki's absence from the hills had kept him out of touch with those things that most mattered to the tribe" (Ngugi 39). In addition, the sacred hill, to which he journeys with his father at the beginning of the narrative looses a huge part of its significance for Waiyaki at the end as a result of the influence of the missionaries' education on him: "the sacred grove seemed to be no more than ordinary bush clustering around the fig tree" (Ngugi 140). Hence, despite Waiyaki's outside appearance as unaffected by the white man's learning, his inner way of thinking and looking at things is greatly transformed.

As a result, Waiyaki's mission takes the form of education as a medium of unity and reconciliation. His thirst for educating his people is a reflection of his wish to change the ideals of his society. Just as Siriana changes his thinking, Waiyaki, seeks to deliver its positive teachings to the children of his tribe in order to produce a new generation that is more tolerant toward foreign factors and less rigid in regard to the purity of its tribe. "To Waiyaki the white man's education was an instrument of enlightenment and advance if only it could be used well" (Ngugi 119). His setting up of an independent school symbolizes his conviction of the possibility of founding a third identity that combines within its boundaries colonial and traditional values. Williams suggests that "the same active appropriation of useful aspects of Western culture is evident in the establishing of Gikuyu-run schools to Africanise formal education" (31). Marioshoni School is hailed by his people and most of their children are sent to join it. Because of that, building more schools becomes Waiyaki's main concern for most of the time, restricting his nationalist efforts in that side and causing the Kiama to assume a negative attitude toward his apparent passivity in rejecting the colonizer. However, Waiyaki's enthusiasm for education is not well justified; he himself is not able to connect it with his anti-colonial struggle for "He had not yet stopped to think where all this was leading, whether the new awareness and enthusiasm he had helped to create would be quenched by education" (Ngugi 109). This embrace of the religion of education is extreme, it leads the audience to speculate, as Sekyi-Otu argues, that "In place of education serving the requirement of unity, unity would serve the ends of education" (173). The narrator shows that, "Every day he was becoming convinced of the need for unity between Kameno and Makuyu. The ancient rivalry would cripple his efforts in education" (Ngugi 91). This shows that education becomes Waiyaki's desired end and it separates his efforts from the political duties that are expected from him. His resignation from the Kiama indicates that active resistance is not among his agenda and that what he cares about is to restore his community in a way that makes it fit with the new modernizing directions. The narrator indicates that fact in a telling passage: "Perhaps the teaching of Livingstone, that education was of value and his boys should not concern themselves with what the government was doing or with politics, had found a place in Waiyaki’s heart" (Ngugi 65). Therefore, Waiyaki's story is more about his confrontation with modernity rather than his preservation of his tradition.

Waiyaki's hybridity and his longing for reconciliation find a place in his emotional life, too. It is reflected in his love for Nyambura, the daughter of Joshua who embodies the full absorption of the foreign ways. Although his love for Nyambura is something beyond himself, this love does unconsciously stem from his immense desire for a unity between the two ridges. In many instances in the novel, Waiyaki connects their story to the larger context in which they live and assumes that either the success or the failure of their love is greatly bound to the result of his uniting project. For example, he contemplates on "the gap between them. It was as big as the one dividing Kameno and Makuyu" (Ngugi 78). Gikandi argues that in nationalist allegories "romantic love is an imaginative mechanism for overcoming the divisions embedded in the *polis*. In an ideal world, Waiyaki’s marriage to Joshua’s daughter would overcome the division between Kameno and Makuyu" (66). Waiyaki justifies his love for an uncircumcised girl by regarding it as a means of achieving the required reconciliation. Their marriage, if it were to be approved, will constitute a major step in that direction. "Nyambura was not circumcised. But this was not a crime. Something passed between them as two human beings, untainted with religion, social conventions or any tradition" (Ngugi 76). These reflections embody Waiyaki's conceptions; that all people are the same; they are all human beings. The religions, conventions and traditions that create rifts among them are seen as dirt that taints their carriers. Everybody has the right to believe in the religion that he finds suitable and to follow whatever traditions he/she likes but that does not give him/her the right to fight and hate those who do not agree with him/her. Still, Waiyaki "would not have liked to be seen by Kabonyi standing with Joshua's daughter. He resented this and wondered if he too was becoming a slave to the tribe" (Ngugi 81). This shows that Waiyaki himself is imprisoned by the conventions of his society and that he needs to deliver his ideals of reconciliation to them before allowing himself to be seen with a Christian girl. However, Waiyaki's and Nyambura's love is rejected by both parties. Nyambura is expelled by her father as the prodigal daughter who disgraces her family by loving the leader of their enemy; those pagans who live in the dark. On the other hand, Waiyaki, by bringing his lover to their village, exposes himself and her to the harsh judgments and accusations of his people. Their marriage is viewed by his people as a contradiction for "How could he work for the togetherness and purity of the tribe and then marry a girl who was not circumcised?" (Ngugi 151) Thus, the novel ends with their waiting for the Kiama's decision about their punishment. The tragic end of the couple's love story indicates the impossibility of achieving reconciliation between the two extremities during a time of high fanaticism.

Another factor to which Waiyaki reacts ambivalently is the Gikuyu tradition of circumcision. When he is young, Waiyaki longs for the day in which he will be circumcised and enters into the world of manhood. However, his education at Siriana results in some changes in his attitude. The narrator describes the idea of circumcision for Waiyaki when he says that "Not that Waiyaki disliked the idea of circumcision … In fact, he considered Livingstone, for all his learning and holiness, a little dense in attacking a custom whose real significance in the tribe he did not understand and probably never would understand" (Ngugi 39-40). This means that Waiyaki is well aware of the significance of circumcision for his society and he rejects the colonizer's oppressive way of eliminating it. For him, the value of circumcision does not lie in the operation itself but in its spiritual reflections on those who undergo it. That is why he concludes that circumcision “could not be stopped overnight. Patience and, above all, education, were needed. If the white man’s religion made you abandon a custom and then did not give you something else of equal value, you became lost” (Ngugi 142). This shows that Waiyaki does not object to stopping the practice, his opposition relies on the way that its prevention would be applied. As a result, Waiyaki's altered opinion of circumcision causes him to feel a weird isolation during its accompanying rituals and an estrangement from its dances. During the rituals "Waiyaki still felt uneasy. Something inside him prevented him from losing himself in this frenzy" (Ngugi 41-42). In addition, Waiyaki's isolation during these celebrations is caused by his taking Livingstone's opinion into consideration: "He wondered what Livingstone would say now if he found him or if he saw the chaos created by locked emotions let loose" (Ngugi 42). Waiyaki's most conflicted emotions toward this issue reaches its peak in his reflection about Muthoni's brave act of undergoing circumcision against her father's orders. "He thought that if he had been in her position he would never have brought himself into such pain. Immediately he hated himself for holding such sentiments. He was of the tribe. He had to endure its ways and be inside the secrets of the hills" (Ngugi 45-46). These thoughts embody the inner struggle between the protagonist's sense of duty and commitment to his tribe with the new ideals he gained in Siriana.

Christianity, too, has its place in the mind of the protagonist. In regard to the religion of the colonizer, Waiyaki is closer. In contrast to the people of Kameno, he is not against its concepts and teachings. "After all, he himself loved some Christian teaching. The element of love and sacrifice agreed with his own temperament. The suffering of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and His agony on the tree had always moved him. But he did not want to betray the tribe" (Ngugi 100). These lines reveal Waiyaki's conviction of some elements of Christianity. However, his commitment to his people and the burden of decolonizing them prevent him from turning his admiration into an actual embrace of those elements. What Waiyaki rejects is the method of those who preach religion strictly without any regard to the roots that bound people to their traditions. Waiyaki's thoughts clearly reflect his condemnation of Joshua. His reflections, by the end of the novel, summarize his position toward what religion is supposed to offer. "A religion that took no account of people's way of life, a religion that did not recognize spots of beauty and truths in their way of life, was useless. It would not satisfy. It would not be a living experience, a source of life and vitality. It would only maim a man's soul, making him fanatically cling to whatever promised security, otherwise he would be lost" (Ngugi 141). So, it is true that Waiyaki likes Christianity and does not mind to embrace some of its elements; nevertheless he does not believe in a blind absorption. His philosophy bears a tolerant view, mixing his own roots and traditions with positive factors from the white man's religion. Williams explains Waiyaki's supposition of how a society should act with a foreign faith that "rather than merely passively accepting the alien elements (here Christianity) the community will take it, extract what is worthwhile, and mould it in ways which fit the needs of the people – and their pre- existing cultural traditions" (31). This wish to import Christian ideas into the Gikuyu traditions appears in Waiykai's language that is full of Christian references and symbols. Gikandi points to this fact saying that "Waiyaki's uniqueness lies in his unconscious ability to speak eloquently about Gikuyu traditions and histories in the figural language of the King James version of the Christian Bible" (70).

The contradiction between Waiyaki's learning and his mission as a savior causes him to live in isolation. His mind is often preoccupied with thoughts about the utility of his educating project and whether that project can serve in realizing the liberating aim that is expected from him by his father and society. For example, at a certain moment in the narrative, the narrator demonstrates that "still he wondered if he had not betrayed that tribe; the tribe he had meant to unite; the tribe he had wanted to save; the people he had wanted to educate, giving them all the benefits of the white man's coming" (Ngugi 141). Also, Waiyaki's belief in the possibility of creating a third space in which Christians and traditionalists can find a place to express themselves and to practice their rituals freely, is usually encountered by doubts because of the evident difficulty of establishing such a condition. Gikandi notes this fact when he says that "Waiyaki is plagued by doubts about the efficacy of hybridity" (63). As the narrative progresses, Waiyaki's belief in a hybrid religion is encountered with some doubts and suspicions. His feelings of loneliness and isolation and the stiffness he encounters from the two parties cause him to live in confusion about his place in society and to question the possibility of achieving the longed for fusion. At times he wonders that "Perhaps there was no half-way house between Makuyu and Kameno. And what of uniting the two ridges? Just now he did not know his ground. He did not know himself" (Ngugi 86). Accordingly, Waiyaki is estranged from his people and his land because of the inner conflict that goes inside his mind and because of the difficulty of achieving the hybridity he has been calling for. At times, "He felt a stranger, a stranger to his land" (Ngugi 60) and at others, "Waiyaki felt himself standing outside all this. And at times he felt isolated" (Ngugi 69). Consequently, Ngugi utilizes his narrative and its hero to represent his own experienced inner struggles. By privileging Waiyaki, Ngugi does, in fact, popularize his own ideas and justify their validity. Ngugi, as an ambivalent writer, draws the readers' attention to the price that tolerating individuals have to pay in a given society. In conclusion, Waiyki's story and attitudes are best summarized by Gikandi:

Waiyaki's task in the novel is actually to negotiate the gap that separates the pre-colonial world from the colonial one, to imagine a national space between a dying "tribal" culture and an alienating colonialisim. As an adult, his quest for a narrative in which the ancient prophecy can be translated into modernity and the culture of colonialism can be harnessed to the service of tradition. Waiyaki's crisis of identity is generated by his location at the intersection of Gikuyu traditions and colonial culture. In this sense he is a victim of cultural hybridity and crisis." (61)

Another form of ambivalence in the novel appears in the character of Muthoni. Through representing Muthoni's conflict, Ngugi shows his ability to project the different forms of cultural hybridity. Just as Waiyaki adopts traditionalist values and tries to mingle them with elements of Christianity, Muthoni performs the same job in reverse; she is Christianized but her new faith does not stop her from being attached to her tribe. She demonstrates another form of cultural hybridity through importing a Gikuyu tradition to her newly embraced religion. She justifies her doing saying that: "I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe" (Ngugi 43). In her eyes, there is no contradiction in such an act; on the contrary, this act is what gives her an identity to which she can hold on firmly. Muthoni is an instance of what Homi Bhabha calls a colonial mimic figure. As is well known, Bhabha defines the concept of colonial mimicry as "a reformed recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that* *is almost the same but not quite*", he adds that "in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha86). Muthoni's difference or slippage is her insistence to be circumcised against the teachings of colonialism. Her belief is characterized by a strong attachment to her culture. Her strong resolution on undergoing circumcision emerges from her conviction that everybody should go through it; even her parents have done that despite their embrace of Christianity: "Father and Mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man’s faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man’s God does not satisfy me. I want, I need something more" (Ngugi 26). Muthoni's speech with her sister explains her faith. It is difficult for her to believe that there can be a man who would marry an uncircumcised girl, even Livingstone, the white man who delivers the knowledge of Christ to them would never agree to marry such a girl. With certainty, she asks her sister that: "do you think that he, a man, would marry a woman not circumcised? Surely there is no tribe that does not circumcise. Or how does a girl grow into a woman?" (Ngugi 26). Thus, Muthoni's solid Gikuyu background prevents her from seeing an alternative to circumcision; it is the only way in which a girl can be transformed into a woman and become valid for marriage. Even those who preach them not to circumcise would never abandon this ritual and will not agree to engage themselves with someone who did. Gikandi reads her story as "an expression of Ngugi's own doubts about the nationalist belief that culture could create a space in which tradition and colonialism can be reconciled" (61).

Another role that Muthoni plays in the novel is that she can be seen as a foil to Waiyaki. Although both characters share qualities of hybridity, yet Muthoni represents a more firm resolution; her narrative is qualified with certainty and insistence. Throughout the novel, there is not one instance in which Muthoni is encountered by doubts or questions; she goes on her belief with characterized solidity and confidence. To put it in Gandhi's words: "The conviction of young Muthoni's personal vision easily surpasses the dogmatic Joshua's vociferous proselytization" (22). On the other hand, Waiyaki's journey is haunted, from the beginning, with fears and doubts; he goes on his mission uncertain of what he does or where he belongs. As Gikandi eloquently explains, "Muthoni articulates the dilemma of cultural or religious hybridity in a language that greatly contrasts with Waiyaki's stutters" (61-62). Even in her final moments, Muthoni is shown as brave as always; her last words convey her deep conviction of her method and that her trip is ended with ultimate triumph: "'tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe'" (Ngugi 53). Waiyaki is greatly affected by Muthoni's story; sometimes he envies her for possessing such a strength and resolution; he contemplates that "Muthoni had tried. Hers was a search for salvation for herself. She had the courage to attempt a reconciliation of the many forces that wanted to control her. She had realized her need, the need to have a wholesome and beautiful life that enriched you and made you grow" (Ngugi 142). In consequence, Ngugi's portrayal of Muthoni is one of admiration; he tried to draw her picture for his protagonist to learn from. In addition, Muthoni's fate foreshadows that of Waiyaki. The fact that she dies a few days after being circumcised is meant to illustrate the difficulty of achieving reconciliation. She dies not because of the act of circumcision, but because she has attempted to resolve the conflict. This is the fate of who attempts to do so; the trial will certainly end in failure. Gikandi's analysis is that "Muthoni is more aware of the personal risks involved in cultural syncretism and is therefore able to prefigure Waiyaki's dilemma" (62). This explains the huge effect her death causes on the two ridges and the great attention her narrative receives from critics.

A less rebelling syncretizing attitude is embodied by Nyambura. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator draws some hints that under her Christian appearance, there lies a typical Gikuyu girl. An important instance appears in Nyambura's contemplation at the river when the time of circumcision is approaching:

Nyambura thought of this and felt slightly guilty … Nyambura wondered whether such thoughts ever came to Muthoni. She thought not and envied her. For Nyambura had learnt and knew that circumcision was sinful. It was a pagan rite from which she and her sister had been saved. A daughter of God should never let even a thought of circumcision come to her mind. Girls of her age would be initiated this season. Had her father, Joshua, not been a man of God, he, no doubt, would have presented them both as candidates. (Ngugi 23)

In her deepest self, Nyambura is longing to be circumcised. It seems that she is jealous of the girls in her age who are going to be circumcised and perhaps she regrets the fact that her religion prevents her from undergoing this operation. However, unlike Muthoni, Nyambura is less certain; she experiences conflicts between her origin and the new faith she has embraced. In these lines, Nyambura demonstrates her submissiveness to her father by trying to convince her conflicting soul that circumcision is an awful ritual that she should abandon. Even thinking about it makes her guilty and she, ironically, envies her sister for not having a thought about it. Later, the fact that Muthoni is circumcised does not separate the two sisters. On the contrary, Nyambura continues visiting her till she dies and even after her death, she never stops thinking about her. This is another evidence that Nyambura does not oppose circumcision at all; it is only her fear from her father that prevents her from doing it.

Nonetheless, it is Nyambura's love for Wiayaki, her father's enemy, that constitutes the full form of hybridity. Her way of looking at Waiyaki as her savior, presents her as another mimic colonial figure: "Nyambura knew then that she could never be saved by Christ; the Christ who dies could only be meaningful if Waiyaki was there for her to touch, for her to feel and talk to. She could only be saved through Waiyaki. Waiyaki then was her savior, her black messiah, the promised one who would come and lead her into the light" (Ngugi 103). Williams' comment on this association is that: "Nyambura's conflation of her feelings toward Christ and those she has for Waiyaki is one sign of the rapid indigenous assimilation and appropriation of Christian discourse" (29). Just as circumcision forms a source of identity and belonging to Muthoni, also Waiyaki does occupy this place in Nyambura's soul; he is the shape in which Nyambura can find reconciliation and he represents a passage toward her culture. Moreover, Nyambura's attachment to her traditions appears in her replacing the river with the church: "Sometimes she would not go to church at all and instead she would go to the Honia river" (104). At the bank of the river, Nyambura finds consolation and she performs her prayers with more freedom and comfort. In contrast to the church, the river bestows her with feelings of identity and closeness to her land. However, her prayers for God to help her in keeping on her father's side and not rebelling demonstrate the difficulty of following him. Nyambura's significant words alert the audience to the difference between her religion and that of her father. She calls the readers' attention to the true meaning of religion and how it should be practiced; the "religion of love and forgiveness" should not separate a father from his daughter and his tribe because when it does then it is "inhuman"; what religion is supposed to do is to unite, bring peace and hold people together (134). The novel ends with Nyambura's rebellion against her father's uniformity and her joining her sister in the anticipation of hybridity. Amoko points that "Each of the children [Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni] caught up in the crossfire articulates and enacts, if unsuccessfully in all three cases, a vision of communal reunification and renewal" (43).

Moreover, Ngugi uses the character of Chege to portray the influence of colonialism on even the most traditionalist people. Despite the fact of his being the spiritual leader of the traditionalist Kameno, Chege sends his son to be educated at Siriana, the center of the white man. His words remain in Waiyaki's mind as constant guidelines: "Go to the mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites" (20). Chege believes partially in cultural hybridity; for him it is good to be educated but that education should not lead to the abandonment of traditions. The narrator illustrates Chege's motives as he explains: "In this Chege did not see it as a contradiction that he, the true embodiment of the true Gikuyu, should have sent his son to the very missionary centre to whose existence he had always opposed … It is good to be wise in the affairs of the white man" (Ngugi 38). Hence, it is apparent that opposition does not mean complete rejection; one can get use of the very thing that he/she rejects. Besides, Chege's conviction arises from his deep belief in the prophecy which cannot be heeded without being wise in the affairs of the white man. However, Chege has doubts about the utility of sending his son to the mission place; he fears that this act will return with negative results and his son will come contaminated by the ways of the colonizer. But every time Waiyaki comes, Chege feels reassured of his commitment to his people. When Waiyaki thinks about reconciliation, he connects it with his father's act: "his father, too, had tried to reconcile the two ways, not in himself, but through his son. Waiyaki was a product of that attempt" (Ngugi 142). It is to be remembered that Chege's ambivalence cannot be compared to the previous characters because it is only one sided. Even in the side where Chege shows compromise and tolerance, it is largely stimulated by his wish to preserve the purity of his tribe. Foreign education, for Chege, is a tool of expelling the colonizer and keeping the land clean.

The mimicry of the Christianity of Joshua's family is extended to Miriamu, his wife. Although she is a static character who remains passive throughout the novel, the narrator draws some hints that her embrace of the white man's religion emerges from her submissiveness rather than from an actual conviction. He contends that a Gikuyu woman lies under the Christian guise of Miriamu. When Joshua remarks to his wife his wish that she is not circumcised, the narrator explains that she agrees with him but it is "Not that Miriamu shared or cherished these sentiments. But she knew him … that he would never refrain from punishing a sin, even if this meant beating his wife" (Ngugi 31). So, it is Miriamu's fear that compels her to go on her husband's ways. For her, it is not a matter of what religion she would embrace, what she most cares about is having a peaceful family that lives harmoniously without any problems. Thus, Miriamu's true religion is obedience and submissiveness to patriarchy; this is the faith that she embraces with deep passion and certainty. "She was a peace-loving woman and she never liked unnecessary tension in the house. Her injunction to her children was always: 'Obey your father.' She did not say it harshly or with bitterness. It was an expression of faith, of belief, of a way of life. 'Your father says this-' and she expected his children to do that, without fuss, without resentment" (Ngugi 34). Therefore, Miriamu remains passive even in the most difficult situations. She does not pronounce one word of opposition to Joshua's renunciation of his daughter despite the hurt it causes to her heart. Also, when she hears about Nyambura's love for Waiyaki, she warns her saying: "Waiyaki is a good young man. But people can talk, you know. We do not want any more trouble in this house. I cannot bear it. Not after Muthoni" (Ngugi 115). Although she likes Waiyaki for what he did for Muthoni and she knows that he would be a perfect husband for her second daughter, still she tries to convince Nyambura to move away from him because her association with him will end in a dilemma. Miriamu is very weak; she does not have her daughters' courage; the courage that makes her choose that path she likes. Consequently, she can be described as an ambivalent character whose choice is made by fear and not preference.

Finally, Ngugi's novel points to his approach in dealing with the culture of the colonizer. He adopts a middle path that renounces any extremity. Ngugi tries to emphasize the predicament that might result in the complete rejection of one's roots. In *The River Between* some of Joshua's followers "went back to drinking; to dancing the tribal ritual; to circumcision … Perhaps the word had not taken root" (Ngugi 30). Also, "Many of those who had enthusiastically gone to him had slipped back to their old customs and rituals. Many had gone back to take a second bride" (Ngugi 99). This demonstrates the difficulty of accomplishing a whole consumption of an alien culture because in this way one will lose touch with his identity and feel lost among his people. That is why many of those Christianized Africans are slipping back to their old customs; the new culture does not provide them with an alternative, making them void and leading them to go back to embrace what they used to have because these customs are what give identity.

On the other hand, the novel provides an account of the two different extremities that contrast greatly with the more tolerant attitudes of ambivalence. First, as the narrator states: "there were the Christians led by Joshua, men of Joshua as they were sometimes called. Their home? Makuyu. Then there were the people of the tribe who had always been against the Mission and its faith. Kameno was, as it were, their home or base" (Ngugi 69). The novel is centered on the conflicts that take place among those antagonists and expresses the dilemma encountered by people finding themselves in between. The fact that the novel ends in the victory of the extremists does not imply the author's approval of their views. On the contrary, it points to their aggressiveness and injustice toward those who do not agree with them. What indicates Ngugi's harmonizing perspective is his way of looking at his characters; he conveys the syncretic characters positively, pointing to their good intentions and sincerity to their origin as well as to the new culture, while the rigid characters are portrayed with a more critical eye that underlines their weaknesses and malice. Therefore, the novel ends in a tragic note that draws the audience's sympathy toward the disastrous and unfair fate of the protagonist, his lover and her sister making them renounce Joshua, Kabonyi and Kamau for the miseries they cause to their land and the divisions that their strictness lead to increase.

Joshua is the representative of modernity in its full form with his complete embrace of the white man's religion and renunciation of any sign of belonging to his own native culture. In his youth, he is one of the first converts to the new faith. His name is a clear sign of his ideology; he is the only character in the novel who does not carry a Gikuyu name. An account of his deep conviction is given at the beginning of the novel: "The new faith worked on him till it came to possess him wholly. He renounced his tribe magic, power and ritual. He turned to and felt the deep presence of the one God. Had he not given the white man power over all?" (Ngugi 29). What distinguishes Joshua from other converts is his "religious uniformity" (Ngugi 30). For him, there is no compromise; embracing the new faith does necessarily imply rejecting any element that is connected to his origin: "He was certainly the most constant of all" (84). His acceptance of Christianity is characterized by blindness; whatever instructions given by the white man should be obeyed immediately. His absolute consent to the unfair law of paying taxes is an example of his naïve consumption of what is implied by the white man: "He knew it was his duty as a Christian to obey the government, giving unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. This was what he wanted every Christian to do" (Ngugi 31-32). Another instance is his approval of the prevention of marrying a second bride without questioning although he is well aware of the fact that men of The Old Testament used to have more than one wife. In explaining Joshua's approval of this decision, the narrator asserts that: "Joshua was not prepared to question what he knew to be God inspired assertions of the white man. After all, the white man had brought Christ into the country" (Ngugi 99). Waiyaki's criticism of Joshua does not rely on his conversion for Waiyaki likes some elements of Christianity, but his point of criticism is that Joshua "had clothed himself with a religion decorated and smeared with everything white. He renounced his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe. And because he had nothing to rest upon, something rich and firm on which to stand and grow, he had to cling with his hands to whatever the missionaries taught him promised future" (Ngugi 141). It is sympathetic that a man dedicates himself wholly against his culture; Losambe comments on Joshua's method saying that "Christian doctrine is translated into reflex actions and mechanical of behavior. The bigoted and fanatical Joshua accepts the alien ideology blindly, uncritically and naively" (‏57).

Not only that Joshua takes all the ways of the white man, but also he harshly rejects all the practices and beliefs that his people have. He always speaks about his people who still hold on to their old ways in terms of darkness and filth and refers to their God as "the prince of darkness"(Ngugi 29). Moreover, Joshua's speech about the Gikuyu religion reveals his ignorance in its matters. For example, he often thinks about the Christian seer who prophesied the coming of the messiah and compares him to Mugo wa Kibiro who has never told of something as great, which points to his ignorance of the Gikuyu's prophecy of a savior for the land. Scott and Housley argue that "Joshua's theology is too rigid to permit any openness to the traditional ways" (233). On the matter of circumcision, Joshua is the strongest objector to such a ritual: "In fact, Joshua believed circumcision to be so sinful that he devoted a prayer to asking God to forgive him for marrying a woman who had been circumcised"(Ngugi 31). He usually remarks to his wife that he wishes that she did not undergo this operation. Also, when the period of circumcision approaches, Joshua prays for God's punishment to those who prepare for its celebrations. In fact, "He felt like going out with a stick, punishing these people, forcing them on to their knees" (Ngugi 37). As Palmer points out "Joshua is as bigoted a religious fanatic as ever existed. In Joshua we see the dangerous consequences of a blind and uncritical acceptance of an alien ideology" (14). Thus, Joshua's religion is a religion of war; tolerance and multiplicity are not among its agenda. He asks his God to “Bring down fire and thunder / Bring down the flood” on the people who refuse to follow him (Ngugi 32). Mathuray describes Joshua's words as concisely conveying "the puritanical and rigid teachings of the eradication of the custom, wrote during the height of the crisis" (52). Furthermore, Joshua's belief endows him with the strength to renounce his daughter and to show indifference towards the news of her death because "Muthoni had ceased to exist on the very day that she had sold herself to the devil. Muthoni had turned her head and longed for the cursed land" (Ngugi 54). This illustrates his profound conviction of the instructions of Christianity and his readiness to accept all of its teachings even if it means abandoning his own daughter.

Consequently, Joshua's "destructive views" alienates him from his family and society (Scott and Housley 233). First, it is true that his wife remains obedient to him, still her relationship with him is characterized by submissiveness and fear. Secondly, his only two daughters rebel against him, each in her own way. Muthoni runs to go through circumcision against her father's strict orders and the obedient Nyambura escapes with Waiyaki, Joshua's embodiment of evil and darkness, in a moment of bravery. Regarding his people and neighbors, Joshua is isolated from most of the people of the ridges. His new religion leads him to cut off his previous relationships with all the ones who do not follow the new faith. Now, his faith becomes his only guide and source of consolation to the lack of friends; he does not mind to lose all of his people if that means satisfying his God. When Waiyaki goes to Joshua's house to warn him about the coming danger of the Kiama, Joshua treats him very badly and dismisses him from his house. The good intentions of Waiyaki cannot be perceived by a man such as Joshua, whose heart is full of hatred for the pagans and their leader: "Joshua was fierce. He hated the young man with the hatred which a man of God has towards Satan" (Ngugi 136). In effect, Joshua's fanaticism is more likely to put off many of his followers, let alone others with different ideologies.

On the other hand, the Kiama is on the top of the traditional extremists. It is founded to preserve the purity of the tribal customs and is headed by Kabonyi who "would rid the country of the influence of the white man. He would restore the purity of the tribe and its wisdom" (Ngugi 95). As Williams states, "Kabonyi's nativist or traditionalist model predicated on strict adherence to tribal custom and the maintenance of cultural purity" (30). The Kiama begins its purifying mission by asking people "to take an oath of allegiance to the Purity and Togetherness of the tribe" (Ngugi 98). This oath exposes those who violate it to punishment. As the novel progresses, this organization gains more power: "The cry that started the new schools was again taken up. Keep the tribe pure. And people listened to them because they did not want the tribe to die" (Ngugi 109). The conservatism of the Kiama is most clearly seen in its rejection of formal education in an age of openness and development. Their fanaticism leads them to privilege their old ways and traditional learning on the modern way of enlightenment. Put in another way, Amoko points that "The Kiama are trying to cling to an old order of things whose time has irreversibly passed" (46). At the meeting, Kabonyi questions Waiyaki's enthusiasm for education: "'Or do you think the education of our tribe, the education and wisdom which you all received, is in any way below that of the white man?'"(95) The Kiama shares Waiyaki in his decolonizing object but their mission follows a different path that is distinguished by nativism and conservatism. Also, the Kiama's strictness results in accusing the protagonist of treason because of his love for an uncircumcised girl. Thus, the stiffness of the Kiama and its leaders, mainly Kabonyi and his son, Kamau, leads to more divisions as they are encountered on the other side with Joshua's firmness.

However, it is important to notice the underlying contradicted motivations of the two groups. While Joshua's extremity emerges from his conviction, Kabonyi's and Kamau's rigidity is stimulated by their feelings of jealousy, greed and hatred. Kabonyi hates Waiyaki because he knows about the prophecy and he wants himself or his son to occupy the place of the savior. His jealousy leads him to take every chance he can get to undermine Waiyaki's ideology and to emphasize his youth in a humiliating way. In the same way, Kamau's resentment of Waiyaki is increased by his jealousy of Nyambura's love for him. He has previously courted Nyambura but she has rejected him in favor of Waiyaki. This explains Kamau's burning feelings of hatred and his attempt to destruct Waiyaki in every possible way. Of course, the pair disguise their revenge in a purifying mission. They contend that "This was no longer a personal battle, but a war between the tribe and Waiyaki" (133). In Amoko's words "Kamau and Kabonyi represent the powerless and marginalized within the traditional Gikuyu community as Ngugi depicts it" (47). Hence, Joshua's unbending way becomes better justified than that of Kabonyi and Kamau whose journey is full of malice and deceit.

Before concluding, a brief account of Chege's philosophy would be provided. Although he expresses his influence by the white man in the matter of education, his influence is originally motivated by his wish of restoring the land. Also, education is the only matter in which Chege shows flexibility. Besides that, Chege is as extremist and rigid as the others. As soon as his friends, Kabonyi and Joshua, convert, "he broke off their former relationship" (37). For him "These Christians would not come to any good" (37). In fact he "feared for them. He feared for those who had embraced strange gods" (Ngugi 54). In addition, just as Joshua is a strong objector of circumcision, Chege is as much a strong objector of abandoning it; he ironically contemplates that "Circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl? Certainly it would never be his son. Waiyaki would never betray the tribe" (Ngugi 37-38). Here Chege demonstrates his deep connection to his land and culture; it is unimaginable that a girl would remain uncircumcised and more than that it is impossible for her to find a husband. Also, Chege's perspective of Muthoni's death is another instance of his stiffness; he concludes that "It was a warning to all, to stick to the ways of the ridges, to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song" (Ngugi 54). His way of analyzing this incident is a sign of his rigidity; he refuses to see the harm that circumcision causes for girls and he would take Muthoni's death as a proof of his own convictions. In consequence, Chege can be seen as the counterpart of Joshua in his extreme attachment to the Gikuyu culture.

In conclusion, *The River Between* aims to reach to a middle space in which all the parties can find a way of expressing their views and practicing their rituals. Ngugi privileges his ideology by deliberately choosing his protagonists as agents of reconciliation. He does, on the other hand, convey the extremists as either naïve, blind or evil to further prove his point. Ngugi does not direct harsh criticism in his novels; instead, he employs irony to criticize those whom he does not agree with. Thus, he becomes able to draw out their weaknesses without hurting anyone. Scott and Housley summarize the novel as a tool that Ngugi utilizes to "foreground not merely the need for a contextual theology, but for a theology in harmony with, and emerging through, the people, the culture, the land itself" (234).

1. Controversial Cultural Elements

Because *The River Between* is centered on the conflicts that take place within the cultural domain, some cultural elements are conveyed with more focus in order to demonstrate the depth of the difference between the two parties and the places in which their struggles appear. The most important element that causes rifts in the novel is the rite of circumcision, which is considered to be central to the Gikuyu community. Religion, of course, occupies a huge space in that conflict. In addition, the different perspectives from which education is viewed illustrate the gap that separates the Christians from the pagans. In short, the plot of *The River Between* is built upon some cultural elements; its main conflicts revolve around the central characters' attempts to analyze those parts in ways that would satisfy the different groups.

The main element that the novel is based upon is the rite of circumcision which "was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life" (Ngugi 37). It "was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe cohesion and integration would be no more" (Ngugi 68). So, circumcision is the symbol of unity and purity of the tribe. Every Gikuyu child longs for the day in which he/she will be circumcised and become able to enter into the world of manhood/womanhood. Gikandi states that circumcision was the universal ritual to Gikuyu identity (22). It constitutes a source of pride for the parents whose kids are undergoing its course. Also, it is unimaginable that there could be a man who would marry an uncircumcised girl because this means that she did not become a woman yet. Uncircumcised girls "were the impure things of the tribe" on whom "Everything dirty and impure was heaped" (Ngugi 121). However, with the coming of the colonizer, the rite is started to be fought. Westerners viewed circumcision negatively and considered it as a sign of backwardness in the life of the Africans. The conflict between whites and natives is expressed most vehemently over the matter of circumcision. Kenyata captures the meaning of the native's defense of this rite: "The real argument lies not in the defense of surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the psychology of Gikuyu- namely that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution, which has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications" (133). Because the white man and his followers fail to recognize the spiritual significance of this rite, they denounce it violently without any regard to the destructive outcome on the natives. For Christians, "Every man of God knew that this was a pagan rite against which, time and time again, the white missionaries had warned Joshua" (Ngugi 25). Many techniques were employed by the missionaries to eliminate the practice against the wishes of the natives. Consequently divisions and hatred emerged out of this conflict.

Muthoni's story in the novel represents the different dimensions of the problem of circumcision. First, her decision to undergo its operation leads her father to disown her as an indication of her shameful act. Later her death is interpreted differently by the diverse factions in ways that demonstrate the perspectives from which they look at the event. To put it in Gikandi's words "different factions try to interpret this death as a prefigurement of their own hermeneutical positions" (62). The Christian Joshua regards her death as "a warning for those who rebelled against their parents and the laws of God" (Ngugi 54) and his followers believe that she "was an evil spirit sent to try the faithful" (Ngugi 58). In addition, Livingstone's opinion toward the matter exemplifies the reactions of the whites: "it was barbarous" (Ngugi 56). On the other hand, the traditionalists view the death in ways that privilege their tribal customs; for the elders of Kameno it "had clearly shown that nothing but evil would come out with any association of the new faith" (Ngugi 58) and their spiritual leader, Chege, judges the incident as "a punishment to Joshua" and a warning "to stick to the ways of the ridges, to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song" (Ngugi 54). At the end, "nobody knew for sure what the death portended" (Ngugi 55). What readers are certain about is that Muthoni's death gives rise to the rifts between the two groups. It is odd that no one in the novel has thought that the death is the natural result of the rudimentary treatment under which Muthoni went; that her death is caused by a natural physical problem that happened during the recovery process. Objectivity is not shown in all the interpretations and analyses which convey sided opinions and illustrate rigid views. This stiffness that is adopted by the two parties results in a number of unfair decisions and actions. The missionaries decide to prohibit the children of those who do not renounce circumcision from entering their schools while the remark of a Gikuyu elder that "All these Christians should be circumcised. By force" (129) signifies the depth of the conflict. More than that, the Kiama's fanaticism results in the burning of the hut of one of Joshua's followers. Therefore, clitoridectomy [Surgical removal of the clitoris], after Muthoni's death, begins to acquire a new significance in the relationship between Makuyu and Kameno. Ngugi's choice of Muthoni's story is an excellent one as it foregrounds the struggles that were going on and provides a full representation of their different dimensions.

Waiyaki and Nyambura's love is also affected by the circumcision conflict. At the beginning, Nyambura tries to stop thinking about Waiyaki because she is certain that such a man would never agree to marry an uncircumcised girl. In regard to Chege, he wonders if there would be man willing to pay cows and goats for such a girl and assumes, ironically, that Waiyaki will never does because he will not betray the tribe. Later, Waiyaki's hybridity changes these ideals and causes him to overlook this matter in choosing his wife. For him, circumcision is not important enough to stand in the face of his love. However, his decision is encountered by the refusal of his people. Such a relationship would be illegal in their eyes as it violates his oath of keeping the purity of the tribe. At the end of the novel the people of Kameno wonder "How could he work for the purity and togetherness of the tribe and then marry a girl who was not circumcised?" (Ngugi 151). Consequently, the end of Waiyaki's love is another situation that Ngugi employs to further demonstrate the intensity of the ongoing clashes.

Religion, also, plays a large role in widening the gap between the two ridges. It is the main reason that separates the people of Makyuy from those of Kameno. The huge differences between Christianity and the paganism of the Gikuyu people allow many misunderstandings and biases to take place among them. First of all, the religious beliefs of the two parties are built upon concepts that contrast greatly; Christianity is a monotheistic religion that believes in the deep presence of the one God while the Gikuyu paganism is a polytheistic religion whose gods are many such as Murungu, Mwenenyaga and Ngai. From the opening chapters, signs of biases appear in the way each group speaks about the other. Christians assert that "the unerring white man had called the Gikuyu god the prince of darkness" (Ngugi 29). On the other hand, traditionalists view the Christian teachings as "against all that which was good and beautiful in the tribe" (Ngugi 37). Moreover, the variation in the smaller details that are attached to each religion increases the rift among their followers. For example, Joshua always refers to Egypt in an undermining manner as a symbol of going back to the old ways and to Jerusalem as the dream of each true Christian. Furthermore, the coinciding of the Christmas celebrations with that of the circumcision enhances the hatred between the different factions as each one looks at the stray ways of the other. This lack of tolerance and the stiffness that characterize the two villages add to the divisions and increase the difficulty of Waiyaki's mission of reconciliation.

In addition to circumcision and religion, prophecies of saviors have their place in the ongoing conflict between the two ridges. In his part, Joshua feels proud of holding on to Christianity as he boasts of its seer who has the ability to see greater things than the Gikuyu seer. "Isaiah, the white man's seer, had prophesied of Jesus. He had told of the coming of a messiah. Had Mugo wa Kibiro, the Gikuyu seer, ever foretold of such a saviour? No Isaiah was great. He had told of Jesus, the saviour of the world" (Ngugi 29). In contrast, Chege reveals to his son that Mugo wa Kibiro has foreseen the coming of the white man as a disruptive factor to the peace of the country: "he saw many butterflies, of many colors, flying about over the land, disrupting the peace and the ordered life of the country. Then he cried aloud and said: 'There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies'" (Ngugi 19). The diverse versions of prophecies expose to the readers that each nation builds its prophecies on its hopes and aspirations. Christians look for a savior who will save all the people from the darkness in which they live and lead them to the light of Christianity, whereas the Gikuyu seer tries to imagine a future free from colonizers by foretelling of a savior of the land "a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people" (Ngugi 20). Gikandi points to this fact when he states that "it was through the discourse of prophecy that nationalists in Central Kenya would seek to reconcile themselves to colonial rule and to create a cultural space in which a future beyond colonialism would be fashioned" (49). He further adds that "the prophetic narrative recreates or imagines a scene of cultural restoration that exists both in an idealized past and an imagined future" (59). Again as each group tries to privilege its prophetic version and undermine that of the other, the space between them is being continually increasing.

Education, which occupies a large space in the narrative, does the same in the struggle as each party tries to spread it to serve its own aims. For Livingstone, the headmaster of the colonial school, education is a systemized approach for converting natives into Christianity. Colonial schools are founded and funded mainly for this purpose; securing the largest possible number of converts. However, natives seem not to be influenced by the school's ideology as Livingstone remarks "these people seemed interested only in education while they paid lip service to salvation. They were entrenched in their blind customs" (Ngugi 55). Therefore, Livingstone's frustration by the natives' insistence on their own ways leads him to exclude the allowance to the school from those who stick to paganism and the tribal customs. In consequence, natives start their own school with a diverse purpose; essentially to restore and unite the community and to lead an anti-colonial resistance. As a result "Schools grew like Mushrooms" as "symbols of people's thirst for the white man's secret magic and power. Few wanted to live the white man's way, but all wanted this thing, this magic" (Ngugi 68). The natives' thirst for the white man's magic and rejection of its ways is a clear indication of its wish to move forward and acquire the best tools for fighting him back. Also, as Gikandi notes, these schools are built on "the belief that one could be educated in the colonial sense and still maintain a measure of affiliation with Gikuyu (traditional) culture" (40). The Marioshoni school is hailed as a symbol of "their defiance of foreign ways" (Ngugi 92). It is ironic that natives employ the colonizer's tool of conversion as a tool of expulsion. Parents encourage their sons to learn in order to become able to fight the colonizer; this wish is the source of enthusiasm that pushes natives forward. Nonetheless, later in the novel, "skepticism and the claims of the land are manipulated by Kabonyi into overwhelming its promise of any future salvation" (Cantalupo 119). Thus Kabonyi compels his people to question the utility of Waiyaki's educational mission and to doubt its ability to give them their land back. Finally, the novel concludes in the victory of Kabonyi's claim against education that will ultimately add to the existing divisions in the land.

In conclusion, *The River Between* is a cultural novel. It depicts the struggles and divisions that were current at the time of its production. This depiction focuses on the clashes that took place within the cultural domain. The novel aims to view colonialism as a disruptive effect as it tries to convey the problems that generated among the natives in consequence of following the new ways. Because the period that the novel speaks about does not contain any active resistance, the novel's sphere becomes cultural rather than political. As a result of Ngugi's influence by the colonial education, he writes his novel in a Western style and mixes it with Gikuyu elements in a reflection of the hybrid teaching that he received. In addition, his portrayal of the novel's characters reveals his preference of the ambivalent individuals who try to mix the two ways with flexibility and tolerance. Furthermore, in order to show the extent of the conflict, Ngugi sheds light on some important cultural elements that illustrate the huge difference between the two cultures. He "powerfully conveys the unresolved tensions that will continue well after the novel ends and that the novel makes no effort to contain" (Said 211). In short, Ngugi's novel exemplifies his genius and talent in its ability to carry deep ideas in a highly symbolic language and to picture the Gikuyu community as it was in reality.

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