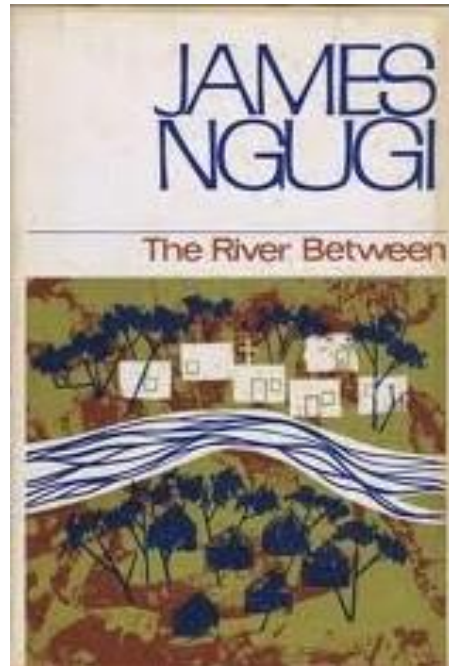


Culture and Myth in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Novel
The River Between

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Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_River_Between

Abstract

Ngugi's most serious commitment lies in his quest for "a socialist order", and "a revolutionary culture" through the processes of the decolonization of mind and decolonization of African Literature. Ngugi's *The River Between* demonstrate both the western world and their own Africa had a glorious past, history, traditions and culture which they could be proud of it. It discovers the culture ethos of the society. Ngugi attempts to explore and identify the roots of the society and the socio-religion. His novel *The River Between* has a feature of myths, rituals, traditions and the problem of the culture conflict. In the novel *The River Between*, the author records the traditions and customs of the people of Kenya. The Gikuyu area of Kenya is a land of great fertility and promise. The people maintain the tribe's magic and rituals pure and intact. Ngugi makes customs of circumcision the centre of the novel and describes how the early African converts into the new faith of Europeans indulged in the cultural conflict of their fellow

Kenya, Kenya is under British colonialism which is steadily encroaching into the interior of the country. The interior is dominated by two ridges of Makuyu and Kameno. Kameno is inhabited by the tribe whose blood and bones speak the language of the kills and which has kept its magic and rituals pure Muthoni and Waiyaki make an attempt to build a bridge between the two ridges of Honia river.

Introduction

Ngugi's *The River Between* initially titled *The Black Messiah* enumerates how a tradition bound tribal Gikuyu village is fragmented by the alien religion Christianity. The village has two ridges:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. [T.R.B.P-1]

Makuyu and Kameno separated by the river Honia. Waiyaki, the Black Messiah is the central figure in the novel. He tries to reconcile the ridges and his effort ultimately consumes his life. Waiyaki is torn between the tribal religion and the religion of the westerners.

Ngugiwa Thiong'o wrote the novel *The River Between* and provides the information about the conflict between the two ridges. The people of Kenya were colonized by the Europeans, and they spread the religion of Christianity; their language and also their educational institution in Kenya.

Waiyaki, the Protagonist

Waiyaki is the protagonist of the novel who has an education in Siriana school. His father Chege advises him to learn the knowledge and wisdom of white people. The conflict in the life of Waiyaki arises due to colonial impact on the natives. The western education with which the protagonist (Waiyaki) equips himself poses a problem to him. Waiyaki's father Chege, a seer makes his son join Siriana Mission School and persuades him to learn all the wisdom of the white man to conquer them:

Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites. [T.R.B.P-24]

Mugo wa kabiro Prophecy

So, he pleads Waiyaki to educate himself and then educate his tribes. Education at Siriana does change him. He tries to achieve the unity between the ridges through reconciliation. Chege remembers the prophecy of Mugo wa kabiro that people will come like a Butterfly, and they would occupy the land for their welfare. This foresighted vision is not understood by people whose minds have been fossilized by the tribal customs and practices and hence Waiyaki faces the conflict. Waiyaki's conflict is caused by Kabonyi, Kamau, Joshua, Muthoni, and Nyambura. Kabonyi an elderly tribal and his son Kamau belong to Makuyu and they embrace Christianity and yet follow the tribal customs.

The people of the ridges don't care for the words of the seer. Chege advised his son to learn the wisdom of white man, but he should not follow that in his life. Waiyaki also performs very well in his studies in Siriana school among all other boys. Joshua is a converter of the Mukuyu people to Christianity. He is eager to follow Christianity:

He found a sanctuary ad the white
Man's power and magic.....
The new faith worked in him till
It came to possess him wholly.He
Renounced his tribal magic power and
Ritual. He turned to and felt deep
Presence of the one God. [T.R.B.P-29]

Tribal Customs and Traditions

But he doesn't like the customs of circumcision which is followed by the tribal community people as their customs. Joshua belongs to Christianity, and he converts many people to Christianity from their tribal tradition. But the people of Kameno follow their old tradition in their customs.

Joshua has two daughters. Nyambura is an elder daughter, and Muthoni is the younger one. Muthoni is a young girl who is longing for circumcision, neglected her father. She provokes her desire to her sister. At first Nyambura rejects her desire, and afterwards for the sake of love towards her sister she accepts it. She says that her father will not accept their desire. So they decide to move to her own aunt's home which is in Kameno. Muthoni elopes to her aunt's home without the knowledge of her father. Her father comes to know about the elopement of Muthoni. Then, he orders his elder daughter Nyambura to bring back her sister to their home.

But Muthoni rejects her father's order and remains there. When Joshua hears the rejection of his daughter, he decides to forget her. But her mother could not reject like her husband.

Muthoni and Waiyaki

Muthoni is supported by Waiyaki, and there is a love affair between Waiyaki and Muthoni. One day Muthoni becomes ill, and she feels about her health. Her sister and mother come to know about the illness of Muthoni. They want to meet her but Joshua prevents them. He orders them not to go there to see her, if they go they have to forget him. Waiyaki makes many attempts to protect the life of Muthoni but he is not able to save her life from death. Muthoni's aim is to abolish the customs of her father's unshakable faith in Christianity. Nyambura comes to meet her sister, when she is in death bed but there is no use at all. After the death of Muthoni, Nyambura and Waiyaki meet together without the knowledge of her father. They fall in love with each other. Nyambura is a faithful daughter of her father. She obeys the words of her father but she has fallen in love with Waiyaki. Nyambura's father rejects their relationship. Nyambura has more affection towards Waiyaki. So she leaves the home without the knowledge of her parents and lives with Waiyaki. He tries to bring awareness among his people who follow the old customs in their community. He insists on the people that the custom followed by them is

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wrong. The elders in the village show their objection to Waiyaki, and do not accept his love with Nyambura; because she is a Christian who belongs to the opposite residence. Waiyaki's father thinks that his son wants to be a saviour of their community people. But people are not ready to accept the idea, of Waiyaki.

Leaving Christian Faith

When the Christian missionary prohibits certain tribal rituals like circumcision, Kabonyi and Kamau give up the alien religion and join the main stream of Gikuyuans. Kabonyi tries to dissuade the people by telling them that the immediate need of the land is to drive away the whites by fighting with them. But Waiyaki convinces the people about the need of reconciliation to drive the whites away from the land. Waiyaki loves Nyambura. Kabony's son, Kamau also loves Nyambura. So kamau abominates Waiyaki. Kinuthia is Waiyaki's friend and classmate. He considers Waiyaki as a man of extraordinary powers and admires him. He warns Waiyaki about the trial which Kabonyi and elders of the tribe plan to punish Waiyaki. Waiyaki never discusses in detail about the necessity of reconciliation to his people. With great difficulty Waiyaki constructs Marioshini his school. But later on he comes away from his ideal world of education and he wants himself to be the instrument to the union of the two ridges. He now believes that priority should be given to reconciliation than to education:

We are all children of Mumbi and we must fight together in one political movement, or else we perish, and the white man will always be on our back. Can a house divided against itself stand? [T.R.B.P.171]

Betrayal of the Tribes?

Waiyaki is accused by the elders of the tribe and Kiama (started by Kabonyi) that he has betrayed the tribes. He is charged with four crimes. 1. He took Muthoni to the hospital and after touching the dead woman of the evil spirits he did not clean himself according to the tribal custom. 2. He visits often Joshua's church. 3. He visits Sirianna to sell tribes to Christians. 4. He is going to marry Nyambura, an uncircumcised girl. Waiyaki convinces the people of all the charges except the fourth one. Procrastination is the fatal flaw in Waiyaki. His fear of losing popularity prevents him from discussing with his people.

Quarrel between the Natives

The central conflict of *The River Between* does not revolve around the struggle between the colonizers and the colonized, but rather among the natives themselves, as a result of the divisions and rifts created by colonization. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi's *The River Between* seek the roots of the society, myths, traditions and rituals. They concerned with the presence of the missionaries and the resultant culture conflict.

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