CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN NGUGI THIONG’O’S FICTION

Despite the ravages of slavery and colonialism on Africa’s political, economic and social systems, the continent’s cultures and aesthetic sensibilities remain independent and vibrant, particularly in the orally based forms of cultural expression. Although African societies have developed writing traditions, Africans are primarily an oral people, and it is that tradition that has dominated the cultural forms created on the continent. Artistic expression plays an important role in the lives of African peoples, providing a forum for participation in the community and for exploring the mysteries of humanity. Orature means something passed on through the spoken word, and because it is based on the spoken language it comes to life only in a living community. Where community life fades away, orality loses its function and dies. It needs people in a living social setting; it needs life itself. Thus orature grows out of tradition, and keeps tradition alive.

African orature is a development of a complex literary genre that demands the establishment of its own aesthetics for its interpretation and evaluation. Orature is a strategic communal tool for non-literate societies in their consolidation and socialization processes, and its spoken nature guarantees its widest circulation. Unlike written literature, orature has unfixed boundaries, which gives it greater
freedom in its execution and interpretation—it can thus be used to praise and criticize those in power. The principal execution of orature is by performance, which combines sound, action, and meaning. Performance brings to the fore and concretizes the interaction among the principals of text, medium, performer, and audience so that an utterance can most adequately be interpreted and evaluated within the context of the total performance. African oral forms include ritual, divining/healing, folk tales, myths, legends, and song and dance.

**Genres of Oral Literature**

Oral traditions can be divided stylistically into those transmitted in a stereotypical way and those transmitted freely, changing with differences of time, place, and individual speakers. The first category includes traditions that function in ritual and cult, such as invocations, incantations, funeral songs, praise songs, etc. Language in this category is highly stylized, and meter and rhythm are more important than conceptual coherence because in traditional society every word is charged with a particular force. The second category includes stories and legends of the origin of man’s institutions, as well as stories told for didactic purposes and for entertainment. Myths and legends are concepts and beliefs about the early history of a race, or explanations of natural events, such as the seasons, handed down from olden times. They are a people’s search for meaning: concepts of the human mind, creations of man invented to give meaning and purpose to the enigma that is called life on earth and to explain the phenomena of nature, events,
and human behavior. Thus myths are burdened with all that cannot be explained except by divine intervention: they reconcile man to the human condition and reveal the conditions and problems, social and personal, that people face in life.

Epics, as an example of legends, are poetic accounts of the deeds of great heroes and heroines, or of a nation’s past history orally transmitted as well as performed in a ceremonial context. The most frequently cited examples of African epics are Sunjata in West Africa, Shaka in South Africa, Mwindo in Central Africa, and Liongo in East Africa. The Sunjata epic is performed in the septennial Kamabolon ceremony in Kingaba, Mali. The ceremony is performed in the Kamanolon sanctuary—a traditional hut with colorful paintings on which a new roof has been restored the night before. The occasion determines the length of the performance, some allowing elaborate embellishment of the text, and others, more formal ones, being more restrictive under the assumption that the elaborations (stories) are already known to the audience. Sunjata and Mwindo ceremonies may last for several days, and may be regarded as a re-creation of society: they have the function of inaugurating a new generation since the young generation is responsible for most of the ritual labor, such as restoring the walls of the sanctuary.

Folk tales are popular stories ingrained in people’s minds, memories which are centuries old and testify to a core of truth handed down orally from generation to generation. Themes of folk tales may range from the creation, people’s relationship with the universe, the origin of disease, witchcraft, marriage and family, and human
relationship with animals. Tales are important because they give useful insights into psychological understanding of the communities that produced them; they are a manifestation of the human condition (predicament) and human imagination, and much of modern literature (and thinking) is based on them. The art of storytelling is such an important aspect of African life that most societies have an animal character as the designated teller of tales. Among the Akan in West Africa the traditional storyteller is Anansi the Spider; among the Chewa in Central Africa it is Nadzikambe the Chameleon; and among the Zulu in South Africa it is Fudukazi the Tortoise.

By its very nature, orality tends to simplify the structure of leadership in society, and by doing so manages to present issues to the audience in a very powerful way. Since orature has a social and political function in society, oral texts can only be understood and interpreted within their wider political and social contexts. African oral forms seem to have fairly recurring common themes, such as sibling rivalry, exile and the prodigal son, corruption at court, return of exile, restoration of order, kindness and generosity, respect for the weak/elderly/parents, mysterious birth, orphanage, etc. The distinctive organizing motifs in African orature include journey, departure, moral decay, corruption of home, obstacle and triumph, return, restoration, etc. Genealogy or the mention of a list of ancestors from whom the hero descends is a very important part of oral histories. Specialized language is used to communicate experiences and concerns, life events, human struggles that orature
articulates, and such language exhibits artistic beauty in content and draws its power from specific linguistic features, such as alliteration, repetition, rhyme, rhythm, mnemonic, ideophone, antithesis, parallelism, assonance, allegory, euphemism, and synecdoche. These devices not only make the expression unusual but also make it also appealing and therefore easily remembered. Where there is a combination of form and content, the artistic expression is born and literature is created. Women dominate the artistic mastering of language during courting, wedding, and the telling of folk tales and stories, when the grandmother becomes the immediate teacher in the use of carefully chosen language.

Apart from epics, folk tales, and legends, song and dance is also a distinctive feature of African orality, and African musical culture and its fusion with various modern forms such as jazz, choral, and gospel singing has produced a unique sound and a major export for the continent. The musical event provides a useful departure point for a discussion of other African art forms such as instrument design, masks, and costume that are part of dance performance. In African practice there is no divide between music and dance, since music and movement constitute an integrated form of expression. Music mirrors a culture’s social and political arrangements and protocols, and it provides the accompaniment for an individual’s rites of passage throughout life. Because histories are kept and recited by specialist performers, people throughout Africa maintain and transmit fundamentally similar values in their expressions of the oral-aesthetic. The size of the continent means that Africa is
a land of diversity of cultures in many forms, sometimes related, sometimes diametrically opposed. Thus, in contrast to the highly rhythmic instrumental music from Central and West Africa, southern Africa has vocal music that, under the influence of missionary-taught hymns, has taken on the form of simple Western harmony. The social dynamics have resulted in both the flourishing of some music and the struggle of others to survive.

**Performance as a Genre**

Performance is a contested concept with no agreed-upon definition and calls into question conventional understanding of tradition, repetition, mechanical reproduction, and ontological definitions of social order and reality. African oral performance forms include mimic, narrative, and music and dance. In narrative, the element of narration, of addressing an audience directly, interspersed with mime of significant episodes from the narrative, is a central element of this category of performance, particularly to a largely illiterate and rural audience where orality is the principal means of communication. Narrative is the representation of an event or sequence of events, real or fictitious, by means of language. But orality also bridges the divide between spirit and flesh, and even between the present and the eternal. Thus the funeral dirges and dances will often range from expressions of grief to joyous sounds and fertility dances, so transforming the trauma of confronting death into a celebration of life for the benefit of those still living.
Performance is not only an enabling facilitator in the duality of communication to the body and soul, but also an important dimension of culture as well as an indicator of how knowledge about culture is produced and utilized. It is the primary site for the production of knowledge, and the place where multiple and often simultaneous discourses are employed. It is a means by which society reflects on its current condition, on the members’ relationship with each other and their environment. It enables people to define and/or reinvent themselves and their society and either reinforce, resist, or subvert prevailing social orders. In performance, subversion and legitimization can emerge in the same utterance or act.

Orality and performance have to be approached from a balanced perspective that avoids projecting orality as a fossilized artifact, or the performer and audience as passive, disengaged bystanders. Thus performance is viewed from process paradigm which is temporal, participatory, and interactive. By focusing on the specific performers, there is also a shift from the narrative timeless to the time-centered, particular, and historically situated—in other words, a shift from structure to process. Something that clearly emerges from the African creative process is the multidimensional nature of performance, founded on the interplay between the forces of narrative, rhythm, and dance. The African oral literary traditions reveal the great variety and depth of imaginative expression with which African languages sustain the creative activities of African societies. Performances of song lyrics, for example, are subtly variable in nuance and style, sensitive to content and occasion,
and intimately dependent on the performer’s rapport with his/her audience. In this sense, oral performance is a collective enterprise rather than an individualistic one.

In oral performances specific texts are recited, although only a few individuals may know the actual words in the text, and the style and manner of the recitation of the text may differ with individual performer and occasion. Because performance styles vary, no two oral performances and their narratives ever contain exactly the same material, and this may result in textual variation of the “ultimate version” of an oral text. For this reason, the manner of performance is often more important than the content. Although performance is inseparable from its context of use, verbal art can be treated as self-contained, bounded objects separable from their social and cultural contexts of production and reception, and decontextualized and recontextualized. Oral performance involves public rendition because the most memorable performances are done at large events before a substantial audience. The performer is usually given enough space at the performance site to allow movement and interaction with other participants, whether it is within a fireside circle or an open public arena where the performer may be required to walk up and down. The language is usually in a highly stylized poetic form, rendered in chant rather than ordinary speaking voice and accompanied by rhythmic body movements. Thus words and action complement each other in oral performance.
Oral Performance in Society

In African societies cultural production and aesthetics become associated with specific oral performers, such as the griot as oral historian among the Mandika in West Africa, and the imbongi as praise poet among the Nguni in southern Africa. In all these cultural practices, initiates are trained, within their cultural environment, by more experienced performers who provide the model and supervise the rehearsals. A potential performer may be recognized as such from early childhood, and may then be entrusted to an experienced performer from whom he or she learns the traditional way of presenting the art form. The initiate and experienced performer may train and rehearse in relative seclusion before the trainee can perform in public. During training the trainee learns the appropriate voice qualities and movements for effective performance, learns how to posture, what language to use, and what costume to wear at what occasion. The careful training of the performers and the close supervision of the performance by elders of the culture ensure that variation in texts from different periods and by different performers is limited. The presence of and supervision by elders also gives the performance prestige and stability. Sex and age of the performer may determine the style of the performance; younger performers tend to be more vigorous than older ones. Thus the fact that the performer belongs to a particular sex, age, and social group influences his/her performance and its reception by the audience.
Performance is generated through, participated in, and shaped by the community and its needs. Apart from providing entertainment for the community, the performances of the various oral forms have also a social purpose. Weddings, for example, are performed to elaborate the continuation of the community, while epic and praise poetry are performed to record the history of the community and urge courage and endurance. Oral performance also plays a religious role, becoming a medium of communication between the living and the dead. Ceremonies can be held involving the whole family when oral performance is used as an appeal or prayer to the ancestors, sometimes with some offering and/or sacrifice. Thus, performance can become an intermediary between the ancestors and the people present. In healing, performance is not just a process to cure the invalid of his/her ailment, but an entertainment for the village audience. So although it is true that such performance is meant as a link to the absent ancestors and to symbolic time, it is also performed for the present village audience, with emphasis on its relevance to their current situation and experience, usually as indicated by the accompanying lyrics. Because the healer is also an entertainer, in interpreting the text the whole social context of the performance must be understood, since the actor is performing within the confines of space, time, and social context which determine the form of the performance and gives it its meaning.

The functional orientation of African orality is absent from most of modern Western theater. African performance can be a way of expressing public opinion, and as such
provides an effective means of social control, for the recitations are in the public arena and are shouted out for all to hear. This function of oral performance in the legitimation of power in the constant power struggles involving forms of rule explains the logic of its organization, the material justification of each situation, and why some performances are peculiarly male or female. The structure and function of the oral performance institution is highly flexible and adaptable, and the performer’s qualities include the ability to adapt to the immediate sociopolitical environment. Since performance can be used for social maintenance, social identity, and recreation of society with the corroboration of the political content, it can easily be abused by those with money and power, creating tension for the performers and raising a serious question about their credibility. The performer’s position in the community relies on his/her ability to gauge the political current in that community and the power structure, to extemporize and compose, and to use the aesthetics of persuasion to sway audiences with his/her performance.

Oral performance is also an important instrument in the educational system, for not only does it act as an incentive to and reward for socially approved actions, but also its recital is a reminder to all present of what qualities and conduct are praiseworthy. It re-establishes communal values and discourages individual tendencies by keeping the oral tradition not only a “secret” known to the few initiated, but also a group “heritage,” communally owned. In orature and performance, focus is on the
collective, on group action, and the performer is always surrounded, encouraged, prompted, and accompanied—the performer is never alone on the stage.

The most defining feature of African orature and performance is the close and intense interaction between performer and audience actualized in the traditional multi-part organization of voices: the call-and-response aesthetic relationship that is also manifested in clapping hands, snapping fingers, whistling, stomping feet, and other body movements. In song performance, for example, the chorus is divided into two voice parts, each of which recites a different text. The temporal relationship between these parts is governed by the principle of non-simultaneous entry, in such a way that the narrator’s “calling” phrase is followed by the chorus “response,” the two voices alternating throughout the performance. The voice of the lead singer who introduces the song is allowed to intermingle with the melody provided by the chorus, thus foregrounding the melodious nature of the lyric that dominates the rhythm of the song. The employment of melodious language enables listeners themselves to work through the words of the song to attain the meaning behind them.

Thus the African oral aesthetic event brings the principle of creation into play in a variety of forms: in the interplay between spirit and flesh, in the antiphonal patterns of sound between leader and chorus, and in the audio-visual integration of music and dance. Through call-and-response, the spontaneous interaction of the audio and the visual, the oral-aesthetic event becomes a creative transition that takes place
within each person participating and among the group as a whole. Call-and-response also establishes and reinforces social and political order within the community since each member contributes a note or phrase at predetermined points in a performance, reflecting their decentralized system of consensus and the interdependence that is necessary for group success. Call-and-response is not just an opening and closing device, it is also meant to enlist audience participation in the performance.

(Reference:http://www.bookrags.com)

Ngugi's fiction feeds on oral traditions of his culture. He makes use of myths, legends and folklores. Ngugi explores devices of oral traditions for the purpose of the preservation and projection of socio-cultural heritage and to teach moral values.

On 8th August,2006 in an interview in London he has accepted:

....My earlier novels, say The River Between, Weep Not, Child, and even A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood, are very much within a certain tradition of the English novel- the nineteenth century English novel. Given the realities of Africa or the Third World of the twentieth century, realist tradition is not adequate in describing fact often enough stranger than fiction. I found the tradition limiting in terms of space and time. But there is freedom in African oral traditions, which dispenses with restrictions of time and space, and even form, in the sense that an oral tale can take a dramatic form. In an oral tale animals can talk to trees, trees can talk to human beings and there is a freer interaction between say animal life, plant life and human life. There is also a greater interaction between the spiritual and material. All those things happen in an African narrative....
In *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) Ngugi's heavy reliance on the autochthonous culture of Africa is at an appreciable level. In *Petals of Blood* (1977), Ngugi makes use of the elements of cultural traditions abundantly. *Petals of Blood* is indeed a quasi-historical novel. The historical elements is however subjected to Ngugi's world outlook and his socialist thinking. He believes that in Africa, where the business of liberation is yet to be completed, we cannot ignore legends and past heroes as it is from them we get inspiration to fire on the gun. *Petals of Blood* traces the history of Kenyan people in general and of the Gikuyu in particular to the earliest times down the ages. The story brings together history, legends and folklores as a way of tracing the continuum from time immemorial; time of Mumbi and Gikuyu to the present. This vast sweep also dramatizes the African experience, struggle, hopes and fears. The socio-historical elements afford expansiveness, weight and mass to the novel, thus intensifying, its epic and educative impulse. Also in *Petals of Blood* several traditional songs are rendered, for circumcision, ceremony. Ngugi uses "Mumboro" a traditional Gikuyu song to make a point about Munira, one of the central character in the novel. The novelist employs story-telling technique in the novel *Devil on the Cross*, which is essentially cast in the mode of folktale through the narrator's use of direct address to the listeners; "let me tell you the lesson Wariinga taught that man"(*Devil on the Cross*: p-221) "you were there, what more can I say"(*Devil on the Cross*: p-246). Another feature taken over from the indigenous folk traditions in *Devil on the Cross* is the frequent use of African proverbs. These are sometimes employed in specific traditional patterns of discussion and debate.
"As the dancer prepares himself for the arena, it is he who knows how he is going to dance. The Elephant is able to carry his tusk however huge..." (Ngugi, *Devil on the Cross*: p-126)

Apart from the fact that *Devil on the Cross* was originally written in Gikuyu, with the title Caitaani Mutharabaini, Ngugi generously employs aspects of Gikuyu oral traditions which is a means of reaching the Kenyan peasants, workers, and youths. Ngugi uses the variants of Gicanndi player to narrate the story. The method ensures that the attention of his audience sustained to convey the message.

When properly used by a writer myths, legends, allusions, motifs and symbols deepen the reader's understanding of the events surrounding them. In Ngugi's writings, their usage makes the reader understand the events of Kenya's history and broaden his knowledge by pointing out parallel events and experiences in the history of mankind. A further exploration into some of these devices might be necessary here to enable the readers fully appreciate their roles in the various novels.

Myths, for instance, are near-fantacy stories of ancient origin belonging mostly to oral tradition; they express ideas and events believed to be truthful but without apparent proof. In this way, myths assume great importance in the annals of a history, for they comprise these unquestional beliefs that are fundamental in the explication of such a society's culture and world view.
Ruth Finegann asserts in her book titled: *Oral Literature in Africa* that:

Myths are prose narratives which in the society in which they are told are considered to be truthful account of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they are cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and rituals.


As could be discerned from the above, the wide acceptance of myths and their dogmatic nature can make them a writer's invaluable device, for he may not need much effort in arguing those issues expressed in them since these are already distilled in the minds of his audience, especially if they are of the same nationality with him. This confusion arises frequently because many a reader may not realise how one dovetails into the other. It may, therefore, be pertinent here to clearly distinguish between them so as to enhance their identification in Ngugi's writings. According to Wellek and Warren in their book titled, *Theory of Literature*:

Myths come to mean any anonymously composed story telling of origins and destinies, the explanation a society offers its young on why we do as we do, its

In his book entitled; *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, T.A. Cuddon maintains that:

> Legend is a story or narrative which lies somewhere between myth and historical fact and which, as a rule, is about a particular figure or person (T.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 81).

From the above definitions, it now becomes easier to identify the two devices and appreciate their significance even when they shade into one another in Ngugi's usage. For despite its being a much disputed term, myth has a religious significance which legend has not.

The most recurrent myth in Ngugi's novels is the Gikuyu story of the creation of the world and the allocation of different lands to different peoples. It was first related in writing by Jomo Kenyatta in his book entitled *Facing Mount Kenya*. In this book, Kenyatta relates the belief of the Gikuyu that in the beginning of things when mankind started to populate the earth, the man Gikuyu, the founder of the tribes was called by the Mogai (the divider of the universe), and was given as his share the land with ravines, the rivers, the forests, the game and all the gifts that the Lord of nature bestowed on mankind:

> After the Mogai had shown the Gikuyu the
Panorama of the wonderful land he had been given,
he commanded him to descend and establish his
homestead on the selected area he named
Mukuruwe Wa Gathanga ...

(Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya p. 3).

The use of this myth in Ngugi's novels, then, is an indication of the author's interest in history of his country, Kenya. More importantly it is also a means through which he celebrates his people's belief in the land as a divine patrimonial inheritance. For this reasons, the land must not be conceded to any invader, no matter how strong. So, as the white man, comes to Kenya and begins to appropriate Kenyan lands, the mere invocation of this myth in the novels censures this action, and reassures the people of the legitimacy of their demand for the full ownership of their land.

In The River Between, Chege, the custodian of the traditions of the people, tells his son, Waiyaki, of the ancient myth. According to him;

It was before Agu, the beginning of things.

Murungu brought the man and woman here and showed them all the vastness of the land. He gave .the country to them and their children, tene na tene,
world without end (The River Between:p. 18).

As a result of the way in which the white man continues to deprive the people of their land, and so denigrate the culture of the blacks, the elders in Ngugi's novels
appear compelled to hand down -this myth to the children in order to perpetuate the inherent belief. Thus, in *Weep Not, child*, Ngotho relates the same myth to the children who had assembled in his Thingira to listen to stories. He told them;

And the creator who is also called Murungu took Mumbi from his holy mountain ... Yes, God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them, this land I-hand over to you. It's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God, under my sacred tree (*Weep Not, child*:p. 24).

The employment of this myth in Ngugi's novels is symbolic not only in the author's desire to present an authentic history of his people, but also in his covert attempt to act like the elders noted above thereby rouse Kenyans to a consciousness of their deprivations. Without being overt, therefore, this device is used to assert the Kenyans' divine ownership over the Kenyan lands as well as keep Kenya’s history alive in the minds of the Kenyan public. It would appear that Ngugi finds this extremely necessary in order to combat the spate of distortions inherent in a situation where the coloniser is the sole historian. In his book entitled *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, G.D. Killam quotes Ngugi as saying that

History is very important in any people, how we look at our past is very important in determining how we look at the present! A distorted view of the people's
past can very easily distort our view and evaluations of potentials, and future possibilities as a people

(Killam, *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi* p.10).

As Ngugi exemplifies in his novels, the mere knowledge of history without determined efforts at putting things straight is only the lame excuses of a coward. This explains why most of the author's heroes are always fighting the liberation war, and when they cannot do this, they, at least, rebel against an oppressive authority or a sacrilegious action against their beliefs. Ngugi seems to expect his Kenyan audience to act the same way as his heroes for, by the skillful use of myth, he makes his reader share the feelings and attitudes of the fictional heroes or characters.

For instance, in *Weep Not Child*, after Ngotho has finished narrating the myth of divine patrimony of the land to the children (*Weep Not, child*, p.24), Njoroe's immediate reaction is a question which even embarrasses Ngotho: "where did the land go?" (*Weep Not, child*, p. 25). As for Boro, his anger can neither be contained nor appeased. He cannot fatten why the black man could have allowed his land to be taken while he sticks to a superstitious belief in a prophecy, and he confronts Ngotho, his father:

> How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?

He walked out without waiting for an answer.
As can be expected, such reactions which this myth invokes in the minds of the fictional characters may also be their effect on the reader since, as noted earlier, he has been encouraged to share the character's feelings and beliefs. The questions raised by Ngoroge and Boro are, therefore, among the major issues which Ngugi imports into the unsuspecting consciousness of the reader. With the sound knowledge of the people's history as contained in these myths and legends, the Kenyan audience becomes more sensitive to the deprivation meted out to them, for as Ime Ikiddeh points out in his book "Ngugi Wa Thiongo, The Novelist as Historian" in A Celebration of Black and African Writing; Ngugi's use of Gikuyu creation myths and prophetic legends in the novels is a part to leave no doubt regarding the timeless memory of the existence of, Gikuyu land and the Gikuyu people (Ikiddeh "Ngugi Wa Thiongo, The Novelist as Historian" in A Celebration of Black and African Writing p. 204). They, therefore, get convinced of the legitimacy of their cause when they ask for the return of their stolen land. They also fully grasp the meaning and extent of the damage and oppression which the white man's presence has meant for the history of their country.

The full knowledge of their situation dawns on Kenyans because their colonization and oppression has been predicted in the legend which appear to complement the creation myths in Ngugi's novels. They also find their roots in the oral traditions of Gikuyu land. Prominent among the legends is that of Mugo Wa Kibiro which Jomo
Kenyatta also records in Facing Mount Kenya. According to Kenyatta, Mugo was a great medicine man whose national duty was to foretell future events and to advise the nation how to prepare for what is in store. Mugo had then told the Gikuyu people,

that strangers would come to Gikuyu from out of the big water, the colour of their body would resemble that of a small light coloured frog which lives in water, their dress would resemble the wings of butterflies; that these strangers would carry magical sticks which would produce fire ... The great 'medicine man advised the people ... to be t carefu.l not to bring them (the strangers) too close to their homesteads, for these strangers are full of evil deeds and would not hesitate to covert the Gikuyu homestead and in the end would want to take everything from the Gikuyu. (Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya pp. 42 -43).

This prophecy of Mugo Wa Kibiro becomes a legend in the course of time because of the absence of written records, till it was fulfilled with the coming of the Europeans to Kenya. It is, however, significant to note that in invoking these legends, Ngugi hardly disguises them. This makes his fiction a mere extension of
Gikuyu history as they retell with a realist presentation of life and events nearly in
the manner of true historical records. The marriage of art and history affected
through these devices imbue his novels with a Gikuyu identity, and make them fully
acceptable to the people as if every detail were their authentic history. This is
because not only do the legends inform and explicate action in the novels, they also
ensure a true portrayal of the Gikuyu history. For instance, in presenting part of the
claims of disputing communities of Kameno and Mukuya in The River Between, the
narrator relates that it could also seem, by many who cared to count, that Kameno
threw up more heroes and leaders than any other ridge. Mugo Wa Kibiro, that great
Gikuyu seer of old had been born there. And he had grown up seeing visions of the
future and speaking them to the many people who wanted to see and here him. And
he still spoke aloud his message and cried:

'There shall come people with clothes like butterfly'.

These were white men (The River Between, p. 2).

Compared to Kenyatta's account, the above fictional recreation of the legend has the
potential of raising it to a more philosophical and universal level for the mere fact
that it has been fictionalized. This is because, as Aristotle noted in his book titled,
The Great Critics "Poetry is a more philosophical and higher thing than history: for
poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (Aristotle, The Great
Critics, p. 37). The implication of this in Ngugi's art is obvious. The fictional ridges
of Makuyu and Kameno can, for instance, stand for Gikuyu land; its division by the
natural force of the Honia River and can also symbolize the division of the Gikuyu country into two antagonistic groups - the Christianized and the traditionalists. They can as well symbolize any notion which disregards the prophecy or advice of its visionaries and gets caught up with the prophesied doom. It could, therefore, be seen that Ngugi’s use of these myths and legends is not only for aesthetic value. Their essence is present in concrete terms not only the events of a people’s history, but also some of the problems that afflicts mankind and which could be prevented if man were honest and rational. In more specific terms, Ngugi also alludes to these myths and legends in order to trace the genesis of the Kenyan problem and to justify the actions which black Kenyans take in order to liberate themselves and reclaim their land. He also uses it as a means of warning against the repetition of these mistakes that gave the country away to the white men. Among these is the refusal to obey their leaders (Mugo Wa Kibiro), for instance, who had then warned them to keep the white at bay.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the origin of the 'party' which is the main rallying point for action against white oppression is presented in an allusion to the prophetic legend to illustrate the claim that the obstinacy of the people contributed in no small measure to the European invasion of the country:

> Its (the party's) origins can, the people say, be -
> traced to the day the whitemen came to the country,
> clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic
witness that the whitman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar, his humility was touching. For a time people ignored the voice of the Gikuyu seer who once said: there shall come a people with clothes like the butterflies, they gave him, the stranger with a scalded skin, a place to erect a temporary shelter (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 9).

In this legend, Ngugi locates the people's tragic benevolence, and their refusal to listen to Mugo Wa Kibiro as the cause of their present predicament. Through this legend, Ngugi conveys to his Kenyan audience his warning against the ugly fate that awaits them if they also ignore him as they did Mugo Wa Kibiro." This fear is expressed in *Petals of Blood* where Waweru's father laments the people's dismissal of Mugo's prophecy which is presented in an allusion to the prophetic legend:

I have a meeting with the elders to discuss this thing prophesied long ago by the travelling seer -Mugo Wa Kibiro. We and our fathers used not to believe him when he told us about red foreigners and how indeed it happened. And now the red stranger had started taking our lands in Tigoni and other places

(*A Grain of Wheat*, p-89)

The author, Ngugi, seems to use this narrative technique to exhort Kenyans to guard against being beaten a second time, for if only their fore -fathers had listened to
Mugo the lands at Tigoni and other places might not have been taken away from them. In the same vain, if the present generation would listen to him, Ngugi, much of what they lost can still be restored.

Furthermore, Ngugi uses this device to authenticate the economic and cultural self-sufficiency of Kenya which was only disrupted by the white man. He also debunks the often vaunted altruistic civilizing mission; which was often given as the main reason behind the European invasion of parts of Africa. The legend of Ndemi, the founder of the town of Ilmorog, (*Petals of Blood* pp. 120-21), celebrates the wealth of the African people and the serenity of their environment prior to the colonial invasion. Ndemi had abandoned the wandering life of a herdsman and fashioned a tool with which he cut some of the trees and cleared the undergrowth. (Through him) Ilmorog forest became a series of tamed cows and goats ... and continued to prosper even after Ndemi, father of many sons and daughters and grand-children, had departed to the secret land of the kindly spirit:

... Here (at Ilmorog), the first European foreigner pitched his tent and sought supplies for his journey across the plains. See what naked creatures over market days have-brought from the land of the sea, they said, and gave him maize and beans, sweet potatoes and yams in exchange for calico and shiny beads. Later another one came with collar around
his neck and a Bible (Petals of Blood, p. 121).

There are also the legends of Waiyaki, Demi na Mathani, Wachiori (the witch), and Kaniri Jin (The River Between, p. 148) all of which help to sustain the narrative and authenticate the timeless existence of an organised and highly developed culture before the arrival of the white man.

Ngugi deliberately fictionalizes real historical heroes of the Mau Mau uprising, investing them with legendary qualities by making their exploits and personalities transcend historical reality. They hence assume legendary status and their actions become another version of the novel's legendary stories. Dedan Kimathi, a real historical leader of the Mau Mau war is fictionalized in this sense. The stories that are told about him by other characters in the novel makes him appear super-human. Karanga, for instance, tells of how he, Dedan Kimathi changed into a white police office and deceived a whole police garrison into replacing his old motor -bike for a new one, when in fact they had intensified their vigilance in order to catch him. As his listeners express doubt at the truth of this story, Karanga reaffirms in Weep Not, Child;

That's the point. Dedan can change himself into anything; a white man, a bird, or a tree. He can also turn himself into an aeroplane. He learnt all these things in the big war. (Weep Not, child, p. 18.)

Similarly, in A Grain of Wheat, there are stories of Harry Thuku (p.13) and Jomo Kenyatha (p.87) all of whom were real leaders of the Kenyan society at one time or
another and bond of unity between fact and fiction in Ngugi's art. This is because their activities are interwoven with those of equally daring fictional characters like Kihika in *A Grain of Wheat*, and Ole Masai in *Petals of Blood*, and presented as one story. Through their extraordinary feats and exemplary behavior, these heroes inspire their fellow fictional characters as much as they do the reader. By presenting their efforts as patriots in such legitimate cause, Ngugi idolises them as the doyens of the liberation struggle, and makes the readers admire not only their dedication and invincibility, but also the cause for which they stand.

By the use of these myths and legends, therefore, and their sequential presentation in his novels -which tends to record the stages of Kenyan's gradual colonization and alienation from their ancestral lands .Ngugi hopes to elicit the sympathy of his readers for the black man's experience in that country.

This is mainly achieved by the exposition of the people's right of ownership in the land, and their innocence regarding the wave of the colonial invasion and brutality perpetrated by the settlers. He also castigates the white man for his ingratitude and covetousness in ensconcing himself in Kenya at the detriment of the people, in his abuse of the temporary welcome accorded him. These devices also help to enlist the reader's support for the black man in his efforts to reclaim what was his.

Another device through which Ngugi arouses patriotic feelings in his Kenyan reader is the use of allusions. This device can be defined as a reference to an event,
phenomena, idea or personality in history or in contemporary life made to show its similarity or relevance to the issue under discussion. He alludes to historical facts and figures but the most recurrent in his novels are the Biblical allusions which are wide ranging, and which is one of the major devices common in all his novels.

Writing on Ngugi's possible enchantment with this device, in a book titled; *Naugi Wa Thiongo: An Exploration into His Writings*, Cook and Okeninkpe observed that;

> The Gikuyu society is somehow lacking in mythological background and the Bible conveniently provides one with a relevant framework. For instance, the idea of destiny with regard to the Israelites and their struggle against slavery, the Gikuyu people have had similar experiences.

Besides, Biblical mythology is well known and stands the advantage of being easily understood by most audience. (Cook and Okenimkpe. *Naugi Wa Thiongo: An Exploration into His Writings*, p. 2).

Through a close reading of Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* many may cast doubts over the authenticity of the first statement in the above assertion. In a book titled *Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, G.D. Killam makes a supportive claims for the rest when he notes that
For Ngugi the passage from the Bible has an association with the situation in Kenya in which sacrifice is called for and in which assurance of the legitimacy of the sacrifices made is needed (Killam, *Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, p. 59).

From indications, therefore, the allusions to Christian mythology and the Biblical stories of the Israelites, especially their sojourn in, and flight from Egypt, are employed to portray and explain similarities between the Kenyan people's search for social salvation from their colonial masters, and the plight of the Israelites under Egyptian bondage. In a book titled "Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*" African Literature Today No 10, Govind Sharma drives home his point when he sees parallels projected in the journey of the Israelites (the Gikuyu people) from Egypt (the state of servitude) to Canaan (the state of freedom) (Sharma "Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in A Grain of Wheat" African Literature Today p. 171).

Moreover, since Ngugi himself believes that Kenyan people find that heir fears are confirmed in the Bible, Biblical allusions become the device with which he strikes the chords of their innermost feelings -equating their sufferings to those of the Israelites and strengthening their belief in the justice of their cause in their bid to regain what the settler has taken from them. His Kenyan audience see themselves and their traditions presented in identifiable terms in *Weep Not, Child* where
Ngoroge (seeing himself as a Kenyan) equates other fictional characters' identities and positions, to these of the Biblical Israelites. As the narrator relates in *Weep Not, Child*:

It did not make much difference that he, Njoroge, had come to identify Gikuyu with Adam and Munbi with Eve ... there was growing up in his heart a feeling that the Gikuku people, whose land had been taken by white men, were no other than the children of Israel about whom he read in the Bible. This explains his brother's remark that Jomo was the Black Moses (*Weep Not, Child*, p. 49).

Here, Njoroge's ready appropriation of the identity of the Israelites to his people further shows Ngugi's subtle use of sheer narrative expediency to arouse patriotic zeal in his Kenyan audience. His experiment with this device further indicates his assumption of an articulator of the Kenyan nationalist sentiments through his art, for the Biblical allusions now reveal an attempt to turn the white man's own religion against him by using same to substantiate the prevalent colonial atmosphere and also to castigate the white man. This is the more reason Ngugi 'portrays the white men as "Pharaoh" whose colonizing drive transcends reasonable bounds, and whose obstinacy and wickedness are only comparable to the Biblical allusions as narrative strategy has the effect of enlisting the reader's sympathy especially if he is a
Christian, and also strengthen his identification with the characters' plight. The Christian reader would, for instance, be moved to pity to find such parallels between the Biblical Exodus of the Israelites, and the plight of the Kenyan people when according to the narrator in *A Grain of Wheat*;

They refused to eat the good things of Pharaoh, instead they chose to cut grass and make bricks with the other children ...in Herry Thuku people saw a man with God's message; go unto Pharaoh and say unto him: let my people go; let my people go. And the people swore they would follow Harry through the desert. They would tighten their belts around their waist, ready to endure thirst and hunger, tears and blood until they set foot on Canaan's shore (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 13).

This oppression depicted above is intensified by the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya. By describing the Mau Mau War, the taking of the oaths of allegiance, and the refusal to &-operate in any way with the white coloniser, Ngugi portrays the Kenyan people as living up to their words as depicted in the above except. In this way, the sympathy elicited in the minds of the Christian readers becomes more strengthened since theirs is a just cause, and since God Himself is reported to have identified and liberated the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage. The arousing of this sense of identification in the mind of the reader is Ngugi's aim
in his employment of the Biblical allusions. In the first motto of A Grain of Wheat, for instance, Ngugi invokes the Biblical passage of 1st Corinthians Chapter 15, verse 36.

\[
\text{Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened,}
\]
\[
\text{except it die. And that which thou sowest not that}
\]
\[
\text{body shall be, but bear grain, it may chance of ’}
\]
\[
\text{wheat, or of some other grain (A Grain of Wheat , p. 1).}
\]

This passage expresses in concrete terms, Ngugi's call for sacrifice which is demanded by the legitimacy of the people's cause and which is portrayed as their only way to salvation. Through this device, therefore, the reader is able to imagine the depth of the people's plight and hence identify with their efforts towards self-determination. Through it, Ngugi also eulogises the Mau Mau uprising by equating it with the Biblical exodus of the Israelites.

Moreover Ngugi's treatment of the Biblical allusions also reveals the ambivalence inherent in the white man's practice of his religion. It is a contradiction in terms, for instance, to preach the equality of peoples but practice the subjugation of the other race. This is one of these oddities which Ngugi will never entertain. As he is quoted by Ime Ikiddeh in a book titled Introduction to Homecoming:

\[
\text{I say contradiction because Christianity, whose basic}
\]
\[
\text{doctrine was love and equality between man, was}
\]
an integral part of that social force -colonialism -

which in Kenya was built on the inequality and

hatred between man and the consequent subjugation

of the black race by the white race (Ikiddeh, *Introduction to Homecoming*, p. 31).

Since the white man is hypocritical to his faith, Ngugi sees no reason in the black man embracing this religion which serves as the white man's instrument for the perpetual subjugation of the black race. This makes Ngugi employ the Biblical allusions as an instrument of satire. In *The River Between*, the narrator's satirical voice mocks Joshua when he tries to justify the disowning of his daughter by suggesting a parallel between Muthoni's rebellion and the Biblical story of Genesis Chapter 9: 15 -16, which tells how Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God. As Joshua presents it,

Muthoni had turned her head and longed for the
cursed land. Lot's wife had done the same thing and
she had been turned to a stone, a rock of salt, to be
forever a warning to others (*The River Between* ,pp. 53 -54).

Here, Joshua's reason for abandoning his daughter to death is portrayed %s having stemmed from fanaticism. He is satirized for his wickedness, and also for his failure to imitate the forgiving attitude of Christ which ought to be a fundamental principle of his faith. The same satiric whip also descends on Rev. Jerrod in Petals of Blood
when he refuses to provide assistance to a dying child but merely dismisses the
group of famished callers after reading the Biblical story of Peter and the Lameman
(Acts of Apostles 3: 1-6) to them. Jerrod tells them:

As for the child who is ill ... I have already offered
prayer for him. Go ye now in peace and trust in the

The author presents this child as a 'lame' who needs help and Rev. Jerrod's faith and
priesthood as hypocritical and, therefore, useless. Rev. Jerrod fails to appreciate that
even Peter, to whom he alludes, had cured the lame man, thereby giving him 'all he
had'. Through this medium, therefore, the author satirizes the 'Joshuas' and 'Jerrods'
of this world who profess Christianity only on their lips but turn dubious in the
events where they should prove their faith. He also seems to suggest 'that
Christianity inculcates in its Africa adherents, a shallowness of mind. that makes
them lose their rationality and the characteristic commitment which the African
shows to the welfare of his community. This explains why his 'good' African
Child, Rev. Jackson Kigondu in A Grain of Wheat, Munira in Petals of Blood and
the good servant in Devil on the Cross all possesses that glib and treacherous
character which never fosters the welfare of their communities. In contrast, those
who rebel against the Christian faith like Muthoni in The River Between, Kihika in A
Grain of Wheat and the 'bad' servant in Devil on the Cross, often possesses sterling qualities that contribute so much to the welfare of others.

The Biblical allusions are, therefore, used as a two dimensional device. One is to justify the actions of a people who found themselves in an oppressive position similar to that of the Israelites, and who had to fight back in order to liberate themselves. The other is to castigate a faith that is founded on hypocrisy, 'and which is used as an instruction of intimidation and colonization of other people. in her comment in African Literature Today Vol. 5, in a section entitled "Religion and Life in James Ngugi's The River Between", Lloyd Williams notes this point in respect of Ngugi's consistent statement on life and religion when he observes that;

He (Ngugi) knows that religion can be meaningful

only if it relates to them (Keyansl' in their daily lives,
only if it arises out of the important aspects of their
past and speaks directly to their experiences in the
present. A religion which only speaks of ideals and
moral truths without touching on the concrete
situation of man in his every day life can give to man
nothing but emptiness (Williams, African Literature Today Vol. 5, p. 54).

Ngugi himself, has also stated this in several of his fictional and critical writings. In The River Between, for instance, the .sentiment is clearly articulated in Waiyaki's
musings in almost identical terms with that of Williams. As Waiyaki perceives; a religion that took no account of people's way of life, a religion that did not recognize spots for beauty and truth in their way of life, was useless. It would not satisfy. It would not be a living experience, a source of life and vitality. This position may well be a reason for Ngugi's use of the Biblical allusions as a satiric weapon against the Christian religion and its white propagators. As far as he is concerned, Christianity is the white man's instrument of "pacification" with which he intimidates and exploits his unsuspecting victims. After all, is it not the same instrument that ignites sharp disagreements, bitter quarrels and subsequent division among erstwhile peaceful African societies an example of which Chinua Achebe shows us in Umuofia, *Things Fall Apart*. The Biblical allusions in the latter's novel tend to underscore this inherent exploitative philosophy of the white man.

Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross* substitutes the 'rich man' with the 'white master', and the kingdom of God' with the Kingdom of the 'Earthly Wiles'. The good 'servants' he recreated as black, capitalists but the 'bad' one who buries the rich man's money he glorifies as a patriot. This is because that servant rejects the continued exploitation of his country and identifies his 'master' as imperialist and a cruel master who reaps where he has never sown. (*Devil on the Cross* p. 48). He also denounces the white imperialist in the strongest of terms, asserting his liberation with an unequivocal decision that, "I will be slave no more" (*Devil on the Cross* p.58). Since Ngugi wants to utilize this parable of the talents to effect his revelation of the white man's
exploitation of the Blacks, and in order to show that the whites justify this exploitation through the doctrines of the Christian religion, he presents the 'master's has response in identical terms with that of the Biblical parable.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi asserts;

> the master looked at him with much bitterness in his eyes, with much pain in his heart. Then he spoke to him, you bad, unfaithful and lazy servant, member of a rebellious clan ... Do you know how it hurts me to find that you buried my capital in a grave, like a corpse? And who has revealed the secret of my name ...No, you black people are incapable of such rebellious thought ...you must, therefore, have been misled by communists ... ( *Devil on the Cross*, p. 85).

The important effect of the above use of the Christian parable is the insight which one begins to develop into the situation. If, for instance, the maximization of profit means cheating and exploiting of others -as could be read into the situation -where then is the usefulness of such enterprise to the oppressed? If the maximization of the capital provided by the whit man must entail the exploitation of the black man, why must the black man continue to desire this capital. This analogy between the Christian religion and exploitative capitalism is, therefore, made to further castigate a religion which the author had earlier denounced. According to Ime Ikiddeh in a
book titled Introduction to Homecoming he states that to Ngugi's understanding, colonization and capitalism are "twin brothers" and Christianity "their more sly but attractive first cousins ...(p. xii). He sees in the three unholy combination of destructive forces that have hindered the emancipation of the Africans. Through the use of Biblical allusions, Ngugi also expands the reader's knowledge by providing him with parallels in similar situations, though it could not be so to the non-Christian reader who may not appreciate these parallels. It could also sow the seed of civil revolt, for clearly, the author, like his characters -Waiyaki, Boro, Kihika, Karega and Waringa -hopes to effect a revolution that will eventually over-throw exploitation.

Furthermore, the author's quotation of Biblical verse and sentences, in some cases, and his echoes, of Biblical language in others, -The River Between, (p. 30), Weep Not. Child (p. 90) invest his novels with a parallel which Ime Ikiddeh in a book titled Introduction to Weep Not Child, equates with "the same kind of purity and unadorned beauty", as that of the Bible (p. xii). This is also point of contact with Bunyan who is similarly inspired.

It is evident in reading Ngugi's novels that his allusion to historical facts and figures also sharpens the reader's perception of the Kenyan experience, and gets him involved, imaginatively, with the plight of the characters. In most of his novels, he introduces the reader to the main conflict by alluding to one historical fact or the
other. In *Weep Not. Child*, for instance, the narrator alludes to the land problem in Kenya which is one of the novel's major source of conflict:

> You could tell the land of black people because it was red, rough and sickly, and lacerated into small stripes while the land of the white settler was green and was not lacerated into small stripes (*Weep Not. Child*, p.7).

In *A Grain of Wheat*, this is even more dramatic.

> One night it happened. Jomo Kenyatta and other leaders of the land were rounded up, Governor Baring had declared a state of Emergency over Kenya (*A Grain of Wheat*, p. 87).

In yet another instance, in *Petals of Blood*, the narrator alludes to some historical personalities while trying to explain Abdulla's elusive feeling which arises out of his jealousy for Wanja's lovers.

> He was a dog panting ... now yapping at the call of the master. No. He was not a dog. he was Mobutu being embraced by Nixion, and looked so happy on his mission of seeking aid, while Nixon made faces at American businessmen and paratroopers to hurry
up and clear oil, gold and copper and uranium from Zarie. He was Amin being received by the Queen after overthrowing Obote... *(Petals of Blood*, p. 315).

Here, the individuals alluded to existed in history and their actions (in satiric rendition) are historical. Therefore, while contributing to the success of Ngugi's stories, the use of historical allusion enhances a thorough re-examination of the events of history (in Kenya in particular, and African in general), and also elevates these events to an international scope. Since the facts and figures alluded to have been fictionalized in their contents, they become satirical. The result then are works of art which penetrate climes and cultures with their eternal message: let my people go, let my people go.

The central or main value of the biblical allusions, is that just as the major driving force for the Israelites was the longing and search for the promised land, the Kenyan people's driving force and source of endurance was the desire and longing to repossess the land which was alienated from them. They are captives in their own land and for them freedom from captivity will only have meaning if the land is freed from foreign captivity.

Ngugi also uses a lot of symbols in his novels. Lee T. Leomon in a book titled A Glossary for the Study of English has observed that:

Although there is much controversy over the
definition of symbol, most generally a symbol is merely a thing that stands for something else ...

Many literary critics reserve the term for a complex semantic relationship in which things and the qualities symbolised can be apprehended only through the symbol; in this sense, the meaning of a symbol can be approximately understood but never completely translated. (Leomon, A Glossary for the Study of English, p. 72).

This definition of Lemon's throws light on that of Wallek and Warren in a book titled Theory of Literature in which they describe symbols as "something calculated and willed, a deliberate mantel translation of concepts into illustrative, pedagogic seasons terms". For the purpose of this research, a symbol should be seen as a thing or an image which is invoked to represent another for clarity of expression, deeper meaning, and better aesthetic appeal.

Ngugi is one of those African Writers who utilizes a lot of symbols as recurrent device in their works. In all his novels, symbols abound which convey the unstable ideas and images which ought to be read into the expression so as to achieve a deeper understanding. Eustace Palmier in a book titled An Introduction to the African Novel has noted that in The River Between "the most obvious is the figure of sleeping lions, the ridges Makuyu and Kameno facing each other antagonistically and representing the divisions in Waiyaki's society. (The River Between, p-12). He
also noted in the book that "the river Honia functions on a symbolic level" but laments that since it is "the river of life, it should have been a life giving force rather than the symbol of division of keeping the two ridges apart" (The River Between, p-12). However, Aminu Abdullahi in a book titled African Writers Talking, quotes Ngugi as saying that, "The River Between can be a factor which brings people together as well as being a factor of separation (The River Between, p.125). It does these, in the first instance, by serving the sacred duty of maintaining the purity of the tribe through the circumcision rites that are performed right at its banks and washed with its water, and secondly; by representing the boundary in the ideological differences between traditional adherents and those who have welcomed the European -Christian vision. In this way, the river assumes any of the alternative symbols which one may read into it. This multi-dimensional nature of the symbols is characteristic of Ngugi since most symbols in his novels conjure up many ideas some of which oppose or contradict one another.

The "rain symbol is among those that assume such multiplicating implications, each with its diverse and often contradictory interpretation. In The River Between, for instance, rain is portrayed as a corrosive agent, in fact, the one element that acts like the whit man in robbing Africans of their land. Here Waiyaki observes it carrying away the soil. Corroding, eating away the earth. Stealing the land (The River Between, p-65).
Here, rain is brought into the same symbolic level as the whit man who is the only enemy of the people capable of violating their right of patrimonial inheritance with impunity. This symbol of rain as a destructive force is further stressed by Ngugi. Rungei wake up on the independence day only to discover that Crops. on the valley slopes were badly damaged. Running water had grooved trenches that now zigzagged all along and bean crops lay everywhere on the valley floor. The leaves of maize plants still standing were lacerated into numerous shreds (*The River Between*, p-I78).

The above action of rain is symbolic of the physical and psychological disposition of Kenyans on the eve of independence. It is true that independence is now a reality but Kenyan Africans will never forget the sufferings that attended their colonial experience, especially those of the Emergency period, and the Mau Mau war which left them physically and morally battered. Those of them who survived those waves of violence surely caught the pathetic figures of maize plants whose leaves were lacerated into numerous shreds.

The rain could also symbolize peace, luxuriance and triumph. In *Weep Not, Child*, for instance, rain ushers in a ray of hope, of victory and triumph for the Africans of Kenya who were going to stand trial the next day. As the narrator relates:

> Much rain fell at Kipanga and the country around on the eve of the judgment day. People were happy in
all the land. The rain was a good omen. Black folk
were on trial (Weep Not, Child, p. 72).

This view of rain as a symbol of victory and black solidarity is also carried into A
Grain of Wheat where the black folk now explain why they see it as a good omen:

people said the falling water was a blessing for
the "blacks" had won freedom. Murungu on high
never slept; he always let his tears fall to this our
land from Agu and Agu ... it had rained the day
Kenyatta returned home from England, it had also
rained the day Kenyatta returned to Gatundu from
Moralal (A Grain of Wheat, p. 155).

As could be seen in the above excepts, rain assumes a symbol of triumph for the
black man, an indication that nature; itself, is in sympathy with the plight of the
Kenyans, and supports their , dogged efforts at self-determination. There is also the
idea of rain as a symbol of divine succor as seen in Petals of Blood where Palmer in
African Literature Today, volume 10, stated that revival is suggested by means of
rain symbolism, the rain which falls immediately after the March to the city being in
the elders' opinion, God's response to their sacrifice (Palmer. African Literature
Today, volume10,p157).

As could be observed in his treatment of the river and rain symbols, Ngugi
sometimes uses one particular element in the signification of two opposing ideas.
His use of vegetation symbol in *Petals of Blood* is another case in point. Eustace Palmer drives home the point when he observes of the novel that:

> One dominant symbol cluster relates to flowers and other forms of vegetation. At times these suggest regeneration, fecundity, and luxuriance; but more often ... they suggest destruction, corruption, evil, the unnatural and death (Palmer, *African Literature Today*, volume10,p157).

However, this use of same symbols in the elucidation of two opposing ideas could lead to ambiguities, since some readers may not always be able to deduce the appropriate interpretations. Though the process of arriving at a correct interpretation becomes more exacting to the reader, such effort is not quite useless since this makes for a deeper understanding when eventually accomplished. Ngugi is, however, less evasive in his treatments of certain symbolic moment hence the reader captures their full import and significance with less difficulty. For instance, the drinking of the local brew of the Thengeta spirit and the subsequent self-awareness that occurred in Africa (*Petals of Blood* pp.232 -38) is symbolic of the beginning of a new wave of self-consciousness which leads Ngugi’s black characters into personal search for the dismantling of capitalism, economic exploitation and imperialism. Demonstrating the new self-consciousness towards the close of the novel, Nyakinyua fights those forces till her death, Abdulla and Karega fight on till they are detained, and Warringa, the indomitable heroine of *Devil on the Cross*
shoots the rich old man of Ngorika, the capitalist exploiter of the people. As Cook
and Okenimkpe in a book titled *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*
interpret this events, the central act in the finale of *Devil on the Cross* is Waringa's
assassination of the rich old man. In this symbolic movement, the two modes of the
novel meet. By definition, this is not to be seen as

*The River Between* portrays isolate action, but a
preliminary more towards the revolutionary retribution
which must eventually be melted out to the oppressors
of Kenyan Africans, all exploited people everywhere
(Cook and Okenimkpe, *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: An
Exploration of His Writings*, p. 195).

The effect of the author's use of symbols is the wide range of associations which
they open the novels to. There is also that dexterity with which they reveal
otherwise hidden message which, in themselves, are also expressive of the author's
thematic vision. Ngugi's use of symbols also invigorates the active reader by posing
little challenges of interpretation, the unraveling of which makes him enjoy the
novels as mature works of art. The use of symbols also makes for a compactness of
structure as they save the author from verbosity.

On a psychological level, Ngugi's use of symbols also enables the reader to retain
some mental images of some of the actions of the novel since they tend to engrave
these on the reader's memory. In this way, the soul-stirring associations which come
from his mental perceptions of these stories become a chain of experiences which
could play significant role since the reader's subsequent appreciation of other literary works.

Finally, the title of the novels are also symbolic. *Weep Not, Child* symbolizes the disillusionment which the hero, Njoroge, suffers as a result of the imperialist, his dreams are frustrated. *The River Between* symbolizes the lack of unity between the Nakuyu and Kameno tribes. *A Grain of Wheat* symbolizes the sacrifice that is needed in order to deal with the "problems of land alienation in Kenya. It symbolizes the sacrifice Kihika make for the redemption of his people. Kihika is the seed which must die before it can come back to life for a grain must die before it can germinate into a new life. *Petals of Blood* deals with the corruption of the pure and traditional life of old Ilmorog. *Petals of Blood* is set in the small remote village of Ilmorog, which serves for Ngugi as a metaphor for development throughout Kenya in the post colonial era. The worm on the petal symbolizes exploitative nature of capitalism and imperialism and it is an external force or factor just as capitalism is alien to the traditional values of the people of Kenya. *Devil on the Cross* symbolizes the devilish practices of imperialists in Kenya. Jomo Kenyatta stands for the saviour or Black Messiah that will deliver his people from bondage. Njoroge also creates a symbolic role for himself when he feels that like Jomo and Moses, he would lead his people out of bondage. The small village of Ngotho is a miniature representation of Kenya during the period of Emergency. As such, its experiences and principal characters are representative of those of a large group. The scene where Mr.
Howlands threatens to castrate Njoroge as he had done his father, Ngotho, shows the European desire to deny the Africans their rights and manhood.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the race on Uhuru day is not just a way of finding out who wins Mumbi over but to find out who has been the most dedicated and steadfast in the struggle for independence. Neither Gikonyo nor Karanja wins the race because each has, in one way or the other betrayed the national cause. The person who wins is General R., running with his characteristic coolness and deliberation, the man who has perserved with unflinching single mindedness. The stool with a pregnant woman which Gikonyo will carve for Mumbi signifies the hope for the birth of a new and better Kenya in future. In *A Grain of Wheat*, water is an important symbol. People who are guilty of certain offences use water as means of making reparation. It is a kind of baptism through which one attains a new life. Mumbi has the urge to surrender herself to the pouring rain, Karanja is drenched in the rain; Mugo is beaten by the rain. Schools in all the novels of Ngugi stand for the black man's thirst for knowledge and Kenyans' rejection of the imperialists attempt to impose their alien culture on them. The school buildings hurriedly and haphazardly erected stand for the people's thirst for the white man's secret.

Another device Ngugi uses in his novels is motif. The dominant motifs that run through Ngugi's novels is the messianic or saviour and land motifs. In each novel the bone of contention is the people's lands which have been taken by first the white colonizers and then the black imperialist. The struggle centres around how to get the
land back because to the Kenyans, loss of land is equated with loss of manhood. A man is worthless without a piece of land.

The messianic motif is also common to the five novels. In *Weep, Not, Child*, Jomo Kenyatta is the 'Black Moses'. Just as Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, he will deliver his people from the hands of the imperialists. The young Njorogo envisions himself as Jomo’s successor as he feels that education will serve as a weapon for this mission. Ngotho believes in an age old prophecy of a saviour that will come to recover the lost land from the colonialist.

In *The River Between*, Chege feels that the old prophecy can only be fulfilled by a member of his family. He sees his son Waiyaki, as a messiah that will deliver his people from bondage. He sends him to school in the belief that the white man can only be fought with his own weapon. Although Chege urges this messianic role on Waiyaki, it is observed that Waiyaki does not know the exact role he is supposed to play:

They called him a saviour. His own father talked of a Messiah to come. Who was the Messiah coming to save? From what? And where would he lead the people? Although Waiyaki did not stop to get clear answers to those questions, he increasingly saw himself as the one who would lead the tribe to the light. Both Njoroge and Waiyaki cannot actually define their roles (*The River Between*, p-119).
In *A Grain of Wheat*, Kihika exhibited the same Messianic vision as Waiyaki and Njoroge. But, unlike the two, he actually assumes his role of delivering his people from bondage. He has a clear vision of the role he is expected to play. The introvert, Mugo, sometimes nurses the secret feeling that he may have been destined to be the people's saviour. In *Petals of Blood*, Karega, Wanja Abudulla, and to some extent, Munira assume the roles of Messiah as they do all within their power to salvage their people from their alienating circumstances.

The journey motif is also presented in this novel. Each of the major characters is a visitor to Ilmorog. Each comes to search for happiness and self-fulfilment. Ironically, they meet a worse fate and seek ways of getting out of the mess which has enveloped them.

By the time *Matigari* was written the situation was very different. Ngugi was by then a radical Marxist writing in the context of post-independence betrayal and within a repressive state whose official discourses have denied Mau-Mau. As early as 1968, President Kenyatta had said that, “Mau-Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again” (Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p-189). Ngugi’s subsequent writing can be seen as an attempt to work against this statement—to remember Mau Mau. There are intriguing problematics in all this. The Gikuyu elite’s class betrayal left the ‘tribe’ fractured and its codes of seeing cracked and abused. Interestingly, this same Gikuyu hegemony, in a sense enables
Ngugi to portray Gikuyu symbols as a general nationalism. A more completely hegemonic social set of codes and values means that dissent must be articulated within those codes, precisely because other codes are rendered inactive or unavailable. This hegemonic manipulation of signs fosters the reproduction of dominant ideologies and dominant power structures, since it is difficult to formulate radical dissent within discourses which function to perpetuate existing power relations. Conversely, incomplete hegemony allows for a wider circulation of different and more radically oppositional codes. This notion of code-manipulation is complicated and over-determined in *Matigari*, which in many ways is the most self-conscious encoding of Christian and Biblical allusions in any of Ngugi’s novels, and is more thoroughgoing, in this respect, than *The River Between*. There are any number of examples: the sharing of food in prison clearly parallels Christ’s Last Supper; Guthera’s selfless devotion after conversion evokes Jesus and Mary Magdalene; Matigari is at times seen as a figure of the Second Coming and, like Christ in the desert, he has the ability to last a long time without food and water. These references are used allegorically and politically; Christian allusions are always placed within a wider social context, and indeed, in *Matigari*, actual church leaders are mocked and satirized.

There are two main reasons, determined by political context and the context of production, for this extensive use of Christian references. One is Ngugi’s decision to write the novel in Gikuyu (and then to have it translated into English) as “a
parabolic narrative . . . supposed to allow Gikuyu readers to orient themselves in the familiar tradition of orality and the Bible” (Gikandi, p-165). Gikandi similarly states that around 1963 “Matigari” became “a signifier of Mau-Mau and function(s), on a higher discursive level, as a trope mediating the colonial past and the post colonial moment” (Gikandi, p -161). Matigari, then, becomes a way of talking about Mau-Mau in a context where it is being denied; language and religious discourse are thus deployed as weapons in hegemonic engagements. This strategy is linked to the second main reason for the presence of Christian and Biblical references. David Maughan Brown persuasively argues that it does not imply a re-conversion on Ngugi’s part, but instead shows a belief that liberation theology offers an ideological framework in which the rights of the dispossessed are foremost, and that it is also linked to Christian churches in Kenya being more vocal throughout the 1980s in their criticism of the government (Brown, “Rehabilitation” pp-173–80).

Matigari, set in the period of postcolonialism, frequently projects the action back to the Mau-Mau struggle. The main character is constructed outside of time, at once being a person within history, but also straddling history, time, and myth so as to confuse the distinctions between them. His name is not revealed until well into the novel, and this initial namelessness suggests that he in a sense symbolizes everybody, an idea Ngugi develops through the suggestion that roles are interchangeable:
But at the same time all wondered: who really was Matigari ma Njiruungi? A patriot? Angel Gabriel? Jesus Christ? Was he a human being or a spirit? A true or false prophet? A saviour or simply a lunatic? Was Matigari a man or a woman? A child or an adult? Or was he only an idea, an image, in people’s minds? Who was he? (Matigari:p-158)

Both Matigari and Guthera tell their stories several times in the third person so that the personal experience is distanced through the manner of its being told, but at the same time the personal is dispersed into inter subjectivity, as if the story could be that of anyone and, in many ways, is everyone’s. A novel firmly set within post colonialism nevertheless deals with the battle between colonizer and colonized, a battle which, in this novel, is personalized through the characters of Matigari and Settler Williams. The struggle between the two characters winds its way through the text, and its narrative has the sensation of displacement in that the battle is a battle between two single protagonists rather than two communities. This structure lends the battle a mythical and legendary texture, which effectively projects it outside of history.

The above comments should in no way be seen as an ideology critique of Ngugi’s novel, although the way the novel has been described might suggest that he has somehow turned full circle by suddenly projecting and displacing history onto myth. Rather, the novel recovers and retraces history, but it does so by displacing it
initially, and allegory has an important function in this double articulation of history both as material struggle and as myth. The struggle between Matigari and Settler Williams is displayed in terms that have the earmarks of Frantz Fanon’s view that the colonized must replace the colonizer rather than come to some agreement, a view echoed by Matigari’s statement

“He and I cannot share the same roof” (Matigari, p-144).

The stylized struggle is summed up:

Take me, for example. Settler Williams and I spent many years in those mountains you see over there, hunting one another down through groves, caves, rivers, ditches, plains, everywhere. I would sometimes catch sight of him in the distance, but by the time I was ready to fire, he had disappeared in the bush, and he would be swallowed by the darkness of the forest.

At other times he would push me into a corner, but by the time he fired, I had already ducked. I would roll on the ground, crawl on my belly, and I would thus slip through his fingers. And so, day after day, week after week, month after month, many years rolled past. Neither of us was prepared to surrender. Sometimes I would hit him and think that I had provided him with a ticket to hell. But just as I was about to come out singing songs of victory, news would reach me that he had been spotted elsewhere, searching to destroy me. On other occasions his bullets would catch me. I would crawl, limp and hide in caves to recuperate, waiting for my bones to mend. (Matigari:pp-20–21)

The original dispute is based on land issues after Settler Williams takes over the house Matigari has built and lived in with his family. William’s black servant, John
Boy, thwarts Matigari’s first attack on Williams. Outnumbered, Matigari escapes to the mountains, pursued by Settler Williams. The original confrontation takes place in ‘real’ time while the subsequent battles and struggles seem to take place in mythical, displaced time. The stylized struggle between the two is further realized in the confrontation between Matigari and the sons of those who have thwarted him for so long. Matigari articulates the struggle in emblematic terms by referring to “the black-man-who-produces” and “the white-man-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed” (Matigari:p-46).

During this confrontation John Boy’s son says that he never fully knew his father’s fate, a point emphasized by the minister later:

Major Howard Williams and John Boy went to fight against terrorists during the war for independence—well, let’s call it that for lack of a better phrase. It is believed that they died fighting. They were awarded medals in absentia for their courage and selflessness. (Matigari:pp-123–24)

The sense of displacement that stems from a lack of closure again situates them out of time, out of history. These comments on the presentation of struggle in the novel can be more fully stated by reference to the passage quoted above. The struggle here is displaced more literally by being located in another place—“those mountains you see over there”—this sense of distance acts as an allegory for the way the Mau- Mau struggle can seem to be far in the past when viewed from the political morass of postcolonial Kenya. The geography beyond the city acts as a site where a now
displaced history took place. Nevertheless, narrative stylistics both displaces history, and denies that its object is history insofar as it imbues history with the sense of something of which is past and finished, whose legacy is an eternal “news would reach me that he had been spotted elsewhere” (Matigari, p-124). This statement contributes a sense that distant history is still relevant, that there is continuity, and that perhaps history is there to be recovered. As is the case so often in Ngugi’s writings, dissent is formulated through the display of disconnectedness, only to reveal links that are then recovered as available and real. Matigari personifies and carries the history of the nation within his own person: he claims, “I am as old as this country” (Matigari , p-112). The novel returns to this idea more obliquely through the narrator’s statement that “His words seemed to remind them of things long forgotten, carrying them back to dreams they had long before” (Matigari , p-56). It has already been mentioned that the novel contains elements of the transference of subjectivity in which seemingly individual qualities are shared in a process that displaces individual subjectivity, and that this process is especially located within the figure of Matigari. More specifically, Matigari seems to represent everyone and everything, including the Mau-Mau struggle—he embodies it and is the retainer of its memory. A rift appears within the two elements when Matigari-as-everyone is not recognized and appears to the people as a stranger. When his fame grows he visits disparate groups to ask where he may discover ‘Truth and Justice,’ but these groups, enthralled with animated discussions of Matigari, neither recognize him, nor what he stands for. A group mythologizing Matigari’s encounter
with some children, claim that the stones thrown at him turned into doves, “fell silent and just stared at the stranger as if he had struck the wrong chord of a popular melody” (Matigari,p-73).

Earlier, Matigari is portrayed as not having complete knowledge of the present ‘real time’ situation:

“This man has indeed spent a long time in the forest, she thought to herself. He should first go home and sleep off the fatigue of many years. Who but a stranger would not know that the police were always fighting against students and workers?” (Matigari:p-40).

There is a rift, therefore, between Matigari as the embodiment of everyone, and Matigari as the embodiment of the memory of Mau-Mau, a rift which allegorizes the fracture between past and present at a time when the hopes of independence dissolve in the face of the postcolonial state. The representative of this repressive and authoritarian regime is linked to language usage and control. Matigari asks the whereabouts of truth and justice within a song or a poem, but is merely told, by the Minister for Truth and Justice, to stop speaking in parables (Matigari,p-113). At an earlier point the Minister promises to speak “the plain truth” (Matigari,p-101), and his discomfort with Matigari’s parable suggests a suspicion of metaphor and allegory, for it is there that the Other in the form of the plurality of language is articulated. At the same time, the Minister’s language is politically all-powerful, as his decrees become law immediately they are voiced, “His decision is just and true. It is now law” (Matigari,p-118).
Realism is an appropriate form for those in power for it maintains, as self-contained and self-evident, that there is no other. Other stylistic forms, such as metaphor and allegory, then, are the almost natural forms of expression of anti-hegemonic forces as they attempt to realize the potential for another way of seeing. Writing of postcolonial allegory generally, Stephen Slemon argues that:

Such acts of post-colonial literary resistance function counter discursively because they ‘read’ the dominant colonialist discursive system as a whole in its possibilities and operations and force that discourses’ synchronic or unitary account of the cultural situation toward the movement of the diachronic. (Slemon, Stephen. “Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-colonial Writing.” Kunapipi:p-3)

Arguably, this is why allegory comes to be the dominant form of expression in Ngugi’s later novels. Allegory appears to be contradictory, for at the same time as its impulses are plural or at least double, and it displays in its mechanics more than one way of articulating something, its impulse is also to constrict and work towards closure as it takes over its object, assuming a direct one-to-one reference between its machinery of expression and its object. The difference, then, is that realism does not acknowledge the mediation of language while allegory doubles its object by acknowledging different expressions of it through language, while still taking over that object. This move towards closure and totality in allegory is as important for the anti-hegemonic project as are the plural aspects of allegory; both elements are put to work in Matigari.
The characters in *Matigari* are as allegorical as those in Brecht’s drama; they function as emblems of class, establishment and gender, although this strategy is problematized here through the slippage of subjectivity into inter subjectivity. As allegory works towards closure, so does the narrativization of the characters who are pared down from the nation into a small family. A poignant example of this contraction is when Matigari, who appears to know everyone as if they form a small close knit unit, is irritated when it is suggested he might not know of Settler Williams and John Boy (*Matigari*, p-47).

The nation is rewritten in terms of a small community, connections between people are again emphasized as in Ngugi’s earlier novels. These connections contain both elements of allegory, the move towards closure through an emphasis of totality, and the opening out or exposing of plurality as demonstrated in figuring the nation as site of authority while centralized rule is rewritten in terms of a self-supporting community.

However, the major allegorical impulses are contained within the figure of Matigari as the embodiment of a psychic split between the community and the memory of Mau-Mau. This struggle and the hopes for independence seem very distant when those who have taken over power, including some who were involved in the struggle itself, have betrayed those ideals. It is this sense of distance that has led to Matigari and the struggle being presented as outside of history: the mythical feel at once seems to project the struggle even further back to the origins of the nation or
community, but at the same time the struggle is represented as eternal, but never grasped and transformed into real historical time. Situating a seminal event in the history of the nation as outside of history through allegory, then, serves as a means to regain that history; the importance of that event is recovered and restated.

Although Matigari and The River Between feature messianic figures, it is Matigari who represents inter subjectivity through the diffuse and provisional nature of his character, while Waiyaki is narrated through the personal codes of fame and status. Both characters are pushed off the scene at the end of each novel, but while continuity in the earlier novel can only be contained in the narration of the healing powers of local geography, in the later novel there is a sense that the protagonist’s task will be continued by someone else. The allegorical ending of each novel is different, therefore, in that Matigari is situated within the social, while The River Between is situated within natural elements. These differences aside, it appears as if Matigari is a rewriting of The River Between, but with a stronger allegorical impulse.

By the time of Matigari it was apparent that hopes of independence had soured and that history had repeated colonialism in the form of neo-colonialism: hence an impulse for Ngugi’s return to the themes and concerns of a novel written before independence. The differences and similarities between the two novels also demonstrate how the form of dissent can be determined by historical and ideological
circumstances. If *The River Between* contained elements of allegory, its author’s view of history was not particularly radical.

Really *Matigari*, written by a more radical author, has staged a return to allegory because its machineries of representation are best suited to cross time and recover a seminal event in the history of the nation. The way in which nationalism is deployed through Gikuyu codes in Ngugi’s writing can be seen as an attempt to overcome the class betrayal enacted by the Gikuyu elite during Mau-Mau and subsequently in the post independence period.

If one of the features of colonial states was that the chain of authority from the top downwards was untouched by any principle of representation or consultation, the same can be said of post colonialism, as witnessed by President Moi’s remarks in 1984:

I call on all ministers, assistant ministers and every other person to sing like parrots. During President Jomo Kenyatta’s period I persistently sang the Kenyatta (tune) until people said: This person has nothing (to say) except to sing for Kenyatta. I say: I didn’t have ideas of my own. Why was I to have my own ideas? I was in Kenyatta’s shoes and therefore, I had to sing whatever Kenyatta wanted. If I had sung another song do you think Kenyatta would have left me alone? Therefore you ought to sing the song I sing. If I put a full stop, you should also put a full stop. (Ngugi, *Decolonising*: p-86)
This is a graphic example of state discourse interpolating the subject through its control of the identifications of and recognition between ‘I’ and ‘you’ while establishing an authoritarian rule. A subject distinct from the state is recognized, but only insofar as to bind it to the state, and the subject’s potential for dissent is not recognized, since such identification and recognition is geared towards the subject seeing its and the states interests as coincident. Some years earlier Kenya had effectively become a one party state (Sicherman, p-93), and the government was arresting, holding without charge and torturing dissidents, and generally using the full force of state apparatuses very effectively. This is the context in which Ngugi wrote.

The form of the dissent found in Ngugi is determined by the relative hegemony the Gikuyu ‘tribe’ holds within the Kenyan superstructure, and the extent to which the Gikuyu dominated the Mau-Mau struggle. This relative hegemony allows Ngugi to present Gikuyu traditions and symbols as a general Kenyan nationalism. The sense in which nationalism is symbolic and cannot be easily contained or explained through a binary model of power is relevant here. The disillusionment of post-independence Kenya is due to a sense in which there are felt to be few opportunities for dissent due to the ideological authoritarian rule imposed by the government. A black/white, colonized/colonizer model of power is obviously inappropriate in this situation, and Ngugi’s class analysis is modified and articulated by a nationalism that symbolically heals and makes the nation whole. A class analysis that sees the
nation as diverse works side by side with a nationalism that sees it as a whole. Ngugi’s novels demonstrate the ways power is diffused, how that diffusion works to make power more effective, and how power works against any potential for intersubjectivities to develop expressions of dissent.

Ngugi readily names power and the forms it takes but, if there are statements of rare and admirable political directness, it is rarely narrated in simplistic terms, and this complexity is particularly the case in the construction of female characters, for example, Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Waringa in *Devil on the Cross*. Both women are seen at some point to interact in an integrated community, narrated as participation within conversation as the free exchange of language which does not coerce or threaten, but reveals previously hidden links. But they are then made to act out more individual lives after the various intersections of power within society disrupt or render transient this active intersubjectivity. Wanja becomes a prostitute and is subsequently presented in the form of a caricature; the construction of Waringa is more positive, but the main frame is that of the subject’s self-sufficiency and her ability to survive without the support of the intersubjective community. Working against forms of power that construct the individual, Ngugi refuses to see the public and private as separate spheres, and instead constructs plots and characters that are revealed to be intimately connected. These links perform an attempt to narrate the nation as a people.
However, nationalism can also be seen as a form of homogeny because it attempts to construct subjects by transcending the articulations of gender and class identity. Nationalism is therefore a precarious form of dissent; its diffuseness means that it can be inverted and enacted in as many ways as there are constructions of ‘the people.’

Dissent in the novels of Ngugi is embodied through a precarious nationalism whose tenuous position is carefully narrated against a background of the network of power relations of which the individual is an effect. Ngugi’s earlier novels revolve around competing cultural constructions of the self. Here a construction of the self, based on an individual ego, is denied desire for an inter subjective experience or some kind of experience in which the subject only recognize itself fully in through its interaction within group or community. As this article has demonstrated, this idea is more fully expressed in the form of nationalism in the later novels. Here individual subjects are shown to be constructed through networks of power.

In all the novels Mau-Mau can be read as the connecting force, or as the location through which these constructions of the self and narrations of power relations must pass or be checked against. It is useful to end by reiterating that the style of Ngugi’s novels changes and is determined through the marginalization of Mau-Mau, both through the passage of time and in the consciousness and official discourse of the nation. Despite the fact that Ngugi’s writing moves towards expression in Marxist terms, his earlier novels are written in the realist style, while fantasy and allegory
make up the stylistics of the later novels. An important historical event in the construction of the nation is neglected, and for this reason the codes of realism become unavailable for the narration of Mau-Mau; something more metaphorical is needed in order to recover the memory of Mau-Mau against power interests who would rather forget it.

The reading of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow* attempts to place the text in the postmodern writing tradition. We point out how surrealistic features are utilized to enhance the themes, style, and the author’s conundrums. Ngugi has been accused of focusing on ideologies at the expense of creativity. *Wizard of the Crow* is, however, a purely artistic text where Ngugi’s creativity is plausibly developed, without hindering his ideological expression. The fact that the text was originally written in Gikuyu helps the writer draw from the resource of traditional discourse, and arguably enable not only Gikuyu culture, but also their worldview and history negotiate for a global position in line with emerging postmodern imperatives.

This is more aptly explained by the fact that reality does not always mediate between text and meaning, but lets the reader rescue or recover the rest of the meaning from their subjective perspective. But what exactly is postmodernism? This artistic method stems from shifts in cultural, philosophical and artistic principles and methods. In literature and literary theory, postmodernism gained currency in the 1950’s though the path of its development can be traced from realism through modernism.

This creative method has had its share of criticism. For instance, Tzvetan Todorov is of the opinion that postmodernism, “expresses the idea of progress in its most naïve form, one that would like everything coming after to be better than everything that came before”( Todorov, Tzvetan. (2007). “Postmodern Culture: Introduction to the Theories of the Contemporary” Electronic Journal,p-2). Todorov accuses postmodernism of celebrating ambiguity and incoherence, in its preference for the term ‘postmodernism’. However, the pessimism expressed by modernist writers would have divorced art from human consciousness. Amidst the chaos of the postmodern society, creativity should, as Ben Okri suggests, be functional to the human consciousness. This would heal the human spirit by giving back to it, “its full, rich, hidden dimensions”, meaning that postmodernism is an artistic improvement on modernism, regardless of the term of choice.

For our current purpose, it is imperative that we acquaint ourselves with the predecessors of postmodernism: realism and modernism. Realism, on its part,
attempts a comprehensive interpretation and description of a society. By using the resources of this method, writers seek not only to describe the world (a construction of social forces), but also to reflect an objective reality that is shaped by human will and actions.

Modernism on the other hand faults the very core of realism. The argument in this case is that realism assumes, in its claim of the possibility of availing a comprehensive representation of reality, that reality is a linear, express result of cause and effect. The modernist therefore scuttles the assumption that there exists an objective reality, which can be adequately perceived by a writer and represented in a text. According to the modernist perspective, the world is incomprehensible and in this sense, a writer’s mind cannot adequately grasp, leave alone represent the complex social interrelations within the confines of a literary text.

This break from realism is the main contention of modernism. The modernist sees the world from a pessimistic point of view. It is a world that is fragmented, decayed, and largely characterized by chaos. Another distinctive feature of modernism is its pessimistic view of contemporary science and technology, and consequent capital determinants of social interaction and human relations. This revulsion can in part be attributed to the consequences of the First World War as evident in the works of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, to mention just the two. Modernist writing, according to Mary Klages, “tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and
history”.( Klages, Mary. “Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed.”, p-2 )

This is the source of modernist pessimism. To the modernist, this fragmentation is tragic, and we should mourn this loss (The Wasteland, Mother Courage and her Children). The role of the artist is therefore defined: to provide unity, meaning and coherence which have been eroded by the modern life. Conversely, postmodernism has a celebrative attitude towards the modern world. Unlike the modernist who laments and problematizes human identity and individuality, the postmodernist appreciates the overcoming of limitations of human progress, although this progress lacks distinctive direction and purpose.

With a particular bias to artistic representation, postmodernism rejects the tragic and pessimistic worldview of modernism. Postmodernism embraces human diversity in culture, art and ideology in a universal context. Relativism and indeterminacy are therefore major characteristics of a postmodern reading of a text, which rejects the concept of a unified underlying reality.

The major premise of postmodernist representation is the fact that creative writing does not simulate, but rather it is its own simulacra or simulation. Art, an integral part of society, should according to the postmodern discourse, seek to wrestle creativity from poetic incarceration, and adopt a populist stance. Art is seen as a populist (not elitist) endeavor that should be taken to its rightful place: to the
masses. This could only be achieved if the creative writer adopts the worldview of the masses in terms of their folklore, beliefs, myths and superstitions. The point of departure is the rejection of the distinction between low and high culture and art. The world is destructured and decentred, meaning that human experience is universal.

Another way of looking at modernism and postmodernism would be from Frederic Jameson’s assertion that “modernism and postmodernism are cultural formations which accompany particular stages of capitalism” (Jameson, Fredric. (2004). “The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate.” Modern Criticism and Theory. (second edition) ed. David Lodge. Delhi: Pearson,p-2). Jameson’s definition pays attention to modes of production and technologies, and identifies three phases of capitalism, each with its accompanying cultural practices, art and literature. The first phase is market capitalism, which occurred in the eighteenth and late nineteenth century in Europe and the United States. This phase is identified with the steam driven motor as the major technological development. The significant literary method during this phase is realism. The second phase occurred from late nineteenth to mid twentieth century, and is associated with electric and internal combustion engines, and with modernism as the prominent literary method. The third phase, in which we are living, is the multinational or consumer capitalism where consumption supersedes production. This phase is associated with nuclear and electronic technology and with postmodernism.
For the historian and the sociologist, postmodernism is best defined as a set of social and historical attitudes, and contrasts “postmodernity” with “modernity.” How do they differ? Whereas modernism refers to the aesthetic movement of the twentieth century, modernity refers to philosophical, ethical and political ideas that form the aesthetic foundation of modernism. Modernity is more concerned with rationality, order, and the entrenchment of grand narratives (archetypes and prototypes). Postmodernity on the other hand, scuttles these grand narratives and in their place advocates for mini-narratives that facilitate the apprehension of situational and local realities. The aesthetic practice is therefore to deconstruct the grand narratives or the epicenter, by rejecting the hegemony of dominant ideological, cultural and social posturing. This explains why postmodernism as a literary method is particularly popular with feminist, oriental and postcolonial writers and thinkers. It is from this theoretical context that Ngugi’s art may be examined.

As a writer, Ngugi is subject to socio-economic and ideological imperatives that govern the production and consumption of knowledge and culture. We will examine how Ngugi adheres to the situational and local realities in line with postmodern aesthetics, as well as how global trends affect his art. As a writer, Ngugi has always focused on the plight of the marginalized, oppressed masses, and *Wizard of the Crow* is not antagonistic to his earlier texts. Major themes and motifs retain a striking similarity. Ngugi’s literary canon maintains uniformity in terms of motifs and umbrella thematic foci. The journey motif is the most prominent.
In *Wizard of the Crow*, this motif is refined in that instances of preternatural flights manifest. In two different instances, Kamiti’s spirit leaves his physical body, and he takes a spiritual journey through time and space: “he felt his whole self lighten and he saw himself rise, rise and float, reaching beyond the grasp for Nyawira. He had left his body behind, and now a bird, he was flying freely in the open sky…” (*Wizard of the Crow*, p-494). The song Nyawira sings to Kamiti in his vision punctuates this spiritual journey:

Wake up brother spirit

Wake up sister spirit

If you let sleep rule over you

Blessings will pass you by. (Ngugi,*Wizard of the Crow*, p-494)

His flight is a reconnaissance of the African Diaspora: from the pyramids of Egypt to the Caribbean islands. It is a spiritual journey that helps him come to terms with his immediate predicament. In fact Ben Okri, a postmodern writer in his own right, is convinced that this art is functional to the human spirit for it can give back to the spirit, “its full, rich, hidden dimensions.” By focusing on a society in chaos, postmodern writing helps us explore the futility of human obsessions that are the root cause of social evils and oppression.

From a stylistic angle, Ngugi makes use of a narrating persona who is distinct from the writer- making it possible to transcend the limitations of time and space. This
narrator is Arigaigai Gathere, “the teller of tales and not the monger of rumors”. This particular technique functions as a tool for psychic and historical exploration, and this is more so when Ngugi, in creating his protagonists, imbue them with his social and literary ideologies. But artistic concerns are more urgent in *Wizard of the Crow*. In the words of Wole Soyinka, literary works should not only seek to be socially persuasive, but writers should uphold those concerns that go beyond pure narrative, to reveal a reality that goes beyond the “the immediately attainable”. (Soyinka, Wole. (1976). *Myth, Literature, and the African World*. New York: Cambridge, p- 66). This aspect rewards Ngugi’s text in that his social vision does not blur his artistic endeavor. The text can be appreciated for the particularly striking metaphorical connotations, most of which are availed by the postmodern art.

Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Wizard of the Crow* utilizes the resource of magical realism to enhance its interrogation of post-independence leadership in Africa through the fictive Free State of Aburiria. Magical realism, a facet of postmodernism, is described by Olatubasun Ogunsanwo as, “a new yearning and a new discovery that is slowly occupying the old tyranny of the mean description of reality.” While eschewing a postcolonial depiction of the Aburirian society, the text does not only invite the reader to share in the comedy of dictatorship, despotism and neoimperialism, but delves deeper to expose the literary aesthetic of truth telling.
This endeavor is made possible by the dynamics of postmodern art, which informs the text’s literary wealth, thematic focus, and ideological intimations.

It is apparent throughout the text that Ngugi intends to reflect the plague of a postcolonial society and the manifestations of inherited colonial heritage. Aburiria, a postcolonial society has the misfortune of moving from one oppressive regime (colonialism) to the post-independence dictatorial, despotic rule of the Ruler. Even as the text intimates a postcolonial approach, it embraces the globalized, postmodern culture and global hybridity. The postcolonial writer refutes and deconstructs the colonizers hegemonic structures that attempt to monopolize truth, order and reality. It is for this reason that Ngugi remains a vocal critic of our over-reliance on Western languages. In “Homecoming”: Address at the University of Nairobi, August 2004, Ngugi argues that in fact, “language as logically connected words is basically a naming system. You name the world and you own the world”. The colonizer, in an effort to deny the Africans the memory of their skills, knowledge and experience effectively used linguistic alienation. Ngugi’s worry is that “by surrendering to the European naming system, we bury our memory under the European memory” (Ngugi “Homecoming”, p-65). As a producer of ideas, the postcolonial writer should remember the African past, and re-member the previously dismembered African reality.

Postmodern writing, as in Ngugi’s text, makes intensive use of the writer’s cultural past in terms of the choice of the dominant narrative dimension. This narrative
dimension is the pillar that organizes the text’s thematic, stylistic, and ideological focus. In an apparent postmodern viewpoint, each and every culture has its subjective interpretation of its reality. A postcolonial writer affirms the colonized’s history and culture that has been abnegated by the colonizer. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi uses African narrative rhythms to authenticate the cultural setting of the text. Ngugi creates characters that modify strategic body organs in a desperate attempt at making themselves useful to the neoimperial socio-economic and political order. This organismic alteration is symbolic of distorted human values on whose back dictatorship battens. It should be noted that the ascription of these grotesque and surrealistic features serves a stylistic as well as a didactic function. While satirizing the futility of oppressive governance, this presentation paints pictures of detestable characters. The people’s reaction to these “modification” is evident in this part of the narrative. People at the stadium kept comparing their different expressions, particularly the movements of their eyes and ears, for it had long been known that the two were always in a mortal struggle to establish which organ was more powerful. The eye or the ear of the Ruler (Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*, p-14).

Ngugi invites the reader to share in the exploration of the cult of dictatorship, its origin, and also its aftermath. Sycophants like Sikiokuu, Machokali, Tajirika, Kaniuru, and others of the same disposition are the cogs that keep the wheel of dictatorship turning. The people of Aburiria are left to contend with extreme poverty while their rulers batten on their backs. Wole Soyinka feels that “the cold reality of
power is, of course, that it has to be endured” (Soyinka, Wole. (1972). *The Man Died*. London: Rex Collins,p-xiv). Endurance doesn’t imply docility, for the man dies in spirit who opts to remain silent.

The symbolic meaning of this character depiction is not lost to us. While depicting the reality of a postcolonial state, Ngugi creates characters like Machokali, Big Ben Mambo and Sikiokuu, whose only reality exists within the reality of the narrative. This is an express instance of the postmodern metaphor, and a direct denial of verisimilitude. Our interpretation calls for a greater effort in decoding their nonlinear presentation and interpretation of reality. As Ngugi reminds us, “dictatorship is a tragedy that manifests itself in comedy.” The text satirizes these characters’ hunger for power and wealth.

As opposed to this alienating depiction, populist characters are given a more heroic presentation. As Ogude notes, women in particular serve as “allegorical tropes (and) primary sites for testing the reconciliation of ethnicity and hope and, the possibility of a rebirth” (Ogude, James. (1999). *Ngugi’s Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London: Pluto.p-109). As opposed the strain of *The River Between* victimhood experienced by women characters such as Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* and Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, Nyawira is in harmony with the city. She is educated and a repository of ideologies that opens up Kamiti’s dormant conscience. The metropolitan city is celebrated for its heterogeneity and protective functions, as
opposed to the popular depiction of the city as a repository of evil and moral degeneration.

As a salient feature of postmodernism, the text is replete with surrealistic incidents and scenes. Nyawira is for instance described as the source of a sweet smell, a contrast of the stench evident in the streets of Eldares, the capital of Aburiria. She is the source of “a more powerful smell, a fresh one, like the scent of flowers” (Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*, p-50). Nyawira’s populist ideology contrasts her with the stinking, capitalistic rottenness that characterizes the streets of Eldares. The ruler’s ‘self-induced expansion’, his floating body; his non- stop speech that lasts for seven days, hours, minutes and seconds, are all only possible in the realm of imaginative, postmodern writing. There is also the Museum of Arrested Motion where objects and animals freeze in motion, and which, “would change colors dramatically, depending on the intensity and angle of the sun”. (Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*, p-443).

The contrast between good and evil is captured in the stench that comes from money, as this description points out: The putrid smell was most intense where the bags of money stood like three guardians of evil stopping him (Kamiti) in his tracks. He felt weak, faint, and held on to a wall.” (Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*, p-188)

These surreal descriptions serve a didactic function. They add to the narrative literary wealth that abstract descriptions would erode. In this way, postmodernism enhances the stylistic as well as the didactic flavor of the text, and as in oral
narratives, these features are condensed stylistic and literary statements communicated in a covert manner. When Tajirika, the Ruler and Sikiokuu develop a mouth at the back of their heads, we are reminded of ogres in oral narratives. This displacement serves to punctuate the greed of post-independence leadership, while asserting the African narrative tradition.

A primary metaphor in *Wizard of the Crow* is the wizard. Kamiti, the wizard of the crow, is pivotal both in presentation and in practice of the craft. He is the embodiment of the writer in a postcolonial, neoimperial state. The act of mirroring is akin to the role of a writer who reflects the evils of those in power, and also helps the society voice its most obscene thoughts and desires. The alienated elite like Tajirika, Sikiokuu, and the Ruler suffer from the malady of words. The word “if” gets stuck in their throats, and it is only the wizard, who can help them confront their most obscene desire: to become white. In Detained, Ngugi points out the role of the writer, and hints at the perilous nature of the calling: “for I have accepted the lot of all writers who try to hold a clear mirror unto the motions of human thought, human society and history in general”.(Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*, pp-190-91). The text in calling for the services of postmodernism transcends with magnificent ease between realism and hyperrealism. The writer serves to reflect, just like a mirror, what goes on in the society. It is this art that predisposes the writer, herein read as the wizard, to all manner of tribulations. The writer has dual power: to reflect the evil of the ruling class, and to reach out to the masses and shape their conscience.
Writing is thus the shrine to which people come to savor their images as divined by the writer-wizard.

Postmodernism celebrates human diversity in culture, art and ideology. As a ‘writer’ and diviner, Kamiti advocates for a syncretic view of Indian and African history. Mahatma Gandhi serves as Kamiti’s impetus for his revolutionary and spiritual growth. In a momentous nirvana, Kamiti evaluates the significance of “the prophets of old, Confucius, Gautama Buddha, Moses, John the Baptist, Mugo wa Kibiru, who had all retreated into the wilderness to commune, in total silence, with the law and that held the universe together”( *Wizard of the Crow*, p-47). The collocation of these prophets is an example of postmodern “mixing” which, according to Mikhail Gromov, “leads to a postmodernistic mixture of styles, which in wider sense is known as ‘intertextuality’”( *Wizard of the Crow*, p-29). It is an attempt at universalizing human culture and negotiating for the relevance of African prophetic figures and history, and in the same breath remembering African heroes in their heroic past.

Though Ngugi’s text draws much of its mimetic power from the African political experience, it reveals a universal human condition. Human beings have an insatiable desire for power and wealth. We are ready to engage evil in a bid to secure for ourselves the comfort of luxury and power. This is a universal trait handed down over generations through the premise of capitalist modernity. In essence, *Wizard of the Crow* decries human impunity, and privileges acts of humane charity. The
punishment that is meted out on the ruler and his pack of aristocrats serves to underscore the temporal nature of material things. Nyawira and Kamiti are rewarded with life and an indefinite union. This underscores the novel’s moral philosophical didactics: illicit power and wealth are ephemeral and brittle for they melt away with time.

Ngugi emphasizes the importance of retaining the memory of our historical identity. Knowing who we are is not enough; we should also be conscious of where we are coming from. This would help us, the post-colonials, avoid mistakes that have turned heroes and heroines who struggled for our liberty villains of their own sacrifice. *Wizard of the Crow* makes good use of the texture of African speech rhythms. Though the text has been translated from the Gikuyu language, it retains much of its original structures. Ngugi’s own translation deliberately leaves intact the flowing yet loaded African folkloric constructions. The novel does not restrict itself to the conventional grammatical structures, and this preserves its African flavor. This undoubtedly gives the text its postcolonial identity, which is intricately tied to its postmodern appeal. Postmodernism and postcolonialism share in not only the way they refute Eurocentric conventions, but also in their use of history as key to the creative process.

Thus *Wizard of the Crow* can genuinely be described as a tour de force. Apart from its substantial length and the prodigious feats of both linguistic dexterity and imaginative fertility displayed by Ngugi in the course of telling his incredible tale,
the book is simply a most impressive example of pure African storytelling. Although it is a complex satire on the exigencies of confusion and dictatorial ignorance that has bedeviled governance in many African nations of the post-colonial era it is more than anything else a cracking adventure story as well as a fantastic psychological thriller. Ngugi has managed to compose a believable tale out of the antics and presumptions of a most unbelievable set of characters. He keeps his readers enthralled through the credible emotional resemblance of the situations that he weaves to events in the contemporary history of several African nations.

This portrait of a nation whose leader is an overbearing patriarch can fit several African nations in every sub-region of the continent, but there is hardly any doubt that Kenya of the immediate post independence period of the sixties and seventies, and maybe its neighbour Uganda in the same era, served as models for the country of Aburiria. The portrayal of incredible brutality disguised as buffoonery that characterises not only The Ruler but also his entourage of sycophantic followers brings back haunting memories of Idi Amin’s Uganda.

At the same time the use of mythical structures to move the tale forward suggests that Ngugi is telling a tale that is both universal and local thus indicating that his own experience of oppression in his home nation is the fundamental source of the narrative. The most profound element of this rollicking and farcical romp is neither its humour nor its challenging imaginative fertility, but its accuracy in analysing
governance as a betrayal of the trust of the ordinary people in modern African society. In this wise the novel is one of the most important creative experiments to have arisen out of the maelstrom of creative responses to African independence. It is both a cautionary tale and a critical masterpiece of literary adventure. In some ways while it can be read as a straightforward fantasy of Swiftian intensity it should also be regarded as an accurate depiction of the modern reality of many African nations. When it is read in this spirit the book becomes not just an exciting story but also a frightening reflection of a catalogue of uncomfortable truths.