

**CONFLICT AND IDENTITY NARRATIVE IN NGUGI WA
THIONG O'S *THE RIVER BETWEEN* AND DUL JOHNSON'S
*ACROSS THE GULF***

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Abstract

One of the challenges faced by most modern societies is crisis of identity. Conflict often emanates from the controversies embedded in any discourse that seeks to interrogate closed identity structures. Be it racial, national, ethnic or gender identity discourse, conception should strive to adopt inclusive paradigms. By defining self in contrast to the other, the elements of exclusion are introduced. These forms of classification systems lead to alienation, and oppression because of a hierarchy that treats as outcasts or lesser, the other groups, thus leading to their marginalization. The result is inequality both at social and economic levels. These lead to uprisings, agitations and conflict which are a threat to cohesive existence, and security. There is therefore the need to interrogate the boundaries that exclusion creates, through the infiltration of discourse by counter narratives that can lead to the fragmentation of boundaries imposed by dogmatic identity narratives. This essay takes into consideration the arbitrary and fluid elements that constitute individual identity as evident in relationships that transcend racial, ethnic and gender boundaries. It does this by examining the plot of selected novels, beyond the physical levels, to expose suppressed layers of identities that play integral roles in the determination of identity. Using Ngugi's *The River Between* and Dul Johnson's *Across The Gulf*, it interprets how individuals navigate and

negotiate their identity and how new realities threaten the grand narratives upon which outmoded identity discourse is framed.

Keywords: Conflict, crisis, identity, security

Introduction

Identity, basically, is the of classification/grouping of people based on given markers which are usually designated by physical markers such as land mass, skin colour, language, culture and kinship. This paper casts light on the creation, negotiation and repressed dimensions of the different modes of identity constructs. These categorizations are propagated through narratives of hate and division, which are internalized and passed on from generation to generation. Literary scholarship can infiltrate these narratives by interrogating the discourse on identity to expose contradictions inherent in identity narratives based on binary structures that seek to group individuals based on fixed features. Literary intervention comes handy and should be done not to undermine the place of kinship in identity but rather to highlight the bridges that have been built across existing boundaries overtime as a result of new realities. Therefore, allowance should be given in factors such as migration fostered by wars or trade, the synthesis of identities through their unions under new cultures such as religion, marriage and other evolving socio-historic conditions that culminate into fusion of identities. These relationships have been further fragmented with emerging complex intersections.

This paper views the different responses to social categories/systems. It delivers the concept of identity as a flexible, multidimensional, phenomenon that defies boundaries imposed by social constructs that tend to categorise individuals or groups into fixed entities. Traditionally, human concepts locate individuals within, and outside binary structures, and classifications systems usually adopted for convenience. These are further propagated through discourse whose modes often time than not, are arbitrary and so laden

with contradictions. The model of examination for this study destabilises ‘organised’ classes which results in collective conflict of a system that does not account for intersections. Ayi Kwei Armah conceives identity as a product of culture, ‘identity is about efficient group cooperation (234). Often time, the tendency and quest for brotherhood stems from the desire to alienate the intruder and foster communality. Over-time, these forms of identity framing assume a dogmatic posture that knits individuals with certain physical features into fixed groups without accounting for other outcomes that may stem from unforeseen possibilities or eventualities. The prohibition of inter-racial, and inter-ethnic relations are markers of oppressive systems that have been dislocated over time. However, the cardinal discourse upon which the imposition of such boundaries emanates continues to be replicated in different quarters. The result is contradiction between internalized identity discourse versus shifting contemporary realities, leading to cultural conflicts that usually escalate into violence which threatens the security of societies with multiple identities such as Africa.

The system of classification in most African societies has its root in a binary discourse that has a larger consequence for the whole process of thought. There is the tendency of perpetuating dogma and exposing the “other” (pushed to the periphery) to abuse. The tendency to privilege one level of identity above the other, translates into a system that fuels oppression. The system projects culture as the centre which privileges ‘the collective’ above ‘the specific. Culture assumes the cardinal element in identity discourse, thereby pushing ‘self’; personal desire into a position of insignificance as the “Other”. This pitches the individual against the general consciousness, with conflict of interests featuring prominently. However, the individual factor opposed to the arbitrary system which does not take into cognisance its desires is prone to unpredictability leading to multiple outcomes.

This paper therefore engenders the interrogation of identity constructs that institutionalise hierarchy in racial, ethnic and gender relationships through an alternate discourse. Armah states,

Narratives provide a great aesthetic medium for the projection of worldviews. Really effective narratives can be vehicles for handy explanations of reality, injecting sense into the otherwise baffling flux of life. (135)

This too can be said of literary analysis which sets out to interrogate the social language and pervading power-plays. Discourse as a tool of interrogation can be used to examine concepts and practices. It examines cultural representations, processes and sources of given practices, to expose tendencies towards dogma, thereby dislocating the grand narratives upon which identity claims are premised. By casting light and raising questions targeted at exposing the contradictions inherent in given principles of identity, a window is opened for multiple interpretations of actions of characters in selected texts.

African writers usually create and negotiate character's identity in their novels, be it racial, ethnic, gender or religious, identities based on personalized experiences. Often, collective identity manifests through culture and tradition, which results in conflict with personal desires and identity. This conflict is most times heightened and perceived as a threat to culture and tradition when perceived at a collective level. In foregrounding dogmatic or politicised claims of identity therefore, the collective is foisted on general consciousness to stifle individual experience without pursuing its argument logically.

Contradictions and conflicts are inherent in constructing identity within a closed and restricted system that does not give room to other possible outcomes such as that in Johnson's *Across the Gulf*. The consequences of such methods are typified in this paper. By going beyond the provision and structure of a system of identity construct as delivered in the plots of selected novel, the paper unravels the power-

plays that underlie identity discourse. This paper also touches on the internalization of dogmas by narratives as manifested through characterization and action. These internalized codes most times unconsciously underlie the creative process. Fluid, multidimensional, and flexible identity narrative/discourse is therefore re-echoed as archetypal of art with high propensity towards conflict resolution.

By examining the construction of identities in the novels and in uncovering the existing layers of identity, the contradiction of identity narratives constructed to suppress other social categories is highlighted. And the fate of the hybrid is typified.

Borders of Identities

Ngugi painstakingly delivers a plot that clearly highlights demarcations and division aided by landmarks in the opening rendition of the *River Between's* setting. By emphasising cultural categories in selected texts, the conflict of identity is foregrounded. This is illustrated in *The River Between*. Similarly, Dul Johnson's latest novel, *Across The Gulf* explores contemporary modes of identity by tracing through Nigerian civil war, evolving history, and those events that further fragment existing layers of identity within a society. In an earlier novel, *Deeper Into The Night*, Johnson, having isolated existing nationalities in Nigeria before independence and the confusion that attends the fusion of these nationalities into a single entity, seems to be raising consciousness on the complexities of identity discourse in any society. In the construction of national identity for instance, there is the tendency to group ethnic nationalities into a single entity. The question however remains, does the belt of collective identity, be it communal or national fuse groups firmly together without giving room for cross-carpeting or other intersections. For instance, the manifestations of the feeling of domination of smaller racial or ethnic nationalities by so-called bigger ones has culminated into infiltration of those so-called privileged class

through migration, marriage or other bonds deliberately formed through affiliates. This clearly is the case in most modern African states, where layers of ethnic nationalities have further been fragmented along religious, political and economic lines.

Even within homogenous groups, there are hierarchies that further marginalization, and exclusions. *The River Between* portrays a culture that celebrates the ritual of circumcision as induction into adulthood on one hand and a stamp of the traditional institution on another. Waiyaki is told by a boy from Koina that he cannot play Demi because he was not born-again (11). Thus induction into adulthood constitutes a strand in the echelon of traditional identity discourse. This later serves as a marker that separates the believers from the non-believers and, isolates two groups clearly demarcated along religious lines. While the Christian religion rejects circumcision, the African tradition endorses it. The first, which Joshua is a metaphor of, embraces the colonialists' Christian religion that views the ritual as heathen, while the second group reveres their cultural origin; the latter adapts tenets of the western religion, thereby perpetuating colonial culture. This leads to a hybrid identity for those who have once been marked by tradition before proclaiming the new religion and, the new breed on another hand who have not been marked but must decide in the midst of the contradictions they were born into.

Similarly, the titles of the texts under study are suggestive of division, and this is evident as the plots unravel. In *The River Between*, the colonial conquest closes in and brings with it a different culture across River Honia, a landmark that indicates a boundary between Kameno and Makuyu. This river seems to be a meeting point for both ridges on one and a point of crisis on another. It is the place Muthoni declares her decision to be circumcised to Nyamburu and, it is the point where Nyamburu and Waiyaki declare their love to each other and symbolically consummate the union of the two ridges with a

kiss. In *Across the Gulf*, war ravages and leads to diffusion of ethnic cultures which sets in motion the crisis of identity etched during the colonial era. Chukwuma had been coerced by the white D.O. to choose the Christian religious concept of monogamy as against his desire for polygamy, leading to the abandonment of his new pregnant wife on the Plateau. Tradition takes care of the situation by restoring Maryen to her former betrothal, thereby giving the baby, Janbut, an identity. On the other side of the gulf, Chukwuma continues life with his first wife and the birth of Ofala immediately follows. However, the lives of these brothers get all mixed up in unforeseen events that expose the contradictions inherent in identity discourse solely constructed along ethnic and regional lines. This narration jettisons the tradition of dogma that seeks to consider identity as a fixed/stable group of traits while suppressing certain problematics that raise questions on the larger system in which identity is embedded. Kalu laments in the wake of the outbreak of the civil war that engulfed Okigboli and led to the disappearance of Ifunanya,

I don't know where God was when those foolish white people were stitching this useless country up as one! I've always said it; these *Awusas* will be the undoing of this thing they put together and call a country! (35)

While *Across The Gulf* recaptures the aftermath of the amalgamation of both the southern and northern blocs of Nigeria that sets the stage for its fusion into a single entity upon independence, *The River Between* mirrors an epoch of transition marked by remarkable changes from a single constructed culture and tradition to a new order characterized by multiple identities and the confusion of the hybrid created with the fusion of different traditions/religion. Like in Johnson's *Across The Gulf*, the theme of abandonment is reflected. Joshua abandons his daughter in favour of the colonial religion just as Chukwuma is arm-twisted to abandon his young bride; Maryen.

Muthoni was ‘born again’ again and this double circumcision, firstly of the ‘mind’ and secondly of physical genital mutilation leads to her death. This is a pointer to the fatality that attends the confusion that occurs with the mix of identities constructs not properly incubated. The hybrid is introduced into a society and abandoned to figure out his path in the jungle of confusion created by the new order. The existence of the hybrid essentially points to the existence of a ‘pure breed’. In *Across the Gulf*, Ikenna operates from a level of legitimacy conferred by tradition to unleash havoc.

You fool! You idiot! How could you be getting drunk and snoring away here like a hog when a bastard son, born of some mercenary *Awusa* soldier, is taking away your birthright from you? Eh, how could you? (184)

By laying claim to the chieftaincy for his son who is biologically and so legitimately so, Ikenna sets in motion the tragedy that climaxes the novel. This pitched Nnanna off balance and, raised question of betrayal between Ofala and Ifunanya as to who revealed the secret of Nnanna’s paternity to Ikenna. The politics of Identity was the golden trump and aces that Ikenna wields in his plot to show his supremacy. He uses the politics of identity to usurp Nnanna’s deserved chieftaincy title. The ease with which Nnanna relinquishes his ‘false’ identity is a different matter altogether, as it may well signal the internalized culture that marks individuals’ relationship with the concept of identity in the society. Nnanna having grown in the Igbo culture, internalized its worldview on identity which is dogmatic and so operates under this given construct of identity to take his decision without rationalization.

However, the illegitimacy of the hybrid does not necessarily invalidate the crises of identity in the ‘pure breed’ who perceives he/she does not benefit or operate fully in a given constructed identity. This formed the point of crisis in both *The River Between* and *Across*

The Gulf. Waiyaki's father; Chege sees himself to be from a lineage of saviours and prophets saddled with the task of protecting the community against external forces; the threat being Joshua on the other side of the river. Ikenna on the other hand, continuously feels undermined as the eldest surviving son of Chukwuma by virtue of conferment of the honours of the custody of the bones of their father on a younger Ofala.

Dislocation is also introduced as an acceptance of a particular marker of identity automatically signals a rejection of the other. Muthoni enthused that she had been reborn and is disowned by her father. Nnanna on the other hand abandons his known family and community in search of a new identity;

...But I knew I had my real name somewhere. I knew it the moment they took their name back from me, that my real name would be waiting for me. My place, our place is so beautiful, Father, even though it has no electricity unlike Okigboli (236, ATG).

The link between identity and geography; a physical marker of identity is demonstrated here. Similarly, Nnanna feels betrayed and when his biological father asks for his name, hear him 'I don't have a name, Father. You have to give me one' (235). Similarly, the phrase 'there's everything in a name' (42,193) occurs in *Across the Gulf* to give it as a marker of identity. The word 'name' appears about 114 times in the novel as a symbol of identity. And the writer painstakingly gives space to make a clear distinction on names; both as a physical and metaphorical marker. Just as Waiyaki in *The River Between* is taken to the hills by his father, the great seer to discover his origin and ties with Murungu. This in itself points to the quest to discover and establish ties (of identity) that give a human, a sense of identity.

There is a great shift in the construction of identity in traditional and contemporary archetypes of African literature, and Ngugi and Dul Johnson mirror this. A shift from the nationalist's perspective of unity in Ngugi's *The River Between* and Dul's *Deeper into The Night*, through to the impact of the transnational effects that attend the mix of different cultures. The consequence of contemporary discourse on identity that does not account for factors such as migration, inter-ethnic marriage, amongst others is tragic. This is so because evolving social, economic and historical evolution have introduced other layers of identities that cut across traditional boundaries, thereby, giving allowance for new dimensions to blood ties and individual experience.

In *Across The Gulf*, family ties are established to reveal the contradictions of the other physical markers of identity. Ofala becomes a victim of a love nearly betrayed, adopts Nnaana; a product of Ifunanya's 'infidelity' or compromise if you may and in a dramatic turn of event enshrouded in irony, Nnaana happens to be Ofala's and Ikenna's nephew. But he does not live to unravel this mystery as he kills his brother and drowns himself afterwards upon the leak of the secret of the biological paternity of Nnaana. Ofala transcends the constraints of biological identity to adopt Nnanna as his son. He loves him but keeps Nnanna's paternity a secret supposedly between himself and Ifunanya. Ofala operating from this understanding of interconnectedness and the knowledge of his other brother across the gulf locked in his sub-conscious finds it easy to accept Nnanaa but keeps this from Okigboli; the town that comes to love the son of all and considers him befitting of the honours of the highest title in the land. But Ikenna latches unto the Igbo worldview and background of identity to unleash his greed under legitimacy. This leaves Okigboli in tragedy.

From the foregoing, it is apt to state that identity becomes a point of conflict, only when it is politicised. Muthoni in *The River Between* is sacrificed to promote the colonial conquest and, Nnanna is uprooted from the only root he knows in search of a new identity because of the politics stimulated by Ikenna concerning a chieftaincy title.

Intersectional Identities

The practical application of identity discourse is such that there are no fixed relationships; as even the most radical approach to identity shifts in crisis. This seems to be the case with Kalu in *Across the Gulf* whose worldview on identity is shaped by the new reality of war. Ofala was not a Christian but a brother in the sense of ethnic affiliation. Kalu is agreeable to this level of ‘infidelity’. However, Ifunanya further rationalizes her father’s position,

...had he not rejected Ofala because he was a heathen until Ofala promised to convert after their wedding? What difference would it make if she substituted one “heathen” with another? (51).

This was the premise upon which she justifies her relationship with Janbut. The implication being that identity is interpreted by characters as they deem through their experiences rather than the general perspective. Conceptualization of identity is further compounded by deductions of modernization and, the conflict of individual experiences. Ikenna had earlier viewed the chieftaincy title as ‘a heathen thing’ but with social changes and social benefits that attended the position, chieftaincy titles become politicised with economic and social prosperity. These greater prospects to exert influence; motivates Ikenna who goes all out to fight for the title for his son, Chinedu.

The dogmatic approach to religious identities is also delivered in both texts. In *Across The Gulf*, Kalu alienates himself initially, just

like Joshua in *The River Between*. This is reflected in the location, shape and paint of their houses, that designate them physically and symbolically as Christians. It is as if their identity is reinforced or preserved by this mental and physical alienation. The boundaries of religious and ethnic identity discourse are therefore further fragmented through their intersection.

Similarly, Dul Johnson in *Deeper Into The Night* explores the physical markers that designate identities and the conflict that emanates from the intersections of religion and ethnicity/culture; bases of identity whose constructions invoke controversy. In the novel, Danmatsi states, 'All our titles have links with our religion' (64). When Nimfa accepts the turban but rejects Islam, Danmatsi insists that the two identities were complementary to each other. This is reflected in his response to Nimfa's constant reference to the turban as "mosquito net".

Nimpa, if you want peace, and if you want to be my friend, stop calling my turban mosquito net! I have told you it is a symbol of my power and my religion, and yet you are still insulting it (64).

Let's consider the exchange that follows Zhimak's query of Nisa's claim to represent the emir.

. . . Not representing him in that sense. There are a few of his people here, you know, so he...I mean the Muslims here, they are his subjects and...' In my own community? His subjects?'

[...]

'Oh, no, no, not in that sense, chief. You see, if your Tarok people here go to another place, they will still be your people and also become the people of that new place, do you see? (34-35)

The affiliations to groups most times demand patriotism and, political loyalty usually conflicts with the cultural authority whose narrative contradicts the introduction of any external force such as religion. Characterization in *Across The Gulf*, highlights the contradiction of a monolithic identity construct based on physical resemblance premised on shared features. So much so that, despite the striking resemblance between Janbut and Ofala, no one sought to know or interrogate whether they were bonded by blood. Both brothers are set apart by ethnic differences, herein rests the tragedy and conflict of traditional boundaries imposed on identity.

Another type of power-play rests in the drama that followed the infiltration of new religious identities in Taktim in *Deeper into the Night*. This exposes individuals who exploit identity discourse by glossing over its practicality. Dogma that emerges from deep-seated allegiance to these identities is often employed in this line of brainwashing. But this can also be explored for the greater vision of promoting nationalistic ideas, which is what Dul Johnson seems to suggest. In the wave of ethnic violence that swept across Plateau and the northern states for instance, suspicion is amplified among the people. Therefore, in Gwangtim, Muslims are excluded from the community meetings. The power-play that pervades the discourse on the conflict embedded in the negotiation of identity is such that the possibility of individuals' multiple social identities is down-played and particular social categories elevated. This practice, however, does not repress individual psychological responses to these categories. This results in contradictions that challenge dogma and unravel conflicts probable in the insistence of maintaining relationships framed by given elements/markers of identity. Antenor Firmin in his effort to establish the futility and the contradictions evident in the attempt to classify humans based on physical markers remarks, '...these different classification systems are based on arbitrary and

idiosyncratic principles' (19). The hint at eccentricities is in consonance with the tenets of post-structuralism that seek to dethrone claims of narratives designated as "truths". He proffers,

There's one easy way to determine how much truth is to be found in certain propositions and their concomitant theories. One needs only follow the development of the ideas on which they are based to find out what principles they lead to and what consequences they entail for scientific and social laws in general (437).

The responsibility therefore rests on literary scholarship to adopt critical approaches in both creative writing and literary criticism by creating models that would interrogate popular claims of identity narrative through robust discourse that would undermine their dogmas. The fragmentation of the boundaries imposed by dogmatic identity narratives when turned on itself destabilizes its grand claims, thereby, giving room to suppressed questions on new realities and contemporary societal developments that may affect, amend and expand existing conceptions on identity to emerge.

Female and Masculine Identity Discourse

The construction of female identity in the texts as evident in their characterization points to the construction of the female as weak, both morally, socially and physically. Chege in *The River Between*, tracing history recounts,

...long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this, women owned everything. The animals you saw were their goats. But because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. So why should they fear them? (15)

This outrageous myth points to the level of the debasing construct of female identity to the level that even animals are held to be aware of the female's weakness. The shift from being rulers to being subjects puts the woman in a disadvantaged position, consequently, vulnerable to forces in the society which, translates into double jeopardy in dealing with identity crises. The understanding of the intersections between gender and economic oppressions would give insight into the limitations that influence decisions and actions of characters. Muthoni would rather accept circumcision that traditionally ushers her into womanhood, than be stripped by the colonial religion. The exclusion from the ritual therefore signals a reaffirmation of her inferiority as a female and would amount to denying her humanity and making her a total outcast. She therefore rebels, '...I want to be a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe...'. This has more to do with her personal identity as a female, rather than a negation or rejection of African culture, contrary to popular critical commentaries.

Similarly, Johnson's *Across The Gulf* constructs Ifunanya as vulnerable, firstly susceptible to Janbut's seduction; she sets in motion the conflict. Secondly, she amplifies the conflict when she unconsciously reveals in the travails of labour, the paternity of her baby to Ikenna who had attended her birth. Thereby, arming him with the time bomb that later engulfs everyone. Paradoxically, male identity is constructed as strong. While male characters are in control of their thoughts, speech and actions, the females are given as vulnerable, emotional and weak. So much so that, Ofala does not reveal the secret of Nnanna's paternity in the state of drunkenness, yet Ifunanya does in her moment of vulnerability (childbirth).

Identity is constructed and interpreted to be determined by masculinity in Igbo culture and so we see Nnanna abandon his mother in search of an unknown father. Janbut from the Tarok/Awusa worldview on the other hand could not be bothered by his false

identity as he had grown into a man of his own. Although he is plagued by questions and dreams, he has developed a super ego that identifies with a consciousness he can relate to. This however does not change the destiny of the Tarok woman as we realise that Maya; Janbut's wife is unable to deliver the message from Rimbut on his true paternity, instead, she gives the message to his uncle, Kondap to deliver.(109,237). Yet, after receiving the message Janbut carries on with the memory of the father he knows, less perturbed by the message of a biological father (133). This is against Nnanna's reaction when considered on the surface. The narration gives Nnanna as highly emotional and one at the infantile stage of development that the woman is forever condemned to and so comes off as somewhat erratic. This also suggests that the concept of biological identity is fluid in the Tarok culture as opposed to its dogmatic construct by its Igbo counterpart as symbolized by Nnanna. This further buttresses the concept of identity as fluid. Dogmatic approaches only trigger tragedy like that witnessed in Okigboli. Also consider Rimbut's reflection on the situation surrounding Janbut's paternity,

Rimbut was secretly proud of his son. *He is indeed a real Tarok*, Rimbut thought. Yes, a real Tarok. Janbut was his son, and nobody could take him away. Did the Tarok not say that if another man was foolish enough to plant his guinea corn on your farm, of course, the harvest was yours? Maryen was already his, as he had *paid everything on her head* before that foolish man from God-knows-where—cook of the white man—came and deceived her with strange foods and money. How could she, a true-born Tarok girl, be that foolish?... (22)

The ego of the male is preserved by distorting popular discourse. By infusing new narratives to uphold male identity as socially constructed, the arbitrary tone of its discourse notwithstanding, male

identity is projected as a stable phenomenon that remains in a domain reserved for only conquerors. However, women are portrayed as erratic regardless of cultures. In *Across The Gulf*, Maya runs off with Chukwuma despite having been betrothed to Rimbut, while Ifunaya in the long run gives in to Janbut without proof of Ofala's death. The sense of judgement of women is consequently delivered as flawed, and impaired as reflected in following erratic and irrational action. Similarly, Maya is ready to receive Ifunanya to guarantee Janbut's happiness. Just as Ifunanya, despite her Christian background, compromises and welcomes Chizurum to guarantee Ofala's peace and happiness. Although, the narration highlights the peaceful co-existence between his two wives, it is given as a patriarchal construct where the wives are expected to accept the wish of the husband without protest. Similarly, in *The River Between*, by fraternizing with what is considered immoral and ungodly, the women face consequences; for Muthoni, death, and for Ifunanya in *Gulf*, polygamy.

Female identity is also embedded in conflict; Nyambura was the piece of icing that escalates the envy of Kamau in *The River Between*, just as Chinelo was the reason for Chinedu's ultimate humiliation in *Across the Gulf*. Similarly, Johnson recreates this impression in *Deeper into The Night*, where Mamzhi clamps down on Illiya because of his childhood crush (Julchit) Jolene. Who although given as brave and a heroine during the war at Gwangtim, fails at the ultimate duty of delivering Gwangtim from the excesses of Mamzhi. This is delivered as a consequence of being morally compromised as she could not provide the blood flow needed to incapacitate Mamzhi. The construct of the female menstruation as a potent evil whose impurity is capable of stripping Mamzhi of his potent power is another matter that is enshrouded in contradictions. However, Mamzhi retains his mystical prowess despite his several escapades.

Women are portrayed as elements that heighten tension, rather than providing real solutions to conflicts. This is heavily reflected in characterization of the texts under study. In *The River Between*, Waiyaki is given to possess a mystical power like Dul Johnson's Mamzhi in *Deeper Into The Night* and Ofala and Janbut in *Across the Gulf* are given as valiant soldiers of the Biafra war. The implication is that, the women are treated as weak and vulnerable despite the feats they may accomplish. Similarly, the duties of women are restricted to nurturing and care-giving after which they take a back stage. Conceptions and perceptions of identity can also be rationalised based on gender. The relationship of characters are ultimately shaped by their different gender identities and this also impacts other discourses on identity and this component of identity should also be given space in any identity discourse.

Conclusion

It is convenient to conclude this comparative study of two authors by stating that the concept of identity is enshrouded in 'certain problematics' that contradict the discourse upon which they are built. The controversy that the fusion of fraternal affiliations and ethnic differences stimulates may partly be attributed to the African worldview which is shaped by the spirit of communality. This knits groups with shared traits into a closed group that alienates the 'outsider' without recourse to emerging intersections that may dislocate closed affiliations. In typical African discourse, anyone outside kinfolk is considered to be weak and, capable of evil and not bound by the kindred spirit. This undermines and questions the aspirations of those individuals (intruders), positive inclinations notwithstanding. Therefore, Waiyaki with exemplary leadership qualities is propagated and generally perceived as compromised because of his affiliation with 'external' elements. By associating with Nyambura who is considered anti-tradition, his vision to marry the

two ridges to calm the storms of conflict is dimmed. Similarly, Ikenna's claim in *Across the Gulf* is that a certain level of bad blood exists in the 'other', being Nnanna that sought to cause enmity between the brothers, despite long-standing estrangements between the brothers. The revelation of Nnanna's biological paternity may be interpreted by the community to be capable of exuding an evil current; the type that engulfed the climax of the text. Therefore, Nnanna's self-imposed exile may well be inspired by his understanding of the Igbo worldview. In that, psychological response to relationships with 'the outsider' is viewed as rebellion on an individual level and desecration on a collective level.

Identity conflict can create a polarized society if not properly managed; the onus therefore lies on literary scholarship to create a bridge by accentuating the prospects in the fusion of different identities. Although, in *The River Between*, there seems to be a dead end in the attempt at discourse aimed at soothing the ambivalence between the two ridges, Ngugi succeeds in showing a progression in conflict management through discourse. Similarly, *Across The Gulf* gives a graphic illustration of different identities in intercourse and the product- a love child signals productivity when identities are properly harnessed. In all, both writers, by highlighting the contradictions embedded in the conceptualization of identity based on dogma, succeed in projecting the possibilities of logical resolutions that may attend the interrogation of historical, and cultural identity framings. This is envisioned as a map towards sustainable peace and good governance based on merit, rather than superficial claims of identity narratives. By tracing through their plots, the different threads that intersect to knit characters in their given societies, the writers succeed in unsettling the popular claims of identity discourse framed by divisive tendencies.

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