

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE

ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY IN SELECTED NOVELS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O

OSCAR MACHARIA MAINA

C82/20132/2012

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY.

MAY 2016

Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or any other award.

Signature

Date

Name: Oscar Macharia Maina

C82/20132/2012

We confirm that the work reported in this thesis was carried out by the student under our supervision.

1. Signature

Date

Dr. Mbugua wa Mungai

Department of Literature

Kenyatta University

2. Signature

Date

Dr. Paul M. Mukundi

Department of Literature

Kenyatta University

DATE: MAY 2016

Dedication

To my family

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the following for making the writing of this thesis possible: my supervisors, Dr. Mbugua wa Mungai and Dr. Paul Mukundi, for their insightful guidance right from the proposal stage to the final draft. Their support and advice has greatly improved the thesis. I also thank other lecturers in the department who directed my thoughts right from the proposal stage. Specifically, I thank Dr. John Mugubi for his advice as I struggled to conceptualise the topic.

I acknowledge the support of my friends and colleagues: Dr. John Muhia, Dr. Ezekiel Kaigai and Mr. Macharia Mwangi who unselfishly shared their resources and gave insightful comments on my work. Mr. Kariuki Banda, Mr. Mark Chetambe, and Mr. Kariuki Kiura gave me unwavering support as I struggled to conduct this research, and for that I am greatly indebted.

I am grateful to my family, especially my wife, Bilha for her support, encouragement and understanding as I wrote this thesis. I also thank my parents; The late George Maina, and Susan Wambui for their sacrifices. My brothers, especially Drs. Githaiga and Kihara, for numerous ways in which they have made everything possible.

I also thank those whose names have not been mentioned, and who in one way or the other, made my research and writing possible. May all of you be blessed abundantly.

Abstract

This study investigates Ngugi wa Thiong'o's use of tragedy as a method of literary representation in his rendition of postcoloniality. The study focuses on five novels; *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*. As its objectives, the study investigates: the various elements of tragedy used in his selected novels; the use of tragedy in the emplotment and representation of thematic concerns in these novels; and the use of the tragic form as an expression of wa Thiong'o's postcolonial vision in the selected novels. The study interrogates the presentation of characters, their narrative world, and the conflicts that these characters represent. The ideas that these characters espouse stir the conflicts that wa Thiong'o highlights through these novels and contribute to the literary signification of the postcolonial discourse. With close analysis of key novelistic features such as narrative plot and structure, representation, characterisation, motifs, and point of narration, the study interrogates how wa Thiong'o uses tragedy not only as a means of evaluating the different causes of tragic conflicts but also as a means of proposing avenues for entrenching both ideological and a literary discourse in response to these tragic conflicts. In its analysis of the selected texts, the study uses tenets of postcolonial criticism and tragic realism to facilitate its evaluation of not only the narrative structure but also the novels' discourse. The study uses descriptive analysis of the selected novels to qualitatively interrogate them in line with the study's objectives.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter One	1
1.0 Background to the Study	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem	3
1.2 Objectives of the Study	4
1.3 Research Questions	4
1.4 Research Assumptions	4
1.5 Justification for the Study	5
1.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study	6
1.7 Literature Review	7
1.8 Conceptual Framework	14
1.8.1 Postcolonial Criticism	15
1.8.2 Tragic Realism	21
1.9 Methodology	29
2.0 Chapter Two	31
2.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Novels and the Tragic Form	31
2.2 Introduction	31
2.3 Tragic Failure in <i>The River Between</i>	31

2.4	Contention of Heroism in <i>A Grain of Wheat</i>	46
2.5	Transition from Epic to Tragic Heroism in <i>Matigari</i>	55
2.6	Gender and the Tragic in <i>Petals of Blood</i> and <i>Devil on the Cross</i>	62
2.7	Conclusion.....	73
3.0	Chapter Three	76
3.1	Themes and the Tragic Form in wa Thiong'o's Novels	76
3.2	Introduction	76
3.3	Cultural Nationalism, Christian Revivalism and Western Education in <i>The River Between</i>	76
3.4	Disenchantment, Betrayal and Retribution in <i>A Grain of Wheat</i>	87
3.5	Allegory of Deprivation and Resistance in <i>Matigari</i>	97
3.6	Conquest, Resistance and Restitution in <i>Petals of Blood</i>	108
3.7	Resisting Imperialism and Neocolonial Dispossession in <i>Devil on the Cross</i>	116
3.8	Conclusion.....	121
4.0	Chapter Four.....	124
4.1	Tragic Realism and Postcolonial Vision in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Novels	124
4.2	Introduction	124
4.3	Envisioning the Nation in <i>The River Between</i>	124
4.4	Collective Experiences as Formation of National Values	133
4.5	Tragic Realism and the Vision for Social Justice in <i>Matigari</i>	139
4.6	Post-Neocolonial Vision in <i>Petals of Blood</i>	146
4.7	The Normative Heroine as Allegory of Postcolonial Nationalism.....	155
4.8	Conclusion.....	165

5.0 Chapter Five	167
5.1 Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	167
5.2 Summary of Findings.....	167
5.3 Conclusions	172
5.4 Recommendations.....	176
Works Cited	178
Appendix.....	192

Chapter One

1.0 Background to the Study

Tragedy as a literary genre has a rich history that cuts across centuries, generic forms, cultural and geographic boundaries. Over the years, this prolific genre and method of literary creation has been appropriated as a platform not only for commenting on and evaluating social and individual circumstances but also as a tool for engaging in a literary evaluation of socio-cultural and political realities.

However, the application of the aspects of tragedy in literary criticism has mostly been restricted to dramatic works of literature. For this reason, the cross-generic interplay between tragedy and other literary forms has been greatly affected. This apparent restriction of tragedy to only dramatic art has, as Gassner would put it, turned tragedy “into a value rather than a genre” (10). Gassner’s view is an indication of a desire to enhance the versatility of tragedy by inviting a multifaceted and a less conservative application of its aspects in accordance with changing social and literary circumstances.

Drawing our attention to the need for a utilitarian application of literary forms to facilitate socio-cultural and political investigation of contemporary experiences, Gassner further queries, “what is the use of devising finely ground definitions unless they can be serviceable to one’s own time?” (11). This rhetorical question suggests the need to question and investigate possible linkages that may exist between literary genres and approaches while disregarding generic absolutism.

Indeed, tragedy has been appropriated into the literary representation of the challenges and conflicts that exist in the 21st century. Of interest is the use of tragic elements in the crafting and representation of postcolonial contestation and expression. This perspective would be informed by the view that literary representation seeks to dramatise and contextualise the fates of characters in given socio-cultural and political locations and interactions.

Works of literature are understood to reflect those issues that essentially define the society. These issues determine the nature and texture of the discourse that a particular work of literature endeavours to represent. For this discourse to be availed to the reader, that work of literature should use a form that is concomitant with the intention of the narrative. Hinged on the unequal relations that manifest in postcolonial discourse, an exploration of literary forms, structures and other narrative choices becomes necessary and well placed in any attempt to engage the thematic essence of a literary work.

Given that wa Thiong'o's fiction contextualises the historical and cultural conjectures of the interaction between the colonised African communities and the colonising West; between the powerful oppressive post-independence forces and the oppressed masses, such fiction would explicitly highlight the consequent individual and social conflicts that result from these unequal relations. These conflicts would be inescapable since the quest for self-definition and restoration would result in both individual and social struggles, best highlighted through a writer's signification of the tragic conflicts and their outcomes.

Indeed, the changing social imperatives that are dependent on a community's experiences dictate the change in the narrative form. This is primarily informed in the desire for a writer to use a narrative form that not only accommodates these social changes but also one that best represents and evaluates these experiences. In relation to the use of the tragic form in African literature, this fact has been best illustrated in the changes that are evident in the form and texture of the African novel. As Dan Izevbaye explains, the centrality of the tragic hero narrative in the African novel diminishes when a community's fate is delineated from that of the heroic character (41).

This ideological shift in the representation of a community's evaluation of social and individual circumstances would invite an exploration of the subsequent effects on the literary and narrative choices, specifically for this study in wa Thiong'o's selected novels.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The study investigates how wa Thiong'o uses elements of tragedy such as tragic characters, tragic plots and tragic motifs in the expression, representation and evaluation of social, political, historical, ideological and other conflicts that manifest in the selected texts. The study examines the use of these elements of tragedy not only as allegorical representations of these conflicts but also as significations of individual and societal contradictions and conditions. The study explores the literary import of the tragic form to further investigate how the writer's choice of a narrative form enhances a literary representation of social and individual discourses in a postcolonial context.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- i. Identify the various elements of tragedy used in wa Thiong'o's five novels.
- ii. Evaluate the use of tragedy in the emplotment and representation of thematic concerns in wa Thiong'o's five novels novels.
- iii. Evaluate the use of the tragic form as an expression of wa Thiong'o's vision for a postcolonial society.

1.3 Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the various elements of tragedy used in wa Thiong'o's selected novels?
- ii. How is tragedy used in the emplotment and presentation of thematic concerns in wa Thiong'o's five novels?
- iii. How is the tragic form used as an expression of wa Thiong'o's vision for a postcolonial society?

1.4 Research Assumptions

The study is guided by the assumptions that:

- i. wa Thiong'o uses elements of tragedy in his selected novels.
- ii. Tragedy is used in the emplotment and presentation of thematic concerns in wa Thiong'o's five novels.
- iii. The tragic form is used as an expression of wa Thiong'o's vision for a postcolonial society.

1.5 Justification for the Study

Literary works give a textualised representation of the social, historical, cultural and political experiences of a society. It is expected therefore that a writer uses a literary mode that affords an accurate rendition of these experiences in terms of both the generic form and the structure of the discourse. Drawing from this observation, the study investigates wa Thiong'o's selected novels to evaluate the use of elements of tragedy to constitute a narrative form that best represents social and individual conflicts in the context of social, historical, cultural and political conflicts that are addressed in these novels.

The selected novels represent both colonial and postcolonial polarisation that stems out of characters' adherence to specific predictably antagonistic social, political and ideological perspectives. This polarisation creates conflicts that expose characters to tragic circumstances.

This position is reinforced by Andrian Poole's assertion that "tragedy stages moments of crisis in a community's understanding of itself, moments when it risks being torn apart by conflicting beliefs about the gods, political authority, relations between the generations and the sexes, between natives and immigrants" (36). Dependent on the social and historical conditions prevalent in a particular context, every community experiences a different form of tragic crisis which then is recreated through a literary discourse that emanates from these crises. Such crises may be represented through either a dramatic or a narrative recreation of the tragic circumstances. However, cognisant of these two generic possibilities, this study focuses

only on the tragic narrative as represented in wa Thiong'o's novels to highlight and respond to tragic conflicts in a postcolonial setting.

1.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Wa Thiong'o's fictional and critical *oeuvre* is evidence of his sustained evaluation and representation of issues that affect African communities. His many publications in prose fiction (*Weep Not, Child, The River Between, A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross, Wizard of the Crow*), autobiographical writing (*Detained and Dreams in a Time of War*), drama (*The Black Hermit, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, and I Will Marry When I Want*) and critical as well as literary essays (*Homecoming, Moving the Centre, Decolonising the Mind, Writers in Politics, Something Torn and New, and Globalectics*) are a testimony of his desire to highlight socio-political, historical and cultural circumstances that the Kenyan postcolonial society grapples with. However, this study delimits itself to wa Thiong'o's novels, and specifically confines itself to those novels that use characters, plots and motifs whose creation and development display elements of tragic nature. These characters must have a prominent role in the narrative as well as in the narrative community. Using these factors, this study focuses on: *The River Between, A Grain of Wheat, Matigari, Petals of Blood, and Devil on the Cross*.

1.7 Literature Review

This section reviews literature that relates to the nature, function, form, and content of tragedy as an aesthetic form, literature on wa Thiong'o's fiction, and also literature on postcolonial fiction. First, literature on tragedy affords the study a foundation for the assessment of the characters, plots, form, themes and other features that are requisite in enhancing an accurate understanding of the sources used for the study. Secondly, literature on wa Thiong'o will inform the study on the perspectives that influence the creation of the narratives, ideas and standpoints taken by the author, while postcolonial literature will aid the study in assessing the standpoints that influence wa Thiong'o's literary perspective.

1.7.1 Literature on Tragic Realism and wa Thiong'o's Fiction

Different researchers and critics have interrogated tragic realism as a concept, and have interrogated its appropriateness in giving a literary rendition of conflicts that arise in the course of social, political, economic and cultural formations inherent in the human society. The study is also interested in interrogating other scholars' views on wa Thiong'o's fiction as a way of strengthening its research premises and grounding its objectives.

While reviewing the centrality of myth in *The River Between*, Ato Sekyi-Otu concludes that Waiyaki's tragedy is a consequence of "a trained refusal to risk the practice of action and the will to meaning made possible by the auspicious indeterminacy and rival promptings of the world's founding covenants" (177). To Sekyi-Otu, Waiyaki's tragedy is a result of his failure to meet his obligations not only as a result of personal failures but also as a result of the conflicting role in a fictive and

mythic sense. As a participant in the conflict between African values and Christianity's abnegation of these values, Waiyaki is torn between the different possibilities that can redeem and preserve the community from imminent self-destruction. However, Sekyi-Otu's study confines itself to characterisation and fails to demonstrate how the novel's use of tragic narration enunciates wa Thiong'o's discourse on colonial and postcolonial dislocation, and provides a perfect setting for the plotting of a tragic narrative as a means of laying bare the contradictory forces that a postcolonial community threatened by a dominant force endures.

James Ogude discusses the historical imperatives in wa Thiong'o's novels and notes the centrality of characterisation in evaluating both the authorial and historical concerns in a colonial and postcolonial setting. However, despite his admission that wa Thiong'o's heroes and heroines "are tinged with tragedy" (82), Ogude does not evaluate how the elements of history and aesthetic choices reflect wa Thiong'o's creation of characters whose demeanor and fictive reality revolve around the tragic narrative genre. Literary creativity functions to enhance a writer's mediation and evaluation of those factors that are determinant of a community's reality and experiences. In wa Thiong'o's fiction, Ogude observes that "the narrative is a tool for shaping, ordering, and reinterpreting history" (*Ngugi's Concept of History* 88). The study interrogates how wa Thiong'o's narratives use tragic realism to, as Ogude notes, shape, order, and reinterpret history.

Simon Gikandi, on the other hand, engages in a critical evaluation of wa Thiong'o's works with particular emphasis on literary and ideological imperatives that influence wa Thiong'o's fiction. But most important is Gikandi's exploration of the

shift between irony and allegory as a means of aiding the identification “with the grand narrative of nationalism and its desires, and an ironic scene in which we are asked to be alert to the discrepancies between the structure of the narrative and the experiences it represents” (113). In Gikandi’s view, this narrative tendency is an artistic appropriation of the thin line between narrow individual choices and their wider national significance, “given content and form [...] by the series of tragedies and mishaps” (115). Beyond this immediate acknowledgement of the role of individual characters in the literary exposition of underlying concerns in the process of colonization and decolonization, Gikandi does not further evaluate the role of tragedy as a creative narration of conflicting and ambivalent national and individual loyalties.

In “Narrative Method in the Novels of Ngugi”, Florence Stratton argues that wa Thiong’o’s stylistic choices give his novels a unique polemic and narrative advantage. To Stratton, wa Thiong’o’s use of dialogue that borders on dramatic exchanges has semblance to drama. This observation resonates with the view that works of literature as art-forms can use inter-generic fusions as a means of enhancing a social and literary dialogue. Moreover, such an inter-generic approach expands critical tools available to literary scholars and enhances the appreciation of literary discourse.

David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe agree that the main heroic characters in wa Thiong’o’s novels endure “sad, ironic vision(s)” (60), and agree that these heroes experience “final reversals [that] are . . . abrupt and equally telling” (256). Nevertheless, Cook and Okenimkpe do not comprehensively interrogate the connection between these characters as allegorical tropes representative of not only their personal tragedies but also the tragedy of an entire community.

The connection between personal and communal circumstances is pursued in the argument that wa Thiong'o's "heroes and heroines have a curiously intellectual bent that is at odds with their station in life" (Ndígírígí 162). This assertion foregrounds the circumstances that precipitate the conflicts that necessitate the use of the tragic form in the representation of the "essentialized identities" (Ndígírígí 162) of the deprived characters in wa Thiong'o's novels.

In addition, these characters must be seen as representations of the writer's reading of socio-political needs of a society at a given period in time. In line with this argument, wa Thiong'o's characters in *Petals of Blood* are seen as "the victims of a system external to themselves and their own community, a system whose exploitation and corruption are the central evils to be overcome" (Greenfield 34). But the process of struggling against evil systems exposes these characters to personal and communal conflicts that may lead to tragic circumstances resulting from a polarisation of moral and ideological standpoints.

Characterisation as mediating factor is used in wa Thiong'o's novels to enable the representation of socio-historical and political concerns. This is an argument that is further underscored by Loflin's view that character typology and socio-historical situations enable the reader's insight into the characters' cultural, racial, and economic situation (272). Tragic characters are thus used as representational tools that enhance our interrogation of the causes of tragic conflicts imminent in the society.

To Nicholas Kamau-Goro, Waiyaki's "failure to reconcile the tensions that tag at his being adumbrate the concerns and actions that lead up to the violent confrontation during the Mau Mau liberation war" (7). While pointing out the near impossibility of

resolving the pertinent issues experienced after the introduction of Christianity as a dominating force before colonialism through rational means, Kamau-Goro implicitly acknowledges the imperatives that precipitate a tragic plotting. In view of Waiyaki's failure, the narrative structure indicates the intricacies of the conflict and illustrates how Waiyaki as a character functions as a literary trope embodying the tragic nature of the conflict that seemingly defies immediate resolution and spills over to the armed conflict experienced during the liberation struggle.

In examining the portrayal of characters in wa Thiong'o's novels, James Ogude argues that:

One of the major thrusts of the novel tradition has been toward the creation of characters who appear to have motive and free will, and for whom we as readers posit pasts and futures which extend implicitly beyond the boundaries of the narrative. (68)

The sentiments expressed by Ogude acknowledge the centrality of characterisation in reconciling and representing not only the narrative's historical and social settings but also the concerns and expectations that textual interrogation should reveal. Ogude further notes that in wa Thiong'o's novels "characters tend to have a significance more typological than psychological" (68). The "typology" of character and the burden of thematic focus would in this way determine nature of the plot or the narrative structure while using the individual characters as embodiments of conflicts that drive both the narrative content and the plot.

This perspective is best illustrated in the difficulty of choice that characters in wa Thiong'o's novel have to make as they confront different oppressive forces. Ogude observes that while some of them engage in elitist escapism, they "also have

associations with the heroes and heroines of their stories which are tinged with tragedy” (82). Nevertheless, apart from this fleeting mention of the element of tragedy in wa Thiong’o’s novels *Ogude* does not engage in any further analysis of these tragic characters or even how their position in the novels affect wa Thiong’o’s rendition of his thematic concerns in a postcolonial context. This study holds that wa Thiong’o’s novels use these tragic heroes and heroines as ideological and narrative voices illustrating the forceful nature of the conflicts and contradictions in the colonial and post-colonial state.

Wa Thiong’o’s fiction focuses on African communities’ struggle against colonial and neocolonial oppressions as a way of highlighting “the complexities and complicities of liberation struggle” (Childs, Weber, and Williams 50). The authors acknowledge that wa Thiong’o does more than just inform us of the struggles faced by the colonised, for, through his depiction of these struggles, he draws our attention to the intricate nature of the socio-political, cultural and historical challenges that the postcolonial society faces. These challenges and the ensuing conflicts are represented through tragic narration whose discourse is hinged on individual characters’ contestation of the various forms of oppression imposed on them by colonial and postcolonial structures.

In their exploration of national allegories, Childs, Weber, and Williams are of the view that “in the case of the single-scope allegory, the blend is construed with the ‘national destiny’ input space projected as its organizing frame . . . [and] that at least to some extent the national destiny influences or even determines the individual destiny of the protagonist (285). Such views agree with the argument that wa Thiong’o’s fiction juxtaposes the circumstances and conflicts experienced by its tragic characters to reveal

both the tragedies and contradictions precipitated by the collision of polarised ideological intents at a wider national or societal platform.

The postcolonial writer adopts the perspective of the colonised, and enunciates thematic concerns that attempt to rediscover the identity and the dignity of the colonised. It is the view of this study that through his selected novels, wa Thiong'o addresses himself to the salient issues that a postcolonial writer should focus on in a bid to assist his/her society to recover its sense of identity. This is on the one hand aided by the author's choice of a narrative strategy that concretely foregrounds issues that are of interest to the postcolonial audience.

To achieve this, postcolonial writers need to use artistic forms that affirm an Afrocentric worldview while contesting and rejecting the sense of otherhood manifest in the alternative. This process must begin with the effort to "transform the condition of mimicking the colonizer's moves into a strategy of resistance "that would "effectively resolve the problems of negation, self-alienation, and internal hatred produced by colonial rule" (Boehmer 162). The study will be examining how wa Thiong'o uses the postcolonial approach to render the narratives of the protagonists who embody a tragic resistance.

The relationship between the writer and the target audience of a literary discourse is affirmed by the view that this relationship affects the nature of the discourse. In this regard, the use of the tragic form in postcolonial discourse is a rhetorical strategy that eases the audience's identification with the narrated events and circumstances. To this end, factors such as race, class, ideology and culture form defining principles in the rendition of a tragic narrative and enable antiphonic

concealment of the authorial persona (Hall 119). Stylistically then, the use of tragedy in postcolonial criticism enhances the writer's detachment from the narrative while enhancing literary discourse that cuts across the various subdivisions constituting a society.

Timothy Brennan investigates the literary perspective of postcolonial writing and argues that in terms of temporal nuances, postcolonial writers address themselves to two distinctive but conjoined discourses that are anticolonial and postcolonial anti-imperialist discourses. In this way, the writing of colonial and post-colonial literature functions as a rhetorical tool that addresses motifs of "cultural difference, epistemological othering, colonial subjectivity, and social contradictions" (121). In relation to wa Thiong'o's novels, his use of the tragic form functions as a rhetorical apparatus for evaluating and highlighting these motifs that result from colonialism and elite nationalism, concepts that are largely responsible for the tragic circumstances that characters in the selected texts find themselves.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

Literary criticism demands the application of theoretical tenets as a means by which the critic grounds his or her reading of literary works. Such tenets avail to the critic tools for focusing on specific narrative, textual and ideological components central to his/her research perspective and stipulated objectives. Since the current study investigates how wa Thiong'o's use of elements of tragedy (a structural component) reinforces the rendering of postcolonial concerns (the ideological component), the study uses the tenets of tragic realism and postcolonial criticism in its reading and analysis of

the selected novels. On the one hand, postcolonial criticism will guide the study as it interrogates how wa Thiong'o's novels engage colonial and postcolonial social, cultural, political and economic subjectivities, while tragic realism will, on the other hand, guide the study as it interrogates the use of elements of tragedy to facilitate wa Thiong'o's interrogation of the various forms of colonial and postcolonial (dis)engagement, conflicts, dominance and resistance.

1.8.1 Postcolonial Criticism

The study uses different strands that comprise postcolonial criticism that include but not limited to propositions advanced by critics such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Karin Barber, Elleke Boehmer among others. Theoretical stipulations as advanced by these scholars facilitate the study's interrogation of issues such as marginalisation, hybridity, syncretism, and postcolonial resistance, that largely lead to tragic conflicts in colonial and postcolonial social, political, and economic contexts. Tragic realism in the postcolonial setting thus reinforces the postcolonial writer's interrogation of those hegemonic practices that have reinforced neocolonial subjugation of the hitherto colonised societies.

The study's use of postcolonial criticism is justified by the concern that the tragic narrative in the African setting is highly influenced by social, political, cultural, and economic contestations and conflicts emanating from colonial and postcolonial experiences. As an approach to literary analysis, postcolonial criticism has been used by writers to explore and validate the perspective of the colonised, and "in a much broader sense to signify the wide range of discourses, ideologies and intellectual formations

which have emerged from cultures that experienced imperial encounters” (Newell 3). Postcolonial criticism therefore creates a platform from which the contestation of colonial and postcolonial inequalities and misrepresentations can be conducted.

This contestation is in line with Bhabha’s view that “the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (qtd. in Childs, Weber, and Williams 73-4). Thus the study uses such views to investigate how wa Thiong’o engages in the deconstruction of the colonial and postcolonial discourse through the various conflicts represented in the novels, and the circumstances that the characters used to represent these conflicts find themselves struggling with.

Postcolonial sensibility in a literary text emanates from central textual or novelistic features such as themes, style, characterisation, plotting and contextualisation. These aspects enable the evaluation of both the coloniser’s and the colonised’s discourse, with the intention of providing a counter-discourse that enhances, “a rereading and exposing of [. . .] underlying assumptions, and a dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified” (Tiffin 101). To the postcolonial critic, Postcolonial writing makes use of literary creativity to provide an alternative rendering of the colonised’s socio-cultural and historical reality. In this way, the postcolonial writer disputes subjugation that the imperial discourse attempts to engrain.

Furthermore, postcolonial criticism provides two theoretical foundations that help postcolonial critics to avail to us an accurate reading of texts that emanate from the

colonies. According to Karin Barber, the postcolonial theoretical framework should be understood in two perspectives; the representation of the colonised in the imperial narrative, and the representation of the colonised's narrative by the colonised (4-5). To this end, the study will employ the postcolonial framework to examine how wa Thiong'o's use of tragedy on one hand counters the colonizer's narrative, and affirms the perspective of the colonised on the other.

Beyond these two immediate achievements accruing from the employment of the tenets of postcolonial criticism, the study benefits from the understanding that postcolonial literature functions as a means of apprehending and subverting the fact of past and existing domination. Postcolonial literature is thus a discourse that aids the reclamation and celebration of the perspective of the colonised. To Gareth Griffiths, "writing, literacy, and the control of literary representations are vital in determining how the colonizers and colonised viewed each other, and how the colonised established or renewed their claims to a separate and distinctive cultural identity (164). In effect, the study examines how wa Thiong'o uses elements of tragedy both as a creative model and a literary contestation that structures and affirms the reality of the colonised.

The use and application of postcolonial criticism has been termed as the interrogation of "time and how it shapes experiences and histories" (Ganguly 163). This argument is informed by the notion that our analysis of postcolonial discourse relies heavily on temporal considerations of cultural and historical convergences that help us evaluate the effects of colonial and postcolonial interactions between Africa and the West. This extends to the evaluation of the influence of colonial thought and culture in post-independence African societies, and how this relationship influences social,

cultural and historical nuances that determine both individual and social conditions that lead to the tragic conflicts that the study investigates.

Colonial occupation and domination thrived on the denial of self-definition and a forced acceptance of an identity as willed by the coloniser. A big part of this denial of self-definition was textually and intellectually administered, meaning that the postcolonial writers needed to respond in kind through textual and intellectual engagement. According to Elleke Boehmer, “postcolonial [discourse] sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization – the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination” (3). In essence, a post-colonial text is expected to present a dichotomy between the structures that support domination and those that scuttle it. This is to be concretised through a focused presentation that thematically and intellectually negates colonial supremacy.

The postcolonial writer thus makes deliberate choices in terms of the means used to enhance a dichotomous textual creation of a reality that enables a reaction of “the historical, political, cultural, and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter” (Boehmer 340). To this end, the study will be guided to explore how the postcolonial discourse in wa Thiong’o’s novels reacts to the notion of historical, political, cultural and literary exegesis of the colonial contexts and narrative.

The application of the theoretical insights of postcolonial criticism helps the study to explore how wa Thiong’o responds to, and deconstructs these inequalities in his choice of themes, characters, form, content, and the settings for his creative works. The study is informed by the understanding that writers aim at representing literary, cultural, historical, political, and social desires, fears, hopes and aspirations of their

societies. This representation, in the postcolonial context, is understood as an express means of reacting to the infiltration of Western culture, history, and economic and intellectual structures largely viewed as foreign and detrimental to the African society.

In terms of the aesthetics of literature, the colonised has contested the use of comparative aesthetics in the writing and criticism of African works of literature. To this end, the study explores, using this contestation, how wa Thiong'o adopts the Western perception of tragedy but contextualises it so that it dovetails with the postcolonial discourse that seeks to deconstruct hegemonic and literary domination of the other by the imperial centre.

To James Ogude, "early African narratives have always been seen as writing against colonial discursive practices in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism" (1). Reading from this context, the study uses the post-colonial theory to explore how wa Thiong'o uses his narratives not only to subvert colonial representation, but also to assert the African perspective that was distorted by the colonial experience. The study further investigates, through the postcolonial theory, how wa Thiong'o uses the tragic plot and character to foreground the contest between the colonizer and the colonised.

Reaction to European past and present domination attracts different regional intellectual responses. To Edward Said, this reaction involves a consolidation of attitudes that can set free the Orient from Orientalism, a concept he argues is evident of "the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region" . . . and which perceives "entire periods of the Orient's cultural, political, and social history [as] mere responses to the West"

(284). Similarly, postcolonial criticism antagonises the untamed sense of otherhood with which the coloniser perceives the ex-colony, and seeks to establish a discourse that can guide an accurate means of self re-invention and re-definition.

In its application of the tenets of postcolonial criticism, this study is guided by the understanding that this framework invites a multiplicity of theoretical insights, emanating from the numerous applications that the framework facilitates. Indeed, Paul M. Mukundi cautions:

postcolonialism, must not be perceived as one monolithic, homogeneous body. Instead, despite the limitations implied in its ambiguity, postcolonialism must be considered as encompassing a series of actions pertaining to the hegemonic and post-hegemonic activities by and for both colonizers and the colonised. (3)

Mukundi's sentiments demonstrate the fact that the use of the tenets of the postcolonial framework should be directed at a specific discourse determined by both the nature and the objectives of a textual investigation.

According to Abiola Irele, "imagination plays a crucial role in any narrative recollection of the past, if only because that past is no longer part of the immediate experience of the modern storyteller" (158). As such, it is the objective of the postcolonial writer to use the literary text as a means by which the African historical identity is re-imagined and re-invigorated. This objective can only be achieved if the postcolonial writer uses a narrative strategy that emphasises on historical rediscovery, and demonstrates the convergence between such rediscovery and the aspirations of the post-independence African society.

To achieve this rediscovery, postcolonial criticism focuses on what Graham Huggan refers to as "a complex process of legitimization negotiated through the

interactions between the producers and consumers of symbolic goods” (4). Literary creativity is, from Huggan’s point of view, a site for symbolising postcolonial subjects’ negotiation for cultural and historical rediscovery. Postcolonial writing can then be appropriately considered as a conscious effort, on the part of the writer, to represent the desire of the postcolony in contesting the historical and social effects of colonialism and postcolonialism.

1.8.2 Tragic Realism

This study uses the concept of tragic realism to facilitate an evaluation of elements of tragedy in the selected novels. This intention is hinged on the expectation that the different theoretical insights into the nature of tragic conflicts, plots, and characters would aid the study in contextualising and investigating the concerns addressed in the selected texts.

Raymond Williams underscores the usefulness of tragedy in the exploration of various conflicts that societies may find itself grappling with, for “tragedy . . . is not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions” (46) that can be used to investigate the representation of “suffering: degeneration, brutalism, fear, hatred, [and] envy” (77). Williams demonstrates the possibility of expanding theoretical and literary grounds for the use of tragedy and tragic elements as a model for literary criticism. These sentiments are in line with Dan Izevbaye’s observation that “there is a sense in which literary genres are symbolic representations of their age” (38), pointing to the fact that a shift in the social and ideological orientation demands a shift in the nature of literary genres as we know them.

As an investigative approach, tragedy has had a problematic existence resulting out of the imperative to adhere to social and ideological shifts. Raymond Williams acknowledges this problematic nature by first cautioning that “we come to tragedy by many roads. It is an immediate experience, a body of literature, a conflict of theory, [and] an academic problem” (33). This is in reference to the different thinking on the nature and use of tragedy as an aesthetic and theoretical form as influenced by socio-historical and cultural imperatives.

In the classical tragic schema, Aristotle points out basic components of a tragic plot; a noble protagonist, the tragic death of the protagonist, and the unjustifiable yet inevitable downfall of the hero. These components have in essence shaped and determined the understanding of tragedy as a dramatic form. Furthermore, tragedy is viewed as a construct of metaphysical beliefs; forces that heroic characters cannot overcome, hence their tragic destruction. This understanding is particularly limiting in light of the view that just like determinant social institutions, tragedy as a literary form is dynamic and subject to change. This change is in tandem with social organisation, structures and contexts.

According to George Steiner, tragedy is “a narrative recounting the life of some ancient or eminent personage who suffered a decline of fortune toward a disastrous end” (11). Steiner’s view may be accurate in a particular context but wrong in his restriction in terms of the nature and uses of tragedy. This perhaps is a result of the tendency to limit tragedy as an art form that can only be found in the 4th and 5th century Greek society and culture.

John Gassner, in discussing the use of tragedy, laments that there are aesthetic bottlenecks such as “latent idealization” of tragedy as a creative method by arguing that such an attempt would misguide us into perceiving works of literature that are informed by tragic aesthetics “as necessary descents from some isolated individual achievement [. . .] or some golden age [that is] never recovered or recoverable” (8). Gassner’s view encourages the use of tragic elements in literary creativity and analysis, considering evolving social and literary circumstances. Such use of tragedy should put into consideration various social and literary norms, and interrogate their influence on the use of tragic elements as a means of staging context specific discourses.

In his analysis of the utilitarian value of 4th and 5th century Athenian tragedy Peter Burian observes that “the rise of tragedy as an art-form gave Athens a powerful instrument for the celebration, criticism, and the redefining of its institutions and ideals, for examining the tensions between heroic legend and democratic ideology, and for discussing political and moral questions” (206). The import of Burian’s stipulation is not in the exposition of the functions of 4th and 5th century tragedy, but in the elucidation of the artistic and socio-political value of tragedy not only to 4th and 5th Athens but also to rest of human cultures and literary contexts.

To William McCollom, there are four distinctive aspects that should characterise tragedy regardless of the context of the narrative; significance of the tragic character, just personality, destruction by forces external to the tragic character, and ambivalence in the actual cause of the character’s downfall (53-53). McCollom’s stipulation encourages our application of elements of tragedy to enhance our investigation of the

literary representation of characters, ideas and the contexts that lead to a narrative that can best be described as tragic.

Augusto Baol proceeds to explain the convergence between tragedy and characterisation, and points out that a character's ideology or perception of the immediate circumstances catalyses that character's predisposition to a tragic ending (12). When analysing the nature of tragic heroes, Baol's observation is important for it guides the study in investigating characterisation through the vista of tragic narration so as to identify and explore those characters depicted as facing tragic circumstances.

For a tragic plotting to evolve, the tragic character must fall victim to the passions and habits that manifest in the creation of an incorrigible desire for self-fulfillment which follows, as much as it veers off, the creation of a myth surrounding the individual's exploits. In other words, the tragic hero must engage in a quest or a search for a desired objective, must be significant in the society as evident from the myth that must be created around the hero, and must experience either personal or social contradictions. These qualities of the tragic give significance to not only the tragic hero, but also the themes or issues that the tragic form represents.

Furthermore, in terms of the narrative's presentation of the hero's character, such a character must rise to, or be assigned a prominent role in influencing the events that happen in the narrative and the community. In terms of the character's traits, the hero must be just in the practice of his/her sense of judgment under prevailing circumstances. This does not necessary imply fairness, but would imply a rigorous though not fair attempt to adopt the most noble option available to the tragic character. These options are the main cause of the hero's inability to evade the consequence that is

his/her inescapable end. This specific aspect seemingly exposes the character to destruction by external forces not directly a consequence of his/her character. For this reason, the hero's downfall is both just and unjust.

The fall, and in essence the tragedy behind it, are philosophical lamentations of the failure of the individual hero to tame the passions and the habits generated by the pursuit of subjective personal and social ideals. These lamentations and reflections form the basis for textual and literary evaluation, and they are therefore important aspects for the study. In the works under study, wa Thiong'o creates characters who embody socio-political ideals that precipitate split loyalties which bring forth the making of hard choices; between self preservation on one hand and ideological or philosophical consistency on the other.

These choices are the essence of the injustice in the suffering and the ultimate downfall of the tragic character, as well as the source of our pity for the suffering of the hero. As readers, we interrogate the conditions of a literary character whose suffering makes the audience realise that "(our) own evil-doing is fundamentally connected with the human condition" (McCullom 55). This sense of identification with the character's circumstances means that as the audience, we should be presented with a character whose nobility must not essentially make him/her alien to the limits of human nature.

McCullom's observation intimates that in modern tragedy, the mythic influence of the gods is not a necessary condition in the conception of the tragic narrative. Nobility or significance as dictated by philosophical thoughts may be acquired through the character's ideological disposition. Furthermore, the study benefits from the understanding that literature responds to prevailing circumstances. As such, different

settings will provide different thematic and stylistic circumstances that will influence the way a work of art is conceived and developed by the writer. As argued by Peter Burian, even our understanding of tragedy should be awake to the difference of plot and setting. He cautions that we need to understand that “there is not a single tragic narrative, but rather a number of story patterns characteristic of tragedy” (181). Indeed, tragedy arises out of the need to foreground the crises that a community may be experiencing.

In addition, the shift from the Classical Greek tragedy to a modern notion of tragedy invites the replacement of some elements so that tragedy is no longer limited in its representation. To Robert Cohen, the insistence of the presence of gods, ghosts, and fate makes tragedy appear as a form “that belongs to an earlier world, a world in which audiences could be expected to accept without dissent the presence of divine forces mixing in with everyday human affairs” (33).

In line with the difference in structure, tragic plots present different forms of conflict, but which are almost universal in the rendering of a tragic narrative. To this end, Rubrian opines that there are three characteristic components; an unyielding collision of wills, demanding yet opposed choices, and the presence of extremely threatening circumstances (181-2). In the context of postcolonial writing in general and wa Thiong’o’s writing in particular, the collision between the colonised and the coloniser, the collision between the pro and anti colonial forces (and the refusal of each to supplicate), and the overall threat to the existence of the characters in particular and the community in general, provide a perfect recipe for a tragic narrative.

The setting of the selected texts is heavily influenced by the urge to confront adversities, in the form of colonial and postcolonial oppression, dispossession, and subjugation. In the quest for justice and the restoration of an acceptable order, the characters created in these works of literature find themselves embodying the struggles of their communities. As the protagonists, they bear the weight of ideological representation and this exposes them to tragic conflicts necessary for a tragic narrative.

In the tragic narrative, therefore, the character is not essentially engaged in a personal struggle, but in a struggle that has a communal bearing. The crisis that the hero finds him/herself in is by extension a communal one. Wole Soyinka affirms the African communal nature of the tragic experience by noting that theatre “becomes the affective, rational and intuitive milieu of the total communal experience, race-formative, cosmogonic” (43). Soyinka argues that the African perspective is more liberal in its use of tragic drama as a means of appreciating a communal reality as opposed to an individual experience.

In contrast, Soyinka argues that the Eurocentric perspective “sees the cause of human anguish as viable only within strictly temporal capsules” as opposed to the African view “whose tragic understanding transcends the causes of individual disjunction and recognizes them as reflections of a far greater disharmony in the communal psyche.” (46). Soyinka’s argument foregrounds the necessity of evaluating the tragic narrative in line with socio-historical attitudes and experiences that inspire the creation and understanding of works of literature. In this way, culturally and historically distinctive realities must be taken into consideration while evaluating works of literature.

Furthermore, the tragic form is a useful literary tool that foregrounds gender inequalities, and enhances the writer's evaluation of the social and cultural factors that give rise to such inequalities. For instance, John Mugubi's study of Rebeka Njau's *The Scar* concludes that Njau's use of elements of tragedy enhances the text's critical evaluation and reflection on the effects of discriminatory socio-cultural institutions.

Works of literature are read within the context of their reflection of the nature of relations that influence their content. As such, works of literature consciously or otherwise avail to the reader the prevalent socio-political, historical, and economic determinants that guide the writer's choice of the stylistic and thematic concerns that warrant attention. In this regard, Michael Hattaway argues that "in his studies of the degradation of powerful men and women Shakespeare inevitably engaged not only with morality but with the nature of power and political authority" (105). Just as Shakespeare interrogated social and political conditions prevalent in his society, wa Thiong'o interrogates colonial and postcolonial conditions that lead to tragic conflicts.

To the postcolonial writer, the tragic narrative can be useful as a means of representing the play of power, domination and resistance, and also a means by which the writer indicates how the practice of power to exert dominance affects a society's sense of its social and political identity. The emanating conflicts are thus best highlighted through the tragic circumstances that the tragic heroes and heroines experience, and in this way works of literature are able to influence readers' appreciation of the significance of socio-cultural, historical, and political issues addressed through postcolonial writing.

1.9 Methodology

Research methodology is largely concerned with the establishment of a rationale behind a researcher's research design and the preferred data analysis method. According to David Silverman, this approach makes it easy for the researcher to "anticipate and answer reasonable questions about his/her research" (304). The study uses purposive data sampling to identify those novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o whose narrative structure and discourse display reliance on elements of tragedy, that are being investigated in the study. For this reason, the study focuses on five novels; *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. In its investigation of the elements of tragedy and postcolonial discourse, the study engages in descriptive literary analysis of the selected texts and any other literature that aids in the qualitative interpretation of these texts. To this end, the tenets of the selected theories will be used to guide, evaluate and clarify the ideas identified in the texts.

The study reviews ideas expressed on tragedy, postcolonial criticism, and also literature on the primary texts used. These ideas help the study to interrogate the linkage between tragedy and postcolonial literature, and to explore the nature of the conflicts highlighted in wa Thiong'o's novels. On the one hand, postcolonial criticism aids the study in locating the texts to their appropriate cultural, political and ideological contexts. This makes it possible for the study to interrogate the novels' discourse, and specifically the conflicts that are represented in the novels. On the other hand, tragic realism facilitates the study's evaluation of structural and narrative properties used in the novels to enhance wa Thiong'o's representation of both colonial and postcolonial conflicts. The use of tragic realism helps the study to focus on narrative aspects such as

plotting, characterisation, tragic irony, social and ideological alienation of heroes and heroines, tragic motifs and other tragic elements used in the selected texts. The use of the tenets of postcolonial criticism and tragic realism offers the study an opportunity to explore areas of convergence between the two conceptual frameworks.

Using secondary sources such as print and electronic books and journals, together with other relevant resources, the study hopes to respond to the research questions and meet the stipulated objectives.

2.0 Chapter Two

2.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Novels and the Tragic Form

2.2 Introduction

A literary text enhances the rendition of its inherent discourse through the conflicts characters find themselves grappling with, and the circumstances that surround and shape these characters' interactions. The representation of these conflicts contextualises the writer's evaluation of social, historical, and political conditions that shape the background of the community and the narrative. However, for the writer's discourse to meet the objective of literary representation, the writer must utilise an appropriate method that packages the conflicts and aids the reader's interpretation of these conflicts. This chapter explores Ngugi wa Thiong'o's use of the tragic form as an artistic method for interrogating social, historical and political conflicts in *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*.

2.3 Tragic Failure in *The River Between*

Tragic narration is largely intended to illuminate a community's collective encounter with social, historical and political realities through the presentation of the tragic hero's individual circumstances. This is as observed by Aristotle who argues that tragedy is a representation of the actions of characters "who necessarily display certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought . . . the two natural causes of actions" (39). Characters, their circumstances and their reaction to these circumstances are, therefore, the driving forces that enhance the rendition of the tragic narrative.

Tragic narration is an excellent model that facilitates representation of social issues that are more distinctively characterised by social upheavals and contestations addressed in *The River Between*. According to K. M. Newton, despite the “foundationalist discourse” inherent in tragic representation, it is a useful tool in addressing conflicts that “are intrinsic to life in the world” (159). This view is best evaluated through the concession that human societies are coalitions of wills that are safeguarded by a variety of rules and sanctions which are at times subject to self contradictions and varied interpretations particularly in moments of uncertainty and social change.

Consequently, in using the tragic form to interrogate social change and its representation in the novel, such interrogation must evaluate the narratives’ and the characters’ interpretation of this change. In this endeavour, the novel can be best interrogated through the examination of formative aspects that constitute its discourse. These range from elements such as narrative devices and techniques, modes of portrayal, and in totality the rhetorical contexts that enhance the rendition of a narrative. In this way, the tragic form enhances our appreciation of the narratives’ view of both the specific changes that a community experiences and the writer’s evaluation of the social and historical significance of them.

According to Joanna Sullivan, “the modern African novel seems to consistently generate four categories of heroes: the tale hero, the epic hero, the tragic hero, and the comic antihero” (182). From this observation, the African novel is identifiable not necessarily by the uniqueness of the issues the genre addresses, but through the uniqueness of the central characters. The demeanour of the hero, from Sullivan’s

argument, is highly dependent on the issues that the character hero represents at a particular social and historical period in the specific society. Given that most precolonial African communities are communalistic, the demeanour of the hero is mostly defined, not by individual characters' social or ideological perspectives, but by the collective experience of the community.

A literary text, from Richard Bradford's point of view, is "a cohesive unity of patterns, structures and effects" (72). The wholesome meaning of a text is, therefore, a result of the writer's effective use of narrative patterns, motifs, structural and stylistic choices that in combination highlight thematic concerns in *The River Between*. These are deliberate stylistic and formal choices that the writer picks to formulate a narrative that is representative of a particular way of assessing the existent realities presented through the text.

Indeed, through literary representation, wa Thiong'o mediates between the existent reality and his or her perspective of this reality so as to influence the worldview of the readers. To achieve this, the writer focuses on the nature of the existent conflicts that result from the practice of social interactions that are subject to social, political, historical, cultural and economic conditions prevalent in a community. Conflicts emanating from skewed power relations are, in *The River Between*, illustrative of the polarisation that centres on the aesthetics of colonial discourse and colonial conditions.

The River Between explores these conditions and evaluates the human capacity to resolve and interrogate them. The use of the tragic form makes the discourse more distinctive or identifiable through specific narrative aspects that range from the plot, the

nature or behavioural demeanour of characters, the motifs, and the narrative imperatives used to elucidate and interrogate the narrated discourse.

Tragic mimesis, the use of elements of tragedy to reflect social, political, cultural and other conflicts evident in our societies, represents contestations and contradictions that characterise the nuances of domination, contest and freedom that our societies have experienced at various phases of their existence. These universal forces are evident any society that struggles to establish an acceptable social and political order. In essence therefore, there are expected contradictions, conflicts and negotiations that may warrant a tragic mimesis or representation. This idea of a universal tragic representation at specific historical moments in a society is to Kwaku Labri Korang, “a reiteration of the story of the quest for human freedom coming up short in [spite of] men’s and women’s commitment and best efforts to negotiate the constraints” (13). This acknowledgement explains the basis for application of tragic realism in a critique of literary works that offer narratives concerning themselves with historical moments that carry indelible truth of social conflicts and contestations.

In his description of the nature and function of tragedy, Aristotle refers to this genre as a form of imitation of actions “brought about by agents who necessarily display certain distinctive qualities both of character and of thought” (39). Characterisation and the ideals that characters represent are in this way highlighted as defining qualities of a tragic narrative. Characters, through their actions, give form to oppositional discourse thus constituting the conflict that moves the events that make the narrative. Aristotle’s identification of character and thought as primary qualities in the composition of a tragic plot dovetails with Geoffrey Breerton’s view on what

constitutes tragic mimesis, which mostly focuses on characters and the situations they represent.

According to Geoffrey Brereton, tragedy is both a literary and a philosophical evaluation of human circumstances, and the human reaction to these circumstances (5) that are, in works of literature, expressed through specific narrative principles. To start with, Brereton argues that a tragic narrative is a composite structure that is constituent of elements such as disaster, failure, irony, and status. These elements are best discussed through specific interrogation of narrative elements such as character, plot, motifs, and point of view, and with specific textual reference to the novels selected for this study.

In the novel, the context for tragic mimesis is first introduced through characterisation, and predictably lays ground for a tragic plotting. In anticipation of the events that will unfold in the plot, the novel attempts to announce Waiyaki's nobility which is linked to his lineage, territory, and individual traits. The fact that he is from Kameno, a land the narrative attributes to greatness and possession of superiority emanating from the myth of creation of the the Gikuyu, Waiyaki's nobility and superior status is well enunciated right from the beginning of the narrative.

The announcement of the primordial conflict between Makuyu and Kameno is significant in that it offers textual opposition that is useful in two ways: on the one hand it expositions the hegemonic contest between the ridges and, on the other hand, it emphasises the superiority of Kameno, the ridge that was bestowed with the sanctity of the sacred grove, and a lineage of great leaders and heroes, a fact that "could be seen, by anyone who cared to count, that Kameno threw up more heroes and leaders than any

other ridge” (2). In this gesture, the narrative anticipates Waiyaki’s superiority by juxtaposing him to great heroes and leaders such as Mugo wa Kibiro the seer, Kamiri the great magician, and Wachiori the great warrior. This part of the narrative is conscious of the argument that “tragedy is not easily associated with trivial personalities” (Brereton 16), and thus seeks to assign to Waiyaki an appropriate context for his requisite nobility while at the same time laying bare the facts of the conflicts and contestations into which he is born.

Apart from this constructed opposition that abnegates Makuyu’s unqualified claim to superiority over Kameno, *The River Between* elucidates other constructions of this opposition in the portrayal of Waiyaki’s stature. Waiyaki, at a very tender age, is bequeathed unmeasured authority and influence. For instance, when he finds Kamau and Kinuthia fighting, he has an aura of command and authority around him that make Kamau shudder. As the narrative tells, “He [Kamau] quickly looked up and met the burning eyes, gazing at him. Meekly he obeyed the unspoken command [although Waiyaki was] quite young; not of Kamau or Kinuthia’s age. He had not even gone through his second birth” (6). These textual disclosures steer the reading of Waiyaki’s character to function as textual presuppositions of Waiyaki’s centrality in the narrative.

In addition, the narrative further invites the reader to appreciate the importance of Waiyaki’s character in the events that will constitute the narrative. In this regard, *The River Between* acknowledges character as a central formative element of meaning creation in the tragic form and literature in general. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle are of the view that “characters are the life of literature: they are the objects of our curiosity and fascination, affection and dislike, admiration and condemnation” (63).

Through this observation, Bennett and Royle stipulate prerequisites for any narrative that seeks to impress upon the readers a degree of either attachment or alienation dependent on a narrative's desire.

Waiyaki's nobility which is further demonstrated by the declaration of his worldview as elucidated through the narrative's description of his gaze: "not a man knew what language the eyes spoke. Only, if the boy gazed at you, you had to obey" (10). In this way, this part of the narrative agrees with the assessment of a literary narrative as a "conventional power of action assumed about the chief characters in fictional literature" (Coupe 151). The novel creates a narrative that from the outset affirms Waiyaki's powers and influence both at the community level and in the constitution of the narrative. Furthermore, the narrative admits that Waiyaki's uniqueness lies not in his built or his status but in his eyes:

Waiyaki was now a tall, powerfully built man who struck people as being handsome. Even so this was not the most striking thing about him. It was his eyes. They looked delicately tragic. But they also appeared commanding and imploring. It was his eyes that spoke of that yearning, that longing for something that would fill him all in all. (69)

It is no coincidence that the novel gives significance to the description of Waiyaki's eyes several times in the course of the narrative. This is stylistically an instance of symbolic dualism which is meant to establish a link between Waiyaki's traits and his social and philosophical worldview. In analysing the connection between narrative choices, inference and discourse, Seymour Chatman is of the opinion that the discourse that is represented through a text is availed through "the capacity of any discourse to choose which events and objects [. . .] to state and which only to imply" (28).

Consequently, the novel's attention to Waiyaki's eyes as a narrative object functions to enunciate his social vision and the tragic nature of this vision.

Laurence Coupe, in his assessment of the usefulness of myths in the investigation of narrative archetypes, identifies four narrative models all of which revolve around the influence of central characters in the narrated events. Besides the mythical and the ordinary hero characters, the hero-leader who "has authority, passions, and powers of expression" yet who is "subject to social criticism" (151) has more bearing to the tragic hero who must, according to Brereton, conform to the notion of philosophical evaluation of human circumstances (6). It is this authority that Waiyaki gets nurtured into when Chege, his father, takes him to the sacred grove and reveals to him that he hails from the lineage of Mugo wa Kibiro, the great seer. More specifically, Chege, confesses that Waiyaki is the descendant of "those few who came to the hills" (18), and emphatically reminds him that he is "the last in the line" (20).

Besides acknowledging Waiyaki's noble status, as demonstrated by his admission into the secrets of the sacred grove, the narrative further predicts the enormity of the challenge that he will have to face as the bearer of Mugo wa Kibiro's prophecy that "salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people" (20). This prophecy concurs in principle with the myth-ritual thinking that attributes the fate of the hero-leader to the existence of a myth and the carrying out of a ritual that accentuates the destiny of the hero, and in Bascom's stipulation, results to either death or deposition (110). With the numerous failures of his predecessors in the noble lineage, Waiyaki's status exposes him to a tragic destiny and is arguably

projected as a continuation of the tragic circumstances that revolve around the social ideology and vision for the community.

Indeed, *The River Between* projects itself as the narrative whose driving conflict revolves around the question of social ideology and social failures. These failures give a mimetic representation of the state of social thought and situations experienced by a community that finds itself at socio-historical crossroad. In the context of tragic realism, the genre pronounces the conflicting social forces and ideologies through what Northrop Frye in “Archetypes of Literature” refers to as “the myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero” (104). In *The River Between*, this isolation is intimated at the very beginning of the narrative and well before Waiyaki takes the status of the hero-leader. His predecessors have found themselves engrossed in a chain of failures and disillusionment that ultimately leads to their isolation from the community.

Essentially, the isolation of the tragic hero is a consequence of both destiny and the choices made by the individual tragic hero. In Waiyaki’s case, isolation results from the divergent social and cultural perspectives inherent in the philosophies adopted by Makuyu and Kameno, and also from his own evaluation of these social and cultural issues. As the narrative recounts, “where did people like Waiyaki stand? Had he not received the white man’s education? And was this not a part of the other faith, the new faith?” (69). This part of the narrative discloses the reasons that inform Waiyaki’s isolation; ideologically, socially and psychologically.

Brereton, in his elucidation of tragic elements, concurs with the Aristotelian view that the main character should be confronted with inevitable disaster. In *The River*

Between, Waiyaki is equipped with double attributes of greatness both by birth and by nurture. Chege, his father, sends him to Siriana, the missionary school, to “learn all the wisdom of the white man” so that he may “save the people in their hour of need” (21). With the quickly shifting events that are precipitated by Muthoni’s death, Waiyaki is quickly immersed into the rivalry that existed between Makuyu and Kamen. The primordial conflict that Waiyaki’s predecessors were confronted with catches up with him, albeit with cultural contest being the new front for this unending rivalry.

Works of literature, according to Bennett and Royle, invite readers to identify with the circumstances in which characters find themselves as means of provoking the readers’ understanding of the text’s discourse (69). In tragedy, this identification heralds to the reader a sense of apocalypticism, a sense of “a shattering of society or the world as a whole” (Bennett and Royle 100). In *The River Between*, the polarisation that is occasioned by the introduction of Christian values that rejected African traditional cultural beliefs threatens not only to shatter the relations between the ridges but also to destroy individuals, families, and other social relationships. In this way, the novel prompts readers to evaluate the place of new western values in influencing changes in the African cultural ontology.

The middle ground in this context should be the understanding of the conflicts inherent in the positions taken by each side of the political and cultural divide. By taking the precarious position, Waiyaki not only exposes himself to social and ideological isolation but also plays into the hands of a tragic ending. As Sullivan points out, tragic heroes in African fiction are a product of such polarisation and that “the tragedy of their stories speaks to the complicated social dynamics arising from the clash

of modernity with traditional values” (182). From this argument, it is evident that apart from the circumstances that produce the tragic characters, other elements of tragedy such as motif (the pattern that such narratives take) and plot are important in the making of a tragic story.

In their analysis of the convergence between plot and motif, Dominguez-Rue and Mrotzek contest that the use of causal boundaries can be a useful instrument that can reveal both the plot structure and the motif or thought pattern of a tragic narrative (673). They further argue that the actions of a tragic character are dictated by both hidden and perceived boundaries. For instance, in *The River Between*, both the physical and ideological boundaries between Kameno and Makuyu precipitate the tragic events in the novel. Waiyaki’s unawareness of the impossibility of unifying the ideologically polarised ridges, as well as his awareness of his role as the one destined to save the two ridges, puts him in a dilemma that pushes him to his tragedy. In Aristotelian view of what should be the convergence of a tragic plot and tragic characterisation, Aristotle argues that the incidences must happen out of necessity, and in line with portrayal characters as “good,” “life-like,” and “consistent” (51). This juxtaposition of plot, characterisation and thought necessitates the tragic effect that follows the reversal or the disaster that the tragic hero experiences.

In the representation of a tragic narrative, motifs are important narrative elements since they influence both the characters and the incidences of the plot. Such motifs may range from wisdom, folly and jealousy. In *The River Between*, Kabonyi’s jealousy emanates from the view that Waiyaki is “too young to be let into the secrets of the tribe” (83). Whitmore is of the opinion that the tragic effect is enhanced by the

presence of evil scheming against the tragic hero who “seeks either to avoid evil when he should face it or to turn it to his own ends” (347).

Whitmore’s contention is that the tragic hero may find himself in a dilemma, and whatever choice the hero makes brings him closer to his destiny and disaster. Although Waiyaki is aware of the existing polarisation between Makuyu and Kamen, and Kabonyi’s jealousy of his growing influence, fate leads him to take the false move and he gets emotionally entangled with Nyambura, Joshua’s daughter. This not only exposes Waiyaki to Kabonyi’s schemes but also betrays the ideals of the tribe and the Kiama, further aggravating his dilemma and hastening his imminent alienation.

The dilemma motif is, however, a direct consequence of the tragic hero’s quest for consistency and nobility of character. In *The River Between*, Waiyaki’s quest for a judicious disposition systematically puts him in a position where his actions and choices relating to his ideological perspective alienate him from the rest of the community, and lead him to what Dominguez-Rue and Mrotzek call the “boundaries of systems archetypes” in which the tragic hero lacks “awareness or knowledge [. . . and] which highly contributes to [his] tragedy” (673). This lack of awareness is neatly tied to a tragic hero’s possession, in his character, of what Aristotle calls the tragic flaw, an inherent weakness in character.

In his presentation as a tragic character, Waiyaki’s weaknesses or miscalculations originate from three inseparable desires: his desire to play the role of the prophesied saviour of the tribe; his desire for reconciliation between Kamen and Makuyu; and his inexplicable romantic attraction to Nyambura. These become the

genesis of Waiyaki's tragic flaw, what Aristotle describes as *hamartia*, a false step which apparently pulls Waiyaki closer to his tragic end.

In his contemplation of the principles of tragedy, Brereton argues that irony is an important component of the tragic since it effectively underscores the reversal of fortune (15). In *The River Between*, the overriding irony, which is hinted right from the introduction, is imminent in Waiyaki's quest. Just like his predecessors, he is betrayed by the very people he tries to help, and who accuse him of betraying the oath. This approach to tragedy interlinks tragic characters with tragic plots and motifs.

Since works of literature are premised on the need to represent and evaluate issues affecting society, writers may place their characters in positions that make them expressions of divergent and in some cases polarising situations. Characters in such cases may have to make choices, some of which may lead to a tragic ending. In his evaluation of the essence of tragedy, Newton argues that "the tragic effect depends on the protagonist accepting that the values that define his or her sense of self cannot be reconciled with the situation with which he or she is faced" (25). It is apparent that Waiyaki is torn between the extremes of cultural conservatism and conversion into the new faith, and as such the crossroads that he finds himself at predisposes him to his isolation, betrayal and tragic ending.

As a literary choice, a text uses the hero's tragedy to represent ambiguities in a society's perspective on important matters affecting the same society. Ian Glen observes that the tragedy of the hero results from the "social dilemma" of a hero-leader who "brings social change but is resented for it; he is someone divided between the modernising and traditional society and [he is] misunderstood and punished by both,

someone finally isolated from familial and social bonds” (23). The conflict between the hero and the community is reflected in the generic use of tragedy since it influences the demeanour of the hero-leader, his status, his failure or disaster and the irony of his social and ideological endeavours.

In its presentation of tragic characterisation, *The River Between* adopts the four Aristotelian models that include “the complex tragedy, which depends entirely on reversal and discovery,” “tragedy of suffering,” “tragedy of character,” and “spectacular tragedy” (56). *The River Between* can be read as a narrative that primarily enhances its tragic sensibility through Waiyaki’s character, his status, and the irony of his changing fortunes. As such, it is a narrative that can be read within the framework of “tragedy of character” that Aristotle conceptualises, and in a sense demonstrates similarity to the Sophoclean depiction of a character whose fate is preordained and whose struggle is against forces that are beyond his control, and who has detrimental personal traits that lead to his downfall.

This tragic conception is further evident in McCollom’s stipulation of four archetypal situations that may militate against the destiny of the tragic hero and render the narrative worth of tragic assessment; a degree of “wrongful behavior,” “a significant fault of error,” the hero’s destruction resulting from “fate or external evil,” and where “the hero’s action is guilty from one point of view and innocent from another” (53). As benchmarks for evaluating the plot structure, the motifs and character portrayal, McCollom’s distinction of these situations has helped the study in elucidating the presence of tragic elements in the novel.

In contrast to the tragic form in the other novels, Waiyaki's tragedy follows the pattern of "the complex tragedy" that according to Aristotle is founded on reversal and discovery, and where his suffering is a consequence of fate and evil that is manifest from outside his personal character or his actions. However, as McCollom argues, Waiyaki's downfall can in part be argued to result from his choices, particularly his ambivalence that largely exposes him to those extraneous evil forces that seek his downfall or destruction.

Moreover, the tragedy that befalls the tragic hero is to Apollo Obonyo Amoko evidence of the fact that through his fiction, wa Thiong'o addresses "the dilemmas of postcolonial intellectual formation" (160). In order for the African intellectual to foreground these dilemmas, there is need to highlight the polarisation that is an express result of the emergent conflicts. It is this polarisation that makes it impossible for Waiyaki, a representative of the African intellectual, to mobilise the ridges to form a cohesive unit in response to colonial violation of African culture and history. The intellectuals failure predisposes him to social rejection and isolation, and consequently drives him towards a tragic ending.

In *The River Between*, the novel's tragic flavour is largely availed through a combination of several narrative components. Wa Thiong'o's use of a language that is deeply rooted in the biblical metaphor (that of the saviour-prophet who is rejected by the very people whose course he attempts to advance), and the motif of a hero who faces inexplicable misfortunes arising from forces that are beyond his control align the narrative with the qualities of the tragic. This is reminiscent of the ritual influence in classical tragedy that aims at highlighting both individual and public discourse

constituting the society's attempt to interrogate and interpret those forces that influence human destiny. In the same way, the tragic in the novel aids the interrogation of social, cultural and historical issues that influence the destiny of the postcolonial African society.

2.4 Contention of Heroism in *A Grain of Wheat*

The texture of the tragic as an art form is determined by the cosmos that informs the society upon which the narrative is based. This is on the one hand achieved through the narrative's focus on individualised contests and conflicts that are nurtured by social interactions, and on the other, by emergent social, political and economic formations that bring with them new conflicts that filter into the relationships between individuals and the institutions that comprise the society.

In Korang's evaluation, this social ordering and the accompanying conflicts are justified by the fact that tragic mimesis is a product of both rational and irrational "suprasocial" and "infrasocial" attempts to establish a social equilibrium (13). In *A Grain of Wheat*, these rational and irrational quests are evident in the characterisation, plotting, and the motifs that constitute the narrative and are responsible for the tragic essence in the novel.

In the novel, as much as the conflicts are triggered by the community's struggle against colonial oppression, the narrative is primarily driven by interpersonal conflicts whose genesis runs back to the precolonial period. However, the same conflicts become foundations for the conflicts that emerge in the colonial period. The evolution of both infrasocial and suprasocial conflicts into tragic conflicts depends on two important

aspects: the presence of a tragic protagonist who struggles against capricious forces, and an unyielding affirmation of a communal desire for freedom and self-definition.

However, concepts such as freedom and self-definition are just social ideals and may not be easily achieved in realistic representation of competing human purposes, values and social contradictions that characterise many human societies. In *A grain of Wheat*, narrative features such as characterisation, plot and motifs play into the hands of textual conditions that precipitate a tragic narration. And in line with Brereton's four basic conditions for a tragic narration - character, status, disaster and irony, tragic realism evaluates the existence of these competing forces and how they impact on the social ontology of both the society and the characters.

As regards the status of the tragic hero, Brereton contends that "tragedy is not easily associated with trivial personalities," and acknowledges that this as a textual consideration is meant to establish "the high standing of the characters" (17). However, the dynamism of tragedy as a genre has dictated other means of assigning nobility to tragic characters and the issues that can be represented through the tragic form. In this regard, Brereton is of the opinion that "the seriousness of the events in itself raises the participants to the tragic level" and, thus, enables an ordinary character to do away with "his individual ordinariness to become, through suffering and disaster, a representative of humanity or some part of it" (18). It is with these considerations that Mugo, although seemingly an ordinary character in *A Grain of Wheat*, can be investigated as a tragic hero dependent on the stature of the issues he represents in the narrative.

To Mugo as well as to other characters, he has heroic status, and is perceived to be the icon of the struggle for independence. In his vision, he is the saviour that the people need and he sees his life as parallel to that of Moses:

He let the gentle voice lure him to distant lands in the past. Moses too was alone keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. And he led the flock to the far side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And God called out to him in a thin voice, Moses, Moses. And Mugo cried out, Here am I, Lord. (137)

There are several incidences in the narrative where the saviour motif, in reference to Mugo's perception of himself, is evident. He has a way of earning people's trust, and they in turn perceive him as the *de facto* leader of the independent society. This perception elevates Mugo in the eyes of the community, and heightens not only his tragic status but also his imminent fall.

Characters, as narrative agents whose actions move the incidences that constitute the plot of the novel, are important aspects in the narration of the tragic. According to Aristotle's conceptualisation of the nature of tragic characters, "tragedy is a representation of people who are better than the average" (52), and who must be "good," "appropriate," "lifelike" and "consistent" (51). Despite this seeming prescription on the nature of the tragic plot, it is considered that the purpose of this prescription is dependent on the desired purpose of the narration as opposed to a particular moral determination of the character.

Undoubtedly, the goodness of character is appropriate to the intended thought or theme, while being lifelike and consistent is dependent on the truthful and realistic presentation of the character. It could, therefore, mean that an evil character, as Mugo is

in *A Grain of Wheat*, needs to be consistent in his evil nature and be an appropriate agent for the presentation of such evil as it may exist in society. In this way, the tragic character as represented through Mugo underscores the relativity of goodness and badness, which in this instance is a deviation from the moral ideal and the primary source of the human contradictions that gives the novel its tragic essence.

Moreover, Mugo embodies the ambivalence of the social forces that make up an ideal community: the desire to preserve which exists simultaneously with an inherently destructive instinct. As a character, Mugo is the product of both individual idiosyncrasies and the prevailing social forces that militate on his thoughts and actions. Mugo is jealous of Kihika's position for he, Mugo, sees himself as the one destined to save the people and to acquire greatness, power and wealth for himself:

He walked in this vision. And in his dazed head was a tumult of thoughts that acquired the concrete logic of a dream. The argument was so clear, so exhilarating, it explained things he had been unable to solve in his life. I am important. I must not die. To keep myself alive, healthy, strong – to wait for my mission in life – is a duty to myself, to men and women of tomorrow. (214)

However, the saviour motif becomes the cause of the primary tragic conflict in the novel. It is perhaps Mugo's perception of himself as the saviour that leads him to betray Kihika, his perceived nemesis in the quest for the messiah role that Mugo seems to have been obsessed with, and perhaps one more strategy for his self-preservation as he waits for the moment of his greatness. In this regard, Aristotle argues that in the plotting of the tragic, so as to enhance the cathartic effect, the consequent suffering must "involve those who are near and dear to one another" (50). *A Grain of Wheat* plays

into this principle of the tragic since all the characters involved in the betrayals have a convergence in the intricacies of the struggle for independence.

In his further discussion of the ingredients of the tragic, Aristotle further states that “the unraveling of the plot should arise from the circumstances of the plot itself,” meaning that the events that constitute the tragic should relate in a causal sense with preceding events evolving from the previous ones because they are “necessary and probable” (52). This demand on the tragic is primarily the source of the surprising reversals and discoveries that must be experienced in the denouement, and which punctuate the disaster that the tragic hero has to experience. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Mugo’s reversal of fortunes from good to bad fortune is orchestrated by his evil nature, a motif that directs the incidences making up the plot of the novel.

Furthermore, according to Whitmore, “every real tragedy must, with whatever preliminaries, lead to a crisis, in which the potency of evil, and the struggle of the participants as they yield to or defy it, inexorably precipitate a catastrophe” (347). In the novel, the coming of independence accompanies the resolution of many of the evils that characterised the struggle for independence. However, there cannot be, to the characters, a restoration unless the unmasking of the person that betrayed Kihika is concluded. This is the one evil that sustains the tragic narrative and which organises the other elements of tragedy that make up the narrative.

However, Gikandi is of the opinion that Mugo is used in the narrative as “the archetypal scapegoat, the representation of the villagers’s pain and suffering during the emergency and the depository of their anxieties” (109). In Gikandi’s view, Mugo is the victim of prevailing social forces, and not the architect of his downfall. In contrast,

when evaluated from the vista of tragic analysis, the novel reveals that, as a character, Mugo is a literary structuration that functions to enunciate the contradictions in human nature, and most significantly those that seek to cannibalise collective aspirations for personal gain. Mugo's actions are defined by his illusions of greatness and his ungainly egocentricism which puts him in a position where he hopes to benefit from colonial and the postcolonial socio-political contexts. It is this contradiction in his worldview that leads to his tragic fall. The tragic form is thus used to punctuate the society's renunciation of such extreme expressions of individualistic desires that seek to negate collective aspirations.

In the Aristotelian conception of the tragic, Mugo's selfishness and his evil conniving nature become his *hubris*, the weakness in character that must lead him to a tragic ending. This observation dovetails with Aristotle's view of the tragic character as "the kind of man who neither is distinguished for excellence and virtue, nor [who] comes to grief on account of baseness and vice, but on account of some error" (38). It can then be argued that Mugo's fall is not precipitated by the community's ill will towards him, but by his own weakness in character. This view is further reiterated by Raymond Williams who contends that one of the commonest tragic motifs is the presentation of "an individual man, from his own aspirations, from his own nature, set out on an action that lead(s) him to tragedy" (88). Character in this case is driven by a particular weakness that predisposes the hero to a tragic ending.

The last tragic element, in *A Grain of Wheat*, is the disaster that befalls Mugo when his guilt becomes apparent. His heroism is negated and he falls, in the eyes of the other characters, from a hero to a villain. To the tragic, the representational value of this

irony is in engendering the crisis that the community has found itself in, in its attempt to reconcile the colonised and the decolonised community. In this way, tragic narration affords the novel a potent tool that aids in a literary depiction of the contradictions that define the social and historical conditions. As a consequence of the novel's employment of irony, the narrative is able to create literary negations that define the ideal postcolonial community. Mugo as a character is contrasted to the other characters who appear to have, in the newly decolonised context, build a vision for themselves as well as for the community.

Gikandi describes the employment of irony as "the appropriate form for representing complex, contested, and incomplete histories" (108). Apparently, through the incisive application of irony, the tragic narrative is able to evaluate the conditions that influence human actions and demonstrate the effects of inappropriate choices that human beings sometimes make as a consequence of social and individual idiosyncrasies. Gikandi further evaluates this ironical juxtaposition of the varied interpretations of the struggle and hope for independence, and asserts that "in its apotheosis and betrayal, [the novel] is given content and form as much by its utopian propensities as by the series of tragedies and mishaps" (115). Tragic form therefore uses character betrayal to allegorically demonstrate, by its presentation of contesting individual wills, the importance of collapsing personal idiosyncrasies into "an intelligible source of meaning" (115) that should aid development of values and ideals beneficial to the nascent postcolonial state.

Additionally, the novel draws from biblical metaphors to enunciate on betrayal motif as a component of a tragic narrative. This enunciation is achieved through the

narrative's constant utilisation of the metaphor of a personality who sacrifices himself for the good of the community, but who is betrayed by a selfish close confidant. However, this metaphor is different from the rejection of the saviour-prophet motif that is evident in *The River Between*. This contrast punctuates the shift in the social discourse and marks waThiong'o's appropriation of language of the tragic form to voice this shift that should be read in tandem with evolving socio-historical imperatives. In this way, the language of tragedy is used to address both to the novel's thematic concerns and to illustrate the dynamics of social and historical change in an emergent post-independence nation.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, there is variance in the narrative's employment of tragic characterisation and accompanying motif. Mugo's character, unlike Waiyaki's, heavily tilts the narrative towards what Aristotle refers to as "tragedy of character," and hence the reversal is not a consequence of what McCollom calls "fate or external evil," but a consequence of some evil within his character. This evil leads Mugo to betray collective desires in pursuit of personal gratification.

Dependent then on these variations, tragic discovery and the accompanying tragic pleasure is experienced by the community or the other characters after they avenge both Kihika's betrayal, and by extension betrayal of the community's socio-political aspirations. As Decker correctly observes, Mugo and his silences do not just represent the stylistic lacunae that militate against a linear reading of the text, and invites an analysis of Mugo's execution as the destruction of the "of a symbol of that which may arise out of imperialism" (56). Consequently, the community is engaging in

a reversal of fortunes of an evil force and thus the narrative places tragic pleasure into the hands of the community.

Tragedy in this sense follows Aristotle's argument on the supremacy of the plot structure in making a tragic narrative. In his opinion, the plot should be perceived as the most important ingredient of tragedy, followed by character (40). The two are however interdependent in the sense that the plot is developed by the actions of the characters, who then influence both the nature of the narrated events, as well as influence the readers' interpretation of the text's discourse. However, Aristotle's attempt at a hierarchical view of these elements is primarily intended to safeguard the structure of the tragic so as to ultimately provide a tragic sense of life. Indeed, the plot structure in *A Grain of Wheat* enhances the tragic sense in which Mugo's ending is premised, and concretises the narrative's evaluation of the complex social, political and economic transition from colonialism to independence.

The novel's use of the tragic form to evaluate changing social, political and economic realities is in tandem with George R. Noyes who argues for an expansion of our interrogation of the tragic to evaluate other motifs that can be used to represent tragic action in contemporary texts. In *A Grain of Wheat*, betrayal functions as a primary motif that facilitates the narrative's evaluation of social, political and economic forces that militate against the emergent postcolonial society. This motif is evident in two distinctive levels; on the one hand, there is individual betrayal that is used to expound on the intricacies of the colonial struggle, and on the other hand, there is the betrayal of communal values, hopes and aspirations. As a matter of fact, individual betrayal is used

to allegorically magnify the betrayal of the dream of nationalism in the post-independence nation.

It is evident that wa Thiong'o explicitly uses betrayal as a motif that illuminates the obstacles that the nascent Kenyan state anticipates. Indeed, Christopher Odhiambo observes that "[n]arrating the nation is arguably one of the most evident preoccupations [. . .] pursued by majority of postcolonial literary writers and critics" (159). Mugo's betrayal of the nationalist desire provides the novel's discourse with the means by which it questions the validity of individualistic desires alongside wider societal and nationalist concerns. By the novel's effective application of tragic irony that nullifies Mugo's quest for prosperity at the expense of the nation, the narrative privileges the nation over the individual. The tragic hero is used as an embodiment of the social evils that will be detrimental to the development of a national conscience that is appropriate for nation building.

As Adrian Poole observes, "it is tempting to see the tragic hero as a kind of scapegoat for our crimes – or unacted desires" (51), since we are "connected, even interconnected, by complex systems of cause and consequence, in which questions of innocence and guilt are all caught up and embroiled" (55). The tragic hero from this perspective is representative of the desire for a community's cleansing of itself by transferring its guilt on one of their own.

2.5 Transition from Epic to Tragic Heroism in *Matigari*

Tragic evaluation of social and historical situations and contexts stems mostly from the existence of extremely divisive and irresolvable social and individual conflicts.

Apparently, when these conflicts are part of the historical background of a literary text, they determine both the thematic concerns and the typology of character that can best illustrate the intended discourse. In the context of post-independence literature, social injustice, inequality, and economic exploitation influence the discourse that texts originating from this historical background must focus on. In terms of their historical contextualisation, texts emanating from this historical backdrop evaluate the significance of colonial heroism in the emergent postcolonial historical and ideological phase, as it is the case in wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*.

In the novel, the character, Matigari, is founded on the epic exploits of the Mau Mau freedom struggle, although changing historical imperatives demand his transition in line with the prevailing social and historical realities. Matigari's historical reemergence forces him to denounce the violence of the struggle for independence by symbolically burying his weaponry before he can be part of the post-independence nation:

Round his waist he wore a cartridge belt decorated with red, blue and green beads and from which hung a pistol in a holster. He slowly unfastened the belt, counted the bullets, rolled it up carefully and placed it next to the sword and the AK47 rifle. He looked at these things for a while, perhaps bidding them goodbye. He covered them with dry soil. He rubbed off all traces of his footsteps and then covered the spot with dry leaves so skillfully that nobody would have suspected there was a hole there" (4)

This exposition of the incidences that constitute the plot of the novel draws a historical and a literary boundary between the epic hero and the tragic hero. By shedding off the rudiments of his pre-independence heroism, Matigari disembarks from his hitherto familiar historical space, and ventures into the unfamiliar history of neocolonialism that

presents him with unprecedented challenges, those that expose him to tragic consequences. Furthermore, Matigari is a microcosmic representation of the ideological and political conflict between the bona fide freedom fighters and bourgeoisie constituted of the beneficiaries of independence. In Matigari's perception, the conflict is not a violent engagement but an ideological negotiation that can be amicably resolved.

The impossibility of resolving the disputed postcolonial social and historical betrayals lays ground for a tragic reading of the incidences that make up the plot of the novel. Such a reading should address itself to pertinent principles such as character, the nature of the conflict, the motifs, isolation and the disaster that awaits the tragic hero, and the resulting ironic twist that accompany the tragic events addressed through the narrative.

At the point when the novel opens, it is apparent that Matigari's renunciation of violence is a symbolic gesture that is meant to concretise his nobility. As he contemplates this transformation, he announces to the world and to himself: "I have now girded myself with a belt of peace. I shall go back to my house and rebuild my home" (5). The novel's discourse is primarily rendered through the symbolism and imagery that revolves around the metaphor of the house and Matigari's metaphorical search for children to occupy it. This is a heroic and noble undertaking which, if he is successful, will cement his image as the community's hero-leader.

Matigari's attempt to engage post-independence socio-political and economic leadership reveals the deterioration of social and economic conditions for low cadre citizens, as a consequence of their exploitation by the rich and powerful. The new socio-political and economic formations cannot accommodate his mission and his quest turns

into a violent struggle with the powerful forces that he seeks to overrun. In this narrative of dispossession, there is literary demonstration of the violence that can be meted out in protection of material and political power. In such a context, the use of tragic mimesis serves as a literary demonstration of the sense of deprivation that characters go through in their attempt to fight their oppressors, resulting in institutionalised disengagement that leads to tragic ending on the part of crusaders for equity and justice.

Indeed, it has been argued that “the greater courage demanded of men deprived of comforting ignorance, [and] the increase in man’s awareness can be viewed as a factor in making tragic art” (Gassner 13). As such, tragic realism enforces the novel’s deconstruction of neocolonial oppression, primarily enhanced through the hero’s conscientisation of the masses to the fact of their oppression.

The novel further enhances its interrogation of neocolonial deprivation through its portrayal of Matigari as a noble character who sheds off the violence of epic heroism as he seeks to negotiate for social, historical and economic justice. However, post-independence political and economic elite, in protection of their privileges, respond with extreme violence meant to deter further contestation of their right to privileges of power and authority. As such, this disengagement can only have tragic consequences on the part of those that do not relent in their crusade for socio-economic justice in the post-independence nation. In Brereton’s discussion of principles of tragedy, he argues that the tragic can result from two possible contexts; awareness “of the unbridgeable gap between desire and achievement” and the awareness “of [. . .] conflict between the actual material order of the world and a preferred ideal order” (60). In the novel, Matigari is portrayed as a character who is driven in his quest for social and historical

justice by these two forms of awareness and the narrative of this quest is framed within the literary confines of the tragic.

The tragic character as a literary trope has an ennobling effect on the issues that he or she may be used to represent and, in Aristotelian view, the tragic protagonist should be superior in his actions so as to excite pity and fear. These emotional responses to the rendition of the tragic are express consequences of the tragic protagonist's tragic error and the resulting disaster or failure. A close examination of the novel's presentation of Matigari assigns him attributes of a tragic protagonist. He engages in the noble cause of fighting deprivation, while on the other, although aware of the impossibility of reconciling the extremes of "desire and achievement," he attempts to fight for equity and social justice through ideological negotiation.

This approach becomes Matigari's tragic error. He is acutely aware of some looming failure after a series of encounters with the authorities. First, his experience with the policemen who were harassing Guthera is quite revealing. When he goes for his gun, he finds out that "there was nothing there. No guns. He remembered that he was wearing the belt of peace. But he was very angry. Of what use is a man if he cannot protect his children?" (30). This excerpt tells of Matigari's awareness of possible failure, yet he continues with his quest to repossess his metaphorical house and gather his children amidst such glaring adversity. Then follows his arrest by the police and a subsequent revision in his quest to search for "no justice other than the justice which has its roots in truth" (82). His failure to negotiate for post-independence truth and justice causes him to mobilise the masses so as to confront the oppressive socio-economic order, but this only punctuates his failure.

It is apparent that Matigari's failure results from his misapprehension of the bourgeois' determination to deny the desires that informed past national history and struggles. However, tragic irony is used as a literary signification of the near impossibility of finding the ideal truth and recapturing "patriotic victory" (*Matigari* 6). In his quest, the only truth that he finds out is the extent of the violence with which those in possession of power are prepared to employ for their self protection.

However, the narrative itself deconstructs Matigari's failure by its use of narrative oppositions that condemn misuse of governance structures to entrench injustice. In this way, the narratives use of pity and fear steels the readers' conscience against the wielders of power and their excesses. The tragic form is thus used in *Matigari* to expose irreconcilable dilemmas that human beings encounter in their search for an ideal social order. According to Newton, tragedy demonstrates that "human beings can never completely free themselves from a humanly-centred perspective on the world and life" (147). This means that societies have to experience conflicts emanating from divergent interpretations of its social and historical experiences, which may result in ideological polarisation that gives rise to tragic conflicts.

Literary representation of such conflicts must entrench a discourse that indicates how such conflicts may be resolved. In *Matigari*, for instance, the hero's rejection of individual salvation becomes a means of entrenching collective protest which evokes identification with the readers, and consequently raises his status to that of a hero-leader. The narrative in this case intimates at the need, for the entire society, to seek for ways of resolving outstanding social, political and historical disputes.

In *Matigari*, the study evaluates how the tragic, from Blends' perspective, functions to enunciate how "destiny [acts] as a force that destroys man . . . [who] inflicts suffering on his fellows and so forces upon them an awareness of their fate" (99). With this view in mind, *Matigari* can be interrogated as a tragic narration on suffering, character, fate and external evil in line with Aristotle's and McCollom's stipulations of tragic situations.

Matigari is a narrative that is woven around the motif of heroic failure. This motif enforces, on the character, what Blends refers to as the tragic hero's "awareness of [his] fate." Heroic failure, in this sense, functions as the narrative's strategy that exposes irreconcilable socio-historical contestations that the community must contend with. A hero in this sense serves as an embodiment of the struggle between different discourses existent in society, while the hero's failure serves to punctuate the narrative's critique of socio-political and historical injustices.

The novel projects Matigari as an influential figure both in thought and action, and as an instigator of social change and ideology. In Aristotle's view, this projection enhances the status of the hero-leader through a tragic character's rhetoric, and reveals to the reader "the kind of thing a man chooses or rejects . . . where something is shown to be true or untrue" (41). However, this reliance on rhetoric as a strategy for advocating for Matigari's vision for socio-economic and historical justice functions as his hubris - his weakness in character and the cause of his certain annihilation. Poole's contention that "tragedies are always concerned with the mysteries of timing . . . with the difficulty of knowing the right time to act or refrain from acting" (97), further illuminates the tragic texture of *Matigari*. The novel demonstrates Matigari's failure as

resulting from his choices of what to do and the appropriate time for his actions. Matigari's inability to achieve his goals forms the background of the novel's castigation of the ruthlessness of power and those that wield it to oppress the weak.

2.6 Gender and the Tragic in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*

Part of this chapter has demonstrated how tragic mimesis can be useful as a means of evaluating social conditions in a given society achieved through the employment of a multiplicity of ideological and literary variations. For instance, tragic art has been used to represent the most base of human characters being destroyed by their evil acts, it can be used to represent the degradation of the most noble by social or preternatural forces, or it can be used to explain the mystery of human suffering and the continuous search for redemption and healing.

In these uses of tragic mimesis, the creation and representation of women characters has predominantly used such characters as allegorical formation enunciating the miseries of love, particularly as "nurturers, killers, as loving mothers and as bearers of the responsibility for both mortality and the 'sin' of human sexuality" (Callaghan 53). However, in wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*, there is a variation where female characters are used as a lens through which social, economic and historical conditions affecting a postcolonial society are investigated.

In *Devil on the Cross*, the novel opens with the prophecy of the Gicaandi Player pronouncing not only his prophecy but also indicating the ideological context in which the novel is premised. In this way, the novel, as in Classical tragedy, uses the song of the Gicaandi Player as an equivalent of the song identified as requisite by Aristotle, who

stipulates that “the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be a part of the whole, and should assume a share in the action” (57). From this observation, the Gicaandi Player tells us of Wariinga’s tribulations, in her interaction with the exploitative social order, as an omnipresent witness.

In the novel, the “Gicaandi Player, the Prophet of Justice” discloses “what now lies concealed by darkness” (8). With these confessions from the narrator, *Devil on the Cross* proceeds to narrate how “misfortune and trouble had trailed Wariinga long before she left Nairobi” (10). This introduction to the events that will constitute the plot seeks to depict Wariinga as an undeserving victim of social and economic forces against which she is seemingly powerless.

From the foregoing, the Gicaandi player’s role in the novel can be appreciated in two ways: the Gicaandi Player provides a dialogic form that foregrounds the novel’s discourse, and also dovetails into what Gĩtahi Gĩtĩĩ refers to as decentring the narrative into “a model for interpersonal and public discourse” (124). From Gĩtĩĩ’s observation, the narrative then acquires significance as a communal lamentation on the inequalities nurtured by a skewed and self-seeking aristocrat that thrives on exploitation and abuse, heightened by the philosophical and textual interactions that precipitate the tragic rendition.

According to Kimani Njogu, *gĩcandĩas* a genre promotes “a simultaneity of interpretation of the narrative” thus promoting “a dialogue of genres [and] a dialogue of narration and metacommentary” (*Reading Poetry* 188). Njogu continues to aver that *Devil on the Cross* “consciously and overtly [uses] the gicandi performer unconstrained spatially and temporally [to tell] people’s struggles in post-colonial Kenya” (“On the

Polyphonic” 48). From the foregoing, it is evident that the Gicaandi Player uses generic versatility of gicaandi to interrogate the narrative’s social context, and to provide unpretentious evaluation of neocolonial circumstances that lead to Wariinga’s tragedy.

The fact that gicaandi as a genre appropriates a popular dialogic form that the masses can easily relate with infuses into the narrative a level of familiarity that enhances the audience’s ability to decode thematic referents alluded to in the novel. Indeed, as Mikhail Bakhtin explains, such dialogic rendition “elevates the social heteroglossia [. . .] with dialogized overtones [to create] artistically calculated nuances” (278-279). Apparently, the novel invokes the Gicaandi Player to break down artistic and ideological boundaries and by so doing disambiguate the narrative’s discourse. Wariinga’s tragedy is in this way represented as a heteroglotic commentary on collective experiences of the neocolonial society.

This idea can be interrogated further through Aristotle’s elaboration on tragic mimesis in relation to the creation of plots, characters and motifs that constitute a tragic narrative, identifies four categories of the tragic: “the complex tragedy, which depends entirely on reversal and discovery,” “tragedy of suffering,” “tragedy of character,” and lastly “spectacular tragedy” (56). Although Aristotle appears to be distinguishing between different types of tragedy, a closer examination of these distinctions affirms the thought in essence these types of plots may be combined in eliciting the tragic effect. The ultimate objective of the tragic narrative should be to appeal to our human feelings, fears, hopes and aspirations. This is achieved through the use of tragic characters to interrogate human interactions, motivations and socio-historical circumstances of their societies.

With reference to *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*, the misfortunes that befall Wariinga and Wanja are a consequence of their encounter with an inhumane and exploitative socio-economic order that denigrates the weak and vulnerable. The tragic heroines' quest is thus to right the wrongs by collapsing the dominant exploitative order. The two novels do not only share in their use of allegorical female characters that used to demonstrate the evils of a denigrating socio-economic order but also in the narrative motifs that organise the events for a tragic reading.

This representation can be attributed to wa Thiong'o's creation of characters that are "highly schematic and stereotyped" and "the embodiment of a tradition of struggle and sacrifice" (Ogude 138). This reading of wa Thiong'o's presentation of his characters demonstrates not only the writer's fixation with an ideological rendering of his intended discourse and character types, but also his use of the narratives to represent the postcolonial society's struggle for socio-economic and historical justice.

In essence, these characters are used to give form and meaning to the tragedies of their communities in terms of suffering and the influence that this suffering has on the conscience of the oppressed. Wariinga and Wanja are sexually abused by men who have the economic might to defeat their quest for social justice, and who are aware of these women's inability to defend themselves. However, these abuses only awaken a violent attitude towards inequality and abuse of the vulnerable. In *Petals of Blood*, the nature of the tragic relationship between the anti-imperialist forces and the imperialist forces is perhaps best captured through Munira's reflections: "how does one tell of murder in a new town? Murder of the spirit? Where does one begin?" (45). Munira's apprehension of other characters and their thoughts avails to the audience the "razor-

blade tension at the edges of [their] words. Violence of thought, violence of sight, violence of memory” (45). It may be argued that such reflections foreground the festering psychological torment that neocolonialism has forced its victims to endure. Apparently, this torment predisposes the dispossessed to potential violence both in thought and action.

This bottled up violence becomes a nurturing ground for the violence of character that may predispose these characters to violent responses and consequently drive them to act in a manner that offers their actions for a tragic reading. Moreover, this violence is read as also evident in the untranslated language and invectives that are markedly visible in *Petals of Blood*, and leads Mwangi to argue that “the very structure of the narrative seems to echo the unfulfilled expectations that the novel thematizes” and the failure “that the struggles for independence have not been translated into human freedoms” (73). From Mwangi’s observations, it is arguable that *Petals of Blood* captures the attempt to interrogate reasons that may account for the lack of freedoms, but in this case from the perspective and allegory of the normative tragic heroine.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the two novels focus on characters and suffering as frameworks that constitute the Aristotelian thinking on the plotting of the tragic. Moreover, it has been opined that tragic motifs are invocations of socio-historical and economic injustices that function as determinants of a character’s actions, and that “the main content of tragedy consists in the phenomena of the inner world of a human being, that action takes place primarily on a psychological basis, that the hero of the tragedy interests us most of all as a moral being, subject to various peculiar transformations” (Kliger 660). This observation sheds more light on the perspective

taken by this study that the two heroines, Wanja and Wariinga, are primarily driven by their violent psychological memories and as such, their tragic circumstances are a consequence of their psychological torment.

As a matter of fact, the two novels blame the prevailing social and historical injustices for the psychological scars that Wanja and Wariinga bear. In this way, the novels ask for an evaluation of the society's perspective as far as gendered social and economic injustices are concerned. In addition, the narratives engage gender as a factor in the society's quest for social and economic restitution. This may be taken as a suggestion that all forms of exploitation need to be considered and addressed before any meaningful assault on social inequalities may be achieved.

As Kliger further observes, narrative motifs "are a product of the imagination's immediate response to the specific conditions of social life" (664). To the tragic, the use of motifs then offers the critic a means of evaluating the patterns that consolidate the narrative's plot, and how this universalises not only the genre but also the experiences of the tragic hero or heroine. Wanja's loss of innocence and her subsequent loss of her conscience is explained by the narrative as the cause of her transformation where she chose to take her "final burial in property and degradation" (328). However, her *anagnorisis*, the moment of discovery, leads her to seek vengeance against the forces that have lured her to her degradation, and in her contemplation, "the manner of ending it was more important than the act" (328). But in her quest to redeem both her dignity and her vision for social and economic justice, she is blinded by brute rage and metes out her version of justice by killing Kimeria and in the process denouncing her corruption through the purifying fire.

Indeed, this act also serves as her redemption in the narrative's denouement. Her discovery is aided by reflections of her past and freedom from the prison of her pain and suffering. She acknowledges that "maybe life was a series of false starts, which, once discovered, called for more renewed efforts at yet another beginning" (337-338). Her transformation rewards her with Abdulla's child, and this knowledge brings her "a kind of inner assurance of possibilities of a new kind of power" (338). The novel thus rewards Wanja for her choices and seeks to atone for her suffering. The *peripeteia* or the reversal of fortunes in this way sets apart the "goodness" of character from the evil characters, and thus projects Wanja as the normative heroine of the novel.

Likewise, *Devil on the Cross* projects Wariinga as an undeserving victim of the oppressive socio-economic forces, and like Wanja, one that seeks to avenge her exploitation. In her childhood, the narrative explains that Wariinga "grew up in Nakuru – upright, always seeking the path of virtue and experience" (141). Nevertheless, upon maturity, her uncle's voracious desire for wealth causes her "to stray from the paths trodden by peasants into the paths of the petty bourgeoisie" (142), when he uses her as a negotiating chip in his pursuit of the wealthy for his material gains. From her interaction with the exploitative rich who seek to exploit her sexually and materially, she engages in a quest for self reliance and social justice. However, with the reemergence of the Rich Old Man who begs at the feet of the new independent Wariinga, she shoots and kills him.

This act that forms the denouement of the narrative appears to be a deliberate literary superimposition of virtue over vice, and it attempts to offer Wariinga an opportunity to negotiate for justice and atonement against an oppressive socio-economic

order. By doing this, the narrative provokes the emotions of pity and fear. These emotions should, in Aristotle's opinion, produce "tragic pleasure" (49), in consideration of the incidences that form the plot and the moment of discovery. Regarding the different discoveries that are appropriate to tragic mimesis, Aristotle provides a distinction of five possible types of tragic discoveries. These include "discovery by means of visible signs," "those which are manufactured by the poet," discovery "due to memory," that which is "a result of reasoning," and the last form is "the fictitious form of discovery arising from the fallacious reasoning of the parties concerned" (53-54).

Aristotle's distinctions are however collapsed into his own argument that the most appropriate discovery is one that is "brought about by the incidents themselves, when the startling disclosure results from events that are probable" (54). In *Devil on the Cross*, the reasons that account for Wariinga's decision to kill the Rich Old Man are as varied as the various levels of interpretation that are precipitated by the narrative itself. On the one hand, Wariinga's action could be said to have been provoked by the Rich Old Man's ridiculous proposal to revive their old romance despite her now being the fiancée of the former's son. On the other hand, Wariinga may have discovered the futility of her hopes for happiness given that Gaturia is the son of the Rich Old Man. Most probable is the remembrance of her pain and suffering in the hands of the Rich Old Man, who according to the narrative is diabolically selfish and denude of dignity. As such, he is deserving of the punishment that is meted out on him while Wariinga deserves the tragic pleasure resulting from her conquest over the hitherto oppressive order.

In *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, the ironies that characterise the ending of the narratives function as a redeeming moment for the victims of gendered social, historical and economic injustices. In the two novels, it is evident that the narratives build on irony to reverse the commodified female heroines that are, to the male comprador acolytes, fruits that are their preserve to ravish and devour. The reversal of fortunes happens in two ways; there is the annihilation of the greedy consumers of the fruits of independence on one hand, and the triumph of the masses over the exploitative socio-economic order.

Moreover, since these normative tragic heroines are allegorical representations of the exploitation and abuse in the Kenyan postcolony, the narratives conform to the motif of “an idealized hero with special attributes like [. . .] near invulnerability” (Kliger 665), particularly at the end of the narratives when they have abnegated their abuse. As a way of celebrating the new conscientised heroines, the novels do not speculate on the punishment that such tragic characters may face as a consequence of their vengeance results in the murder of their oppressors. If anything, the heroines are as having succeeded in achieving some level of personal and collective gratification as they symbolically annihilate structures that have hitherto facilitated social and economic injustices.

For instance, after killing the Rich Old Man, “Wariinga calmly walked away, as the people watched from a safe distance” although “she knew with all her heart that the hardest struggles of her life’s journey lay ahead . . .” (*Devil* 254). With this ending, the narrative deliberately avoids discussing the specific struggles and instead gives Wariinga an acute awareness of the circumstances that predicate her future challenges,

triumphs and possible failures. Likewise, Wanja's artistic and spiritual awareness is revealed through her sketching of Abdulla bearing the semblance to Kimathi and relating this to her unborn child, allegorically pronouncing the hope of future triumph. And this made her feel "a tremendous calm, a kind of inner assurance of the possibilities of a new kind of power" (*Petals* 338).

These endings affirm what Jarret-Kerr refers to as the tragic form's primary demonstration of two basic principles of the human condition; the fact that an individual is not entirely responsible for his or her fate and thus his or her suffering is largely undeserved, and secondly that individuals can attempt their redemption if they "repent, sacrifice, accept" (371). This observation admits that literary employment of tragic narration can be used as a redeeming tool that affirms the centrality of human desire for a reaffirmation of humanity particularly when faced with degrading socio-historical conditions.

Wariinga's final decision is constructed around the narrative's desire to ennoble not only the tragic heroine's actions, but also the structured discourse that informs the text. This is achieved through what has been referred to as "ideologically constructed logic of binarism" and which demonstrates that tragic heroines are "the bearers of history's significance" (Nicholls 174). Although the creation of binaries is central to the construction of a tragic heroine and with it the contention to historical importance, it is necessary to hastily add that indeed, the construction of the tragic character be it male or female, just like the construction of an epic hero, functions to historicise the narrated events.

In *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, the tragic heroine is constructed as a means by which the novels engage in a paradigmatic decentring of neocolonialism, and largely from an allegorical prism. The metaphor of sexual exploitation and abuse has been used in the two novels as literary signification of the post-independence socio-economic exploitation of the peasants by the minority that controls the forces of economic production. Sexual exploitation is symbolic of the desire to conquer and exploit the weak and vulnerable for the sake of self gratification. Equally important in the narratives is the heroines' desire for vengeance and retribution, which also signifies the neocolonial subjects' quest for social and historical justice and freedom from the manacles of colonial and neocolonial social and economic order.

Wariinga and Wanja, the tragic heroines, engage in the quest for what Callaghan terms "a degree of sexual autonomy" (65) and act as the normative heroines that both expose and destroy the tyranny of economic dominance. The use of the tragic form, which is enhanced through the two novels' use of metafiction, dialogism and polyphony, facilitates what Korang views as "representation [of] men and women in concrete socio-historical setting" (8). Tragic realism, in this way, enhances the reciprocal relationship between the narrative and the discourse, making it easier for the narrative to elicit ideological alienation against the exploitative neocolonial order that has been imposed on the disinherited masses, and to use the tragic effect as a means of punctuating the themes of dispossession and retribution. The tragic effect is thus appropriated as an important ideological and literary tool that demonises neocolonial exploitation of the masses by the elite. In essence, readers are emotionally dissuaded

from sympathising with the evil socio-economic system that is rightly being punished for its transgressions.

The intense emotions that characterise the novels' denouement function to negate the material determinism that is the root cause of social and economic inequalities inherent in the postcolonial state. This negation is on one hand aided by the element of psychological restoration that the heroines experience as they confront their tormentors. In this way, the tragic heroines become symbols of a free society: one that has overcome social and economic inequality and entrenched a sense of social and historical justice for those that have endured colonial and neocolonial injustices. The tragic form, in this way, demonstrates the conflicts that must be resolved before the postcolonial society can start rebuilding its identity.

Furthermore, the two novels adhere to the stipulations of the tragic form since much of the response that we find coming through the heroines is occasioned by the aspect of external evil, and the guilt that we may associate with the consequences of their actions ambiguous and therefore unavailable for our moral sense of judgment. And the narratives therefore can only provoke in us a condemnation of the acolytes who perpetuate the existing oppressive social, historical and economic order. Our pity is directed at the heroines who endure humiliation and abuse as they grow and attempt to overturn the structures that make such abuse tenable.

2.7 Conclusion

The chapter has interrogated the various elements of tragedy that are identifiable through the novels' presentation of characters, the conflicts that they attempt to resolve,

and the literary significance of these conflicts. The characters demonstrate a broad awareness of the various factors that influence human destiny, and are largely seen as forging both an ideological and a philosophical interrogation of their conditions in particular and the conditions of their communities in general. In so doing, the novels have used the tragic form to present literary interrogation of socio-economic, historical, cultural and political conflicts that Kenya has experienced during and after colonialism.

The study has found out that the novels have used tragic protagonists to represent changing social realities, and to draw our attention to the significance of these socio-cultural, political and historical changes. Tragic heroes and heroines are thus used as narrative agents that provide oppositional or alternative discourse which effectively guides our interrogation of tragic conflicts that are at the core of the novels' thematic focus. For instance, tragic characterisation has been used to demonstrate the growth of the heroes and heroines from naivety to knowledge, from weakness to strength, and from dependence to autonomy in thought and action. These characters, in their capacity as hero-leaders in their specific communities, represent social, historical and political conflicts inherent in their communities, and demonstrate the intricacies that surround human quest for solutions to the conflicts and problems that communities may encounter.

The study has further observed that the tragic form has been used in the novels to demonstrate the negative effects of ideological polarisation, which is an express result of the postcolonial society's failure to resolve conflicts that arise out of such polarisation. On their part, tragic heroes' and heroines' ideological convictions become their tragic flaws, which expose them to tragic endings and subsequent reversal of

fortunes. Social and ideological alienation, as experienced by tragic protagonists, draws our attention to the contradictory nature of socio-cultural, political and historical changes. The tragic form appropriates heroic alienation as a means by which the narratives demonstrate the consequences of inadequate engagement between the different polarities.

For instance, in *The River Between*, tragic realism depicts social and cultural disharmony that is a consequence of colonial incursion and the introduction of Christianity and Western education. The tragic nature of this conflict is reinforced by the narrative's use of motifs such as wisdom and folly, betrayal and jealousy to anticipate the conflicts and the disengagement that will characterise the postcolonial state. Ideological disengagement is further explored through the use of tragic mimesis in *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* where the narratives decry the rise of the bourgeois imperialism. It is in the next chapter that the study interrogates specific thematic concerns as addressed through the novels' use of tragic realism.

3.0 Chapter Three

3.1 Themes and the Tragic Form in wa Thiong'o's Novels

3.2 Introduction

This chapter interrogates thematic concerns addressed in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*, and interrogates interconnectedness between these themes and the tragic form. As observed in the previous chapter, the tragic form has been used to foreground the text's discourse on socio-political polarisation that is a direct consequence of the introduction of colonial social and pedagogical values and practices. The chapter is guided by the understanding that a critical analysis of a literary narrative benefits immensely from the interrogation of such elements as narrative form, style, and narrative representation all which conglomerate to constitute the text. This observation is further supported by the fact that an accurate analysis of these constituent elements of a narrative specifies the conditions for intelligibility of the narrative, and thus assists our interpretation of the narrative's discourse. In this way, the reader can evaluate the interplay between the signifying structures and the implicit realities that are textually represented.

3.3 Cultural Nationalism, Christian Revivalism and Western Education in *The River Between*.

The use of the tragic perspective in the analysis of novelistic discourse directs our attention to a multiplicity of narrative aspects and, consequently, facilitates our approach to a novel's thematic analysis. Such formative aspects that constitute the texts,

including narrative devices and techniques, modes of portrayal and in totality the rhetorical context that surrounds narrative composition are cascaded into the act of reading and analysing wa Thiong'o's five novels. Gerald Prince and Arlene Noble are of the view that this approach to novelistic inquiry has the ability "to isolate and describe the fundamental elements of the narrated" (543), which in this case are the thematic concerns fundamentally engrained in wa Thiong'o's novels and presented through the tragic form. With this import, the study will be guided in examining the importance of tragedy as a mode of narrative composition, and its enhancement of meaning production in wa Thiong'o's novels.

Furthermore, at the heart of postcolonial discourse upon which wa Thiong'o's novels are premised, is the contestation of colonial structuration of the African social, historical and cultural identities. Such contestation is, in essence, a means of contesting colonialism and colonial structures, and which focuses on the expression of colonial subjects' desire to form new decolonised social and historical identities. To Phyllis Taoua, wa Thiong'o's novelistic discourse "contemplate[s] all the ambiguities inherent in the process of decolonization" (215-16), and as such interrogates the social and historical conditions of the postcolonial society. This argument opens up a vista that enables an evaluation of how the tragic form facilitates the thematic foci of wa Thiong'o's novels.

Joanna Sullivan, in an exploration of the different categories of heroic forms often used in African literature, identifies "the tale hero, the epic hero, the tragic hero, and the comic antihero," and argues that "the tragic hero represents a modified epic hero, more human, more recognizably one of us, someone who wants to assert an

individual viewpoint, yet fears the consequential stigma of social outcast” (182). The choice and use of the tragic hero is a structural and narrative choice that can be used to demonstrate “the complicated social dynamics arising from the clash of modernity with traditional values” (Sullivan 182). This argument dovetails with the postcolonial discourse that demands signification of the multifarious rhetoric emanating from the contradictory perspectives on the place of new cultural and historical encounters resulting from colonial incursion into Africa.

Postcolonial conflicts, as addressed in *The River Between*, are represented through what Kwaku Labri Korang refers to as “suprasocial” and “infrasocial” levels (13). While the “suprasocial” refers to conflicts that result from external influences, the “infrasocial” refers to those conflicts that result from interpersonal conflicts between individuals whose lives are essentially organised within the same social or communal sphere. In *The River Between*, the “infrasocial” conflicts function as the foundation blocks for a tragic narration, and the conflicts therein addressed as the basis for the allegorical representation of colonial and postcolonial concerns, conflicts and contradictions, which are illuminated through the themes of cultural nationalism, Christian revivalism and western education.

According to Peter Hitchcock, postcoloniality, in its “logic of conventions” centres on the exploration of social ontology and practices fermented by the binaries of colonizer/colonized and questions two important facets of the postcolonial: expression of difference and the process of becoming (299). From Hitchcock’s observation, postcolonial discourse should then address themes that facilitate our investigation of contradictions and conflicts existent in a society that is in the process of (re)discovery.

The River Between can be said to evaluate the conflicts and contradictions of cultural and social change that are necessitated by the introduction of Western education, Christianity, and western culture. Through Waiyaki's tragic presentation, the narrative enhances the rendition of the difficulty of choices offered by the binaries of new/old, conservative/dynamic, and traditional/modern. These social and historical realities necessitate the presentation of the inevitable upheavals resulting from the collision of differing perspectives, and offers aesthetic and literary signification of the contradictions that these upheavals merit. In *The River Between*, this upheaval is aptly presented through both the individual circumstances that characters in the novel face and the communal reaction to these circumstances.

Indeed, *The River Between* is a narrative of conflicts as militated by the introduction of new epistemological, religious and cultural values and norms. The major forces in the narrative emanate from the conflicts between traditional African cultural nationalism, Christian revivalism and catechism, and western education. Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni are used in the narrative as expressions of hybridity and as literary manifestations of the conflict between the three polarities of Kikuyu cultural nationalism, Christianity and western education.

The expression of difference and the rigours of awareness and discovery that, in Hitchcock's argument, determine the postcolonial *topos* in *The River Between* are directly related to the consciousness of the community and the characters that the narrative uses to render its discourse. Although the historical conflicts between Kameno and Makuyu form the basis for new conflicts that are merited by the introduction of Christianity, the narrative's main focus is on the effects of the ridges' disjointed

approach to this intrusion and their inevitable conquest. And this incongruence of perspectives is best illustrated through the tragic predisposition that Waiyaki is thrust into right from the beginning of the novel. In this way, the novel allegorises his fate to symbolically represent the contradictions manifest in the consciousness of the community at large.

In the novel, there are several levels at which the clouding of the community's conscience can be read. The primordial inorganic existence between the ridges symbolises and anticipates the everlasting disunity between the ridges:

When you stood in the valley, the two ridges ceased to be sleeping lions united by their common source of life. They became antagonists. You could tell this, not by anything tangible but by the way they faced each other, like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region. (1)

This excerpt both acknowledges the ontological and ideological differences between Kameno and Makuyu and invites the reader to anticipate the continuation of antagonism and conflicting worldviews as will be precipitated by the events in the narrative. In this way, the community's inability to forge a cohesive social and ideological force against cultural and social domination by the new Christian and Western values forms the main discourse underlying *The River Between*. The narrative evaluates the contradictions that are manifest in different forms at different parts of the narrative, and which elucidate the explanations for this failure.

The quest for identity and the contradictions manifest in the colonial counter-discourse is given a teleological drive in *The River Between* by the casting of Waiyaki as the tragic hero of the narrative, and whose failure to reconcile not only the leadership

of the ridges but also the social and cultural debate demonstrates the magnitude of the conflicting worldviews. These polarising worldviews are played out in the cultural argument that is used as the arena for the continuation of the rivalries between Kameno and Makuyu. However, Waiyaki is caught up in the argument as he strives to live up to the prophecy of unifying the ridges as they confront the changing social and cultural realities.

With respect to the narrative structure, form and characterisation, *The River Between* can be read as Bildungsroman, the narration of a young and naïve hero's exposure to worldly matters such as life and love. Julie Mullaney expounds on the relationship between the Bildungsroman and colonial locations and rhetoric by noting that such a narrative:

Charts the initiation of the child or young adult into the society and the challenges this process generates, often thematized in the protagonist's estrangement from family, community and nation, leading to fraught attempts to renegotiate relationships with place. (30)

Waiyaki's demeanour is symptomatic of a tragic hero-leader who oversimplifies both the prophecy and the urgency of the prevailing social, historical and cultural circumstances, and falls within what Ato Sekyi-Otu refers to as "divinations of unwilled truths to be accepted, commemorated, and awaited" (162). Sekyi-Otu attributes Waiyaki's failure to the character's misreading of both his role and his prophecy "as scene, event, and word" (162), and thus neglects his prophesied role as "a black messiah from the hills" (38). However, Waiyaki's failure cannot be entirely blamed on his personal failures, and his indecisiveness may be attributed to narrative and social conditions prevalent at the time.

David Cook and Michael Okenimpke have observed that Waiyaki's actions are informed by the naivety of a young man "asked to solve the problems of society long before he can solve the problems of his own identity" (31). As a Bildungsroman, Waiyaki is thrust into an unfamiliar world of the prophecy and the unharmonious coexistence between Makuyu and Kameno, and as Cook and Okenimpke have observed, he is ideologically unprepared for the responsibility that is thrust on his shoulders. This lack of grounding predisposes Waiyaki to tragic failure.

However, the narrative thematises the difficulty of self-formation in a postcolonial location. Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura are presented as characters groping for an acceptable resolution of the question embodied in the socio-cultural conflict between Kikuyu cultural nationalism, Christianity and western education. This observation is concomitant with Mullaney's assertion that "postcolonial writers explore the canon as a vehicle of culture" (34) to investigate the cross-cultural debate between the divergent perspectives surrounding colonialism and the conquest of indigenous people to redefine both their cultures and their history.

The ambiguity of the issues that precipitate the cultural rift between the ridges is perhaps best illustrated through Chege's lament on the value of female circumcision: "Were the Christians now preaching against all that which was good and beautiful in the tribe? Circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl?" (37-38). On the one hand, defenders of the purity of Kikuyu cultural ontology perceive their culture as "good and beautiful" and as such it is to be defended against the rising wave of Christian influence. Ironically, Waiyaki, at least in Chege's view,

embodies the hope of retention and defense of the community's cultural purity and the carrier of the ancient prophecy. But these responsibilities and expectations become formative elements in the unfolding of the tragic process.

As Peter R. Connolly argues, this process is characterised by “an extreme instance of difficult decision or choice” where the hero's actions “go progressively out of his own control” (552). In its rendition of the polarisation merited by contradictory perspectives that surround the debate on the place of Gikuyu cultural practices, Western education and Christianity, Waiyaki finds himself in a situation where social and ideological divisions make it impossible for the society to resolve emergent conflicts. Waiyaki aggravates the situation by displaying some character flaws such as his attraction to both Muthoni and Nyambura – characters that also represent divergent views on the relevance of Christian values in the context of Gikuyu cultural beliefs and customs.

However, the narrative admits Waiyaki's ambiguity and opens up the contradictory representation that hints at his failure as a hero-leader in the community's defense of its cultural heritage. As the narrative explains, “Waiyaki's absence from the hills had kept him out of touch with those things that most mattered to the tribe” (39). This part of the narrative takes away from Waiyaki the hegemonic dominance that the prophecy had bequeathed to him. He becomes a symbol of ambiguity and hybridity, teetering from one end of the cultural debate to the other, and in essence he becomes grossly indecisive as far as reconciling the divergent opinions is concerned.

This indecisiveness is well demonstrated in Waiyaki's inability to join his peers in the initiation dance since “that thing inside him kept him aloof, preventing him from

fully joining the stream,” although later on he is submerged into the dance after insistent prodding from his agemates and he finds himself only wanting “this thing . . . this mad intoxication of ecstasy and pleasure” (42) but which only leads him to “a hollowness inside his stomach” and thereby “la[ys] himself naked, exposes himself for all to see” (43).

Waiyaki’s indecisiveness is a result of the diametrically opposed demands that are being made on him. He is on the one hand sent by his father to Siriana to “learn all the wisdom of the white man” so as to come back and “save the people in their hour of need” (21), and on the other hand he wants to avoid betraying Gikuyu cultural values. His exposure to Western Christian education further complicates his position and prevents him from giving himself “to the dream in the rhythm” (43) of the ways of the tribe. His lack of personal commitment is symptomatic of the absence of personal conviction as far as African culture, Western education, and Christianity are concerned.

The complexity of the conflicts that characters in *The River Between* have to contend with breeds confusion, alienation and ambivalence. This is aptly demonstrated through the two hybrid characters: Muthoni and Nyambura. Although they represent different perspectives on the cultural debate, each is engrossed in difficulty of choice just like Waiyaki. Muthoni on the one hand yearns for a preservation of the notions of beauty and womanhood as contemplated by the Kikuyu traditional culture. Her yearning for cultural preservation is aptly symbolised by her self-exile from Makuyu (the social location for Christian revivalism) to Kameno (the site for cultural nationalism). Muthoni’s ambivalence is consolidated in her pursuit of mediation between the new Christian faith and retention of cultural ideals that guide conceptualisation of

womanhood and motherhood. As she admits to Waiyaki, “I say I am a Christian . . . I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe” (43). This acknowledgement makes explicit the ambivalence that marks the colonial condition and the inner conflicts and contradictions that the tempestuous change metes out on individual characters as well as the entire community.

Nyambura’s perspective, on the other hand, is more critical of the rhetoric of the new faith. In her thinking, Joshua’s version of Christianity “came to stand between a father and his daughter so that her death did not move him, then it was inhuman” (134). She, consequently, yearns for an alternative religion, “the faith that would give life and peace to all” (135). The conjoined circumstances experienced by Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura highlight the difficulty that Mullaney refers to as “the processes and forms of change, adaptation and reconfiguration” (24). The failure of these characters to achieve their desires cements the view that despite their best efforts, they could not reconcile the polarisation that the demands for change on the one hand and the desire for conservatism on the other have created.

Furthermore, the three characters represent the genesis of Waiyaki’s indecisiveness. It is evident that although Waiyaki is well aware of Christianity’s desire for cultural pacification of African traditions, he finds himself unable to condemn those that have abandoned African culture and crossed over to Christianity. Indeed, Waiyaki perceives it as his duty to protect this breakaway society as evident in his attempt to warn Joshua of the impending attack by Kabonyi and the Kiama. Although Waiyaki’s ambivalence appears to be detrimental to the puritan stance that the Kiama has adopted,

that ambivalence is a pointer to the narrative's acceptance of a sense of shared historical past and an undeniable recognition of a shared identity and destiny.

In line with Stephen Slemon's observation on the interplay between the history of colonised societies and the literary presentation of the history of postcolonial societies, *The River Between* uses its characters as "genuinely historical subjects, [and] as subjects of their own histories" (192). As subjects of the history of colonisation, these characters function as indicators of the tragic conflicts that colonial infiltration introduced to a hitherto organic African culture. The African communities' search for an appropriate response brought about divisiveness as the African communities grappled to understand this unprecedented historical experience. For instance, in *The River Between*, the tragedy that befalls Waiyaki as a person and as the hero leader of the community accords the social and historical contradictions and conflicts their appropriate historical significance.

In accordance with the elements of the tragic form, *The River Between*, according to Langbaum, presents the tragic circumstances of a character as existentially hierarchically ordered to attract "our sympathy by externalizing through action his internal being" (83). As readers, we perceive the events that affect Waiyaki's tragic circumstances as a result of social and historical conditions that are out of his control. He is tossed into a disputed historical ancestry, he is confronted with the demands of the prophecy at an early age, and he finally finds himself in the midst of conflicting forces involved in the three pronged argument on culture, Christianity and Western education. These forces, more than the character himself, are to blame for the tragic circumstances that lead to Waiyaki's failure as the prophesied messiah. Our sympathy for the hero is

mostly evoked by our perception of him as an embodiment “of a heroic affirmation of an uncompromising human will to freedom” (Korang 14), and as an expression of concrete human possibilities.

Through the narrative’s subscription to three important periods: past cultural autonomy, the disputed present, and the distant elusive future, *The River Between’s* postcolonial discourse interrogates the existent social and cultural contexts and locations as a means of seeking a transformative and inclusive cultural, educational and religious practice that reconciles divergent cultural polarities and heals the rifts that divide the postcolonial African community. Inherent in the narrative’s ideological and epistemological discourse is the quest for syncretism, sacrifice and reconciliation which are advanced as the most plausible exit out of the chaos and conflicts that characterise the contestations between the different actors and their hard held perspectives. In its discourse, the novel explicitly advances the view that social conflicts ought to be resolved in such a manner that all views on divisive issues are considered before an amicable solution can be reached.

3.4 Disenchantment, Betrayal and Retribution in *A Grain of Wheat*

In terms of its cultural, historical and ideological settings, *A Grain of Wheat* occupies a unique position in wa Thiong’o’s *oeuvre* since it is set at the threshold of political and social reorganisation necessitated by the end of colonialism and the coming of independence. The novel attempts a reconciliation of the different individual and social conflicts that characterised the colonial period and the subsequent struggle for independence. Ideologically, the novel engages in a discourse that not only attempts

to account for the various individual and social conflicts that characterised the struggle for independence but also engages in a philosophical exploration of the influence of these conflicts in the postcolonial state. Through the tragic elements evident in the narrative, *A Grain of Wheat* explores the implications of competing human interests that breed betrayal, jealousy, struggle for power and domination. The novel further interrogates how these competing interests may explicitly impact on the new political and social order that independence heralds.

A Grain of Wheat is primarily an attempt to narrate the past and use it as a means of questioning the future. The past is recollected through the individual interactions of the characters, their reactions to events and relationships, and the social formations that are a consequence of these characters interpretation of the value of their experiences. In this way, the narrative appropriates the resulting ironic twists as a means of narrating and interrogating the nuances of colonisation and decolonisation.

An outstanding aspect of the narrative in this evaluation is its projection of historical and social heroism. Through the novel's appropriation of the tragic form, the narrative delves into the history of the main characters and interrogates the different social and historical factors that define their response to the changing social, historical and political realities. Specifically, the novel examines the quest for power and the resultant betrayals at personal and communal levels. Through Mugo, the tragic antagonist in the narrative, the novel anticipates the rise of a capitalistic motif as symbolised by his contestation of heroism that masks his quest for personal aggrandisement. In essence, Mugo's anti-heroic presentation in the novel functions not only as one of the illustrations of the narrative's interrogation of the past but also as its

most powerful rendition of the ironies that characterise the formation of a new socio-political and economic dispensation.

Indeed, as Simon Gikandi aptly observes, the novel explores “competing versions and visions of history” which structurally aid in the narrative’s exposition of “disillusionment and betrayal” (v). Stylistically, the novel incisively juxtaposes characters and the events that define their interactions to bring out these thematic issues. As the narrative opens, we are introduced to Mugo’s uneasiness with people and events. Apart from his personal nervousness that seems to paralyse his being, his encounter with Warui, Githua, and the old woman leaves him incapacitated to even work on his land, and in his contemplation, “the country appeared sick and dull” (6). The novel’s preoccupation with Mugo’s past and present intimates a close relationship between his past and the formative events that will constitute the narrative, and most importantly portrays Mugo’s disenchantment with history as well as with his past.

In Julie Mullaney’s opinion, “postcolonial literatures often delineate the forms of interruption that colonialism represents in the lives, histories and experiences of the colonized” (39). This observation urges a reading of postcolonial literature from the narrated summative experiences of the characters that postcolonial writers may use to present the colonial experience, the anti-colonial struggles and the act of decolonisation. Postcolonial narratives achieve this representation by use of characters that serve as a literary means of attempting a comprehensive rendition of the history of postcolonial societies.

In this regard, *A Grain of Wheat* attempts to use characters as microcosmic representations of the contradictory interests that characterise the processes of

colonialism, the struggle for independence, and finally the acquisition of independence. The novel, by setting out to narrate individual characters' encounter with colonialism, invites a cautious interpretation of the colonial experience not as a homogenous experience but as an encounter that has its own socio-historical conflicts and contradictions. Indeed, as Leela Gadhi cautions, "in its therapeutic retrieval of the colonial past, postcolonialism needs to define itself as an area of study which is willing not only to make, but also to gain, theoretical sense out of that past" (5). Part of this sense is the portrayal of the inner desires, hopes and inadequacies that characterise Mugo as a colonial subject and the society's hero, as this part of the narrative explains:

He turned to the soil. He would labour, sweat, and through success and wealth, force society to recognize him. There was, for him, then, solace in the very act of breaking the soil: to bury seeds and watch the green leaves heave and thrust themselves out of the ground, to tend the plants to ripeness and then harvest, these were all part of the world he had created for himself and which formed the background against which his dreams soared to the sky. But then Kihika had come into his life. (9)

It is in this excerpt that the narrative explains Kihika's historical relevance not only with reference to the history of decolonization, but also in reference to Mugo's eccentric ambitions. Kihika's coming into Mugo's life is a disruption of Mugo's alienation from himself, the community and most importantly latter's attempt to alienate himself from the historical events affecting his community.

The narrative, having already alienated the reader from Mugo's interpretation of the importance of social, political and historical events that have shaped the community, prepares the reader for the ironic twists that are the foundations of disenchantment. The narrator uses expressive statements that invite the reader to question Mugo's station in

the community. He is a man incapable of appreciating the changing circumstances, for in his opinion, “time drags, everything repeats itself . . . the day ahead would be just like the yesterday and the day before” (2), and he is a man who “[feels] hollow” (6) regardless of the enthusiasm that the rest of Thabai has with the changing social and political events, and who walks “like a man who knows he is followed or watched” (9). It is the novel’s use of such depictions that concretises its presentation of Mugo as tragically flawed, and a symbol of colonial and postcolonial uncertainties.

A Grain of Wheat further uses its key characters as social units to interrogate the theme of betrayal both at personal and communal levels. This is availed to the reader through deliberate application of tragic irony that the narrative uses to punctuate the betrayal and tragic reversal. After its initial depiction of Mugo’s inadequacy as a hero, the narrative engages in a systematic enunciation of the historical encounter between the characters and others that form significant units in the narrative, and their reaction to the fact of colonisation. The narrative explains the complex relationship between people and events, and consequently attempts to explain how these relationships influence the destiny of the individuals and the society at large. In this way, the narrative demonstrates the interconnectedness between personal and communal failures.

Jealousy as a motif in the narrative is interwoven with the theme of betrayal. The most interesting is Mugo’s jealousy towards Kihika, who, to Mugo’s surprise, “ha[s] such power and knowledge” as demonstrated when he “unroll[s] the history of Kenya” (16) and moves the emotions of the masses at Rungei during the meeting of the Movement. Furthermore, when they dramatically lock eyes, Mugo experiences “an intense vibration of terror and hatred” (17). Having depicted Mugo as an alienated and

inadequate social and communal unit, the narrative draws on this presentation to explain Mugo's dislike for Kihika.

Mugo's dislike for Kihika functions as a fundamental ingredient in the presentation of narrative oppositions, where a narrative may expound on its discourse by presenting characters that have contrasting worldviews. In this way, *A Grain of Wheat* presents Kihika as a character that has social and political significance as contrasted to Mugo, who is groping for ways of earning at least some appreciation from the community. Mugo believes that he will earn this recognition "through success and wealth" (9), and he is jealous that the recognition that he so fervently desires can be easily earned by the likes of Kihika who was to him "a boy, probably younger than him" (16). Psychologically and socially, Mugo generates a motive for his betrayal of Kihika in particular, and the betrayal of the postcolonial society in general. However, as the narrative demonstrates, the multiplicity of moral dilemmas that almost all the characters in the narrative display compounds their inability to unmask Mugo for what he is. Indeed, as Kenneth Harrow observes, the tragic narrative thrives on "the principal characters experience more of doubt than certainty in their lives" (170). This uncertainty clouds the characters' psychology and provides more avenues for the complications necessary in the development of the tragic plot.

For instance, the moral uncertainties that the main characters are faced with emanate from the intricacies of the social and political demands in the freedom struggle. Consequently, the irony that characterises the narrative emanates from the social and psychological boundaries that characterise the interactions and relationships between the principal characters. In *A Grain of Wheat*, personal suffering and ever-present guilt

hinder the characters' ability to evaluate the social and historical circumstances that affect their lives. To this extent, they even misconstrue Mugo to be the hero of the freedom struggle, and even "wove new legends around his name and imagined deeds" (221). Ironically, the people avoid scrutinising Mugo's reactions to their perception, and they quickly attribute his discomfort around people to the mystery of greatness.

It is apparent that the other characters' inability to perceive Mugo's guilt is not only explained by the psychological boundaries that inhibit characters' perception of the truth but which the narrator in complicity with the audience know all too well, but also by the existence of an easy scapegoat; Karanja. Adrian Poole explains that we are "connected, even interconnected, by complex systems of cause and consequence, in which questions of innocence and guilt are all caught up and embroiled" (55). There lacks effective communication between the primary characters, and like Githua, each seems to have an expressive narrative that is purely an attempt to reorganise his or her life in tandem with the imperatives of the changing social and historical dispensation. Through this characterisation, the novel intimates the competing interests that will manifest in the anticipated social order that independence will herald.

Ironically, many of these narratives are woven around Mugo and Kihika's memory. By doing this, the narrative, as Gikandi puts it, uses Mugo as "the subject of allegorical coherence and epistemological certainty" (114). However, the narrative announces to the reader the inner turmoil and the unspoken desires and motives that govern Mugo's actions and reactions to people and events. Nevertheless, his centrality in rendering the irony that aesthetically founds the historical significance of the intricate personal and social contradictions is indisputable.

Besides interrogating the historical significance of the betrayals and resulting ironies, *A Grain of Wheat* can also be argued to be a quest for historical restitution mainly sought through retribution. It is apparent that the narrative admits the impossibility of a meaningful celebration of independence before Kihika's betrayer is unmasked and punished. Symbolically, General R. engages in an enumeration of the demands that the people have and the hope that the new dispensation will pay attention to the fact that the new nation state should be built in accordance with "the heroic tradition of resistance" and "must revere [the] heroes and punish traitors" (240). The collocation of these requisites in General R's demands is a thematic expressiveness stipulated from the epistemological conceptualisation of independence.

Moreover, beneath this quest for retribution lies a desire for social and historical purification that should pave way for the reconstruction of the hitherto disrupted social and historical structures. In this way, the narrative adopts the tragic dictum that specifies, as John Gassner stipulates, the use of the tragic to "connect life with suffering, crime with expiation, disequilibrium . . . with painfully arrived at restorations" (16). And it is exactly this restoration that the newly independent society seeks as it moves towards the new dawn. The first act is a quest for public communal restitution that is sought through public ritualistic punishment of Kihika's betrayer.

The characters' preoccupation with the search and punishment of the betrayer is also read by Cook and Okenimkpe as informed by the understanding that "individual betrayals are representative of the vast betrayal of a whole society by its power elite" (68). The novel acknowledges the possibility of a new socio-economic and political order that may contradict the values that guided the freedom struggle. In its attempt to

forestall the influence of these emergent forces, the narrative engages in a form of ideological posturing meant to symbolically establish standards for punishment and retribution.

K. M. Newton is of the view that the tragic as used in literary works to interrogate the human condition offers such texts a means for “social confrontation between the human realm and order” and ideologically guards against “social ossification” (19) of pretensions to social values and norms. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Mugo’s execution is symbolically used for a cathartic purpose intended to heal the community’s psyche as it emerges from the turmoil of the freedom struggle, and also as a means of deterring reemergence of such traitors in the new dispensation.

Critically read, Mugo is the nemesis of nationalist desire embodied by freedom fighters like Kihika and the entire Movement. He represents an aggressive materialistic quest for self aggrandizement that is parallel to the objectives of the struggle. In his resolution to betray Kihika, he relates his actions to a future where he would meet his “duty to [himself], to men and women of tomorrow” and he would use his reward to “buy more land. He would build a big house. He would then find a woman for a wife and get children” (214). This eccentric contemplation of a postcolonial future is antagonistic to the desires of the community at the specific social and historical context, and it is not surprising that the coming of independence must denigrate such antagonism to promote communal objectives of the freedom struggle.

The cautious optimism displayed in the transitioning Thabai community can be viewed as an attempt to solidify the relief of the community as it emerged from colonial definition in pursuit of its self-redefinition in historical, cultural and political spheres.

This is akin to what Elleke Boehmer refers to as “an intense need to create new worlds out of old stories” and in this attempt give the emerging diversity “conceptual shape” by use of “rhetorical figures to translate the inarticulate” (14). However, this effort may not found actual translation in the post-independence period since as Wole Ogundele argues, “contrary to the rhetoric of cultural nationalism which promised to reconnect the severed arteries of Africa’s organic history, the independent nation-states saw themselves as new nations” that had “little interest in the long and mysterious precolonial period” (131). *A Grain of Wheat* interrogates this history through its employment of the tragic form, and successfully questions the genesis of postcolonial materialism responsible for many of the evils that plague the post-independence nation-state.

The break with the expected grand narrative that would encompass all the accumulated historical, cultural and social knowledge that should have been used in the formation of the new states is decried in wa Thiong’o’s later novels. The failure to reconcile the past and the present historical experiences as a means of forging a future forms another phase of the postcolonial canon which Mullaney describes as a preoccupation “with the continuing impact of histories of colonialism and with documenting the varied effects of relations of power in the formation of identities” (105). It is evident that many post-independence societies struggle to delineate their present from the grip of the colonial heritage that continues to erode the capacity of these societies as they seek to recapture the rhythm of the organic precolonial societies.

Admittedly, this engagement of the postcolonial literary text with the nature of social and historical realities in independent states forms the thematic corpus for many

of postcolonial African narratives. Thematically and ideologically, postcolonial African literature “interrogates the poisoned gift of independence” (Ndigirigi 85), so as to evaluate how the history of colonialism and neocolonialism continues to impede social and economic development in postcolonial states.

Indeed, *The River Between* makes an attempt to account for the post-independence power relations that will characterise the post-independence state. On the one hand, there is the Kiama that has started to stamp its dominance on social and political affairs of the community. The Kiama “is the voice of the people” (141) and it represents, in the hierarchy of power relations, the highest authority in the politics of the colonial and postcolonial state. On the other hand, there is the educated elite who, unlike the Kiama, are politically and culturally liberal. In the novel’s denouement, these forces pull in different directions as symbolised by the Kiama’s banishment of the alternative voice in the name of the elite. This standoff lays ground for the continued conflicts that plague the post-independence Kenyan society.

3.5 Allegory of Deprivation and Resistance in *Matigari*

The ideological and aesthetic rendering of *Matigari* presents a new literary means by which postcolonial discourse can interrogate power relations in the context of inequality and deprivation. The novel decries the relentless practice of denying historical responsibilities in sharing the benefits of the freedom struggle. This denial of the historical past as a key ingredient in the formation of new political and economic structures is interrogated, in the novel, from the perspective of an epic hero whose

engagement with the structures of power and economic control reverses his circumstances from an epic to a tragic hero.

In its stylistic orientation, the novel satirises the abuse of power and the misuse of governance structures by the powerful elite that have appropriated social and economic benefits of the freedom struggle. *Matigari*, which translates to “the remains,” is a discourse that revives the spirit of the freedom fighters who now have been relegated to historically dispossessed peasants to be hunted when they question neocolonial oppression. *Matigari* is used in the narrative as an exploratory agent exposing himself to tragic circumstances, and through his quest, aids the readers’ discovery of how the elite have been dehumanised by their insatiable thirst for power and wealth, and the means needed to safeguard these privileges.

In this regard, Newton avers that the tragic form “operates according to absolute principles . . . conceptualised as truth” and whose literary application is based on “the unsatisfied curiosity about the nature of power allied to the belief that some valid discoveries about it are possible” (124). It is this discovery of truth and illumination of dispossession that forms the ideological drive in *Matigari*. Conceptually, the novel is an interrogation of history as rendered by the comprador bourgeoisie that has appropriated colonial structures of thought and economy to exploit the masses.

According to Mullaney, such interrogation “returns to colonial history to enact and exact certain forms of settlement with the unsettled past in the present” with a primary aim of “excavating the dangers and values of recurrent disturbances and displacement” (69). As the narrative opens, we are given an exposition into colonial history which metaphorically is described through the imagery of settlers hunting “of

foxes accompanied by packs of well-fed dogs” (3), and the symbolic mutilation of their quarry in celebration of victory.

The narrator in the novel sets himself apart as a historical witness and renders an account of the historical imperatives that surround Matigari’s return to evaluate the historical circumstances surrounding the attainment of independence. In its address to the reader or listener, the narrative declares its fictiveness by urging readers to “allocate the duration of any of the actions according to [their] choice,” and thus attempts to deny any historical specificity. However, despite this invitation to perceive the narrative as fictional does not preempt the narrator’s proposition of himself as a historical witness, and his narrative as a simulation of historical and social reality: the reality that Matigari seeks out as he emerges from an epic to a tragic milieu.

The narrator fosters the novel’s attempt to provide a historical account that evades the pitfall of the intentional fallacy. The novel’s use of this narrative strategy helps it to achieve some credible level of authenticity in its rendition of subjective history of oppression, even when the writer may be perceived as part of the intellectual class that historically may be ambivalent to the predicament of the peasant workers, and the workers’ resistance against such oppression. Indeed, as Gareth Griffiths argues, “in inscribing such acts of resistance the deep fear for the liberal critic is contained in the worry that in the representation [. . .] what is inscribed is not the subaltern’s voice but the voice of your own other” (167). To overcome such danger that Griffiths speaks of, *Matigari* creates a narrative persona who directs our understanding of the narrative so as to render unto us a truthful account of social and historical conditions prevalent in the neocolonial state.

This “return to colonial history,” to borrow Mullaney’s phrase, is significant as it is the foundation that informs Matigari’s interaction with postcolonial displacement that he will encounter in the rest of the narrative. Furthermore, his hope that he had seen “the last of colonial problems” (3) is shrouded in uncertainty going by the limitation well represented by his perception of the landscape where “the land was cloaked in fog” and hence he “could not see far and wide” (3). This part of the narrative represents Matigari’s apprehension of the historical uncertainty between the past and the present, and it is this uncertainty that informs his caution as he preserves the arms; the remains of the freedom struggle. This he performs in preparation for the symbolic crossing of the river, and his emergence out of the forest.

Matigari’s emergence from the forest embodies the return motif that historically is a return of either the detainees from detention camps that is aptly narrated in *A Grain of Wheat*, and the return of freedom fighters from the forests after the attainment of independence. In both cases, the return is a form of expressive discourse that deliberates on the discrepancy between the expectations of the returnees and the emerging socio-political order that disregards the needs and desires of the postcolonial state. In this way, the return motif is aesthetically used to concretise the conflicts that characterise the post-independent nation-state. As Elleke Boehmer stipulates, the black bourgeoisie became “aggressively chauvinistic, culturally impoverished, and kleptocratic” (“Postcolonialism” 348), and enhanced a disequilibrium that became the new frontier for a social, historical and ideological contestation.

By using the hero’s return as a motif, *Matigari* offers itself as a narrative of discoveries where the hero interrogates social and historical facts from an ideal

perspective and collocates this to the discoveries and experiences that are recounted by the narrator. Although the narrative ostensibly prescribes unto itself qualities such as fictiveness, timelessness, lack of spatial and contextual specificity, readers can locate the narrative within the postcolonial canon in respect of the text's historical, textual and contextual locations.

Postcolonial writing may superimpose textual qualities that attempt to influence both the discourse and our interpretation of this discourse. According to Boehmer, "the space-time framework and patterns of causality in a narrative work not only impart coherence to a fragmented history, but also help organize and clarify foundational moments in the anti-imperial movement" (*Colonial and Postcolonial* 189). This implies that interrogating the postcolonial text may reveal the historical and contextual underpinnings even when the text attempts to suggest otherwise. The state of the nation-state is from this argument intertwined with, and subjected to, specific experiences that can be disambiguated by a precise reading of the structures of collective or even individual encounters.

As a historically situated narrative, *Matigari* interrogates the systematic deprivation whose form and structure is availed through the epic-tragic transition that Matigari undergoes. In his presentation, Matigari is not only an embodiment of the quest for historical justice, but he also functions as a legitimising force in the struggle for justice and equity. This is achieved through the depiction of the tragic hero as a normative hero: the voice that condemns disequilibrium and deprivation of the workers by those who have appropriated state resources for personal gain.

Indeed, Matigari's first quest is the interrogation of the social conditions that now face the postcolony, and as he contemplates in his mission, he intends to "rise up [. . .] and go to all the public places, blowing the horn of patriotic service and the trumpet of patriotic victory" (6). Matigari uses the symbol of a house in which he and his children "would build their lives anew in the unity of their common sweat" (16) to represent the ideal social order in which the gains of the freedom struggle would benefit the patriots and not the reincarnated oppressive forces that have appropriated the vision of the freedom struggle.

Matigari, both as a character and symbol in the narrative, represents the reclamation of the spirit of freedom struggle and correction of historical and social truths that should guide the destiny of the postcolony. Predictably, the ideological orientation of the narrative centres on two important pillars; truth and justice. Although this pursuit agrees with Aristotle's stipulation that the basis for a tragic hero's "moral goodness" that should "impress our imagination and arouse the sense of grandeur" (233), the ideological stance espoused by the narrative, in James Ogude's view, "presupposes the existence of a collective consciousness among the peasantry and the working class" (33). The assumption of a homogenous aspiration forms part of Matigari's *hubris*, and contributes to the failure of his noble quest for the ideals of truth and justice.

Furthermore, Matigari's failure results from his inability to deduce the contradictions that complicate the constitution of the postcolonial state and its history. Emanating from a history replete with opposed desires and expectations, the masses, that to Matigari are the children of freedom fighters, have divergent views on history

and its relevance to their present circumstances. This fact is misread by Matigari whose rhetoric of redemption is vilified by even those, on whose behalf he negotiates social and historical justice.

The tragic hero's failure to a large extent also contributes to the irony that characterises the narrative, and consequently questions historical convergence between colonial and postcolonial history. The demonstration of new postcolonial reality where heroism and triumphs of the freedom struggle form only a part of the history of the post-independence nation-state is best illuminated by Matigari's failure to rebuild his metaphorical home and gather his metaphorical children to live in it. There is, on part of Matigari's version of nationhood, a failure to recognise "new metaphors of nationhood" and "to frame defining symbols for the purposes of imagining the nation" (Boehmer 189). Matigari is stuck on the idealised nation-state that was to be the product of the freedom struggle which should have culminated in the banishment of colonialists and oppressive neocolonial structures.

The social and historical contradictions that characterise the post-independence state are, as the novel demonstrates, a continuation of the colonial grip on the precolonial social and cultural structures that Matigari seeks to resuscitate. However, the existent postcolonial imperatives denigrate this effort, consequently demonstrating the impossibility of using "patriotic victory" (6) as the means by which the neocolonial nation-state embeds resistance to inherited colonial structures and value systems. The incompatibility between the triumphs of the freedom struggle and the contradictions in the postcolony lead to the tragic texture of the novel, and aesthetically functions to

exacerbate not only Matigari's predicament but also the oppression of the subjects of neocolonial deprivation.

The novel further exposes the inexistence of a homogenous social and historical background that should have informed the formation of a nationalist entity. According to Bruce King, the postcolonial period should be perceived as "a time when the unity of the state is being challenged by other kinds of identifications" (7), and a period when reflections on "the paradoxical nature of colonialism and post-colonialism" (11) should be intensified. This on the one hand illustrated through the narratives demonstration of the competing interests that characterise the post-independence social order, and on the other hand by the exploration of social and economic stratification best demonstrated by the allegory of the house that is first appropriated by Settler Williams who, upon the achievement of independence, hands it down to Robert Williams and John Boy.

Ideologically, Matigari's tragic circumstances are illustrative of the replacement of the African perception of social order with a capitalistic social and economic stratification that resists what Masizi Kunene terms as "a dispassionate examination of reality" (36). As the narrative demonstrates, truth and justice are elusive virtues in the post-independence state. There is passivity on the part of postcolonial subjects, who fall into two distinctive categories; "those who accept things as they are" and "those who want to change things" (91). The novel, through Matigari's rhetoric, advances the discourse of resistance by inviting victims of neocolonialism to reject neocolonial hegemony that breeds social and historical passivity.

However, this undertaking cannot be an easy one because there are those who are persuaded that "there is a lot of wisdom in learning to keep one's lips sealed" and in

“singing the approved tune,” and those who have “been ordained into the order of cowardice” (92). Confronted with such disengagement, Matigari’s futile quest for an ideal solution to neocolonial vagaries can only be achieved through a “concerted struggle of peasant workers through mass mobilisation, trade union movements and armed resistance” (Ogude 32). The narrative, in its interrogation of the postcolonial relations between the imperialists and the workers, suggests a failure of the systems of governance to create avenues for social and historical justice. As such, the narrative explores the possibilities of reviving the patriotic struggle that had culminated in the attainment of independence, and encourages subjects of neocolonialism to use the period as a point of historical reference.

Such a confrontation of the existent structures of governance that are considered legitimate and their opposition illegitimate would culminate into “a collision between ethical principles which can both be justified in their own terms” and whose claim to “objective necessity” (Newton 2) results in creation of tragic conflicts. In the philosophy of the tragic, the production of the cathartic effect that, in Aristotelian view, is hinged on pity and fear can aesthetically be perceived as a literary means of guarding against hopelessness that would result out of Matigari’s failure to resolve the deprivation of the peasant workers. However, the suffering of the tragic protagonist establishes an ideological attachment with the readers, and alienates the readers from the ideological rationalisation offered as the alternative discourse by the oppressive bourgeois elite.

However, the inability of Matigari’s rhetoric of peace to resolve the oppression of the peasants calls for a new strategy, for “the failure of one crop does not deter one

from sowing seeds again” and as such, Matigari contemplates “how he would take up arms to fight for his house once again” (150). Undoubtedly, the heirs of the structures of deprivation emboldened by their success in suppressing “the sound of the horn of justice” (21) retaliate with brutality that leads to Matigari’s attempt to cross back and retrieve his weaponry. However, the narrative symbolically allows Muriuki, the resurrected generation of freedom fighters, to retrieve the symbols of an armed struggle which would constitute the new phase of struggle in the name of an armed revolution aimed at restoring a more acceptable social order.

Indeed, such framing of the struggles against material and social deprivation is at the heart of tragic realist novels, which according to Daniel O’Connell, functions “to challenge the assumptions of bourgeois ideology” (224) which uses social and economic progress to deodorise their exploitation of human and other resources to secure gains for themselves and others of their rank. As a literary and ideological tool, tragic realism uses the tragic hero to question the social order and expand the horizons of awareness, by inviting a condemnation of historical and material deprivation of the powerless. In addition, the novel’s depiction of the tragic situation in which Matigari finds himself castigates the neocolonial disorder that is akin to what Raymond Williams terms as “the fault in the soul” (62), which in the tragic form is demonstrated through “violence, dislocation and extended suffering” (64). Indeed, at the core of the novel’s discourse is the desire of the deprived postcolonial subjects to overturn their deprivation, fully aware of the limitations they face in this undertaking.

Nevertheless, Matigari’s legendary status and the historical vantage point that he derives from the Mau Mau conquest, avails to the victims of neocolonial subjugation

renewed hope for restitution. He becomes to them the bearer of a vision for restoration of truth and justice. However, the obstinate post-independence socio-economic and political structure denies him the opportunity to fulfill his vision and turns his quest from an epic return to a tragic annihilation. Matigari's tenacity bequeaths the masses unmeasured awareness and an awakening that equips them with the knowledge that they can resist and fight against their exploitation, although they anticipate great disadvantage in their struggle against a more powerful enemy.

Consequently, the use of the tragic form anticipates inevitable disadvantage on the part of the tragic hero and other dissenting ideologues as they face their nemesis that is in the form of neocolonial oppression. However, the disadvantages that the tragic hero endures are part of the formative units in such a narrative, and are deliberately employed as a means of enhancing the evocation of essential emotions on the part of the audience. This notion is in agreement with Korang's views on the tragic, where he argues that such narratives demonstrate:

the resilience of the human spirit as a matter of its capacity to rise up to the occasion when the stakes in the existential gamble appear to be irretrievably and irrevocably lost. This is emblemized in the tragic protagonist who struggles, even as fate and capricious forces conspire to send him/her crashing in defeat and/or death. (13-14)

For reasons ingrained in Korang's assertion, it is evident that the tragic form, in its evaluation of the discourse of resistance in Matigari, avoids condemning an armed revolution as a means of ending the exploitation of the peasants. The novel proposes a reinvention of the heroism of the colonial struggle and resistance against oppression, by resurrecting this spirit of resistance in Muriuki – whose name translates into the

resurrected one. By depicting the tragic ending of Matigari both as a hero and a victim, the narrative celebrates sacrifice and by its evocation of pity and fear, encourages the expression of nationalism as a concerted effort to safeguard the victory of the oppressed.

Furthermore, *Matigari* successfully uses the conflict between the two implacably opposed socio-economic classes to draw attention to the need for continued resistance against neocolonialism. The standoff can only be resolved if the post-independence governance restores the virtues of truth and justice, and allows the patriots to reap the fruits of their historical struggle for freedom and self definition. Unless this desirable social and economic order is allowed to become a reality, then the armed conflict that Muriuki symbolises is bound to continue until neocolonial totalitarianism is vanquished.

3.6 Conquest, Resistance and Restitution in *Petals of Blood*

The rendition of the postcolonial social and historical imbalances through the prism of tragic heroines in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* is a significant literary and ideological choice. The novels highlight the evils of an aggressively exploitative patriarchal socio-economic ordering and interrogate the ideological avenues that may be used to remedy the inequalities. The use of tragic irony in the narratives concretises the portrayal of the discourse of gendered inequalities, and demonstrates the viciousness of the exploitative capitalism. The narrative focuses on commoditisation of human values, and encourages the destruction of those structures that breed social and economic inequalities in postcolonial society. Furthermore, by utilising the tragic form,

the narratives demonstrate the ideological underpinnings that must inform the quest for social, historical and economic justice in the postcolonial context.

In *Petals of Blood*, the interrogation of the social order is hinged on Wanja, the pivotal point of the narrative. She allegorises the conscience of the community in the changing phases of conquest, exploitation and rediscovery. The novel builds on the imagery of gendered variances to expound on the discourse of exploitation, and to contrast male and female perspectives on the existent inequalities in the postcolonial nation-state. Wanja symbolises nature or the natural order of things that capitalistic instincts seek to possess, conquer and subjugate. She is the embodiment of social and historical conflicts and contradictions that structure the expressive discourse at the heart of the narrative.

Quite early in the narrative, we are confronted with the metaphor of exploitation when Munira, having taken his students out in the field, encounters a worm eaten flower. In his explanation to the curious children, he states that such a flower “cannot bear fruit” and consequently urges the students to “always kill worms” (22). The expressive discourse intimated through this encounter between Munira and what he fearfully explains as “a law of nature” (22) concatenate many of the relationships that function as social units in the exposition of the thematic concerns in the novel. These relationships revolve around the exploitative elite, and the peasants, who, like “the worm-eaten flower” (22), are socially and materially deprived.

Consequently, *Petals of Blood* is the narration of a community’s effort aimed at creating a philosophy that may avail to it a means of repudiating neocolonialism. Ilmorog, a microcosm of the neocolonial society, is a community struggling to cascade

individual experiences to form a collective social history and a sense of identity. The fact that all the key characters, as they come to Ilmorog, arrive from a point of displacement or dispossession, is significant in reading the novel's perception of history and its influence on the conscience of the neocolonial society. For instance, all the key characters do not have functional family units or even fruitful relationships, and the only meaningful social entity they can identify with is the Ilmorog community. Wanja brings to Ilmorog the burden of neocolonial dispossession of the peasant by the heirs of oppressive colonial structures; Abdulla is crippled in the struggle for independence; Munira has his dreams of academic excellence truncated at Siriana; while Karega is dismissed from school and has his hopes similarly thwarted by an intolerant colonial educational system.

At Ilmorog, the villagers seek a new order and a revival of their inner hopes, and in a way a redefinition of their social history with the wisdom of their personal and collective experiences. In this way, *Petals of Blood* adheres to the tenets of postcolonial literature in what Mullaney refers to as the interrogation of "the relationship between history, memory and place" (41). The experiences that have brought the inhabitants of Ilmorog to the village are formative units in the novel's attempt to relay important social and historical experiences relevant to the interpretation of the discourse of power relations and postcolonial dispossession. Although the narrative articulates its evaluation of social philosophy through the intricate relationship between the characters, it is Wanja who functions as the pillar of the discourse due to the novel's depiction of her as the bearer of the motifs of dispossession, resistance and restoration.

Wanja's contribution in the articulation of the collective desires of the Ilmorog community is hinged on the community's sojourn to the city in pursuit of a remedy for their collective problems. Historically, her participation in the trek to the city is founded on the conquests of Ndemi, the "best magician in words," and the founder of Ilmorog, who was "tired of merely adapting to nature and its changing fortune" (120). This linkage to the past historical exploits of the community serves as an ideological invitation to the villagers to perceive their tribulations as "a community crisis needing a communal response" (123). The journey, as a narrative metaphor, integrates the personal experiences of the characters and their collective understanding of their history. It is through the events that characterise the villagers' journey that the intrusive narrator relates the confrontation between the past and the present, and most importantly, the community's encounter with the inhumane neocolonial social order.

The journey functions as an ideological turning point that alters Wanja's perspective on social and economic relationships when she returns to Ilmorog. The despair and the loss of trust in institutions breed transformative thinking in Wanja's approach to the tribulations of the community, and she urges them "not to kneel down to sorrow and to despair" (257). Through her determination, she identifies an ideological and social response to the struggles of her community, by turning to capitalistic tendencies that seem to resolve the despair of the community. She establishes herself as a "famed proprietor [. . .] aloof, distant, condescending, willing, and commanding things to happen" (270). This transformation is indicative of the possible reactions that an inhumane and exploitative social order may precipitate, and within the context of her role as the normative hero for social resistance against

neocolonial social and historical injustice, an indication of the tragic consequences of neocolonial dispossession.

Furthermore, the community's awareness of the "rainbow memories of gain and loss, triumph and failure [. . .] suffering and knowledge" (123) necessitates a new mode of resistance. The parodying of neocolonial hegemony and the subversion of genuine precolonial sense of communalism serves as a demonstration of Wanja's acute awareness of the limitation of choice, and offers her "an instrument of retribution" (Cook and Okenimkpe 92). The changing social and historical landscape is best demonstrated through Wanja's transformation from an individual searching for self regeneration and "a new flowering of self" (107), which is to be achieved through purposive redirection of her energies to honest and productive labour at Ilmorog.

However, the arrival of the Trans-Africa highway portends changes in the social thinking of the Ilmorog community, and disrupts social and individual hopes and desires. The town's transformation "from a deserted village into a sprawling town of stone, iron, concrete and glass" (263), depicts the disintegration of the cohesive social values that have hitherto informed social and economic interactions in the community, where "nothing was for free" (280). Wanja attributes the changes to the fact that "this world . . . this Kenya . . . this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you" (291).

The novel uses social transformation as a means of interrogating the tragic effects of modern capitalism. This approach agrees with Newton's attribution of the tragic with "the Dionysian or the darkness that has to be embraced even if the result may be destructive at both the individual and cultural level" (124). The tragic in this

way decries the destruction of individuality and awareness as a means of condemning the social forces that bring about this destruction. These are the forces that impede Wanja's dreams of self regeneration and instead of her expected "new flowering of self" (107), she is, like Munira's flower, she turns into "a worm-eaten flower . . . [which] cannot bear fruit" (22).

Tragic discourse, as employed in *Petals of Blood*, deconstructs the emergent capitalistic aggressiveness, and illustrates the fact that the best of human intentions have failed to reconcile social and economic conflicts. This has resulted in the tragic disintegration of desirable social structures and values precipitating what can be best referred to as a tragic moral impasse. This is partly demonstrated in the way Wanja rationalises her "irrevocable and final entry into whoredom" (311), which to her is merely a response to the demands of changing social and historical circumstances.

Stuart Hall attributes transformations in postcolonial identities to the fact that these identities "have histories [. . . and] like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation [. . .] subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power" (98). The impossibility of holding on to the essentialised past of Ilmorog where there were solid social bonds and interconnected perception of destiny is the basis for the tragic endings that most of the cultural and historical values of this community have to endure. This is best expressed in Munira's pain as he contemplates "the growth of Ilmorog from its beginnings in rain and drought to the present flowering in petals of blood" (45), which translate to a condemnation of the external neocolonial forces and a purgation of the community's spirit. Modernisation of Ilmorog results in "murder of the spirit" (45) and demonstrates the tragic "irony of progress" (Gikandi

137), which dispossesses the community its valued social structures and a common understanding of their history, identity and destiny.

The artistic castigation of materialistic modernisation and the insatiable desire for capitalistic conquest concretises the novel's ideological thrust. In this way, the novel functions to demonstrate what Evan Mwangi views as the use of art "as not only a means by which we understand our circumstances and narrate ourselves into existence but [also as] a reflection of the concrete conditions around us" (67). Literary discourse, as in Mwangi's observation on the social value of artistic expression, offers readers an opportunity to evaluate the actions and desires of characters in concrete social and historical circumstances. In *Petals of Blood*, the narration of the misfortunes of the community as it collides with the unsolicited interruption of their social structure by imperialistic desires, elicits our "humanistic solidarity with either the individual/aggregate elements in a society, or the entire society, that suffer the tragic misfortune" (Korang 13). The novel further demonstrates, according to Patrick Williams, that "human relations are there to be fought for and [to be] constructed" (81). It is only through such an effort that the neocolonial society may be able to confront colonial legacies in the name of capitalism, neocolonialism, individualism and inhumane industrialisation.

Furthermore, *Petals of Blood* makes explicit attempts to entice the reader to accept the historical perspective offered by the narrative. This is on the one hand makes readers empathise with misfortunes of the tragic characters, their community or even their social class, and on the other hand to provide a solid background for accurate reading of the narrative's thematic concerns. The enunciation of historical imperatives

underlying the narrative is mainly achieved by the naming of characters, both fictional and historical figures. According to Carol Sicherman, such utilisation is intended “to make Kenyan readers reflect on their own place in the continuum of history” (303). Additionally, such reflection as Sicherman refers to is significant in enhancing the acceptance of the novel’s discourse on social and historical truths.

The importance of history, past and present, is accentuated by Wanja’s sketch that blurs the historical distance between Abdulla and Kimathi, and the difference between the emotions of suffering and happiness. In this way, the narrative celebrates hope as enshrined in the community’s awareness of its historical context, and underscores the need for sacrifice in the struggle for freedom and social justice. Furthermore, Wanja’s conception of Abdulla’s child signifies a continuation of hope and struggle for a more just society. In this way, the novel uses the tragic rendition of the community’s encounter with imperialism as a means of asserting the need and desire for social and historical justice in the postcolonial context.

However, as the narrative demonstrates, such justice can only be achieved if the masses become conscientised on the fact of social and economic class inequalities, and become therefore aware of the factors that have abetted this form of stratification. It is for this reason that the novel engages in a revisionist collocation of colonial and postcolonial history. By using characters such as Nyakinyua and Abdulla, the narrative uses the Mau Mau freedom struggle as a point for historical and ideological reference. This fact is punctuated by Wanja’s sketch that artistically emphasizes that the past and the present must merge as a single force while confronting neocolonial capitalism.

3.7 Resisting Imperialism and Neocolonial Dispossession in *Devil on the Cross*

The elements of space, place and history as formative units in the interrogation of the postcolonial condition merge well with character, time and point of narration to interrogate the emergent social conditions brought about by the conflicting cultural and historical encounters between the coloniser and the colonised. The unwilling encounter is, in the context of *Devil on the Cross*, made more vivid not only by the novel's use of the tragic form but also by its use of a female tragic protagonist in Wariinga. Through Wariinga, the novel demonstrates the negative effects of commoditisation of human values and the tragedy that may result from efforts that may aim at restoring a more desirable social order.

Devil on the Cross, using the omniscience of the Gicaandi Player, recounts the “too disgraceful, too shameful” (7) story of Wariinga, admittedly with permission from Wariinga's mother. These preliminary declarations by the narrator lay the grounds for an emotional recounting of “all that is hidden” (7) and also what “lies hidden by darkness” (8). With these preliminary confessions, the narrative not only lays claim to objectivity and historical accuracy, but also prepares its audience for an emotive interrogation of historical imperatives that produce the kind of misfortunes that befalls Wariinga. The novel exploits the philosophy of narration and narrative making as a reservoir of history and as a means for evaluating the social and historical experiences of the society.

By adopting the narrative mode as means of articulating Wariinga's misfortunes, *Devil on the Cross* engages in the exploration of what Abiola Irele calls “the symbolic and cognitive spheres of awareness” (161). This stylistic choice in the focalisation of

the novel accords the narrator, as well as the narrative, unmeasured authority and credibility in the enunciation of the neocolonial social conditions. In addition, the narrator assigns himself a unique historical autonomy, which ultimately fortifies the rendition of the novel's thematic concerns.

The novel builds on “formalized realism and extreme ironic satire” (Cook and Okenimkpe 117) to explore the exploitation of the peasants by the powerful elite, that have turned their advantage over the masses into means of extortion and exploitation. More accurately, the novel explores gendered structures of exploitation, and examines the structures of social and economic exploitation from a feminine perspective. The novel is thus able to utilise gender and social class stratification as a means of mounting what Helen Tiffin refers to as “counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse” (17). The journey to the Devil's Feast is an artistic, ideological and historical interrogation of the national and international forces that have facilitated the continuation of material and social exploitation in the neocolony.

The journey, as a motif in the novel, provides a means of focalisation through which the characters share their experiences and views on how the exploitation of the masses has been abetted by the structures of post-independence governance. Christianity, the political elite, the judiciary and the police are depicted as social formations that have safeguarded the oppressors of the people, and extended the dehumanisation of the victims of historical dispossession. By making reference to the freedom struggle, and the fact that “they redeemed [their land] from the hands of [their] enemies with [their] own blood” (44), the masses legitimise their claim to national resources that the elite have appropriated.

In this way, the people's negotiation for the ownership of their national and historical space adheres to the "dynamics of indigenous claims to place and apprehends some of the ways that indigenous histories and identities are embodied" (Mullaney 28). This negotiation does not only scuttle the hegemony of the ruling class, but demonstrates the elites' lack of moral right to lay claim to national history and resources. Particularly through the freedom struggle that the peasant workers use as a point of historical reference, they create a sense of historical awareness and a need to resituate and reorder the social and historical reality of the neocolonial state. Moreover, the novel underscores the significance of the organic precolonial social structures as benchmarks in generating a social and economic philosophy that can aid the post-independence state as it grapples with the challenges of nationhood and nation building.

The influence of Marxist realism in the expression of the novel's ideological intention is unmistakable in *Devil on the Cross*. The novel portrays predetermined ideological and normative propositions that depict bourgeois exploitation of the workers, and the workers' active engagement in revolutionary thinking aimed at overturning their oppression. According to Tony Davies, Marxist aesthetics, in its depiction of "fundamental truths of human thought, feeling and experience" (146), cannot escape the use typology of character. Consequently, it is inescapable that the narrative will represent the tragic consequences of the workers' collision with the oppressive socio-political and economic order. Wariinga is thus a product of these literary and ideological choices used in the narrative's expressive discourse.

It is through Wariinga that the novel demonstrates the moral corruption of the beneficiaries of post-independence scramble for national resources in pursuit of

individual enrichment. Through her misfortunes with the Rich Old Man, the narrative concretises her victimhood, and invites us to side with her predicament. It is for this reason, the invitation to condemn injustice and violation of inherently human values, that Adrian Poole argues that modern tragedy, “asks us to observe the ways in which people reach judgements about who is to blame: the pressures they are under, the motives that impel them, the satisfactions they seek” (54). The tragic form in this sense consolidates the narrative’s rendition of the complex circumstances that surround postcolonial subjects’ exploration of social, political and economic forces that have abetted their exploitation by colonial and neo-colonial structures.

The novel castigates individualism and materialism that has broken the African perception of shared history and destiny, and depicts the misconception of what M. Keith Booker terms as capitalism’s attempt to portray itself “as a natural, common-sense way of ordering a society” (67). *Devil on the Cross* exploits imagery that discredits this notion of social order by alienating the reader from the misfortunes that befall those that dehumanise the historically and materially dispossessed peasants. In this way, wa Thiong’o makes effective use of grotesque realism to portray perpetrators of neocolonial exploitation as inhuman and subsequently morally legitimise any form of punishment that is meted out on their kind.

To further concretise the novel’s employment of grotesque realism, the narrative provides an opportunity for the readers to peep into the Devil’s Feast, a display of the arrogance of dispossession, to enable the reader weigh the moral grounds on which to evaluate the necessity of Wariinga’s limited choices. Wariinga is accorded the role of the normative heroine, whose analysis of the forms of oppression of the peasant workers

resonates with the novel's discourse: labour, intellectual exploitation, the erosion of social values and ultimately sexual exploitation (206). Muturi's rhetoric solidifies the discourse of exploitation, in words reminiscent of Matigari's own discourse, as he speaks of "the clan of the workers [. . . who] build houses [only for] others to occupy them [. . . who] make clothes [yet] others take them" (208).

Such rhetoric delegitimises the bourgeoisies' social and historical claim to power and national resources. Consequently, the moral impasse that makes restoration of a just social order impossible demonstrates the tragic choices that unabated exploitation may limit victims to. To this end, Ralph A. Austen posits that "the legitimacy of the normative hero derives [. . .] from the reliance upon him of the ordinary population to deal with threats" (389), and as such his or her actions are exempted from moral evaluation or condemnation. The novel offers Wariinga her redemption by rationalising her actions as necessary response to miseries of the peasant workers under the yoke of neocolonial capitalism, and she undoubtedly becomes what Daniel O'Connell terms as "the alienated hero of bourgeois society" (223). Acutely aware that "the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead" (254), Wariinga seemingly accepts her fugitive status, proud that she has had her retribution against her tormentor.

The indeterminate ending of the narrative is, at another level, a demonstration of the continuous struggle against the vulgarity of neocolonial exploitation of the post-independence society. Through Wariinga, the symbol of anti-imperialist spirit, the novel demonstrates the desire of the marginalised socio-economic class for a day when this

class will achieve socio-economic and historical justice from the manacles of capitalistic exploitation and social domination by the powerful elite.

Wariinga aggressively pursues justice for the sake of the deprived. Such acts ennoble her social and historical standing, and most importantly allow her to demonstrate the need to rekindle the heroic spirit that guided the freedom struggle. Her bravery and determination to correct historical injustices is celebrated by the narrative as a means of altering the mindset of the exploitative post-independence elite and directing them to the possibility of a forceful assertion of the peasants' undying quest for a just social order that distributes the benefits of independence to all the subjects of colonialism.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter has interrogated the use of the tragic form as a means of representing wa Thiong'o's exploration of conflicts stemming from the colonial and postcolonial historical moments. The study has found out that the novels employ tragic realism to enhance their representation of factors responsible for escalation of postcolonial socio-economic, political and historical contestations. On the one hand, elements of tragedy such as characterisation, narrative plot, the use of narrative motifs, social and historical settings and narrative technique concatenate to expose causal factors that account for social and ideological conflicts prevalent in the nascent postcolonial society. On the other hand, these elements highlight the narratives' discourse on socio-historical and economic inequalities largely responsible for the kind of disengagement that characterise postcolonial society.

In *The River Between*, the study has interrogated the tripartite clash involving Gikuyu traditional nationalism, Christian revivalism and Western education, and has discussed how these forces bring about polarisation that ultimately leads to tragic consequences. As anticipated towards the end of the novel, social and ideological realignments that coalesce into social classes that continue to disengage in the postcolonial era. Tragic mimesis in this case is used as a literary compass that points to us the genesis and development of socio-economic, political and historical conflicts between emergent social classes.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the study has found out that the narrative uses tragic realism to represent the themes of disenchantment, betrayal and retribution emanating from the freedom struggle. Through tragic rendition, these themes further demonstrate the implications of failed or inadequate engagement in the new formation that is the post-independence nation-state. Tragic conflicts arise out of contesting social and individual desires, and uses Mugo's anti-heroic stature to explain the extension of capitalistic instincts that lead to the betrayal of collective aspirations.

Historical deprivation and the accompanying resistance are further interrogated in *Matigari*, a novel whose discourse encourages the reinvention of the heroism of the freedom struggle in tackling neocolonial imperialism. It is clear that Matigari's tragedy is used in the novel as an aesthetic tool to punctuate the effects of social and ideological disengagement between the emergent bourgeois class and the masses who have been deprived of their rightful share of benefits of the freedom struggle.

Petals of Blood and *Devil on the Cross* further represent escalation of this social and ideological rift between dispossessed masses and the imperialist elite by

representing the themes of neocolonial imperialism and social and historical deprivation. The tragic heroines used in the two novels allegorise the collective tragedy of the neocolonial state. The study concludes that tragic realism is employed in the novels to enhance readers' appreciation of socio-economic and historical displacement experienced by the masses in the neocolonial state, and to rationalise retributive acts that lead to the heroines' tragic endings. Tragic realism in this sense punctuates not only the dehumanisation meted out on subjects of neocolonial injustices but also the violence that such dehumanisation can nurture.

Having explored thematic concerns that are illuminated in these novels through their employment of tragic realism, the next chapter discusses how tragic realism illuminateswa Thiong'o's vision for the Kenyan postcolonial society.

4.0 Chapter Four

4.1 Tragic Realism and Postcolonial Vision in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Novels

4.2 Introduction

As an expressive and philosophical art form, literature is used to record, recount and interrogate social and historical conditions and experiences that societies have encountered. In their rendition of these experiences, writers use literary texts as a means of engineering social thought, and as a way of articulating their visions relative to their interpretation of the prevailing social and historical conditions. To articulate their visions, writers make aesthetic choices that may range from the structural to stylistic considerations. Specifically, the tragic form affords the writer the means by which to represent the social, historical or cultural attitudes and experiences that shape human relationships, and eventually helps the writer to interrogate the implication of the past to the present and the future. The tragic form, in this regard, sharpens the writer's use of imaginative criticism to interrogate ideological perspectives that a community adopts in the context of social, political and cultural conflicts. With this in mind, the chapter interrogates how wa Thiong'o uses the tragic form as a means by which he enunciates his interpretation of the nature of human relations and their impact on the postcolonial society.

4.3 Envisioning the Nation in *The River Between*.

The use of the tragic form to represent the polarities of Gikuyu cultural nationalism, Western education and Christian evangelisation in *The River Between* is meant to enunciate wa Thiong'o's vision on these themes. By addressing these thematic

concerns, the narrative traces the genesis and the evolution of cultural imperialism, the primary tenet informing the novel's postcolonial concerns. In its reconstruction of the intrusion of precolonial Africa's social and cultural structures by Western influences, the novel projects its vision of precolonial Africa's history and culture, and evaluates how the African social and cultural milieu was affected by the fact of colonial incursion. In essence, the novel's presentation of Waiyaki as a *Bildungsroman*, a naïve young man attempting to understand both himself and his society, endorses wa Thiong'o's perspective on the challenges faced by a colonised society that struggles to find its way after its epistemological awareness is overturned by the emergence of colonialism and imposition of colonial institutions and ideologies.

The River Between opens with the acknowledgement of the contested yet undisturbed history of the ridges, "which just slept, the big deep sleep of their Creator," yet they continued to "struggle for the leadership of this isolated region" (1). By opening this window into the history of the ridges, the novel lays ground for the magnitude of the ideological difference that the arrival of colonial education and Christian revivalism will bring, and how this will in turn alter the epistemological awareness of the ridges. From the novel's point of view, the only valid reason for the antagonism that exists between Makuyu and Kameno is grounded on the quest for historical supremacy, rather than on any social or cultural disagreement.

However, the introduction of Christianity and Western education provide a new ground for contestation, which unfortunately disturbs the community's established cultural identity, and questions social and historical structures that the community has hitherto depended on for the expression and sustenance of its cultural identity. In

WaThiong'o's depiction of this unprecedented disruption of the Kenyan culture, he uses the tragic form as an ideological means by which the colonised African communities "transcend the vicissitudes of a problematic experience, in an effort towards an expressive grasp of the world in which that experience unfolds" (45). It is in an effort to "grasp the world" that the novel first interrogates the historical background that facilitates the advent of the cultural crisis that is born out of colonialism.

The novel explores the failure of the precolonial African communities to critique the incursion of Western value systems, some of which were detrimental to the cohesive coexistence of these communities. By using the tragic form, the novel interrogates the historical process that leads to the onset of colonialism, and the cultural debate that is sparked by Christianity and Western education, and indeed, according to James Ogude, an interrogation of "the problematics of the nationalist discourse" (5). Indeed, as the founding narrative concedes, the ridges have had an extremely inorganic existence before and during the colonial encounter, further explaining the impossibility of forging a concrete cultural, political and ideological front in response to colonial domination.

Wa Thiong'o criticises the ridges' inability or unwillingness to interrogate changing social and historical imperatives by questioning the antagonism with which the community treats "those who had the courage to look beyond their present content to a life and land beyond [and who] were the select few sent by Murungu to save the people in their hour of need" [yet who] "became strangers to the hills" (3). In its counter-discourse, the community argues that "the white man cannot speak the language of the hills. And knows not the ways of the land" (7). By revisiting this foundational discourse in the history of colonial conquest, *The River Between* evaluates

historical failures that facilitate colonisation and the subsequent denigration of African history and culture.

In this way, wa Thiong'o demonstrates the importance of history as a defining component in nation formation, since it fosters, in the community's conscience, a sense of shared social, historical and political destiny. The ridges do not have a solid political understanding, and in essence do not have a sense of nationalism. Indeed, the ridges are more concerned with the contestation for dominance over each other and not on immediate common threats. This past, which is recounted through the alienation of the community's rejected heroes, has largely been misinterpreted by the ridges as yet another front for historical contest. As Mary Egun Modupe Kolawole observes, it is such "political ineptitude [that] impairs the messianic vision of the heroes [. . .] leading to solitude, madness and destruction" (129). Essentially, the effects that Kolawole refers to are best explored by the narrative's depiction of the resultant tragic vision as embodied by Waiyaki, the tragic protagonist in the narrative.

Through its disjointed approach to a common history, the community alienates itself from important past experiences that would have guided its reaction to the emerging social and cultural concerns. Partly, as wa Thiong'o's vision on the usefulness of past history illustrates, the transition from a familiar past to an unfamiliar present and future lays ground for an ambivalent approach to the changing social and cultural realities. According to Ato Quayson, such ambivalence "with respect to the past is that it either renders the underlying cultural codes no longer entirely relevant or makes them seem subservient to inherently narrow or unrepresentative principles" (35). It is the emergence of individualistic as opposed to collective interpretation of cultural practices

and beliefs that leads to the cultural and socio-political positioning, which ultimately leads to the devaluation of Gikuyu social and cultural epistemology.

Wa Thiong'o singles out the absence of sound political organisation and understanding as being responsible for the tragic circumstances that alienated community's heroes find themselves. As literary tropes, these heroes symbolise the historical contradictions that blur the community's understanding of both itself and the dynamics of evolving social and historical events. The tragedy of the heroes discounts "ethnic polities as an earlier form of social organisation" (Ogude 15). The ideological rift between African communities and their failure to utilise their shared history as a means of forging a sense of nationalism may not, on their own, precipitate the devastation that colonialism brings upon African socio-cultural institutions. This devastation is mainly brought about by the imposition of colonial values that were, as Edward Said puts it, aimed at "disregarding, essentializing, [and] denuding" (379) the African cultural, political, and social history.

In *The River Between*, this devastation is abetted by Christian revivalism and western education that disregard the African social, cultural and historical identity, and exploit the contradictions and weaknesses in the amorphous African self-definition. The consequence of the African cultural and historical ambivalence is made vivid through the polarisation that accompanies the ideological contest between Gikuyu cultural conservatism, Christianity and western education. Waiyaki's tragic alienation and his failure to reconcile the community demonstrates wa Thiong'o's vision on the value of commitment to past history as a means of understanding the present and forecasting on the future. The tragic irony emanating from Waiyaki's failure concretises waThiong'o's

vision of history as a means of conceptualising nationalism and resolving inherent contradictions.

In the novel, Waiyaki's tragedy is an express result of his commitment to a visionary cultural position that in his view would resolve some of the contradictions arising out of the divergent cultures. As Robert K. M. Newton argues, "if [the hero's] commitment is threatened by the world beyond the self, the hero refuses to compromise as his commitment is identified with a core of self that must remain intact. If one allows that core to be breached then one's human identity becomes vulnerable" (40). The tragic hero is in this way used to represent the most rational but unpopular way of resolving emerging conflicts.

Precolonial Africa, from the discourse depicted in *The River Between*, is not devoid of its own set of contradictions and cultural anomalies. However, the onset of colonialism thrust the community into an unprecedented cultural debate that helped the community to evaluate these contradictions and cultural anomalies. The failure of the different perspectives to engage in some form of dialectic evaluation on selective preservation of the best precolonial African practices and the abandonment of those that are inappropriate presents a volatile cultural and historical situation. On the one hand, this produces cultural absolutism as envisaged by the Kiama, and on the other hand indiscriminate demonisation of precolonial cultural values. As wa Thiong'o demonstrates, these hardened views can only lead to tragic consequences for those, like Waiyaki, who try to establish a middle ground.

According to Evan Mwangi, "colonialism exacerbated tensions within a society already in motion toward an indigenous modernity" (*Africa Writes Back* 31-32). In

essence, wa Thiong'o interrogates the role of the colonial and Christian influences in abetting the polarisation that disrupts the historical progression of the precolonial African community's cultural revolution. Through this depiction, *The River Between* interrogates colonial hegemony that attempted to denigrate African culture in its entirety and, by using the perspective of the tragic form, invites a reading that empathises with Waiyaki's conviction on the importance of cultural syncretism as the most prudent means of embracing a future where the influence of Christian and western cultural and religious values is undeniable.

Waiyaki's pronouncements, when he is summoned by the Kiama, are indicative of wa Thiong'o's vision on possible means by which the postcolonial society can address its dilemma on the politics of precolonial African culture, Christianity and Western education. In response to Kabonyi's accusation that Waiyaki's association with Christians would contaminate the purity of the tribe, he responds thus: "I too am concerned with the purity of the tribe. I am also concerned with the growth and development of the ridges. We cannot do this through hatred. We must be united, Christians and non-Christians, Makuyu or Kameno. For salvation of the hills is in our hands" (127-128). Although Kabonyi's subterfuge seems to have elicited the support of the elders who have sabotaged Waiyaki's vision for the hills, the admission by the intrusive narrator that the villagers "did not want to read the guilt in one another's faces. Neither did they want to speak to one another, for they knew full well what they had done" (152). This part of the narrative discounts the presumed failure of Waiyaki's vision and admits the infallibility of his synergetic approach to the inevitable change that colonialism occasions.

Furthermore, in affirming wa Thiong'o's vision as corroborated by the above excerpt, *The River Between* uses Waiyaki's tragedy to enact its discourse on history and to assert what Richard Braford terms as the use of rhetoric to enunciate "that speculative element of human existence that underpins all our beliefs about the nature of truth, justice, politics and behavior" (5), and which are interpreted in conformity with the writer's vision on how these elements influence individual and communal existence and destiny. As Elleke Boehmer observes, the postcolonial writer should engage "in the search for alternative meanings" within the context of undeniable "cultural cross-fertilization and eventual hybridization" (124). It is this acknowledgement that influences wa Thiong'o's revisionist yet progressive vision of African history, which rejects even the most vile cultural Machiavellianism that denies the dynamics of cultural and historical change.

Indeed, David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe stipulate that the novel "centres on the struggle to free men's minds from the constraints of colonialism in preparation for the assertion of national integrity and individual human identity" (68). This implies a psychological healing and a resolution of the contestations and the conflicts that colonialism had inadvertently given rise to. The use of the tragic form makes it possible for the novel's discourse to achieve this purging, and sharpens wa Thiong'o's vision on new national history and identity.

The tragic form is an essential artistic component in the enhancement of wa Thiong'o's vision on the means of achieving social order that culminates in the formation of a national philosophy in *The River Between*. As Peter R. Connolly contends, the "tragic vision [. . .] focuses on a human situation [that] mimes an

experiential process that draws an audience to recognise possibilities and dilemmas in life” (550). In addition, Simon Gikandi observes that Waiyaki’s alienation and failure “has brought the two sides to confront the fact that they are not two distinct cultural entities, but are actually conjoined by similar spatial and temporal interests” (68-69). In this way, the tragic is used as an expression of wa Thiong’o’s vision of the ideal values that can coalesce to facilitate development of the emergent nation-state where cultural and historical identities are affirmed and not used as a basis for social and political exclusion.

This vision is in tandem with Wole Soyinka’s observation that a writer should embrace “a creative concern which conceptualises or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable” (66). In line with Soyinka’s observation, it is apparent that *The River Between* creates a visionary proposition that interrogates the contextual and historical realities that African states and cultures have to deal with as a prerequisite for social and political order in the new hybrid structures formed from the cultural and historical background of African and colonial value systems. The novel achieves this by contrasting cultural and historical values, which, in the context of tragic realism, is actualised through what Robert Langbaum terms as “the illusion of historical actuality [which] escapes philosophical rationalization [and moves] towards historical empiricism” (81).

The achievement of what Langbaum calls “historical empiricism” demands on the one hand a recovery of the precolonial socio-cultural epistemology and on the other hand hybridisation of this with the cultural and historical influences of the colonial interaction. It is from this vision of history that social and cultural nationalism would

emerge, and as Ogude points out, this would also entail “dialogue with other adjacent zones of knowledge” (1) and possibly facilitate, as Nicholas Kamau-Goro stipulates, a “discursive space of engagement where the clash between the contesting cultures can be negotiated” (11). *The River Between* dialectically interrogates selective values that can spawn a reconstituted history that does not denigrate either the indigenous or the inherited cultural values emanating out of Africa’s cultural and epistemological interaction with colonial Europe.

Through the discourse enunciated in *The River Between*, the tragic form underpins the novel’s vision of the nuances of religion, Western education and African culture. It is apparent that the three social units are important conduits in the imagination, formation and transformation of cultural values, which if properly applied, will constitute a national culture necessary for the formation of a postcolonial nation that is aware of its historical and political context. The novel uses Waiyaki’s tragedy as an allegorical representation of the various contradictory forces and influences whose miscomprehension may lead to the destruction of the emergent nation-state.

4.4 Collective Experiences as Formation of National Values

A Grain of Wheat is predicated upon the history of collective suffering, sacrifice and the betrayals that characterised the freedom struggle. The novel interrogates the individual contradictions that colonisation and the struggle for freedom precipitated. Through the evocation of the social and individual conflicts, the novel exposes the intricate social and individual responses to colonialism, and pronounces the significance of these conflicts in nurturing a future that upholds social and historical justice. The

significance of these conflicts is highlighted through contested heroism that is the bedrock of the narrative, and the tragic irony that relays wa Thiong'o's vision for a post-independence nation-state. The discourse espoused by the narrative questions the historical relevance of the betrayals that colonial occupation and the resultant freedom struggle give rise to. In essence, the novel engages in the assessment of social and historical values that should be useful in the formation of a national culture, and how past experiences may function as ideological benchmarks in the reconstitution and management of the affairs of the new state.

As the tragic antihero in the novel, Mugo, metaphorically encodes the ambivalence of history as a resource for social and cultural progress, and exposes the dangers of a linear reading of history as demonstrated by the villagers' belief in Mugo's heroic stature. According to James Decker, Mugo's silence, as well as the inability of other characters to express themselves, is a representation of "a fragmented community" that is suffering from "a hesitancy to hope" (51). Decker's observation acknowledges the centrality of history as well as wa Thiong'o's vision on the influence of historical experiences in the consolidation of a national conscience.

The fragmentation of the colonised society is well articulated through the inability of the characters to articulate their thoughts and feelings, as well as understanding each other's feelings, thoughts and desires. This speech affliction is contrasted to the precolonial social fabric that is depicted as cohesive and productive, before the communalism with which the precolonial society transacted its social affairs is overturned by the introduction of colonialism. The novel thus demonstrates the social

effects of colonisation, while at the same time envisioning a confrontation of these changes that are detrimental to the desired cohesion in the new national culture.

Wa Thiong'o's vision of new national cultures espouses the interrogation of what Jana Gohrisch refers to as "the experience of [cultural] dislocation and migration [. . . in a bid to] appreciate hybrid constructions better by paying attention to their functions as local answers to global problems" (231-232). *A Grain of Wheat* collocates precolonial social, historical and cultural values with those that are imbibed by the colonial and postcolonial subjects, and interrogates the appropriateness of hybrid values emanating from both socio-cultural contexts. In this way, the novel constructs its vision on history and socio-cultural value systems that can be relied upon to build new national values that can herald social justice in the new dispensation.

The novel's vision is further enhanced by the narrative's creation of a tragic anti-hero, who, as Gikandi argues, is "the archetypal subject defined by moral crisis" and through whom "individual and collective desires are measured" (108). The tragic contributes to the exposition of wa Thing'o's vision on the relevance of history as a defining component in the formation of moral values in the reconstitution of national values emerging from a fragmented past and history. The novel, through its rendition of this moral crisis, advocates for its resolution through the projection of a renewed commitment to progressive social and national values.

In addition, *A Grain of Wheat* interrogates the meaning of independence, and attempts to depict a rationalisation of both individual and communal expectations on the newly independent state. By depicting Mugo as the tragic anti-hero in the narrative, wa Thiong'o questions the community's perception of colonial and anticolonial history.

This history, as understood by the community is inadequate, inaccurate and therefore unreliable. In this way, the novel critiques the community's interpretation of the meaning and significance of individual sacrifice, in the context of changing social and political ideals. Therefore, the narrative acts as a historical mediator, who interrogates the patterns, the forms and the contexts of events and individuals whose actions function as units that constitute the colonial and postcolonial history. For instance, the narrative offers an objective evaluation of Mugo's perceived heroism, while the community, unaware of the historical contexts, creates its own version of heroism. The community's sense of history is presented as subjectively flawed and grossly imperceptive.

The tragic irony embedded in the narrative anticipates problems in the ideological and social formation that shall characterise the postcolonial state. It is apparent that the narrative deconstructs what Elleke Boehmer refers to as "the exclusive preoccupation with the homogenous or monolithic national identities" ("Colonialism" 349), to enunciate wa Thiong'o's historical vision which cautions this perception of nationalism, achievable only through a critical evaluation of the dictums of nationalism and heroism.

A Grain of Wheat is an exploration of colonial history as focalised through the experiences of individual characters, and their interpretation of these experiences relative to the problematics of decolonisation and nationalism. As Gikonyo confesses:

We talked of loyalty to the movement and love for our country. You know a time came when I did not care about Uhuru for the country any more. I just wanted to come home. And I would have sold Kenya to the whiteman to buy my own freedom. (75)

This confession exposes the contradictory nature of the history of decolonisation, and valorises the community's perception of the past as the means of projecting the future. As Ogude observes, this "serves to undermine the false rhetorics of post-liberation politics by calling for a thorough examination of the motives and actions of our nationalist leaders" (75). In this way, the novel suggests that it is only through the attainment of objective historical discourse that new national values can be reinvented, and only after competing renditions of decolonisation as professed by individuals have been discredited.

David Scott, in his exploration of tragedy of enlightenment, argues that this mode of literary creativity, "obliges us to rethink some of our cherished assumptions about political order, about justice, and about community as well as some of our conventional conceptions about agency, responsibility, and freedom" (206). In *A Grain of Wheat*, such questioning is arrived at through the narrative's use of irony, betrayal and the inherent reversals that repudiate the limitations of heroism and nationalism as espoused by the characters. Social and historical justice is then to be achieved through a decentring of the dominant narrative that disregards subjective and materialistic contextualisation of history.

Moreover, according to Kenneth Harrow, *A Grain of Wheat* concerns itself with the elusive "ideological middle ground [. . .] in which to be human is to meet the demands of both private and public commitments and in which the sense of coherence and of meaning which the actions of the past confer on the present belongs to our individual lives and to history alike" (186). In essence, this depiction of the lacunae that exists between individual characters' ability to correlate their circumstances and

experiences to the destiny of the nation or community, enables the novel to consolidate its vision on the effects of individual (in)actions, desires and betrayals on the nation.

The novel also demonstrates the paradoxical relationship between the individual and the nation. For instance, the nation is retributive in its annihilation of Mugo, the allegorical representation of the betrayal of hopes and desires of the nation, pointing to the emergence of a dysfunctional relationship between the nation and the individual, a conflict that is expected to filter into the nascent nation-state. Through the reconciliation that happens between Gikonyo and Mumbi, *A Grain of Wheat* envisions a postcolonial future that is characterised by renewal, and the forging of new values that herald hope for the post-independence nation. In this way, Mugo's execution is an act of purging the community of the evil that has been orchestrated by social and individual inadequacies.

Symbolically, this vision is expounded in the carving that Gikonyo imagines:

He would carve the stool now, after the hospital, before he resumed his business, or in-between the business hours. He worked the motif in detail. He changed the figures. He would now carve a thin man, with hard lines on the face, shoulders and head bent, supporting the weight. His right would stretch to link with that of a woman, also with hard lines on the face. The third figure would be that of a child on whose head or shoulders the other two hands of the man and woman would meet. (265-266)

In essence, this reconciliation is afforded by the novel's use of the tragic form to achieve what Paul E. Kirkland refers to as "the remedy for pessimism" (72), and which helps humanity to "abandon messy reality in favor of the image of some more permanent realm" (73). As in Gikonyo's imagination of his carving, the post-independence state is aided in extricating itself from a pessimistic past and to be able to

imagine the formation of a promising future and to regenerate its values to ones that can nurture national identity.

Forging national identity is, as the novel demonstrates, dependent on the community's ability to attempt to find a way of resolving past evils and betrayals. To this end, Julie Mullaney posits that "the postcolonial gothic returns to colonial history to enact and exact certain forms of settlement with the unsettled past in the present" (69). By revisiting its past failures, the community is therefore able to interrogate the dangers and the ideological failures that may have abetted social and individual dislocations, and which if not remedied could plague the community both in its present and its future. In this way, tragic realism highlights both individual and communal errors that have given rise to individual and communal betrayals. By exposing these causal factors, *A Grain of Wheat* demonstrates the need for the postcolonial society to engender more nationalistic values that can foster a nationalistic identity.

4.5 Tragic Realism and the Vision for Social Justice in *Matigari*

Matigari contextualises the failed regeneration of post-independence social and political values anticipated in *A Grain of Wheat*. The novel interrogates the failure of the post-independence state to ensure social and economic justice, and the entrenchment of neocolonial social and economic dispossession of the peasant workers. The narrative decries the betrayal of the freedom struggle, as focalised through Matigari's probing of the social, economic and moral morass that have become defining features of the postcolonial state. The discourse of dispossession is enhanced by the narrative's juxtaposition of the hopes and desires of the freedom struggle as envisioned by

Matigari, against the fact of neocolonial oppression where social, political and economic freedoms have become a preserve of the inheritors of the structures of colonial oppression.

The use of tragic realism to interrogate neocolonial imperialism sharpens the narrative's rendition of its vision for truth and justice, and concretises its critique of post-independence essentialism. In its discourse, the novel delves into the history of the freedom struggle that culminates in the attainment of independence as a means of arousing the consciousness of the deprived workers and peasants. The novel uses history as a platform from which nationalist values of the freedom struggle are contrasted with neocolonial imperialism, where these values are abnegated, and replaced by neocolonial imperialism and dispossession.

Indeed, *Matigari* is an inquiry into the nature of social, political and economic interactions prevalent in a post-independence society, and depicts wa Thiong'o's criticism of disorder and injustice resulting from the skewed power relations between the imperialists and the exploited masses. As Robert Anchor argues, visionary works of literature foster "a sense of possibility, unrealized but realizable" (116), and which helps us comprehend the "full and unsparing rendition of the tragedy of the human condition" (118). In this spirit, *Matigari* interrogates neocolonial social conditions and expresses the writer's vision for social justice, rendered through Matigari's quest for truth and justice, and in his conscientisation of the public on the need for resistance against imperialism, as the following part of the narrative demonstrates:

The God who is prophesied is in you, in me and in other humans. He has always been there inside us since the beginning of time. Imperialism has tried to kill that God within us. But one day that God will return from the

dead. Yes, one day that God within us will come alive and liberate us who believe in Him. (156)

It is apparent that the narrative uses the elevated moral standing of the tragic hero as a means of asserting its vision of resistance against imperialism. The narrative's philosophy of resistance is codified by the humanism that results out of Matigari's ability to attract our sympathy through his altruistic confrontation of potentially dangerous circumstances for the good of the community. In this way, the tragic form functions as a discursive tool that enunciates the text's vision of the means of entrenching the ideals of truth and justice, but which can only be achieved through conscientisation of the masses on the need to overturn their exploitation.

As a trope in the narrative, Matigari embodies the revisionist history of the struggle for freedom and the disillusionment resulting out of neocolonial imperialism that negates the ideals and desires of the emergent post-independence state. Matigari's circumstances are illustrative of the novel's evaluation of the social and political conditions that are a consequence of neocolonial materialism and aggressive individualism that betray the ideals of nationalism, truth and justice. In expressing his vision for the neocolonial state, wa Thiong'o uses tragic realism to depict, according to Charles D. Blend, how humans "inflict suffering on their fellows and so forces upon them an awareness of their fate" (99), and also as a potent tool for interrogating plausible ways of entrenching the ideals of nationalism and social justice.

Furthermore, the novel's use of Christian allegory and its mimicking of Christ-like rhetoric engenders its evocation of the writer's vision. As Matigari declares, true liberation will return "the day when His followers will be able to stand up without

worrying about tribe, race or colour” (156). Apparently, Matigari’s rhetoric is an explicit attempt, by the narrative, to stipulate conditions necessary for the enactment of a successful negotiation of social and economic justice. From the foregoing, it is apparent that the novel, in its vision of a successful liberation of the exploited subjects, isolates ideological commitment and unconditional unity as necessary preconditions.

However, Ogude views this envisioning of the peasant struggle against imperialism as limiting since it attempts to “forge a coherent vision for change in the face of fragmentation [and] displacement” (146). Despite the fact that Ogude’s critique of the novel’s vision in particular and wa Thiong’o’s writing in general is well thought out, there is evidence in the novel to suggest that the narrative is aware of this shortcoming, and essentially mitigates against this limitation. For instance, the narrative offers two distinctive levels of reading Matigari. On the one hand, Matigari exists as a myth, and on the hand he exists as a human being. Although Matigari the man is tragically destroyed by agents of the neocolonial state, Matigari the myth continues to inspire peasant workers in their resistance. This Matigari is the embodiment of the novel’s vision, transcending the limitations of human frailties, for as the narrative intimates, the novel is wound around the unvanquished tale of the tragic yet heroic adventures that are ontologically meaningful in reimagining the ideals of the postcolonial nation.

Indeed, Cook and Okenimkpe argue that the novel achieves its rendition of its vision in its denouement by casting Matigari as having the “element of mystic apotheosis” that enables him to symbolise “the task of creating a socio-political fable of great force and immediate relevance” (151). The novel’s vision on the condition of the

postcolonial state is further bolstered by its interrogation of the influence of colonial structures on the social and political conditions existent in the post-independence state. The narrative invites the reader to question these influences and examine how they contribute to the horror that has become the post-independence state.

In the context of postcolonial criticism, Mullaney affirms that the canon “describes a range of critical practices or approaches employed to understand the various dimensions and ramifications of colonization and its aftermath” (5). It is apparent that in his envisioning of the means of resolving problem of neocolonial imperialism, wa Thiong’o advocates for an examination of colonial hegemony and its role in collapsing the independent state’s perception of truth and justice. The disregard for these values and ideals is projected in the novel as the genesis of the dispossession that has been entrenched in governance and socio-economic relations between the elite and the peasants. As Matigari laments:

The seeker of truth and justice ends up in prisons and detention camps. Yes, those who sow good seeds are accused of sowing weeds. As for the sell-outs, they are too busy locking up our patriots in gaols, or sending them into exile to let outsiders come and bask in the comfort wrought by others. (150)

The link between the history of colonial incursion and neocolonialism is expressly identified, through this excerpt, as partly responsible for the betrayal of the hopes and desires of the postcolonial state. The narrative then builds its vision of social and historical justice founded on the need to challenge “the imperialist enemy and its local watchdogs” (156) as the only means of keeping alive the desire for liberation.

As a fable for postcolonial interrogation of neocolonial social conditions and a narrative of the desire for neocolonial resistance, Matigari is encoded with

waThiong'o's ideological insinuations and overt calls for visionary revolution of the political and economic structures. The contrast between good and evil, and the moral indignation that emanates from the tragic sense in which *Matigari* ends provides a moral ground for the revolutionary overtone that characterises the narrative's thematic focus. In its envisioning of armed resistance, the novel draws, according to Kathleen Greenfield, from its "carefully constructed analysis of the place of the peasants and workers in the economic, political and social framework of neocolonial relations in an elaborate web of personal acts of oppression, exploitation, and domination" (41).

In its evocation of resistance, the novel builds on systematic alienation from the neocolonial social order. The oppressive social and economic structures denigrate any sympathy or condemnation of an armed struggle. This is achieved through the narrative's presentation of the regime's extravagant use of violence to quell agitation for truth and justice, and through the compassionate presentation of the failed workers' quest for social and economic justice. Thus, the novel's careful appropriation of tragic *pathos* and the moral high ground from which the struggle is launched justify the disruption that would be occasioned by the armed uprising against injustice and oppression.

The narrative uses the literary flavour of riddling "to metaphorize across time, space and event" (Gĩtĩ 121), enhancing its presentation of the effects of neocolonialism while at the same time invoking the discourse of resistance. In addition, the riddles are expected to resonate with the community and as such enhance the peasants' and workers' identification with both the narrative and its represented discourse. In this way, the narrative invites its readership to share in the vision that is

enunciated in the novel, as focalised through Matigari, a character that metaphorically embodies patriotism and resistance against social and historical injustices.

In its depiction of deprivation and dispossession, *Matigari* acknowledges the complexity of the circumstances that surround attempts to purge the evils committed by the neocolonial state. However, the novel emboldens its narrative by stylistically building on tragic irony to offer “a pointed satire of those who have turned the postcolony into a theatre stage upon which they enact the absurd dance of death and slavery” (Ogude 160). Through this stylistic choice, the novel solidifies its vision of a society that derives its institutions not from the practice of raw power and violence, but from the collective aspirations and desires of the entire society.

In *Matigari*, tragic realism affirms the superiority of humanistic ideals over seemingly insurmountable forces that seek to dislodge these ideals. Through the cathartic evocation of pity and fear, Matigari’s tragic circumstances negate despair and uphold optimism that is heralded by his envisioning of a plausible means of striving for an acceptable social order. In this sense, the tragic form functions to demonstrate that “human value remains and is not negated even if particular human beings are defeated by a world incommensurable with their hopes or ideals” (Newton 72). Tragic realism thus upholds the stoicism of indigenous African values and ideals, and offers the narrative a platform from which it envisions their dissemination and affirms their significance in the postcolonial nation. It is this stoicism that punctuates wa Thiong’o’s articulation of the pitfalls that need to be overcome before the postcolonial state can engender truth and justice in its value system.

4.6 Post-Neocolonial Vision in *Petals of Blood*

Petals of Blood is uniquely situated in the context of wa Thiong'o's novelistic oeuvre, as it is the first of his novels that focalises its thematic and ideological thrust from the vantage point of a female protagonist. The narrative foregrounds the questions of gender, form and ideology that are central to the novel's presentation of neocolonial politics in Kenya, and the effects of imperialism and modernity on postcolonial subjects still reeling from the effects of colonialism. The discourse of neocolonial dispossession is rendered through the novel's demonstration of the inversion of social and economic landscape of the Ilmorog community in particular, and the postcolonial state in general. The narrative decries the destruction of cohesive social values and the collective sense of identity, and their replacement with imperialism that is largely antagonistic to national social and historical aspirations. Imperialism is depicted as detrimental to the psycho-social development of the community, as evident in the psychological scars and social disintegration that results from the collision of the two worldviews.

The novel builds its vision for postcolonial society through the narration of Wanja's tragedy, which illustrates personal histories and circumstances that concatenate to form a communal philosophy that may aid the society in its confrontation of neocolonial imperialism. Although the narrative is derived from the recollection of individual characters' experiences, these experiences provide a panoramic assessment of neocolonial social and historical conditions. To articulate its vision, the narrative uses the pedestal of the characters past histories to dramatise its political and philosophical concerns, and ultimately to conscientise its readership on the ideals for postcolonial nationalism.

For instance, it is through Wanja's tragic circumstances, the allegory of the neocolonial state, that the novel illuminates the degradation of the post-independence state, as well as the struggles for regeneration and rediscovery. However, the narrative uses her tragedy to concretise its depiction of both the dehumanisation of neocolonial subjects, and the desire for renewal and regeneration.

Indeed, *Petals of Blood* narrates the experiences of those that "carry maimed souls and [. . . who] are looking for a cure" (73), and whose accumulated experiences afford the novel insights into the social and historical conditions existent in the neocolonial state. These characters perceive Ilmorog as a sanctuary, and a place where they engage in the evaluation of their personal and collective encounters with neocolonialism, as they explore what wa Thiong'o refers to as "the possibilities of a new social order from the womb of the old" (*Writers in Politics* 76).

In the narrative, the tragic form becomes a useful literary tool that contextualises presentation of the community's struggles against neocolonial abnegation of the community's sense of history and identity. The arrival of neocolonial capitalism alters the community's perception of its collective destiny that had hitherto sustained the community through the different seasons of victory, defeat, abundance and even scarcity. As evident from this part of the narrative, "history and legend showed that Ilmorog had always been threatened by the twin cruelties of unprepared-for vagaries of nature and the uncontrolled actions of men" (111).

It is through Wanja, the tragic heroine of the narrative, that the novel articulates its evaluation of the social and historical conditions prevalent in the postcolonial state, and expresses its vision for postcolonial nationalism. Her torment in the hands of an

exploitative social and economic system transforms her into an aggressive prostitute. She views this moral degeneration as “a game . . . of money . . . [where] you eat or you are eaten” (293). It is evident that the narrative views her twisted perspective as a consequence of her tribulations, and her sense of despair against a seemingly invincible system.

Wanja’s transformation from a young girl who “had sworn that she would really make something of herself in Ilmorog” (126) to one who internalises capitalistic values and attitudes is the narrative’s way of demonstrating the adverse effects of untamed exploitation of the powerless. She is a product of a system that she seeks to revolt against, and such she becomes a moral and ideological contradiction. Consequently, she seeks retribution by murdering the agents of her social degeneration. In this pursuit, Wanja undergoes purification and punishment before she can engage meaningfully in the struggle for social justice since she has been complicit in the victimisation of her lot. She purges herself through the same fire that annihilates Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo.

The novel uses Wanja’s quest for redemption as a means of concretising its vision on the need for re-evaluation of the values that bolster the struggle against neocolonialism. Her tragic transformation and her desire for retribution culminate in the adoption of an optimistic sense of history and identity. She has realised that:

Everything was simply a matter of love and hate [. . .] Siamese twins – back to back in a human heart. Because you loved you also hated: and because you hated you also loved. What you love decided what you would have to hate in relation to what you loved [. . .] You knew what you loved and what you hated by what you did, what actions, what side you had chosen [. . .] You could not stand on the fence in a struggle and still say you were on the side of those fighting the evil. (335)

This stream of consciousness is indicative of Wanja's *anagnoris*, her awareness of the need for social and ideological commitment in the struggle against neocolonialism. It is through this awareness that the novel underscores its vision for social justice. The accomplishment of this vision had been hindered by the failure, on the part of victims of neocolonial exploitation, to forge a philosophical front while interrogating their exploitation.

In this way, the narrative decries the failure of the neocolonial community to develop a social and ideological framework, which is a useful instrument in protecting the community against undesired incursions of imperialism. In preparation for the epic trek to the city, the community reflects on its social and historical fortunes and misfortunes as it prepares to formally engage the state in the quest for solutions to its economic predicament. Nyakinyua, the maternal custodian of the community's history and wisdom, reminds the community of the immense power of its collective authority. In her words, "there was a time when things happened the way [...] Ilmorog wanted them to happen" (115).

Petals of Blood engages in the celebration of African history and identity, and depicts the tragic devaluation of African history, culture and dignity by the incursion of colonialism and colonial institutions. This transition is best illustrated through Nyakinyua's lament:

We had power over the movement of our limbs. We made up our own words and sang them and we danced to them. But there came a time when this power was taken from us. We danced yes, but somebody else called out the words and the song. (115)

This lament expresses the desire of the postcolonial society to generate a discourse that can afford the nurturing of a social and ideological vision that can bolster the community's efforts as it seeks to "confront that which had been the cause of [its] empty granaries, that which sapped [its] energies, and caused [its] weakness" (116). Similarly, George A. Panichas, is of the view that the tragic form advances "a humanistic orientation [. . . and] a fervent and consummate preoccupation with the nature of man, his predicament and his fate" (3). Tragic realism, in this way, enhances the retrospective evaluation a community's circumstances, and by so doing underscores need for an ideological framework that can effectively resolve the underlying conflicts.

It is in this spirit that the novel evaluates the conflicts that plague the postcolonial nation-state, particularly resulting from the importation of values and norms that are foreign to the worldview of precolonial African communities. Furthermore, the narrative articulates the community's refutation of imperialist hegemony by situating the narrative in Ilmorog village, "the home of myth and tradition [. . .] idealized [and] destabilized [yet] central to the construction of a common vision for Africa" (Mullaney 16). It is through its juxtaposition of the African values and neocolonial imperialism, particularly as depicted through the community's journey to the city, that the novel demonstrates "that man's estate is rotten at heart" (118).

The novel engenders its vision of the values that can nurture a social ideology necessary for the adoption of a social philosophy that can stem rottenness in the postcolonial nation-state. In this way, the postcolonial state will be able to progress "beyond the pillorying of human wickedness and the tragedy of human debasement"

(Cook and Okenimkpe 108). To build its vision, the novel uses character tropes that enhance the readers' alienation from dehumanising neocolonial value systems.

According to Craig V. Smith, *Petals of Blood* represents the complexities of “change, hope, failure, and new, pessimistically yet critically enabling visions of postcolonial places” (94). Symbolically, the changing social and historical fortunes of the postcolonial society are illustrated through the different seasons of rain and drought that influence shifts in ideological positioning of the Ilmorog community. These shifts teeter between hope and despair and consequently demand new thinking and the adoption of new ideological perspectives to resolve the resultant problems. Indeed, the narrative's ideological thrust is embodied in the struggles of the main characters to resolve issues emanating from their personal histories. Wanja, Karega, Munira and Abdulla are all emblematic symbols of a quest for personal and communal renewal that is geared towards what Patrick Williams terms as the interrogation of “human relations [that] are there to be fought for and constructed” (81).

The narrative creates characters that identify with the needs and the desires of the victims of capitalistic exploitation, and “asserts a great hope that the mass of humanity will in time prevail over the malignity of the privileged few” (Cook and Okenimkpe 108). The moral struggle that bolsters the novel's vision for postcolonial social and economic justice is woven around the quest for a renewal of nationalistic values and the denigration of foreign social and economic ideas that are bequeathed to the African worldview by colonialism and neocolonialism.

To present its vision for postcolonial society, the novel uses tragic realism as a means of demonstrating the inhumane nature of capitalism which formalises

neocolonial subjects' exploitation of each other. Indeed, according to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, the tragic as an art form "makes the unconscious public [. . . and] leaves us uncertain about our very identities, uncertain about how we feel, about what has happened to us" (102). The novel's utilisation of tragic realism thus provides the narrative with a discursive platform through which the effects of neocolonialism on national values are revived, and an avenue through which wa Thiong'o's vision for ideal nationalistic values is engendered.

This vision is encapsulated in Karega's thoughts on the desire for heroes who are "born every day among the people" and who would fight the "system that bred hordes of round-bellied jiggers and bedbugs with parasitism and cannibalism" (344). In this way, *Petals of Blood* confirms wa Thiong'o's textualisation of his vision for the postcolonial state as that which can only be achieved through conscientisation of the peasant workers on their exploitation, and the entrenchment of the spirit of personal sacrifice as a means of overturning their exploitation. The novel then envisions a future in which the oppressed will end their subjugation and engrain, in the community's conscience, a culture of proactive engagement with their governance. It is the attainment of this vision, according to Mullaney, that will facilitate the postcolonial communities articulation "of their distinct values of their law, knowledges and histories, indigenous expressions of sovereignty [. . . although] often denied in formal regimes of power" (129).

This vision is embodied by Karega's thoughts and his interpretation of the future hope for workers and peasants. The workers, in agreeing to join him in the struggle open up a new world of possibilities, and in Karega's vision, "tomorrow it would be the

workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system of all its preying bloodthirsty gods and gnostic angels” (344). The novel’s vision is affirmed by the tenets of tragic narration, where the tragic vision “shows man’s extremities of suffering, pain and calamity [. . . and] insists that certain conflicts are so irreconcilable that they can be resolved only at the price of the total convulsion and transformation of man’s familiar self and world” (Connolly 551). Apparently, the use of tragic narrative aids postcolonial discourse in demonstrating the intensity of the conflicts that must be resolved before a satisfactory relationship between the oppressive elite and the masses can be achieved. However, *Petals of Blood* illustrates the pitfalls that polarisation may present both at a communal and individual level. At the communal level, there is the rise in interpersonal conflicts that emanate from ideological differences, while at an individual level there is social and psychological alienation that predisposes individuals to violent reaction against perpetrators of injustice.

Social alienation of the individual, which is a component of tragic narration, and the preparedness of such an individual to endure disadvantage for the sake of the struggle is well demonstrated through Munira. Although he is depicted as an ambivalent character that lacks the concise expression of thoughts that Karega has, his actions are evident of the narrative’s desire to applaud his contribution to the struggle. He disowns his bourgeois background and exiles himself to Ilmorog, where he participates in the establishment and development of the school, one that he hopes will not entrench capitalistic hegemony that is evident in missionary education.

When Munira sets the fire that burns Wanja’s brothel, he feels that “he was no longer an outsider, for he had finally affirmed his oneness with the Law” (333). This

marks his transformation from an inactive agent to an aggressive crusader for moral purity, a belief that sways the perspective of other characters, and demonstrates that “there are no easy solutions to social ills” (Cook and Okenimkpe 105). Undeniably, Cook and Okenimkpe attribute Munira’s violence to ideological frustration that forces him to make tragic choices in his quest for means by which to resolve the moral and social dilemmas that confront the postcolonial state. This demonstrates that the tragic form ennobles the narrative’s discourse, thereby forcing other significant characters to reflect on the discourse thus represented.

For instance, Munira’s views on moral purity and social justice influence Inspector Godfrey’s views on justice and social order, further entrenching the narrative’s vision on social and political justice. As Godfrey reflects, “the system of capitalism and capitalistic democracy needed moral purity if it was going to survive” (334). This is a confirmation of the narrative’s anticipation, in its vision, of a situation where resistance against the evils of neocolonialism involves not just the masses, but also those others that can identify with the logic of social justice and nationalistic values. However, this can only be achieved after a comprehensive conscientisation of the society to the fact of social and economic inequality. In this endeavour, crusaders of this ideal social and economic order must endure suffering as a means by which the society starts to pay attention to relations between the different social and economic classes.

In its rendition of wa Thiong’o’s postcolonial vision, *Petals of Blood* draws from Marxist and tragic realism as a means of concretising the narrative’s vision for social justice. The novel utilises the historical background of the postcolonial

community to enunciate on the influences of imperialism and the inhumane social and political order that independence inadvertently brings unto the formerly colonised society. This inhumane social order is contrasted with the indigenous African perception of collective destiny and equitable justice, which are, in the narrative's perspective, necessary for a renewal of national values in the post-independence context. However, as the novel demonstrates, the re-entrenchment of such values can only be achieved through a concerted struggle that redefines the social and political structures attainable if the masses engage in a popular resistance.

4.7 The Normative Heroine as Allegory of Postcolonial Nationalism

Devil on the Cross is the narration of gendered neocolonial exploitation and the demonstration of the discourse of resistance against material and social subjugation in the postcolonial state. The narrative interrogates social and economic factors that have condoned the continued exploitation of the peasants and the workers by the privileged few who have appropriated the structures of economic production to serve their individual needs. In its discourse, the novel presents an ironic rendition of the vulgarities that characterise the perception of neocolonial agents as concerns their exploitation of national resources and structures of governance to serve their insatiable gluttony. The novel focalises its discourse through Wariinga, the normative tragic heroine of the narrative, whose interactions with neocolonial imperialism provide a vista through which the novel articulates its vision for the postcolonial state.

The novel avers that its discourse intends to uncover “pits in our courtyard” so that the postcolonial state may “discern the pitfalls in [. . . its] path” and resist being led

“into blindness of the heart and deafness of the mind” (7). These objectives that are central to wa Thiong’o’s vision for his postcolonial society are best articulated through the exposition of “what now lies concealed by darkness” (8). The narrative promises to use Wariinga’s tragic circumstances resulting from her encounter with the devil as an avenue for exposing the evils of neocolonial imperialism, and in the process deconstruct neocolonial hegemony that subjugates nationalistic desires. In *Devil on the Cross*, this exposure is achieved through the creation of a counter-discourse that denudes the historical truth about social and historical realities that nurture neocolonial subjugation.

According to Ogude, this revelation is intended “to give form to this state of ‘chaos’ by attempting to reconstitute history out of fragmentation” (151). Rendering a true historical account offers neocolonial subjects an opportunity to assess the genesis of their marginalisation and consolidate their variegated historical interpretations so as to enhance a nationalistic vision that can remedy the ills plaguing the post-independence state. This is akin to what Tony Davies refers to as creating “a way of understanding the world, and thus of living and acting in it” (150). *Devil on the Cross* is a condemnation of failed nationalism occasioned by imperialism. The narrative’s discourse further interrogates the evils that have been bequeathed the post-independence nation by the colonial regime. By so doing, the novel condemns the institutionalised exploitation of peasant workers by forces that appropriate national resources so as to benefit an oppressive minority.

Wariinga, the tragic heroine of the narrative, symbolises the resultant commoditisation of national resources to serve the voracious appetite for riches and fame that characterises social relations in the postcolonial state. The novel satirises this

insatiable quest for wealth through the testimonials of capitalists such as Gitutu wa Gataanguru who believes that “the question of whether one had formerly been cold or hot or lukewarm was irrelevant when it came to the grabbing of land [and instead] what [is] important [is] the handsome physique of money” (103). The narrative rebukes such sentiments and the deliberate devaluation of the liberation struggle, in which nationalist desires and values are desecrated in pursuit of personal gratification.

Likewise, Kihaahu wa Gatheeca’s testimony on “modern theft and robbery” (108) demonstrates neocolonial disregard for social justice. Indeed, he admits that he has “often stayed awake figuring out ways and means of increasing the whole country’s hunger and thirst” (118). The narrative decries the inhuman attitude of the imperialists who seek to profit from the misfortunes of the nation. In contrast, the novel’s expressive discourse appears to suggest that most of the misfortunes that bedevil the postcolonial society emanate from the failure of the state to entrench a nationalistic culture that would curtail neocolonialism and untamed imperialism.

However, the narrative, in its vision, contemplates a future in which neocolonial subjects can overturn their own exploitation by cultivating a culture of resistance, social and economic independence, and a deliberate effort aimed at scuttling the structures that facilitate their exploitation. In its vision, *Devil on the Cross* thus seeks what Boehmer calls “self-determination” which is only possible if postcolonial subjects “develop ways of dealing with the negation, self-alienation, and internal hatred produced by colonialist rule” (*Colonial and Postcolonial* 162) and culture. The novel use of satire and tragic irony facilitates its deconstruction of neocolonial culture, which is depicted as ideologically misplaced in the context of nationalism and national values.

Furthermore, the savagery of imperialism is juxtaposed against the nation's desire for freedom and justice as elaborated through Muturi's clarification that "the Mau Mau's Harambee was an organization designed to spread humanitarianism, for its members used to offer their own lives in defence of children and disabled" (39). In contrast, the incursion of imperialism in the postcolonial state has inverted nationalist values resulting in social stratification, exploitation and subversion of national institutions. Consequently, in rendering its vision, the narrative calls for conscientisation of the peasants and the workers to "rescue the soul of the nation from imperialism and slavery" (230), regardless of personal loss or suffering.

The novel uses tragic realism to emphasise the importance of personal sacrifice as a means of liberating nationalistic values and desires. According to Bennett and Royle, tragic realism as a literary mode is useful in representing circumstances that are "humanly engineered and happening in a world in which something could and should be done" (107). *Devil on the Cross* uses Wariinga as a normative tragic heroine to enact its evaluation of the neocolonial society in which "power, in its own violent quest for grandeur, [has made] vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence" (Mbembe 133). In essence, the narrative questions the legitimacy of neocolonial imperialism and uses Wariinga's tragic narrative to conscientise the masses so that they are not led "into the blindness of the heart and into deafness of the mind" and to equip them with the means through which they may destroy neocolonialism so that it does not "pursue the task of building Hell for the people on Earth" (7).

Fundamentally, the tragic form enhances a writer's vision "by throwing in the highest stakes [that include] human happiness and human lives" (Brereton 72). *Devil on*

the Cross, using the perspective of the Gicaandi Player extrapolates the social and historical circumstances that abet the rise of imperialism and provides an ideological exemplification of how imperialism can be repudiated. To achieve this, the novel builds on the artistic and ideological thrust gained by its use of the Gicaandi Player who provides, according to Gitahi Gititi, “an extended divination of the ills of the nation” by taking up the multifunctional role of “diviner/priest, investigator, philosopher, counselor, comforter, [and] the voice of conscience” (118). These roles that are assigned to the Gicaandi Player concatenate to enunciate the novel’s discourse as well as to advance its assessment of the prevailing social and historical challenges that hinder formation of a social vision that may militate against neocolonial imperialism.

Furthermore, according to Rita Abrahamsen, the postcolonial canon must perceive “power as productive of identities and subjectivities” which must be engaged so as to enhance “the production of truth and rationality” (198). *Devil on the Cross* engages in the examination of marginalisation of the peasants and the workers, and at the same time contests this marginalisation by equipping victims of neocolonial exploitation with knowledge on possible ways of overturning their oppression. Knowledge and truth are key factors in the narrative’s rendition of wa Thiong’o’s vision for his postcolonial society, where subjects of neocolonial deprivation reject their subjugation.

The novel further envisions a post-neocolonial future where postcolonial society will remedy its subjugation by first regaining its cultural and epistemological identity. As the narrative laments,

Cultural imperialism is the mother to slavery of the mind and the body. It is cultural imperialism that gives birth to mental blindness and deafness that persuades people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country, to make foreigners the ears and mouths of their national affairs. (58)

It is apparent that the novel perceives the attainment of true independence and the achievement of social and economic freedoms on cultural and political emancipation of the postcolonial society, and attributes the evils of neocolonialism to the erosion of authentic African values. This recovery would “guard the entrance to our national homestead” and animate “the fire of wisdom” (58). This endeavour is central in unearthing “the roots of Kenyan national culture” that are embedded “in the traditions of all the nationalities of Kenya” (59).

Devil on the Cross presents postcolonial nationalism as possible if different ethnic histories and cultures are merged to provide an ideological framework that repudiates negative colonial and postcolonial subjectivities. In Gikandi’s view, the narrative uses Wariinga to symbolise the desire “to break out of the prison-house of self-hate and victimization and to assert [. . .] identity outside the culture and economy of arrested decolonization” (220). In its discourse, the narrative articulates its vision on the relevance of precolonial and colonial histories in locating the genesis of neocolonialism, and a means by which the postcolonial state may discover where “the eaters of men and the killers of men [came] from” (67).

The novel’s vision for the postcolonial state is thus engendered in the characters’ awareness of their exploitation and the impossible circumstances that they face as they question and attempt to end their subjugation. However, hope for the oppressed masses is engendered in the possibility that “one day the oppressed sections will act in concert”

(Cook and Okenimkpe 130) to decimate neocolonial structures that have engrained servitude and hindered achievement of social and economic justice in the postcolonial state. As a normative tragic heroine in the narrative, Wariinga embodies the voice of resistance and a metaphoric deconstruction of neocolonial entrapment. Her struggle against neocolonial imperialism is advanced on two fronts; she uses her limitations to develop a sense of socio-economic independence, and uses her knowledge of the evils of neocolonialism to critique post-independence socio-economic injustices.

The novel depicts the violence of imperialism and its disregard for social and economic justice so as to justify “the revolutionary wrath” (Cook and Okenimkpe 130) that Wariinga, the normative heroine of the narrative, responds with as a consequence of her despair resulting from her contact with the evils of neocolonial capitalism. It is from the background of the novel’s articulation of the unacceptability of post-independence capitalism that Wariinga, “by virtue of her innocence and her purity of purpose” (Cook and Okenimkpe 131). In this way, the novel uses Wariinga to engender its call on the subjects of neocolonial dispossession to challenge the “irrationality” and the “immorality” of a social system that entrenches deprivation and servitude, and consequently negating nationalistic values of freedom, equity and justice.

The novel’s use of tragic form aids its presentation of the patterns of tragic failures that have occasioned the use of aggressive violence in asserting the desired nationalistic vision amidst the immutability of neocolonial oppression. According to Connolly, the tragic vision may be applied “to draw an audience [. . .] to confront whatever is conceived as the ultimate power in any given world whether it be embodied in the gods, nature, the political establishment, the social system or psychological

compulsion” (551). In this way, the novel’s discourse questions neocolonial socio-economic order with the aim of entrenching a revolutionary ideology that overturns exploitative structures and institutions. As the narrative demonstrates, this can only happen if the masses embrace personal and communal sacrifice. For instance, Wariinga embraces her alienation as a necessary ingredient in the postcolonial society’s interrogation of the limits of their collective achievement and she thus functions not only as the normative heroine in the narrative, but also as an expression of renewed nobility that bears the ideals of the postcolonial nation.

As an aesthetic catalyst in the narrative’s expression of the ideals of nationalism, Wariinga, according to Gikandi, represents both “the author’s desire for radical transformation and utopian resolution” and “the arrested nature of such desires and longings” (221). This paradoxical construction in the nature of her character greatly contributes to the tragic circumstances that compound her choices and her desires. However, this tragic flavour concretises the narrative’s discourse on the need to overcome personal limitations and contradictions in pursuit of postcolonial national vision. This vision is only attainable if the subjects of neocolonial exploitation use their personal circumstances as a fable for demonstrating the possibility of defeating neocolonial structures and institutions that inhibit the realisation of much desired nationalistic vision where national resources are utilised to nurture the dream of a national culture.

This dream is enunciated through Gaturia’s composition that seeks:

to reconstruct the whole process of mixing the various voices and the various sounds in harmony: how and where all the voices meet; how and where they part, each voice taking its own separate path; and finally how

and where they come together again, the various voices floating in harmony like the Thiririka River flowing through flat plains towards the sea, all the voices blending into each other like the colours of the rainbow. (226)

This dream, as the narrative intimates, can only be a consequence of concerted efforts that concatenate to form a national symphony that embraces difference and tolerance provided they are geared towards the attainment of nationalistic objectives. Moreover, the narrative views history as a key component in envisioning the future of the post-neocolonial state. It is the remembrance of the nation's experiences that will facilitate its knowledge of the "how and where" as it flows "towards the sea" that symbolically represents the achievement of national desires and progress. In this way, the postcolonial state would achieve some form of post-neocolonial egalitarianism by, according to Kirkland, attempting "to denature man" and engender an "ideological spirit of revolution attached to the doctrines of inequality" (63), a culmination of all the efforts aimed at conscientising the society on the need for social, historical and economic justice.

Furthermore, historical conscientisation in this regard would extend to include negotiation for "indigenous sovereignty" which in turn fosters the expression of both individual and collective self definitions (Mullaney 129). As part of the novel's discourse, the attainment of self definition accelerates the achievement of the post-neocolonial society's vision for a national culture that is free from ideologies that are foreign to the postcolonial state. In this way, the postcolonial nation would, in accordance with Gaturiria's imagination, condemn "those who sold the soul of the nation to foreigners" and celebrate "the deeds of those who rescued the soul of the nation from

foreign slavery” (227). Gaturia’s sentiments resonate with Boehmer’s argument that postcolonial literatures seek “to establish new metaphors of nationhood” and to interrogate “defining symbols for the purposes of imagining the nation” (*Colonial and Postcolonial* 189). Such an endeavour is directed at conscientising postcolonial subjects to attempt a redefinition of social, cultural and historical realities in recognition of the past and present challenges facing these societies.

The postcolonial society, as Wariinga’s personal experiences demonstrate, needs to draw from its past as a means by which a consolidated challenge against debilitating socio-economic structures can be re-ordered so as to enhance postcolonial society’s actualisation of its vision for social and economic justice. The struggle that the tragic narrative represents through its discourse is in other words an attempt to redefine the ideals of nationhood as stipulated in the hopes and desires of the freedom struggle, bolstered by ideals such as equity, justice and self reliance.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that *Devil on the Cross* envisions the survival of the postcolonial nation as hinged on peasants’ and workers’ awareness of their role in nation building. This will in turn facilitate the cascading of their collective experiences to constitute the much needed symphony that is the bedrock of the postcolonial society’s ideological framework, and equip them with knowledge that will aid them in rejecting foreign social and cultural influences. To accumulate this knowledge, the postcolonial society needs to revisit indigenous African history for its moral and political philosophy. As the narrative suggests, this philosophy will facilitate nation building and entrenchment of national desires and visions for social, political and

economic prosperity, and solidify a sense of collective identity and destiny for the postcolonial subjects.

4.8 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed how wa Thiong'o uses novelistic discourse to articulate his vision for the postcolonial society. This vision, as the study has found out, is directly influenced by collective historical experiences of the Kenyan society. In *The River Between*, wa Thiong'o interrogates the onset of colonialism and uses Waiyaki's tragedy to demonstrate the need for social and cultural syncretism as a means of building an effective response towards colonial incursion, and as the most potent means of nurturing a national culture. Furthermore, the study has concluded that tragic realism is used in the novel to expose the genesis of social and political disengagement that extends to the postcolonial society. Such disengagement can only be resolved if the postcolonial state confronts its inherent contradictions and finds a way of embracing cultural and ideological pluralism.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, wa Thiong'o's vision for the post-independence state focuses more on social and historical conscientisation of the emergent nation-state as it engages in the quest for national values and a national identity. It is clear that the novel, as it envisions the formation of a new nation, advocates for redefinition of national values, an act that should be preceded by an objective evaluation of historical betrayals and social dislocations. Such evaluation should seek to entrench an objective discourse on colonial history, providing the postcolonial nation with an uncontested historical

reference needed as the nation struggles to rebuild its institutions and its socio-political identity.

In *Matigari*, wa Thiong'o's vision is hinged on the desire to overturn neocolonial imperialism, a consequence postcolonial historical dispossession and which can only be overturned if the masses engage in the struggle against foreign and local imperialist forces. Tragic realism is used in the novel to foreground disillusionment and dispossession that characterises the post-independence state, and to deconstruct neocolonial hegemony. *Matigari*'s tragedy underscores the novel's vision that is founded on the need to conscientise the masses on the fact of their exploitation culminating in a sustained negotiation for socio-historical justice. Humanistic ideals, as espoused by *Matigari*, the tragic hero, would provide insurmountable force as the postcolonial state reinstates inclusivity, justice and truth.

A similar vision is extended in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, where wa Thiong'o demonstrates the importance of history as a means of refuting neocolonialism and engendering nationalistic values and desires. Tragic realism is used to depict the effects of neocolonial imperialism through the psycho-social scars that tragic heroines are forced to live with. The tragedy that befalls the two heroines, the allegorical representation of post-independence Kenya, punctuates the need for the Kenyan postcolonial state to utilise its collective memories of subjugation, oppression and exploitation as grounds for building a new socio-economic philosophy that annihilates neocolonial hegemony.

5.0 Chapter Five

5.1 Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study set out to investigate the various elements of tragedy used in selected novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the use of tragedy in the emplotment and representation of thematic concerns in the selected novels, and the use of tragedy to express wa Thiong'o's postcolonial vision. The study delimited itself to *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*. To achieve its objectives, the study utilised an eclectic theoretical approach by using tenets from postcolonial criticism and theoretical principles derived from tragic realism. On the one hand, postcolonial criticism provided the study with literary tools useful in analysing how the novels' discourse addresses social and cultural issues resulting from both colonial and postcolonial contexts. On the other hand, tragic realism provided the study with theoretical tenets that were used to identify and interrogate elements of tragedy evident in the selected novels, and also to interrogate how the use of the tragic form enhances the novels' postcolonial discourse.

This approach has guided the study in identifying and interpreting narrative aspects such as plot, representation, characterisation, motifs, and point of narration, and to interrogate these elements as deliberate narrative choices used by wa Thiong'o to enunciate the tragic conflicts addressed in the selected novels. By exploring these narrative choices, the study has been able to evaluate how elements of tragedy manifest in the novels, and interrogate the connectedness between the tragic form and postcolonial discourse.

The study has discussed wa Thiong'o's use of the tragic form to address colonial and postcolonial social, cultural, political and economic conflicts in *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*. The study started by exploring elements of tragic realism, and interrogated how these literary principles assist in the enunciation of postcolonial concerns inherent in the selected novels. Furthermore, the study has analysed how elements of tragedy are appropriated by the narratives to best represent the conflicts that the novels' discourse addresses.

However, as the study has found out, the divisiveness on the issues of culture, religion and education, creates social and ideological divisions that ultimately predispose Waiyaki to tragic failure. Partly, his failure is a consequence of polarisation that is brought about by these divisions, and also a consequence of his choices and commitment to these choices. As stipulated by the principles of tragic mimesis, Waiyaki is deposed from his noble status, a reversal that is evident of tragic irony, since as the hero-leader of the community, he fails not necessary as a result of any weakness in character, but as a result of inevitable destiny or as a consequence of forces that are beyond his control. The motif of jealousy also contributes to Waiyaki's tragedy, where he gets exposed to conniving evil designs of Kabonyi, who incites the Kiama to isolate Waiyaki and ultimately banish him from the tribe, punctuating Waiyaki's tragic failure in his role as the hero-leader of the community.

Likewise, *A Grain of Wheat* utilises tragic mimesis to represent colonial social and individual conflicts, and to interrogate their effects on the post-independence nation-state. In its characterisation, the narrative makes effective use of the tragic anti-

hero to depict how boundaries of awareness affects the development of collective national consciousness and how this in turn affects the evolution of social, political and economic values of the newly independent postcolonial societies. As the tragic anti-hero, Mugo embodies the social contradictions that are a product of the colonial experience, and transposes these contradictions into the new socio-economic entity.

By using the betrayal motif, concretely depicts competing human interests and show how they lay ground for tragic conflicts. This motif becomes the foundation for the novel's depiction of the themes of post-independence disenchantment and social political retribution. On the one hand, disenchantment results from the community's realisation that their vision for a new social, political and economic order has been betrayed by the emergence of capitalism which is a continuation of the domination that comes with colonialism. On the other hand, retribution symbolises colonial subjects' desire to truncate the history of colonialism from their progressive vision of nationalism and freedom from the colonial heritage.

Tragic irony in *A Grain of Wheat* is intertwined with the betrayal of the communal optimism that is heralded by the coming of independence, and functions as a literary tool that philosophically questions the true nature of independence in the context of social and individual conflicts. Moreover, it is the betrayal motif that underscores the difficulties that the new nation must face as it grapples to establish its identity as a cohesive unit. The sense of discovery that results after Mugo's anti-heroic character is unmasked aligns the narrative's denouement to the tragic anagnorisis, the sense of discovery, where the community becomes aware of the emergent individualism that is bent on capital accumulation as symbolised by Mugo and as well as by other

characters such as Karanja, Gikonyo and the member of parliament. In this way, *A Grain of Wheat* uses the tenets of tragic mimesis to underscore the importance of aligning the postcolonial society's accumulated social and historical knowledge as braces itself for the challenges of nationhood.

In *Matigari*, the study has explored the use of a hero that transitions from an epic hero to a tragic hero to foreground the effects of neocolonial oppression. Matigari, the tragic hero of the narrative engages his interrogation of the post-independence society from the vantage point of colonial history, and laments the deterioration of social, economic and political values of the post-independence state, that has been ravaged by inherited colonial structures. Specifically, the unchecked appropriation of national resources by the elite for the benefit of their class and their foreign compatriots is interrogated as a primary cause of the tragic conflict that generates the plot in the narrative.

The tragic hero is used in the novel to ennoble the perspective of the subjects of neo-colonial oppression, and rationalises his quest for truth and justice. Matigari uses the history of the freedom struggle to negotiate for socio-economic and political justice for the subjects of colonial and postcolonial dispossession. The hero thus serves an apocalyptic role by raising the consciousness of the masses to confront their oppression by engaging the neocolonial regime. However, assumption on the power of history as a liberating tool leads to his tragic error, where he fails to anticipate brutality and violence as tools that are at the disposal of the neocolonial state to safeguard its denial of the desire that informed the freedom struggle. It is this error that leads to Matigari's failure and subsequent annihilation by the structures of the unjust post-independence state.

The tragic form, as used in *Matigari*, deconstructs neocolonial dispossession and demonstrates the urgency with which issues of economic oppression and the denial of the values of nationhood should be addressed as a means by which the postcolonial society can live to the aspirations of the freedom struggle. This urgency is foregrounded by both Matigari's tragic circumstances and his tragic vision for the post-independence state. As a narrative strategy, heroic failure punctuates the novel's condemnation of postcolonial injustice where the elite negate the ideological aspirations of the patriotic struggle that preceded the attainment of independence. At the same time, such failure and tragic destruction of the hero satirises the fear that the undeserving beneficiaries of the patriotic struggle live with, as a consequence of the guilt of having betrayed the desire for nationhood and national prosperity.

The study has further concluded that *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* use tragic heroines as allegorical representations of class and gender oppression. Through Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, the tragic form is used to represent the extremities of neocolonial exploitation. Tragic characterisation is, in this sense, used to allegorise the exploitation of the neocolonial state through the symbolic role assigned the tragic heroines. The tragic form, as used in the two narratives, functions as a pedagogical tool that sharpens the narratives' rendition of the vagaries of colonial and neocolonial socio-cultural and economic injustices.

Furthermore, the two novels entrench a social and ideological vision that is hinged on the metaphor of regenerative resistance. The tragic heroines, Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, represent the postcolonial spirit that seeks to avenge the ills of social and economic exploitation that stems from colonialism and

extends to post-independence neocolonialism. In this way, the tragic heroine serves as a normative heroine that conscientises the rest of the society on the fact of its exploitation, and encourages the adoption of resistance and destruction of the structures that have abetted such exploitation.

The two novels represent their anti-neocolonial discourse through the tragedies that the two heroines experience. The social and economic exploitation that the characters experience microcosmically symbolise the difficulties being experienced by the newly formed post-independence state. On the one hand, the state experiences deflowerment occasioned by its encounter with the conniving colonial regime. On the other hand, the post-independence state finds itself at the centre of a more exploitative neocolonial order that continues the dehumanisation of the colonial ideology albeit with the assistance of comprador bourgeoisie that seeks material and social gratification. The intensity of the conflicts that result from attempted contestations by the subjects of these forms of exploitation is illustrated through the novels' appropriation of the tragic form.

5.3 Conclusions

The study has interrogated the use of elements of tragedy in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, and has used the theoretical tenets of tragic realism and postcolonial criticism to explore wa Thiong'o's use of narrative aspects such as plot, representation, characterisation, motifs, and point of narration to interrogate postcolonial social,

political, and economic inequalities and injustices, and to further depict wa Thiong'o's vision for the postcolonial society.

In the study, it emerges that wa Thiong'o's use of the tragic form in the selected novels enhances his own evaluation of the issues that affect the Kenyan post-independence state. The conflicts, as represented in the novels, lead to social polarisation and thus become more difficult to resolve. However, by using the tragic heroes' and heroines' determination to direct their efforts towards the development of social, political and historical awareness, wa Thiong'o demonstrates the possibility of struggling for and achieving both social and historical justice. Furthermore, the novels have used the tragedy of the heroes and heroines to underscore the importance of not only the issues highlighted in the novels' discourse but also to emphasise the need for the postcolonial state to resolve the issues raised through the discourse.

Through the discourse inherent in the novels, wa Thiong'o advocates for the adoption of a social ideology that fosters a sense of nationalism and commitment to national values and desires. In this way, the post-independence state would be able to achieve desirable social and economic progress that distributes the benefits of independence to all in a democratic manner.

The tragic form has been used in the selected novels to interrogate the divergent social, political and economic systems that guide acquisition of power and dominance. The conflicts addressed in the novels are used as a means by which wa Thiong'o engages in a discursive evaluation of how power is used for hegemonic purposes and more often to dominate, unfairly, over the victims of social and economic deprivation.

The ensuing contest results in conflicts that wa Thiong'o represents through tragic mimesis as a means by which the narratives condemn the ensuing injustices.

In *The River Between*, the study has concluded that wa Thiong'o uses tragic elements such as nobility of tragic hero's character and thought, tragic irony, tragic motifs, character flaws, and tragic plot to represent social conflicts, contradictions and failures that African communities are confronted with after colonial incursion into the African socio-cultural, historical and political spheres. The colonial experience is presented, in the novel, as having given rise to diametrically opposed ideological divides into which Waiyaki is born. As a consequence of his lineage, Waiyaki is bequeathed nobility of character, which is solidified by the primordial prophecy that identifies him as the last in the line of the great seers, and one that will save the community in its time of need.

The use of tragedy in *A Grain of Wheat* functions to aesthetically question both colonial and postcolonial histories, and to ideologically attempt to explain the ideological connection between colonial history and socio-economic disengagement that characterises the postcolonial state. The tragic form is thus used to interrogate the consequences of failed reconciliation of divergent interests that coalesce to form the postcolonial state, and to render an aesthetic demonstration of the ideological divide that is expected to characterise the new nation state.

This divide is further interrogated in *Matigari*, where tragic realism is used to highlight neocolonial dispossession that characterises the newly independent state. *Matigari's* tragedy punctuates the need for the masses to question neocolonial social, political and economic systems that have been institutionalised by the ruling

bourgeoisie. This should culminate into a sustained redefinition of national values and reinstitute inclusivity, justice and truth. Tragic realism, as used in *Matigari*, contrasts the absence of humanistic values in the neocolonial state, and demonstrates the tragedy that will result unless social, political and economic disengagements are not resolved.

In *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, the novels' utilisation of tragic heroines enhances wa Thiong'o's demonstration of the kind of dehumanisation that results from post-independence social, economic and ideological polarisation. The study concludes that the use of tragic mimesis encourages our appreciation of social, ideological, economic and political displacement that is experienced by the subjects of neocolonial exploitation, and whose tragic circumstances are allegorically represented in the tragedy of Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Warringa in *Devil on the Cross*. Tragic mimesis in this case facilitates postcolonial criticism's interrogation of colonial and neocolonial structures that have inhibited the attainment of the nationalist desire that guided the struggle for freedom and self-definition. The heroines are in this case metaphorical representations of socio-political and economic dislocation that is a direct consequence of neocolonial dispossession.

The study further concludes that tragic realism is employed in the novels to concretise condemnation of the socio-economic and historical displacement experienced by the masses in the neocolonial state, and to rationalise retributive acts that are undertaken by the tragic heroines. Tragic realism in this sense punctuates not only the dehumanisation meted out on subjects of neocolonial dispossession but also justifies the violence as a means by which the dispossessed masses can overturn their dehumanisation.

The tragic form is further used to enunciate wa Thiong'o's vision for the postcolonial state. This is achieved through the novels' use of normative tragic heroines who embody the voice of resistance and a metaphoric deconstruction of neocolonial exploitation. The heroines' struggle against neocolonial imperialism develops a sense of socio-economic independence, and affords subjects of neocolonial oppression a means by which they can question and overturn socio-economic and political subjectivities. The heroines' rejection of servitude and dependence entrenches the desire for the postcolonial state to attain its nationalistic vision through collective self-definition. The study concludes that tragedy is thus used to enhance postcolonial conscientisation, and avails to subjects of neocolonial exploitation an avenue that they can use to interrogate past socio-historical experiences as a means animating the present. In this way, the neocolonial state can regain its value systems that are needed in redefining values and ideologies that can foster a national vision and culture.

5.4 Recommendations

The study has interrogated the use of elements of tragedy in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels, and has purposively delimited itself to *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*. The researcher is of the view that future studies can interrogate other narrative and structural choices employed in these novels, and further explore how these choices enhance wa Thiong'o's rendition of his vision for postcolonial societies. Furthermore, other studies can evaluate how writers use the tragic form to facilitate a literary representation of socio-economic, political and historical conflicts that are unique to the contexts that inform their

writings. This is in line with the observation that tragic mimesis is a useful tool in the representation of conflicting ideals that predispose heroes and heroines to tragic circumstances. As such, literary research can interrogate how writers represent social, cultural and political conflicts, and explore the role of tragedy in interrogating these conflicts.

Works Cited

- Abrahamsen, Rita. "African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge." *The Royal African Society*. 102. 407. (2003): 189-210. Oxford University. Web. 4 April 2015.
- Amoko, Apollo Obonyo. *Postcolonialism in the Wake of the Nairobi Revolution: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Idea of African Literature*. New York: Palgrave, 2010. E-Book.
- Anchor, Robert. "Realism and Ideology: The Question of Order." *History and Theory*. 22.2. (1983): 107-119. Wesleyan University. Web. 02 January 2014.
- Austen, Ralph A. "Criminals and the African Cultural Imagination: Normative and Deviant Heroism in Pre-colonial and Modern Narratives." *Journal of the International African Institutes*. 56. 4 (1986): 385-398. Web. 17 October 2014.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Baol, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto, 2000. Print.
- Barber, Karin. "African Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism." 26.4. (1995): Jstor. Web. 17 May 2011.

Bascom, William. "The Myth-Ritual Theory." *The Journal of American Folklore*. 70.

276. (1957): 103-114. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 June 2014.

Bennet, Andrew and Nicholas Royle. *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and*

Theory. 2nd ed. Prentice Hall Europe, 1999. Print.

Blends, Charles D. "The Rewards of Tragedy." *Yale French Studies: Passion and*

Intellect. 18. (1957): 97-106. Yale University Press. Web. 15 Sept. 2014.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford,

2005. Print.

- - -. "Colonialism." *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Waugh. New York:

Oxford, 2006. Print.

Bradford, Richard. *Stylistics: The New Critical Idiom*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Print.

Brennan, Timothy. "From Development to Globalization: Postcolonial Studies and

Globalization Theory." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Ed.

Neil Lazarus. New York: Cambridge U. P. 2004. 120-138. Print.

- Brereton, Geoffrey. *Principles of Tragedy*. Florida: Miami Press, 1968. Print.
- Burian, Peter. "Myth into *Muthos*: The Shaping of Tragic Plot." *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Ed. P. E. Easterling. New York: Cambridge U. P., 1997. 178-208. Print.
- Callaghan, Dympna. *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. Print.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. New York: Cornell University, 1978. Print.
- Childs, Peter, Jean Jacques Weber, and Patrick Williams. *Post-Colonial Theory and Literatures: African, Caribbean and South Asia*. Trier, Germany: WVT Wissenschaftlicher, 2006. Print.
- Cohen, Robert. *Theatre*. 5th ed. California: Mayfield, 2000. Print.
- Connolly, Peter R. "Tragic Life and the Art of Tragedy." *St. Patrick's College*. 41.9: 548-553. Web. 22 September 2014.
- Cook, David and Michael Okenimkpe. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An exploration of his Writings*. 2nd ed. New York: Henemann, 1997. Print.

Coupe, Laurence. *Myth: The New Critical Idiom*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Davies, Tony. "Marxist Aesthetics." *Literary Criticism and Theory*. Ed. Patricia Waugh. New York: Oxford, 2006. Print.

Decker, James. "Mugo and the Silence of Oppression." *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995. Print.

Dorsch, T.S. *Classical Literary Criticism*. New York: Penguin, 1965. Print.

Ferrell, William K. *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology*. London: Praeger, 2000. Print.

Frye, Northrop. "The Archetypes of Literature." *The Kenyon Review*. 13.1. (1951): 92-110. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 March 2014.

Gadhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998. Web.

Ganguly, Keya. "Temporality and Postcolonial Discourse." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Ed. Neil Lazarus. New York: Cambridge U. P. 2004. 162-179. Print.

Gassner, John. "Tragic Perspectives: A Sequence of Queries." *The Tulane Drama Review*. Vol. 2. 3. 7-22. 2 January 2014. Web.

Gikandi, Simon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. New York: Cambridge, 2000. Print.

Gĩtĩĩ, Gĩtahi. "Recuperating a 'Disappearing' Art Form: Resonances of 'Gicaandi' in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Devil on the Cross." *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995. Print.

Glen, Ian. "Heroic Failure in the Novels of Achebe." *Institute for the Study of English in Africa*. 12.1. (1985): 11-27. JSTOR. Web. 01 Sept. 2014.

Gohrisch, Jana. "Cultural Exchange and the Representation of History in Postcolonial Literature." *European Journals of English Studies*. 10. 3. (2006): 231-247. Routledge. Web. 18 February 2015.

Greenfield, Kathleen. "Murdering the Sleep of Dictators: Corruption, Betrayal, and the Call to Revolution in the Work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o." *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995. Print.

Griffiths, Gareth. "The Myth of Authenticity." *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Hall, Edith. "The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy." *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Ed. P. E. Easterling. New York: Cambridge U. P., 1997. 93-126. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities." *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Harrow, Kenneth. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*: Season of Irony." *Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Peter Nazareth. New York: Twayne, 2000. Print.

Hattaway, Michael. "Tragedy and Political Authority." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*. Ed. Claire McEachern. New York: Cambridge U. P., 2002. 103-22. Print.

Hitchcock, Peter. "The Genre of Postcoloniality." *New Literary History*. 34.2 (2003):299-330. *The John Hopkins University*. Web. 8 December 2014.

Huggan, Graham. *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 2001. E-book.

Irele, Abiola. "Dimensions of African Discourse." *Teaching Postcolonial and Commonwealth Literature*. 19.3 (1992): 45-59. College Literature. Web. 18 February 2015.

--. "Narrative, History, and the African Imagination." *Narrative*. 1.2 (1993): 156-172. Ohio State University. Web. 6 October 2014.

Izevbaye, Dan. "Chinua Achebe and the African Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Ed. F. Abiola Irele. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Web.

Jarret-Kerr, Martin. "The Conditions of Tragedy." *Comparative Literature Studies*. 2.4 (1965): 363-374. Penn State Press. Web. 23 November 2013.

Kamau-Goro, Nicholas. "African Culture and the Language of Nationalist Imagination: The Reconfiguration of Christianity in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*." *Studies in World Christianity*. 16.1 (2010): 6-26. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 March 2012.

King, Bruce. "New Centres of Consciousness: New, Post-colonial, and International English Literature." *New National and Post-colonial Literatures*. Ed. Bruce King. New York: Oxford. Print.

- Kirkland, Paul E. "Nietzsche's Tragic Realism." *The Review of Politics*. 72 (2010): 55-78. University of Notre Dame. Web. 18 January 2015.
- Kliger, Ilya. "Resurgent Forms in Ivan Goncharov and Alexander Veselovsky: Toward a Historical Poetics of Tragic Realism." *The Russian Review*. 71 (2012): 655-672. Wiley-Blackwell. Web. 10 July 2014.
- Kolawole, Mary Egun Modupe. "Kofi Awoonor as a Prophet of Conscience." *African Languages and Culture*. 5.2. (1992): 125-132. Taylor & Francis. Web. 18 February 2015.
- Korang, Kwaku Labri. "Making a Post-Eurocentric Humanity: Tragedy, Realism, and Things Fall Apart." *Research in African Literatures*. 42.2 (2011): 1-29. Indiana University. Web. 10 March 2014.
- Kunene, Masizi. "Problems in African Literature." *Research in African Literatures*. 23.1 (1992): 27-44. Indiana University. Web. 3/11/2014.
- Langbaum, Robert. "Aristotle and Modern Literature." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 15.1 (1956): 74-84. Wiley. Web. 22 September 2014.
- Loflin, Christine. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Visions of Africa." *Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Peter Nazareth. New York: Twayne, 2000. 261-280. Print.

Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. Berkely, California: University of California, 2001. Print.

McCollom, William G. "The Downfall of the Tragic Hero." *National Council of Teachers of English*. 19.2 (1957): 51-56. *JSTOR*.Web. 25 June 2008.

Mugubi, John G. O. "Rebeka Njau's Social Vision." MA Thesis. University of Nairobi, 1994. Print.

Mukundi, Paul M. *Preventing Things From Falling Further Apart: The Preservation of Cultural Identities in Postcolonial African, Indian, and Caribbean Literatures*. London: Adonis & Abbey, 2010. Print.

Mullaney, Julie. *Postcolonial Literatures in Context*. London: Continuum. Print.

Mwangi, Evan. *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality*. New York: State University of New York, 2009. Print.

- - -. "The Gendered Politics of Untranslated Language and Aporia in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*." *Research inn African Literatures*. 35.4. (2004): 66-74. *JSTOR*.Web. 10 March 2014.

- Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, Gĩchingiri. *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Drama and the Kamirithu Popular TheaterExperiment*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press. Print.
- Newell, Stephanie. *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*. New York: Oxford, 2006. Print.
- Newton, K. M. *Modern Literature and the Tragic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008. Print.
- Nicholls, Brendon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Gender, and the Ethics of Postcolonial Reading*. Ashgate-ebook, 1988. Web.
- Njogu, Kimani. "On the Polyphonic Nature of the gicaandi Genre." *African Languages and Cultures*. 10.1. (1997): 47-62. Taylor & Francis. Web. 10 October 2015.
- - -. *Reading Poetry as Dialogue*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2004. Print.
- Noyes, George R. "Aristotle and Modern Tragedy." *Modern Language Notes*. 13.1. (1898): 6-12. The John Hopkins University Press. Web. 28 May 2014.
- O'Connell, Daniel. "Marxist Models of Tragic Realism." *Duke University*. 13.2 (1980): 221-225. Web. 02 January 2014.
- Odhiambo, Christopher. "Whose Nation? Romanticizing the Vision of a Nation in Bole

Butake's 'Betrothal Without Libation' and Family Saga.'" *Research in African Literatures*. 40.2. (2009): 159-172. Indiana University Press. Web. 25 August 2015.

Ogude, James. "Ngugi's Concept of History and the Post-Colonial Discourses in Kenya." *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. 31.1 (1997): 86-112. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 March 2014.

-. -. *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London: Pluto, 1999. Print.

Ogundele, Wole. "Devices of Evasion: The Mythic versus the Historical Imagination in the Postcolonial African Novel." *Research in African Literatures*. 33.3 (2002): 125-139. Web. 8 December 2014.

Panichas, George A. "Aspects of Tragedy, Ancient and Modern." *Modern Age*. 39.4. (1997): 1-7. Web. 23 February 2012.

Poole, Andrian. *Tragedy: A very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford, 2005. Print.

Prince, Gerald and Arlene Noble. "Narratology, Narrative, and Meaning." *Poetics Today* 12.3 (1991): 543-552. Web 10 March 2014.

- Quayson, Ato. "Self-Writing and Existential Alienation in African Literature." *Research in African Literatures*. 42.2. (2011): 30-45. Indiana University Press. Web. 18 February 2015.
- Said, Edward. "Crisis [in Orientalism]." *Modern Criticisms and Theory*. 2nd ed. ed. David Lodge, Delhi Pearson Education, 2004. Print.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: the Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke, 2004. Print.
- Sekyi-Otu, Ato. "The Refusal of Agency: The Founding Narrative and Waiyaki's Tragedy in *The River Between*." *Research in African Literature*. 16. 2 (1985): 157-178. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 August 2012.
- Sicherman, Carol. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Writing of Kenyan History." *Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Peter Nazareth. New York: Twayne, 2000. Print.
- Silverman, David. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, 2005. Print.
- Slemon, Stephen. "Post-colonial Critical Theories." *New National and Post-colonial Literatures*. Ed. Bruce King. New York: Oxford. Print.

Smith, Craig V. “‘Rainbow memories of Gain and Loss’: *Petals of Blood* and the New Resistance.” *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong’o*. Ed. Charles Cantalupo. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995. Print.

Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. New York: Cambridge, 1976. Print.

Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy*. London: Faber, 1961. Print.

Stratton, Florence. “Narrative Method in the Novels of Ngugi.” *African Literature Today*, Vol. 13. New York: Heinemann, 1983. Print.

Sullivan, Joanna. “Redifining the African Novel.” *Research in African Literatures*. 37.4. (2006): 177-188. Indiana University. Web. 01 September 2014.

Tiffin, Helen. “Post-Colonial Literature and Counter-Discourse.” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffins, and Hellen Tiffin. New York: Routledge, 2006. 95-101. Print.

Taoua, Phyllis. “The Postcolonial Condition.” *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Ed. F. Abiola Irele. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Web.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Devil on the Cross*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1982. Print.

---. *A Grain of Wheat*. London: Heinemann, 1967. Print.

---. *Matigari*. London: Heinemann, 1987. Print.

---. *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann, 1972. Print.

---. *The River Between*. London: Heinemann, 1965. Print.

---. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981. Print.

Whitmore, Charles E. "The nature of Tragedy" *Modern Language Association of America*. 27.3. (1919): *JSTOR*. Web. 28 May 2014.

Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1969. Print.

Appendix