The novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o have two implicit ideas that make him a propagandist of his own culture. They are faith in one’s own culture and the importance of education. Ngugi’s reputation rests primarily on his fiction. But his non-fiction too stresses the significance of cultural practices and language in the struggle to forge a national identity. According to him, the negligence of the African language leads to the ruin of African culture. Thus he bids farewell to English in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). He regards English as a neocolonial tool of dominance that will erase authentic African tradition. *Moving the Center: the Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (1993), the collection of Essays which came in 1993, continues to stress his commitment to the preservation and re-establishment of Kenyan cultural and linguistic heritage.

As a result, after his fifth novel *Petals of Blood* (1977), Ngugi switched over from English to Gikuyu, his mother tongue except for critical essays. This became the medium for drama and a new prose form developed from oral story-telling. Ngugi’s reasons for rejecting English and taking up Gikuyu are set out in the series of essays in *Decolonizing*
the Mind, where he rejects the language of the colonizer as the most “powerful vehicle through which [the colonizer’s] power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation” (1986, 9). It carried with it the cultural assumptions of the imperial power and also encouraged a total rupture between the domestic and agrarian world of the African child and his school environment, eventually divorcing the English-educated African writer from his own roots and from his own country men. Moreover, Ngugi argued that it is the duty of the African writer to contribute to the development of his own indigenous language, and to its enrichment rather than its decline. All the more, as a committed Marxist, Ngugi’s choice of Gikuyu also entails his concern to reach and influence the group he believes most likely to bring about change, the workers and the peasants for whom the English language and the genre of the English novel are alien.

In London, in June 1988, at the launching of Storms of the Heart: An Anthology of Black Arts and Culture, Ngugi made a firm restatement of his personal and literary conviction that African literatures must be written in African languages. This is a position that Ngugi had held since 1977 and continues to restate despite the fact of his exile in England and the criticism that his reading public is primarily in England. It was when he worked at the Kamiriithu Community Educational Center in 1976-77,
that he understood that in order to communicate with the people of the village, or in a broader sense, the ordinary people, he had to use the language of the people which is also a strong weapon for decolonization. This change in his conviction is marked by the change of his name from the Christianized “James Ngugi” to Ngugi wa Thiong’o. This reversion to a traditional, pre-colonial and pre-Christian African name requires us to see that in African literature we are dealing with a living and changing literature and with writers who are very much alive. Moreover, this name change also indicates that he personally intends henceforth to refuse the Western identity that is implied by a baptismal name and will choose instead to refer to himself by way of a more traditionally African identity, to his father, his family and his ancestors. Ngugi began to re-think the acceptance of English across the years, first by calling for the use of Kenyan languages as the medium of education. With Caitaani Mutharabaini written during his 1978 detention, Ngugi abandoned writing in English as the medium of his creative expression and began to use Gikuyu, though he himself translated it as Devil on the Cross (1980).

“Writing in an African language enables me to reach a certain social stratum that was always bypassed by my works in English,” says Ngugi in an interview (Jussawala, 1992, 28). Ngugi does not celebrate Gikuyu as a unified African language. But he says that this is at least a language that reaches the vast majority of the Gikuyu speaking
nationality, than English would do. Moreover, it could be made available in other African languages through translation and that is important too because then the African languages will be communicating with one another. Such a literature developed from this communication will meet its purpose more successfully as it will reach a wider range of readers than the acquired colonial languages like English, French or Portuguese.

In both *Decolonizing the Mind* and *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi associates language very closely with culture so that the two almost work on an axis of interchangeability. Both language and culture are the blueprints of identity and value for a nation or a people, leading Ngugi to assert that “[l]anguage as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (1986, 15). What is African is located in what has become ‘traditional’ African culture carried and understood through indigenous languages. If ‘Africa’ is located in the largely oral histories of African languages, then issues of literacy, audience and the plurality of the modern world would seem to place insurmountable obstacles in the path of Ngugi’s protest for African literature. If there is a critical debate within and about literature, Africa has been denied an equal platform in order to participate on its own cultural hence linguistic terms. Ngugi’s argument is not for an African past before Europe, but insists instead that Africa takes its place alongside rather than behind Europe in a fair exchange of cultural gifts.
Language embodies Ngugi’s conception of national cultural integrity. He famously regards language as the basis of a people’s material and cultural life, and the repository of historical memory, to possess their world and address ancestors and unborn generation. He thus treats national languages, in Benedict Anderson’s terms as “emblems of nation-ness” and also as something with a vital “capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities” (1991, 133). According to Ngugi, language is an undiluted cultural essence and the taproot to the past, as well as a tool for solidarity and resistance. Ngugi’s early journalism calls for harmony among Kenya’s many ethnic nationalities, repeating the familiar colonial mantra of “tribalism” as the nations greatest enemy. *Petals of Blood* is founded on the notion of such harmony, and in particular, a union of traditionally competing pastoralists and cultivators in the interests of collective resistance. Ngugi’s last play at Kamiriithu, *Mother Sing for Me* or *Maitu Njugira* (1986) incorporated different Kenyan languages. In the open space of the performance, a type of linguistic melting took place. The multi-ethnic audience had to interact to grasp the play’s shifting linguistic and cultural registers.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi further asserts the importance of the indigenous language. When a language is mother-tongue to any particular society, it then becomes a means of communication and also a carrier of the culture of those people. Communication between human
beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. Similar kinds of things and actions recurring similarly in their mutability, patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge emerge under similar circumstances. These are passed on to the successive generations and become the inherited basis for their further actions on nature and on themselves. A gradual accumulation of values occurs and this in time becomes almost self-evident truths governing their general conceptions. In due course, this establishes itself, as a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life. They develop a distinctive culture and history. Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values based on which they perceive themselves and the universe and moreover, it is on those values a people’s identity is based, and also their sense of particularity. And the vehicle through which all this is carried is language. Language becomes indistinguishable from culture because it is language which enables its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and its transmission from one generation to the next.

Ngugi goes on to explain that culture has three important aspects. Culture reflects history and while doing so it forms images which help a people in the conception of themselves as a people individually and collectively. Thus language as culture is mediating between an individual and his own self, between his/her own self and other selves, between him/her and nature. The third aspect of language as culture is that culture
transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and written language, a specific language. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries.

To put it in a nutshell, communication creates culture and culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus an inevitable and inseparable part of an individual just as a community of human beings with a specific form and character and a specific history.

Colonialism also involves two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. Thus the new language, i.e., the colonizing language could never properly reflect or imitate the real life of that community. Since the new imposed language of the colonizer could never completely break the native language as spoken, their most reflective area of domination was written. Thus an individual is initiated into the colonial language right from his
childhood when he begins his education and thus it becomes easy for people to write in the language of their conceptualization. This resulted in the imprisoning of the African thought in foreign or colonial languages. This also resulted in the distancing and alienation of the most radical and revolutionary African thought and literature from the indigenous majority, who had, unfortunately little or no education and knowledge in the colonial language. Thus Ngugi proclaims that an African writer should use the national language to which all have access.

The culturally oriented perspective of Ngugi earned him a great reputation as a writer, playwright, journalist and lecturer. He has been widely acclaimed as the most influential writer of East Africa. His criticism of colonial rule, Christianity and post-colonial abuses earned him both admiration from the public and incurred wrath from Kenyan neo-colonist authorities. Ngugi, as he is usually known, belongs to Kenya’s largest ethnic group, the Gikuyus. Ngugi published his first novel *Weep Not Child* in 1964 during his education in England. This was the first novel in English to be published by an East African. His second novel, *The River Between* (1965), has as its background Mau Mau rebellion, and described an unhappy romance between Christians and non-Christians. He returned to Kenya in 1967 and taught in the English Department of the University College of Nairobi as its first African faculty member. Within a year he began a radical reform of the
curriculum. This reform, in a gesture that prefigured his progressive model national development, advocated a focus on Kenyan, Pan-African, and African diasporan literatures, and especially orature. In 1969, he resigned the post in protest during a students’ strike. His novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) marked his embrace of Fanonist Marxism. He subsequently renounced English Christianity and his English name, as said earlier, and began to write in his native Gikuyu and Swahili. In *Petals of Blood*, his longest and most complex novel, he described in great detail the exploitation of Kenya’s masses by its own established elite.

The uncensored political message of his 1977 play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* provoked the then Vice President Daniel Arap Moi and was arrested in 1977 December, by the Kenyan Government and detained for a year. No formal charges were filed against him. After his release in 1982, he left Kenya on a self-imposed exile in London. While detained in the Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, he wrote his first modern novel in Gikuyu, *Caitaani Mutheraba-Ini* (1980) translated by the author himself as *Devil on the Cross*, on prison issued toilet papers. His later works include *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary* (1981), *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), an essay arguing for African writers’ expression in their native languages, rather than European languages, in order to renounce lingering colonial ties and to build an authentic African
literature. Then came *Matigari* (1987), one of his most famous works, a satire based on a Gikuyu folktale. In 1992, he became a professor of Comparative Literature and Performance Studies at New York University, where he held the Erich Maria Remarque Chair. On August 8, 2004, Ngugi ended his twenty two year exile to return to Kenya as part of a month long tour of East Africa, where he was greeted by a crowd of thousands. Addressing the crowd, he declared that he had returned with an open mind, an open heart and open arms, to touch base, and to learn. He added that he owed his return to the collective struggle of the Kenyan people. His tour was suspended immediately as a result of a bitter experience he and his family had to meet with, and Ngugi returned to America, and in the summer 2006, the American publishing firm Random House published his first new novel in nearly two decades, *Wizard of the Crow*, translated to English from Gikuyu by the author.

Ngugi always sympathized with the oppressed and underprivileged people in his nation. Before independence, this included most Kenyans, for the country was being ruled by foreigners; but after independence he showed that the poor, rural and working class people continued to suffer – this time at the hands of their more fortunately placed fellow countrymen who controlled all the levers of political and economic power. So Ngugi’s primary target of criticism shifted from the colonial government to the neo-colonial government. For his literary
accomplishment, Ngugi has received many awards. He received the Distinguished Africanist Award from the New York African Studies Association (1996), the Fonlon - Nichols Prize (1996), the Zora Neale Hurston – Paul Robeson Award (1993), the Lotus Prize for Afro-Asian Literature (1973), UNESCO First Prize (1963), and the East Africa Novel Prize (1962).

Ngugi’s call for Africanism and his propaganda for the return to ethnic values is edified on nationalist consciousness. The national freedom of Kenya, for Ngugi is not merely the political freedom from the devastating entrapment of whites, but rather from the neo-colonial, disorienting, internal forces which subjugates the indigenous culture and continues in the interests of the colonial powers. Ngugi makes a clarion call to return to the original ethnic cultural values which is the means to return to an identity liberated from the acculturated one. And it is for this purpose he stresses on the importance of language. So almost all his novels are based on this nationalist consciousness, which it is evident, is the return to one’s own ethnic roots and also to the African ethnic roots in general. His two early novels The River Between and Petals of Blood are taken up for analysis to explicate how Ngugi has attempted to negotiate his nation to a return to its own implicit culture.

Redeeming traditional African culture is a pre-occupation Ngugi shares with many African writers. The need, Ngugi obviously felt,
to refute the colonialist view of the history of his people shaped the nature of his fiction. His first three novels set out to disprove the specific charges made by colonialist historians, to restore traditional Gikuyu values, and to redeem the Mau Mau movement which was an armed peasant revolt aimed at reclaiming land "alienated" and given to white farmers by the English government. The theme is most prevalent in *The River Between*, which is an attempt to reconcile the best of tribal and Christian ways to form a viable spiritual guide for the people. The hero and heroine are caught between warring factions of traditional and Christianized Gikuyus and though the hero makes an admirable attempt to reconcile the two cultures, both within himself and in the dismally divided community, he fails because as an educated African he has begun to set great store by his own personal aspirations. The best of the tribal ways is represented in the character of Chege, the father of the hero, Waiyaki. He is the keeper of tribal values:

> For he knew, more than any other person, the ways of the land and the hidden things of the tribe. He knew the meaning of every ritual and every sign. So, he is at the head of every important ceremony. (7)

More than that he is a visionary who has warned his people of the devastating effects of the white man on the unity of the tribe. When they refuse to hear his warnings he places his faith in his son, whom he sends
to a missionary school to prepare for the fight against the intruders. Chege’s world view is, however, slowly lost to the tribe. This is indicated in the very moving scene in which Chege takes his son Waiyaki to Mount Kenya, the seat of the tribe’s legendary founders Gikuyu and Mumbi:

Chege was standing beside his son, but a few steps behind. He looked across the ridges, across the hills, gazing still into space, like a man in a vision. Perhaps he was looking at something hidden from Waiyaki. Waiyaki strained his eyes but could not see anything. (17-18)

The landscape of *The River Between* serves to be allegoric in establishing the theme of the novel. If landscape is understood as the description of the land and its role in the cultural, economic, and spiritual life of the community, it becomes clear that landscape is an essential part of African literature. In Ngugi’s novels too it is important because the landscape of Kenya is intimately related to the community’s spiritual, social and political identity. Ngugi’s description of landscape is shaped by some specific circumstances of Kenyan history: the centrality of land in the Gikuyu world view, the forced removals of the Gikuyu from the White Highlands, the Mau Mau independence war, and post-independence disillusionment of Kenya. Ngugi himself has insisted on the connection between particular historical events and literature: “Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus,
shape and direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society (*Homecoming*, xv). Ngugi’s works re-evaluate the importance of landscape, integrating geography with his people’s cultural environment, religion, beliefs, and economic system. The early novels emphasize the relation of a specifically Gikuyu culture to the land, all the while articulating a national and socialist vision of Kenya. By examining the charges in the description of landscape in his novels, and considering them as a response to colonial literature about Kenya and in connection with Ngugi’s critique of the economic and political situation in Kenya, we can trace the development of his fiction from a limited acceptance of Western techniques of description to a rejection of these techniques as implying a view of nature that Ngugi no longer shares.

Ngugi’s first written novel, *The River Between* though published after *Weep Not Child*, opens with a sweeping description of the landscape:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. . . .

A river flowed through the valley of life. . . . The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-to-life. Honia
River never died: it seemed to possess a strong will to live, scorning droughts and weather changes. And it went on in the same way, never hurrying, never hesitating. People saw this and were happy. (1)

The above passage is a bird’s eye view of the landscape but when the landscape is looked at from inside the valley rather than aerially the foreshadowing of conflict is intensified:

When you stood in the valley, the two ridges . . . became antagonists . . . 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. (1)

The river divides rather than unites, marking the boundary between the two opposing sides, Christian and traditional villages. By placing these descriptions side by side, Ngugi leaves the “correctness” of either vision open; Waiyaki, the protagonist, must decide whether the Gikuyu are ready to be united or are destined to be split into two opposing camps. The choice of the action is linked to the choice of perspective; if Waiyaki can persuade the villagers to see themselves as united, as part of the same community and the same valley, they will be able to overcome their differences. But if the river is seen as a dividing boundary rather than a unifying force, the social rift will be unbreachable.

Ngugi’s description of the landscape is integrated with his
development of action and character. Waiyaki’s father, Chege, takes him to visit a place sacred to his clan, pointing out medicinal herbs along the way. We witness how Waiyaki is being educated in the connections between the Gikuyu community and nature, and specifically in the connections to this particular landscape, where medicinal herbs grow and where there are sacred sites. Ngugi’s description of the community’s relation to the land at the moment when colonialism, through the arrival of Christian missionaries, was just beginning to make itself felt, echoes the importance of land to the Gikuyu people:

> These ancient hills and ridges were the heart and soul of the land. They kept the tribes’ magic and rituals, pure and intact. . . . To the stranger, they kept dumb, breathing none of the secrets of which they were the guardians. Kagutui ka Mucil gatihakagwo Ageni; the oilskin of the house is not for rubbing into the skin of strangers. (3)

Throughout the novel, the conflict between Christianity and traditionalism is seen as threatening the people’s connection to the land. In one scene Muthoni, the daughter of a religious minister, reveals to her sister Nyambura that she wants to be circumcised to belong to her actual community:

> Look, please, I – I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and
ridges. . . . I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. . . . My life and your life are here in the hills, that you and I know. (26)

Female circumcision was one of the crucial conflicts between Christianity and traditionalism. To Christians it is barbaric; but without it a woman cannot be initiated into her clan. Muthoni’s sister Nyambura is stunned to silence at the shocking desire of her sister since they are the daughters of a minister. Yet Muthoni’s description of her decision shows that Muthoni sees this action as the only way to have an authentic connection to the hills and the ridges. On the other hand when Nyambura reaches out to the landscape to reassure herself and support her Christian beliefs, she receives nothing: the insects’ noise only helped to intensify the silence and an inner fear crept into her. The description of the landscape at this instant shows that Christianity detaches the individual from the landscape, both through the loss of traditional initiation rites which would connect the individual to the clan and to the land, and through the loss of traditional interpretations of the landscape – for Nyambura, the symbolic significance of the land in the Gikuyu culture has been lost. The land is silent and offers no alternative answers to the doubts of Nyambura, but Muthoni’s choice seems to be in harmony with the landscape of the valley.
The colonialists have not yet moved into the hills. Their influence is felt through the Christian school in a nearby town, and their political and economic power is known only through descriptions of their houses and through the tax gatherers. Yet Waiyaki, the protagonist, senses what is to come:

And still it rained, with the little streams gathering and joining together. He saw what they were doing –

Carrying away the soil.

Corroding, eating away the earth.

Stealing the land.

And that was the cry, the cry on every ridge . . . The earth was important to the tribe. (65)

Waiyaki explicitly connects this irresistible erosion with the white settlers: “That was why Kinuthia and others like him feared the encroachment of the white man” (65). This coming threat emphasizes the importance of Waiyaki’s quest to unify the two villages, without which both villages will be washed away by the erosion caused by the white settlers.

Towards the end of the novel, Ngugi foreshadows the coming of Mau Mau:

Suddenly the people who stood on the hills or up the slope saw big yellow flames emanated by the setting sun. The
flames seemed near and far and the trees and the country were caught in flames. They feared. (145)

Ngugi’s image of the flames of the sunset here suggests that the Mau Mau uprising was a natural, even inevitable, phenomenon.

Throughout the novel, the river Honia is a symbol of life, power of unification. In this image, Ngugi draws on the importance of the river in traditional life, as a source of water, and as a source of spiritual renewal. Even Christianity is included in the landscape through the Biblical language of the river’s song:

And river Honia went on flowing through the valley of life, throbbing, murmuring an unknown song.

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountains, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* (150)

The river’s warning is unheeded by the people of Kameno: they reject their teacher because he preaches unification with the Christians of Makuyu. With the betrayal of Waiyaki by the people of Kameno, it would seem that the hope of unification has been lost forever but Ngugi closes the novel with a final image of the river:

Honia River went on flowing between them, down through the valley of life, its beat rising above the dark stillness, reaching into the heart of the people of Makuyu and
Charles Nnolim, in his essay titled “Background Setting: Key to the Structure of Ngugi’s *The River Between*” (1976, 20-29) sees this as a tragic ending: “Ngugi seems to look on Honia River as symbolizing the continued and eternal strife between the Makuyu and Kameno tribesman (22). However, in “Kenya: The Two Rifts” Ngugi uses a similar image:

Kenya is potentially a great country . . . [and] the different springs in every tribe and race can and should be channeled to flow together in a national stream from which all may draw. (1972, 24)

In opposition to the eroding forces of colonialism, Ngugi claims that nationalism and socialism are life-giving unifying forces. Thus, although Waiyaki, the middle figure in between the ridges, is unable to find a resolution, the Honia River’s ability to reach into the heart of the people in both villages implies that there is still the possibility of unification and social change in Kenya.

Early critics of Ngugi’s fiction noted his use of landscape as an integral part of *The River Between*. One observation is that the Honia River is a symbol of the inherent unity of the two communities: the division between them is an unnatural struggle. Chris Wanjala asserts that Ngugi’s purpose is to portray

[t]he destruction that inhered in colonialism and to evoke the
need for a renewal and rebirth of African cultural and economic institutions that help the African to be at home in his society and in his physical environment” (1978, 70). Thus Honia River is a representation of the potential for renewal in the two communities.

Ngugi, writing about the scandalous allegation that Africans have no culture, has said, “Because he knew that this ‘scandalous allegation’ was also embodied in European books, especially fiction on Africa, the African writer tried to answer by asserting in the books he wrote, that Africa had a culture as good as any” (1972, 11). As he begins to write in Gikuyu, he puts into practice his own beliefs:

Why can’t African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it? . . . The aim, in short, should be to orient ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre (1972, 146).

Another outstanding theme of The River Between is the process of self-affirmation and self-fulfillment by returning to embracing the cultural and spiritual roots of the tribe. Ngugi effectively portrays this through the two opposing father-daughter characters: Joshua, the Christian father, and Muthoni, the daughter who returns to cultural beliefs. The main stumbling block in Muthoni’s journey towards self-discovery was her father’s rigid puritanical religion, which could not be
reconciled with the rituals of the tribe. So Muthoni had to rebel against this puritanical norms to lead a more meaningful and enriching life. Defying her father through undergoing the act of circumcision, Muthoni cuts the psychological umbilical chord which had prevented her development into a mature person in her own right. In contrast to Muthoni, Joshua, her father, lacks a proper sense of direction and orientation in his life, and he merely makes himself the white man’s tool in being guided by the missionaries’ do’s and don’ts without using his own critical faculties as such. The act of Muthoni’s circumcision is very significant.

Though circumcision is a custom widely criticized, in the novel, it forms the edifice of cultural enforcement. Albert Gerard, in his essay “Preservation of Tradition in African Creative Writing” remarks that the influence of tradition in the growth and development of modern Sub-Saharan literature has been “primarily negative” and leads to “deficiencies in character delineation” (1970, n.p.). But this does not apply to Ngugi’s *The River Between* where tradition plays an important role at the individual and social levels. Thus, circumcision, an important ritual in the tribe, far from being detrimental to character delineation, makes characterization in the novel sound and effective. In fact, the spiritual and the social functions of circumcision in the novel are rather like the two sides of the same coin, with each side reinforcing the other:
Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure and something that gave meaning to a man’s life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe’s cohesion and integration would be no more. (68)

Binding the tribe, giving life to a person’s life, circumcision is the core of the whole social structure among the Gikuyu people.

The emptiness of the inner self and the loss of the sense of one’s own self are asserted by the character of Joshua, the convert. He is simply an imitator of the white man’s way of life. In other words, he is a black white man who adopted the values of white and living in a no man’s land after having uprooted himself from his origins in the tribe by completely rejecting all the values and rituals that held the tribe cohesively together as an organic whole. Concerning the uprooting of Joshua from his own culture Ngugi states in the novel:

He 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, . . . he had to cling with his hands to whatever the missionaries taught him promised future. (141)

This epitomizes Joshua’s emptiness in inner self and its influence on his
character.

Circumcision, unimaginable to be put into actual practice in Joshua’s superficially westernized household, brings Muthoni, as has been argued, into direct collision with her father’s standards and expectations, and therefore deep in her soul she wants to reconcile Christianity with the rituals of the tribe. Although this attempt at reconciling two opposing value systems is a difficult process involving physical and mental suffering, Muthoni is determined to endure this agony because she has found meaning and salvation in it:

I say I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into ways of the tribe. . . . Yes – I want to be a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe. (43-44)

And Waiyaki asserts:

. . . Muthoni had found something, something filled her soul and made her endure everything. Muthoni had tried to find salvation for herself, a surer ground for herself on which to stand. (106)

Circumcision, therefore, far from alienating her from Christianity enables her to get a new understanding of the religion itself. At the same time, her sense of belonging and self-esteem are reinforced because, as she says
she has now become “a Christian in the tribe” (53). Her attempts to reconcile the two beliefs are reflected in these lines:

Muthoni said she had seen Jesus. She had done so by going back to the tribe, by marrying the rituals of the tribe with Christ. And she had seen him through suffering. She had been circumcised and said she had become a woman.

(103)

Thus when any religion is in harmony with the local customs and traditions of its believers, it gets the right soil to flourish in and leads to a healthy growth of its followers.

While Muthoni’s constructive efforts reinforce reconciliation between Christianity and the rituals of the tribe, Joshua consciously and unconsciously brings about the disintegration of the two opposing systems, i.e., the Western and African modes of life by his divisive attitude. Joshua constantly suppresses and crushes the part in his own being that seeks fulfillment, understanding and growth as a person in his own right. To him faith has become a non-living process incapable of growth, and conversion to traditional roots in the tribe. Commenting on Joshua’s type of religion, Ngugi says:

A religion that took no count of people’s 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. (141)

Joshua’s outright rejection of his African roots and cultural heritage, which has put his integrity and dignity into question, has also led to his alienation from himself and from the people of his country. As a victim of the colonial institution he has long ceased to be his true self, unwisely trying to live up to the standards and expectations of his colonial masters, the white missionaries. This dignity lost during the colonial period is what they must regain in order to affirm their self, individuality and communal integrity. Thus we see that Ngugi makes a serious attempt to reconcile indigenous culture with the purity of Christian belief, so that the best of the two are merged for the people to overcome their colonial identity crisis and replace it with a new identity which is rooted in the tribal spiritual social and cultural traditions which make their life beautiful and unique. That is why Ngugi makes use of circumcision to project the impact of traditional belief system showing both its positive and negative aspects – positive in the sense that it provides with a strong sense of belonging to the tribe and negative because of the physical pain and even the fatalistic outcome of undergoing circumcision in the crudest way. But the former sensitivity dims the latter possibility.

An important factor adopted by Ngugi, as we have seen earlier, in
order to project his ethno-centrism is language. That was why he bade farewell to English and turned to Gikuyu and Kiswahili. But prior to his return to the indigenous languages, there was an unconscious process of nativization of English, though he claims that he does not consciously strive to Africanize his narrative idiom. He argues that although he writes his novels in English, he does not write in the fashion of Achebe or Okara who consciously bend English language to reflect their African experience. However, when we make a detour of his novels, we can see that as far back as 1964, when he wrote *Weep Not Child* he is consciously engaged in the nativization process and that his novels exhibit traces of ‘East African English’. Linguistic nativization in Ngugi assumes two modes – there is the process of relexification of his mother tongue, Gikuyu, using English vocabulary, but indigenous structures and rhythms, and there is the linguistic appropriation whereby English words are re-defined in new contexts. Ngugi subjects English words to the phonological and morphological processes of his native language and they are called loan words. The inscription of Gikuyu morpho-phonemic dynamics on British English (BE) words involves the addition of vowels to the end of BE words and the breaking up of consonant clusters by the insertion of vowels. The following words illustrate it:

1. “They called him *Jsaka*” (*WNC*, 33). The author himself explains that
2. “This was his Christian name, a corruption of Isaac.” (*WNC*, 33)
3. “His father Ezekiel . . . was a wealthy land owner” (POB, 13) – (Ezekiel).

4. “. . . the way she held up her chin as she spoke, has staili” (POB, 64) – style.

Through the process of relexification and appropriation, Ngugi inscribes African meaning and values into extant English words. He manipulates English words to produce and transmit meanings beyond the purely denotative reference of the words conveying, a wide range of emotional, attitudinal and symbolic context. This is a counter discursive strategy for challenging the dominant linguistic canons of BE. Ngugi’s lexico-semantic relexification and appropriation take the modes of semantic shift, conversion, translation equivalence, analogical creation, and coinage. Through the process of semantic shift, Ngugi appropriates extant English words and imbues them with new meanings in consonance with the East African historical and cultural context. The following examples cite each instance:

1. “I hear that they might be sending travelers to the moon” (POB, 79) – astronauts or cosmonauts.

2. “If you said that you did not know who the barber was, or where his shop was, people at once knew that you were either stranger or a fool (WNC, 9). According to Ngugi, “A fool, in the town’s vocabulary meant a man who had a wife who would not let him leave her lap
even for a second” (*WNC*, 9).

Another mode used by Ngugi is conversion. He subverts the dominant code by the deliberate transfer of a word from one part of speech to another without any change in its form. This is also a sort of linguistic appropriation. By circumventing the English code, Ngugi is able to economize his expressions and condense information. This can be illustrated through the following:

1. “‘Don’t *woman* me!’ he shouted hysterically” (*WNC*, 53) – to pester or nag like a woman.

2. “. . . black policemen led by two gum-chewing white *khakkied* officers” (*POB*, 168) – wearing khakis.

3. “A riot squad and *sirened* police car came to the scene” (*POB*, 183) – police with their siren on.

Translation equivalence represents the process of relexification par excellence. Loan translation is an aspect of relexification. To quote Zabus:

Relxification . . . can be . . . redefined as the forging of a new literary aesthetic medium out of elements of an alien, dominant lexicon. As a method, relexification stems from a need to solve an immediate aesthetic problem: that of rendering African concepts, thought patterns and linguistic features in the European language. As a strategy *in potential,*
relexification seeks to affirm the hidden or repressed original behind what is construed as the original language text. (Davis, 1980, 106)

Thus the ideological intention of translation equivalence is to superimpose the thought system of the colonized subject on the dominant code. However, typologies are never fool-proof. The examples furnished below qualify such coinages:

1. “The two women usually stayed together to . . . shorten the night” 
   \[(WNC, 11)\] – pass the night by telling traditional stories.

2. “You *drink* oath” \[(WNC, 72)\] – you take oath.

3. “. . . everybody knew that Kabonyi was *ill* \[(RB, 97)\] – as Ngugi explains, “Actually he was not ill, but he was full of fury” \[(RB, 97)\].

4. The *iron snake* . . . was quickly wriggling towards Nairobi \[(AGOW, 12)\] – railroad.

5. “Brushing sides with women’s skirts” \[(AGOW, 52)\] – doing a woman’s job.

6. “Men bought dances” \[(AGOW, 63)\]. (According to the author, “When a person bought a dance, the guitarist played for him alone, praising his name, always the son of a woman” \[(AGOW, 63)\].

7. “That was twelve years after Godfrey Munira . . . first rod a *metal horse*” \[(POB, 15)\] – a bicycle.

8. “The man in the city – we hear that they put a rubber trouser on it?”
(POB, 74) – condom.

9. “. . . it was he who had casually broached the possibility of his supplying us with grains of maize” (POB, 223-24) – bullets.

10. “. . . school children brought in hired lorries to see the winged horse” (POB, 257) – airplane.

11.“I thought you only knew this language of ‘Good morning’” (DOC, 57) – the English language.

12.“It could be the woman’s disease,” Mwaura said. (DOC, 69) – pregnancy.

13.“. . . let’s shower saliva on our breast” (DOC, 87) – pray.

14.“. . . Kareendi of the easy thighs” (DOC, 57) – a woman of easy virtues.

Translation equivalence is also underscored through the use of native figures of speech and proverbs too. It is through the use of these devices that Ngugi is able to evoke the cultural milieu in which the action takes place. Examples of such figures of speech include “They sang songs / with words that pierced one’s heart like a spear” (1977a, 26), “You look like an old basket / That has lost all shape” (29). His use of proverbs often focus on the value of the society: “An aging hero has no admirers” (13), “A fool’s walking stick supports the clever” (15).

Analogical creation also contributes to the enrichment of the nativization of English. It is the formation of new words on the basis of
partial likeness or agreement in form or in sense with already existing words in English. The use of words like “houseboy” in *A Grain of Wheat*, where it refers to a house-keeper in the African context who does several things at the same time (that of a driver, babysitter, cleaner, cook, launderers, watchman, etc.) and “Sugar mummies” (1980, 122), where it refers to rich, usually elderly women who are generous to young men in return for sexual favors. Through word-formation process of compounding, East Africa users of English invent words or word groups which not only help in collapsing potentially longer expressions or structures but also aid in fashioning words that convey new cognitive and socio-linguistic reality peculiar to the world Ngugi attempts to represent.

“... he saw a chance to finally still the occasional voices of guilt since his midnight tea at Gatundu” (1977, 114) where “midnight tea” is an expression for secret oath taking as a revolutionary. Another example for native expression is “devil’s waters” (1964, 5) which means mirage. Ngugi himself explains this phenomenon in the following manner: “When you traveled along it (the road) on hot days you saw little lakes ahead of you. But when you went near, the lakes vanished” (1964, 5).

Thus it can be seen that although Ngugi does not believe that he writes in an ‘East African English,’ he consciously or unconsciously engages in linguistic nativization in his creative writing. And although he has successfully moved the centre of his creative writing from the code of
‘standard’ British English to that of his mother tongue Gikuyu, this movement has not occurred without his prior re-territorialization of the English language. Apart from this Ngugi makes immense use of the native language in all his novels. There are phrases and even sentences in Gikuyu so that he is able to successfully launch his ideas with its total essence. Even in his Devil on the Cross, which was originally written in Gikuyu and later translated by himself, we find the use of Gikuyu significantly. That is why we are able to be a part of the society portrayed before us and able to attend the feast not as an outsider, but as an insider. We do not observe the things from outside, but is translated to that world of Gikuyu speaking people and understood the implications of their spiritual obligations to their own society. The actual participant of the Devil’s feast in the novel owe their loyalty to the foreigners present there, while those like Wangari and Muturi, try to save their society from these neo-colonists. Their ardency can be felt throughout the novel and insurgence of their ethnic traditionalism becomes evident here.

While Devil on the Cross is a fight against neo-colonists, it is also a female “bildungsroman.” Ngugi is one of the men of good will, as Mariamma Ba calls them, who has attempted to transcend the sexual allegory and hence to resolve the problems of gender in a way that run counter to the biases embedded in the contemporary African male literary tradition. Like Farah, Ngugi also makes an important new departure in
contemporary African literature, i.e., men writers’ engagement with women writers in a dialogue on gender. As different from the works of other African male writers, in the works of writers like Achebe, Ngugi and Farah, there is an attempt to transform the status of women from that of object to that of subject. Ngugi has made an authorial intention about the role of their central female characters. Ngugi opens *Detained*, his prison diary, by hailing Waringa, the heroine *Devil on the Cross* as his inspiration: “Waringa heroine of toil . . . there she walks haughtily carrying her freedom in her hands” (3). Later, he tells of the decision he made regarding her characterization: “Because the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the condition of her present being (10).

*Devil on the Cross* tells the story of Waringa’s development as she passes from girlhood into adulthood and recognizes her identity and role in the world. At the Devil’s Feast, a competition among modern thieves and robbers to choose the best means of exploiting the masses, Waringa faces a spiritual crisis. Challenged by the devil in a dream to account for her passivity in the face of her former lover, the rich Old Man’s treatment of her, she defends her reaction by appealing to conventional notions of her gender: I’m a woman. I’m weak. There was nothing I could do (191). As a result of her enlightenment at the Feast, she undergoes a transformation:
Today’s Waringa has decided that she’ll never again allow herself to be a mere flower, whose purpose is to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people’s lives, waiting to be thrown on to a rubbish heap the moment the splendour of her body withers. The Waringa of today has decided to be self-reliant all the time to plunge into the middle of the arena of life’s struggle in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity. (216)

Gender functions as a metaphor for class in the first section of the novel. Sexually abused and exploited by the men of the new ruling class, Waringa provides a useful symbol for the degraded state of neo-colonial Kenya. In order to secure employment, she must first satisfy the demands of the boss, whose “target is [always her] thighs” (19). On the basis of her experience of looking for secretarial work she reaches a conclusion: “The day on which they are born is the very day on which every part of their body is buried except one – they are left with a single organ” (26). Waringa, “heroine of toil,” “. . . said goodbye to being a secretary” (218) and qualified as an engineer and motor mechanic. Not even contemplating the organization of a stenographer’s trade union, she enthusiastically takes up a male defined profession and becomes active in promoting the cause of its (male) workers. Ngugi makes his heroine undergo a transformation in character. Her stereotypical feminine
qualities are converted into equally stereotype masculine ones. The younger Waringa is passive in her response to her oppressors; the mature Waringa is aggressive - even violent. A master of martial arts, she assaults her opponents “with so many judo kicks and karate chops” (221). She is an expert marksman also. She sometimes shoots to kill and sometimes merely shatters knee caps.

The manner in which Ngugi equips his heroine with the weapon is very significant. The conventional symbolic association of the gun with phallic power is made explicit. As Waringa reminds the Rich Old Man just before she shoots him, she has taken over the role he used to perform when they played the game of “the hunter and the hunted” (253). In the version they played when they were lovers, the game reached its climax when the Rich Old Man fired his pistol into the sky to announce his sexual conquest. But finally, when the pistol came into her hands, the climax reversed with her shooting the Rich Old Man, and thereby acquires a heroic stature. With a gun in her possession, she is suitably equipped to participate in the struggle for a more equitable social system for men.

Gender is also a function of class in Ngugi’s representation of the opposing sides in the conflict. One of the defining characteristics of the ruling elite is its objectification, as well as commodification of women. On the other hand peasants and workers are portrayed as being sexually
egalitarian. Thus, whereas the boss of the company where Waringa seeks employment as a secretary first “eyes [her] from top to toe” and then suggests that they retire “to the *Modern Love Bar and Lodging* to sign the contract” (19), the mechanics at the garage where she eventually finds a job respect her for her ability: “a deep friendship developed between Waringa and the other workers” (221). Ngugi’s image of gender equality in peasant and working class society bears no relation to reality as he himself seems to admit when he urges workers and peasants to unite without sexist prejudices. Ngugi deviates into sexism when his class dialectic leaves no room for the female other when he portrays Waringa as a gun-toting revolutionary. He tries to erase the gender boundaries and man and woman become equal. He very vividly explicates how a woman too is as strong as man, given the opportunity to manifest it.

As quoted earlier from the *Detained* that he created a picture of strong, determined woman because women are the, most oppressed and exploited section, and they are willed to resist and struggle against the conditions of their present being, it is applicable to Mumbi and Wanja who are portrayed in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* respectively. They are not only metaphoric representations of modern Kenya, but of Kenyan women at different stages of their emancipation. When Mumbi takes some tentative steps to female assertion, Wanja completes that process in *Petals of Blood*. She comes to acquire some power unavailable
to Mumbi, but she is also able to make incursions into spheres thus far
dominated by men. Like Waringa of Devil on the Cross, she gets engaged
in a world usually attributed to men. For a time she seems to be defeated,
but finally emerges triumphant. In the encounters she had to face she was
although sullied, she manages to keep her integrity as a woman in tact,
and at the same time to retain a healthy and necessary rapport with men.

An analysis of the character of Mumbi reveals the process of her
emergence as an awakened and liberated woman. There is a gradual
graphical growth through her personal experiences. Mumbi is initially
presented as follows:

Her dark eyes had a dreamy look that longed for something
the village could not give. She lay in the sun and ardently
yearned for a life in which love and heroism, suffering and
martyrdom were possible. She was young. She had fed on
stories in which Gikuyu women braved the terrors of the
forest to save people, of beautiful girls given to the gods as
sacrifice before the rains. In the Old Testament she often
saw herself as Esther, so she reveled in that moment when
Esther finally answers King Ahasuer’s question and
dramatically points at Haman, saying: The adversary and
enemy is the wicked Haman. (3)

Here we can detect a self-righteousness and self-indulgence which might
appear appealing to a young mind. But what should be noted is the fact that she has developed no desire yet to assert herself as a woman. She thrives in the world of men, and her romantic inspirations are achieved in the forest when she makes love to Gikonyo for the first time. However, the State of Emergency, declared when the Mau Mau was escalated, heralds the separation of the young couple and the eventual breakdown of their marriage. Gikonyo had a very unpleasant hard time in the camp because unlike Mugo or Kihika, labeled as hardcore terrorists, his experiences were relatively mild. But throughout his detention he was invigorated by the memory of the faithful, devoted wife he had left behind. But Mumbi has to battle greater odds outside. Not only does she contend with starvation and penury, but also has to escape the harassment from the homeguards and the odious attentions of Karanja. Consequently her troubles are much more demanding and agonizing:

Beating was not isolated to one person here, another one there. Soldiers and homeguards entered the trench and beat anybody who raised their back or showed down in any way. . . . We were prisoners in the village, and the soldiers had built their camps all round to prevent any escape. We went without food. The cry of children was terrible to hear. The new D.O. did not mind the cries. He even permitted soldiers
to pick women and carry them to their tents. God! I didn’t know how I escaped from the ignominy. (125-28)

The traumatic experience Mumbi goes through during the State of Emergency certainly strengthens Mumbi. Even her sexual encounter with Karanja is no exception. This humiliating episode in her life triggers off her fight and there comes a triumph after the humiliation. She transcends degradation through patience, stoic endurance, and self-assertion and becomes a heroine in her own right. This transformation can be best captured in the words of Judith Cochrane:

She learns the necessity of compromising her vision, even forgetting it in order to live. . . . Her experiences during the Emergency shock her that bravery is learning to cope with the threats of starvation rather than the terrors of the forest, and that sacrifice is often brutal and unnecessary rather than noble and redemptive. The stages by which her dreams are rendered down increase Mumbi’s own stature, for in learning to come to terms with the shabby as well as with the good and noble she grows in understanding, compassion and independence. (1984, 98-99)

Mumbi’s self-realization was a long and arduous task. The triumph is preceded by anguish because the lifting of the Emergency does not bring any easy solutions; on the contrary, her troubles are increased. In
Gikonyo’s attempt to come back to his lost life, he confesses the oath and returns to Thabai determined “to take up the thread of life where he had left it” (98). But he returns to find that his wife has had a child by Karanja. Gikonyo is already filled with a guilty conscience because he has confessed his oath and liberated himself from the camp while others suffer because of their silence. He is totally frustrated and vents his frustrations on her. This causes estrangement between them and gives Mumbi chance to look into herself as an individual. Confronted by a husband who refuses to communicate, and denied the opportunity to function as a typical wife, Mumbi becomes a more vocal and more useful member of the community.

Mumbi’s maturity becomes much more explicit in her confrontation with and the ultimate victory over Mugo. When her husband fails to persuade Mugo to attend the Uhuru celebrations, the villagers of Thabai send Mumbi to negotiate with Mugo. She is determined to succeed where her husband and failed and she succeeds too well. Mumbi is transparently honest, and she always “insists upon community, on the telling her story without hiding it” (5). Her honesty is infectious, and its repercussions on Mugo are fatal, but by forcing the true story out of Mugo, she makes a positive contribution to the community too. Not only does her soul searching honesty persuade Mugo to confess that he had betrayed Kihika, but it also makes some of the
villagers realize that they were too eager in setting up heroes and in denouncing traitors. This disclosure compels them to make a reassessment of their own lives.

Mumbi’s success at making a martyr of the man who killed her brother by proxy is one of the positive aspects that Ngugi identifies in her. But there are other traitors too that are noteworthy. Though Mumbi has every reason to ensure that Mugo is destroyed, she deplores bloodshed, and if at all she had a chance to voice her opinion, she would have prevented the execution of Mugo. While General R. and Koinadu still live in a world of slaughter and revenge, Mumbi is an advocate of peace and forgiveness. Mugo’s tale, her own suffering, and her innate good sense have made her realize that the need for violence has ended and that a new Kenya must be built on other principles. She says: “Surely enough blood had already been shed: why add more grief to the land?” (158). Though this has invited criticism against Ngugi that he repudiates the Mau Mau, it marks another stage of Mumbi’s growth to self-awareness.

The fact that Mumbi has reached her fullest maturity is manifested when she first leaves her husband and then resolves to end the conflict between them. As Charles Nama suggests,

Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* is another heroine who embraces traditional values in Gikuyu society. Even the major
characters in the novel acknowledge her singular role as they glorify her with songs which evoke the origins of the Gikuyu clan. (1986, 141)

But at the same time she also challenges some of the traditions she is supposed to uphold. When Gikonyo brutalizes her son and calls her a whore, she leaves her husband and by abandoning her husband, she defies one of the most sacred norms of an essentially patriarchal society. “My husband? Never” (261), she informs her mother when the latter asks her to go back. The manner in which she rushes to her husband’s aid when he is injured in the race, shows how much she is fond of her husband. But that gives her no reason to return to her husband on his terms. Mumbi, though she represents some of the values esteemed by the Gikuyus, her actions reveal that these must be reassessed and revalued, to retain their significance in the new Kenya.

Gikonyo gets enough leisure to brood over his broken marriage during his prolonged stay at the hospital. He makes a self-realization that he is partly responsible for the estrangement and makes overtures to Mumbi. Her reaction to his request is the least of what he had expected: “No, not today,” she said, almost impatiently, as if she was now really aware of her independence. Gikonyo was surprised by the “new firmness in her voice” (213). When his initial supplication fails, Gikonyo makes this appeal which invokes her traditional obligation to hearth, home and
husband: “Will you go back to the house, light the fire, and see things don’t decay?” (213). Her response to the entreaty, and Gikonyo’s anxious yet positive reaction to her speech, indicate unequivocally, that in one household at least marital relation will henceforth be on an equal footing. The sequence also establishes that Mumbi has matured beyond recognition and attained a selfhood that was impossible in a pre-independent Kenya:

“No, Gikonyo. People try to rub out things, but they cannot. Things are not so easy. What has passed between us is too much to be passed over in a sentence. We need to talk, to open our hearts to one another, examine them, and together plan the future we want. But now, I must go for the child is ill.”

“Will you – will you come tomorrow?” he asked unable to hide his anxiety and fear. He knew, at once, that in future he would reckon with her feelings, her thoughts, her desires – a new Mumbi. (213)

The novel ends with Gikonyo determined to carve a figure of “a woman big – big with child” (213). This can be recognized as the metaphor for a new Kenya. The novel ends with a note of cautious optimism. What is important to realize is that the new Kenya will not retain some of the odious strictures of the old. Thus the tale of Mumbi acts as a reminder to
the Kenyans that the new society will have to accommodate women in a way it refused to do before.

Mumbi is central to the lives of the male protagonists of the novel, but she remains marginal to some extent. But in *Petals of Blood* one of the four major characters is a woman. She is the central female character. Ime Ikkideh, asserts that Wanja is “more central, more complex and more purposeful than any previous woman in Ngugi” and concludes that “[s]he acts as the rallying point for all the central characters: Abdulla, Munira and Karega; and she draws together even the non-central but thematically important ones: Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo” (1986, 51). Wanja’s predecessors are depicted as heroines motivated by idealism, and a desire for truth and justice. They remain innocent of any evil or destruction unwittingly resulting from their actions. Even Mumbi, despite her unfaithfulness to Gikonyo, retains a certain incorruptible purity. But Wanja is not deified. She has a generous warm personality but can at times be selfish, callous and vindictive. But her strengths are her dominant characteristics, and in these she resembles Ngugi’s previous heroines and also she possesses the admirable qualities Ngugi associates with the true Gikuyu woman. Eustace Palmer points out: “She belongs to that remarkable breed of Ngugi women – Mwihaki, Nyambura, Muthoni, Mumbi, Wambuku – all of them brave, resilient, resourceful and determined” (1979, 297). Palmer’s further assertions that none of these
women are “really feminine,” and that “it is the more masculine aspects of Wanja’s character that are stressed” (1979, 297-98), appear to lack justification unless the women’s remarkable qualities and lack of passivity are regarded as essentially masculine traits.

Women such as Muthoni, Nyambura, Mumbi and Wanja are involved in creating new feminine roles and changing attitudes to womanhood. The ‘new’ Mumbi who demands respect and equality in her relationship with Gikonyo at the end of *A Grain of Wheat*, is very much a kindred spirit to Wanja, whose life is a constant struggle for respect and independence as a woman. As Wanja puts it:

> If you have a cunt – excuse my language, but it seems the curse of Adam’s Eve on those who are born with it – if you are born with this hole, instead if it being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore. (293)

While Mumbi is the protest of subordinate wife, Wanja’s is that of the whore. Though Mumbi and Wanja can be described as new types of women, they do not represent a denial of their traditional heritages, but its modern expression. The close and harmonious relationship each of these young woman enjoys with an older woman who is the epitome of tradition, expresses their identification with a feminine heritage. The nature of these relationships between women
derives from traditional notions of community, and appears as saving and exemplary in the contemporary context of developing capitalism. In *A Grain of Wheat* the quality of feminine co-operation, solidarity and understanding between Mumbi and Wanja shows mother-in-law and daughter-in-law as complementary images of two ages of Gikuyu womanhood. This similar kind of female solidarity had existed between Muthoni and Nyambura in *The River Between* and also Njoroge’s two mothers in *Weep not Child*. In *Petals of Blood* the close relationship between Wanja and her grandmother Nyakinyua has a similar function.

Nyakinyua has been projected as the embodiment of traditional values. Ngugi makes it patent almost at the beginning itself that she is the repository of the best values of old Ilmorog. As a traditional woman par excellence, Nyakinyua’s portrayal strongly refutes the stereotype of the traditional woman as the silent passive burden-bearer. This is a woman who protests by shitting a mountain in Munira’s school yard, excels in the poetry of ‘erotic abuse’ in circumcision songs, leads the women in attacking the KCO officials, convinces the elders that they should support the march to Nairobi, and takes an enthusiastic part in it. Even her death can be seen as a final protest against the loss of her land. Wanja has inherited this defiant and courageous spirit of Nyakinyua. But Nyakinyua appears as the woman of the past, acting throughout the novel as the voice of the people’s history, and Wanja is very much a woman of the
present. Nyakinyua is a valiant and resourceful woman, but she does not develop in the manner of Wanja or Mumbi because she has already “found” herself at the beginning of the book. Wanja on the other hand is a very complex character whose development can be traced throughout. She intrigues the people of Ilmorog when she arrives by car with her modern possessions. She initiates action and brings change. She revives Abdulla’s shop, sends Joseph to school, and sparks off Ilmorog’s economic growth by selling Theng’ata. She is praised in popular songs for turning “a bedbug of a village into a town” (264). Not only does Wanja change herself, but she is also changing constantly. Part of her complexity is that she is both the “city woman” that the villagers initially take her to be, and the rural daughter of the soil. As Abdulla jokingly puts it, she is a “barmaid farmer” (61).

Wanja’s career is more varied and her “progress” more spectacular than Mumbi’s because she never had the security and domestic harmony that the latter enjoyed in her youth. Wanja is exploited from her birth. The grand-daughter of a person who had defied the British and been martyred for it, she is, nevertheless, brought up by a father who is a time-server and a hypocrite. While he mercilessly whips his daughter for “holding hands” with a class mate, he encourages her attachment to Kimeria, a married man, because he has wealth and position. When Wanja becomes pregnant, Kimeria refuses to accept responsibility for the
child; as a consequence she flees to the city to escape her parents’ wrath. There, she drifts to a job that is “readily available to us girls” (41), that of barmaid and prostitute.

Wanja’s migration to the village marks a noteworthy turn of events in her life. She begins to work in the fields too and that brings her close to Nyakinyua. Her enthusiasm and involvement in this practical labor shows her affinity with the earth, the basis of the people’s tradition and identity. A short period of contact with the soil entirely changes her bearing and appearance. Karega observes on the march to the city: “Over the past few weeks he had witnessed the gradual withering away of her earlier calculated smoothness, the practiced light in her eyes, and the birth of a broken-nailed lean beauty” (128). After the return to Ilmorog, Wanja is strongly involved with the women’s farming co-operative, the Ndemi-Nyakinyua group. At times such as this, when Wanja is giving herself off to the community and not selling her body to men, she appears most beautiful and fulfilled. Both Abdulla and Munira wonder at her “utter transformation” (201). The climax of this period of transformation is Wanja’s love affair with Karega. But the untimely departure of Karega and the death of Abdulla’s donkey mark the beginning of the end for the community of the Old Ilmorog, and the dissolution of Wanja’s identity as the daughter of the soil.

Wanja’s further transformation to wigged and painted whorehouse
madam finally turns upon her redemption of Nyakinyua’s land. On the
death of Nyakinyua, Wanja sells her share of the new business with
Abdulla in order to get the land back. This gesture is meant to serve the
memory of Nyakinyua and honour the family tradition of resistance for
which Wanja’s grandfather had died, but Wanja builds on her land a
whorehouse to service the needs of the new black masters such as Chui,
Mzigo and Kimeria, the betrayers of the people. Wanja’s setting up of the
Sunshine Lodge is one way of taking revenge on the men who have
exploited her economically, spiritually and physically. And when she
stabs Kimeria at the end of the novel, she vindicates herself, her
grandmother, and the downtrodden people of Thabai. But her fulfillment
comes only when she establishes a secure relationship with a man. Chidi
Amuta is of the view that “Wanja resists exploitation by the men folk but
instead uses her relationships with the men as a stabilizing influence for
her own self-realization” (1989, 150).

Wanja’s opening of the whorehouse is her revenge against men
and a society that has failed her. She becomes cynically committed to
financial profit and self interest. At this stage, Abdulla feels that she has
“lost that firm grasp, that harmony with the invisible law” (311). Munira
describes the new wealthy Wanja as “that bird periodically born out of
ashes and dust” (281). Wanja does indeed rise like a phoenix from the
ashes of the burnt Sunshine Lodge, but she kills Kimeria, which helps her
regain her womanhood, and the fire Munira starts exterminates two other antagonists too. Munira had intended to save others from Wanja, but she is the one who is saved and all three men who seek salvation in Wanja some way or other, are finally instrumental in the invidious position. Munira satisfies her spiritual craving for purification of fire, while Abdulla physically drags her body from the burning house. Munira’s vengeance brings a grim kind of poetic justice to Wanja, for Kimeria, the man who had flowered in her virgin blood, meets a bloody death at her hands shortly before the fire destroys all evidence of this murder. On the same evening Abdulla has been possessed with the idea that he must kill Kimeria in order to regain his manhood, but it is Wanja who kills him, and regains her womanhood.

Although Karega protests that individual assassinations are pointless and will not change the system, the way in which the death of Kimeria is presented suggests that justice has been done. Wanja’s act of violence in this instance is an act of personal liberation, a kind of cleansing. Wanja’s early murder of her new born child is, by contrast, an abuse of both her power to destroy, and to create. She feels that in choosing to murder her own child, she “had murdered her own life” (328). Her barrenness is not simply physical, but expressive of a far deeper spiritual and emotional lack of fulfillment. At the height of her affairs with Karega, Wanja feels she is “about to flower” (251), but is
deprived of that opportunity. It is only after the fire that this finally comes about. When she is recovering from her ordeal in hospital, Wanja feels, within her womb, the stirring of a new life. She now approaches the world with a new consciousness. Her pregnancy and her re-union with her mother, while a little contrived and melodramatic, are meaningful expressions of her new flowering. She experiences a homecoming and reaffirms her identity with her Ilmorog origins. Now heeding the voice of Nyakinyua, Wanja is restored as her mother’s daughter and daughter of the soil, and regains her life-giving potential. Her pregnancy becomes a symbol of hope and regeneration, a promise for the future. As a fertile image, she represents Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and the survival of the people, both in body and soul.

It is an apt turn of events that the father of Wanja’s child should be Abdulla, the unsung Mau Mau hero who fought with Kimathi, a man whom Karega comes to regard as “the best self of the community, symbol of Kenya’s truest courage” (228). In terms of the changes in Wanja, it is significant that Abdulla sees his relationship with her in images of an elemental union with the earth:

Only that for him now, a woman was truly the other world: with its own contours, valleys, rivers, streams, ridges, sharp turns, steep and slow climbs and descents, and above all, movement of secret springs of life... A woman was a
world, the world. (315)

The exact nature of the relationship between Wanja and Abdulla are left undefined. Conventional marriage is not offered as a facile solution to Wanja’s predicament as a whore. Her liberation is not to be achieved with her union with a man, but through her fulfillment as an independent woman. In reply to her mother asking whose child she is bearing, Wanja does not give a straight forward answer, but draws a picture in which the image of Abdulla is merged with other images of the people’s struggle:

Wanja got a piece of charcoal and a piece of cardboard. For one hour or so she remained absorbed in her sketching. And suddenly she felt lifted out of her own self, she felt waves of emotion she had never experienced. The figure began to take shape on the board. It was a combination of the sculpture she once saw at the lawyer’s place in Nairobi and the images of Kimathi in his moments of triumph and laughter and sorrow and terror – but without one limb. When it was over, she felt a tremendous calm, a kind of inner assurance of the possibilities of a new kind of power. (338)

As Killam concludes,

Wanja is returned to the position of harmonious connection with the Invisible Laws, a connection made manifest in the drawing she makes in the hospital, a drawing that is as it
were forced from her by a will beyond herself, a will deriving from force still alive in the country. (1984, 138)

Through her drawing Wanja feels for the first time the exhilaration of her creative power, expressed both in her artistry and her pregnancy. Her confidence no longer comes from the cynical manipulation of the power of her body over men, but from a new sense of worth and self-respect. The sculpture Wanja mentions had puzzled the marchers from Ilmorog because it was a figure that possessed both male and female features, “as if it was a man and woman in one” (161). Nyaknyua finally settles the argument about it: “A man cannot have a child without a woman. A woman cannot bear a child without a man. And was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeem this country?” (161). The allusions inherent in Wanja’s reference to the sculpture suggest that she has come to understand that men and women must stop exploiting each other, and instead work together to destroy capitalism’s Darwinian jungle and realize Karega’s socialist “human kingdom”: “the kingdom of man and woman, joying and loving in creative labor” (344).

Though Ngugi is an acclaimed Kenyan writer it is clear that Ngugi is not a voice of merely Kenya but the whole of Africa. His views on language are significant in this perspective. Moreover, like Farah, Ngugi also accepts some of the positive aspects of colonial rule. He does not totally reject Christianity which enriches their culture. Ngugi does not
celebrate circumcision, but tends to say that to be an African, a return to one's own cultural roots is a must. Hence it is illustrated that Ngugi also very successfully merged the twin problematics of ethnicity and femininity for stabilizing the nationalist as well as the ethnic agenda of the state. As we have seen, his works demonstrate that 'Uhuru' cannot be attained without total emancipation of women.