

## RESHAPING IDENTITY IN NGŪGĪ'S *DEVIL ON THE CROSS* AND *MATIGARI*

KOFFI Konan Fortuné

hetran2011@gmail.com

Université Alassane Ouattara

**Abstract :** In a constant changing world, it is vital Africans should design new identity standards. If it is possible to state the identity issue as the nomos of the African literature, the latter also encapsulates items such as the chronotope and solidarity. Before the incapacity of these markers to guarantee a real happiness to Africans, it is therefore crucial to design a new identity standard based on values such as resilience and self esteem while having a close contact with the world.

**Keywords :** alienation, emancipation, identity, postcolonial, resilience.

**Résumé :** Dans un environnement en constante mutation, il importe aux Africains de définir un nouveau modèle identitaire. Si l'on peut postuler la question identitaire comme le nomos de la littérature africaine, celle-ci prend également en compte des éléments comme le chronotope et la solidarité. Au vu de l'impossibilité de tels référents à assurer un réel épanouissement aux Africains, il y a lieu de définir un nouveau modèle identitaire reposant sur la résilience et la confiance en soi tout en restant ouvert au monde.

**Mots clés :** aliénation, émancipation, identité, postcolonial, résilience.

### INTRODUCTION

History and literature have it that Africans, before the advent of colonization, lived in harmony and complied with a series of cultural items which established their specificity. In the nineteenth century, when colonizers set foot into Africa in order to achieve "the pacification of the primitive tribe" (Achebe, 1958, p.257), their colonial project was founded on two basic pillars : European religion and western education. In the course of their mission, they succeeded in convincing local populations that the latter should abandon their religious beliefs and practices which were said to be ill-suited for modernity. Accordingly, on the one hand, many Africans accepted to forego their local gods and divinities and embraced the European monotheist religion. On the other one, European ways of life, culture and civilization were successfully imposed upon the local populations thanks to western educational systems.

The adoption of foreign values (western religion and education) resulted in the alienation of the local population who eventually developed into a hybrid population neither Africans nor Europeans. This situation of alienation which results in a loss of identity attracted the attention of major figures of African intellectuals, artists and political activists. These figures have paid a special attention to this situation of belonging to two antagonistic worlds in which African

cultures were denigrated and devalued. In many instances, before the trampling down of their culture by colonizers, the majority of Africans found it necessary to rebel. This resistance which was sometimes carried out in political frameworks resulted, in some countries, in violent actions.

In various situations, the African identity, which can be defined as a set of dynamic items whereby the specificity of a people can be established, has been spoiled. African writers such as Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and the Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his *Devil on the Cross* and *A Grain of Wheat* were worried about the destabilisation of some African values. Ngũgĩ recalls the tools used by the colonizers which brought about instability and disorder in Africa, particularly in Kenya. The consequences of this instability caused by European colonizers are highlighted by Ngũgĩ in his *Devil on the Cross* :

The white man came to this country holding the Bible in his left hand and a gun in his right. He stole the people's fertile lands. He stole the people's cattle and goats under the cover of fines and taxes. He robbed people of the labour of their hands. Ngũgĩ (1980, p. 102)

Thus alienated, the local populations made the choice of following European values while abandoning theirs. By narrating this alienation, these writers actually denounce the loss of the African identity and underline the necessity to revitalise them. This is, at least, the task Ngũgĩ assigns himself in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* which is particularly dedicated to a creative shift to African values, cultures and languages. By so doing, he implicitly pleads for the re-creation of African identity since the previous one has been spoiled, derided not only by colonizers but also by Africans themselves. For the Kenyan novelist, it is vital for Africans to rely on themselves instead of "aping" foreigners' values to create their own identity. This is in fact what he points out when he states: we "cannot ape and hope to create." (Ngũgĩ, 2003, p.162).

This study will be carried out in the contestatory dimension of the postcolonial approach, as Moura perceives it. For him indeed, one of the targets of postcolonial approaches is to fight "the colonial codes" (Moura, 1999, p. 127) which tends to deny Africans the right to life. As a matter of fact, an analysis of the novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, enables to assert that they unveil the relationships between the 'new' "centre and the periphery" (Ashcroft, 2002, p.134), between the ruling elites and working masses which have replaced respectively the

former colonizers and the colonized. This theory seems all the more appropriate that it is about a confrontation of two opposed identities: the African identity and the European one.

This article which discusses the way the African identity can be restored will be woven around three major axes. To this end, the first part shows that the identity issue has always been at the heart of the African literature and the way the 'first' African identity markers were spoiled. As for the second axis, it chiefly discusses the way key characters of the two novels react to the destabilization of this identity and techniques the writer resorts to in the restoration process of the identity. The last part reveals that some attitudes developed by major characters can be considered as the results of the definition of the new African identity.

## **I. WRITING THE AFRICAN IDENTITY : THE NOMOS OF MODERN AFRICAN LITERATURE**

The question of identity is not a new one, particularly in the African literature as it has always been at its heart. If the pioneers of this literature (Plaatje and Mofolo) have discussed it in various ways, those of the second generation kept on laying the emphasis on this topic. From then on, it is possible to assert that from the beginning until now the identity issue is addressed in the African literature. Early African writers show the pervasiveness of the question of identity through constant references to the African traditional way of life, its political structure as well as its economic organizations. Thus, African beliefs and heroes which are referred to in Mofolo's *Chaka* are a clear emphasis on the African identity.

As for the writers of the second generation, their works generally unveil the failure of African independences due to incapacity of the ruling elites to address the problems masses are confronted to. All in all, the identity issue is the backbone, the guiding principle even the nomos of the African literature. In other words, African writers cannot detach themselves from this question which they take into account while writing their novels. To some extent they seem to be considerably influenced by their surrounding environment that they try to represent to the western world, in particular.

However the conditions of emergence a literary work are very often taken into account in its analysis. Then, if some argue that there is no link between literary outputs and the surrounding environment, others hold that there is a close relationship between the writer's production and the world which surrounds him. Paul Dorn is part of the second group as he holds that literature is based on the writer's social realities. This tight relationship between the

literary output and the writer's environment shows that the writer is, in many cases, influenced by his surrounding environment. The constant interest of the writer for his closest world is emphasized by Paul Dorn :

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum, it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo- colonialism. (Paul Dorn, 1999, p.1)

It is therefore possible to say that economic, political and social situations are the underlying grounds upon which many writers base their works. In other words, the socio- political and even economic context in which a literary work is written influences it. Ngũgĩ is part of those African writers who do not overlook the realities of their land. Many of his novels, reflect the identity of the Kenyan people. Through the allusions to the political organization, the social structure, the cultural customs and the economic habits of the Kikuyus, Ngũgĩ actually depicts his land, his people. This is the case of *Weep not, Child*, which is considered as an autobiography or *The River Between* that lays bare a cultural clash between two tribes as well. His post-independence *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* which linger on the mismanagement of public affairs by new ruling elites once the Kenyan independence was achieved are also a depiction of the realities of his land. Thus, the identity is implicitly depicted through the narration of the local atmosphere in Ngũgĩ's works.

A close look at the selected works of the corpus (*Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*) reveals the writer's profound interest for values such as brotherhood, justice and love which, he claims, had prevailed in pre-colonial Kenya. The closeness of people with values such as brotherhood which was a key value before Kenya achieved its independence is recalled by Ngũgĩ as he wrote : "when a bean fell, we split it and we share it." (Ngũgĩ, *Devil on the Cross*, 1986, p.56). Kikuyu people were so attached to self sacrifice that they were ready to give their life for the salvation of their peers. This sense of sacrifice is expressed as they say " few must die so that many shall live" (Ngũgĩ, 1967, p.167)

In addition to self sacrifice which connotes identity for the Kenyans, one can also see the presence of orature : a mixture of oral elements in the narration. The corpus is in fact dominated by a series of oral items such as songs, riddles, stories, proverbs etc., which give the text a new tone, a mixed identity since the original text becomes a mixture of two different genres : the written and the oral one.

If, through proverbs, it is possible to see the writer's interest in his land values, the latter are also used to fulfil a specific target. As a matter of fact, in Africa, proverbs are generally used to show one's mastery of the language, knowledge of his land and also to teach values to the listener. The proverb also has an aesthetic dimension. Emphasizing the double function of proverbs, Achebe asserted that : "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." (Achebe, 1958, p.7) By this assertion, the nigerian writer implicitly mentions the social role of proverbs as images that are used by the speaker help facilitate their understanding. In our corpus, some proverbs are elicited in order to teach wisdom or carefulness. This is the case when the narrator says "the hunter who stalks his prey too stealthily may frighten it off in the end." (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.21) Here, Ngũgĩ is not alluding to a real hunter but rather to anyone pursuing an objective. In his quest, the latter should be clever and careful, otherwise he could fail and miss his objective.

In *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, another key value which can be considered as an identity marker is solidarity. Indeed, the bloody struggles that preceded the Kenyan independence can help better understand the allusion to this value. In fact, the Mau Mau fighters had to show solidarity to defeat the british colonial forces. To some extent, solidarity has a particular meaning for them since it has become the guiding principle of their lives. For instance, the oath Mau Mau fighters had to take during the war, gave a special meaning to their conception of solidarity as everyone had to comply with. In short, solidarity can be considered as an identity marker since the understanding they had of it went beyond a mere promise ; it was a binding act that united all the fighters. The interest of the writer for the notion of solidarity is recalled through the metaphor of the louse provided by the narrator of *Devil on the Cross* :

A single finger cannot kill a louse ; a single log cannot make a fire last through the night ; a single man, however strong, cannot build a bridge across a river ; and many hands can lift a weight, however heavy.  
(Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.25)

Through these words, the writer reveals that victory can be obtained with unity. As a matter of fact, it is together that a bridge, in other words a nation, can be built. It is when people unite their forces that they can lift heavy weights, that is to say take up challenges. On the contrary, once are divided, people cannot win victories and it becomes easier for the ennemy to defeat them. Solidarity was so specific to the Kenyans that the writer is disappointed by its lack in the post independence Kenya. The precedence of solidarity is recalled, through a song, by the narrator of when he says :

Great love I sow there,  
Among the women and the children.  
When a bean fell,  
We would share it among ourselves (Ngũgĩ, 1986, pp.55-56)

Through this song, the author shows how special the notion of solidarity was for the people of his land. Everyone believed in its importance as it was the driving force of all their actions. The metaphor of the bean is important since it is part of the Kenyans' eating habits. It can then be understood as an identity marker since every Kenyan recognizes himself in it.

The realistic mood of Ngũgĩ's narrative is captured through reference to know local geographical sites like the reference to these places create an 'illusion of referentiality', or reality. While some writers prefer using imaginary sites which are therefore the products of their imagination, Ngũgĩ usually uses real places to which are added historical dates. As a matter of fact, the corpus is dominated by recurrent allusions to Kenyan places such as the Maximum Security Prison (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p.90), Mombasa, Nairobi (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.10), Kariokor, Eastleigh (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.30) and Ofafa Jericho (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.26) which are places that still exist in Kenya.

The reference to these places is far from being fortuitous. In fact, this topos which can only be seen in this country gives the novel a special meaning since the places themselves are special ones. To some extent, they portray an identity value because they help establish a certain specificity. Nairobi which is referred to in the novels is actually the capital city of Kenya; it is above all the Kenyans' cattlemen known as Masai's land. As for Kibera, which is located in Nairobi, it is one of the largest slums of East Africa. The allusion to these places aims at giving an outline of some Kenyan places and implicitly informing the reader about his land, his identity.

The identity issue is displayed in the corpus under various forms. In fact, if some identity values appear through oral markers (songs, riddles and proverbs etc), others are also depicted through virtues like solidarity, compliance to an oath and brotherhood which are cherished by Kenyans in a particular way. Moreover, the narrative space is endowed with an identity dimension as areas that are referred to, have a specific meaning for the local populations. However, with the advent of colonization, all these identity markers have been considerably impacted. The situation worsened in the postcolonial atmosphere with the antagonistic views

opposing the centre and the periphery which 'constrains' the writer to shed light on the harsh realities endured by his countrymen for reshaping of the local identity.

## **II. WRITING THE IDENTITY CRISIS AND ITS REBIRTH IN POST INDEPENDENCE KENYA**

The achievement of independence in many African countries paved the way to former African freedom fighters who eventually seized power. This was also the case of Kenya where the coming to power of local leaders did not improve the situation. On the contrary, the new African rulers showed less interest in the lot of their population and failed to meet their expectations. Moral and physical exploitation of their peers, money laundering, embezzlement of public funds, dispossession of fertile lands were their new ways of management. Recalling this context of anomy "where everything is upside down." (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p.137), that is to say a Kenya where values are trampled down, Mwaura, declares : "Business is my temple and money is my God" (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p. 56). In other words, the interests of the new elite no longer go hand in hand with the ones of the masses' concerns.

The new center, embodied by this ruling elite, takes pleasure in oppressing the periphery represented by the exploited masses. Solidarity and brotherhood are no more praised in the new Kenya which has edicted a new vision which cherishes selfishness, oppression and alienation. In a context of new forms of domination and oppression, Ngũgĩ's reaction is manifold. One of the major reactions is to be found in the new orientation he took. In fact, unlike Thomas Mofolo whose works were produced in Sesotho (an African language), Ngũgĩ has decided, since 1980 with his *Devil on the Cross*, to stop writing the original version of his novels in English. By so doing, he stopped promoting Europeans languages since for him, *we* "cannot ape and hope to create" (Ngũgĩ, 2003, p.162).

Indeed, as long as African writers will keep on writing in European languages (French, English and Portuguese), they will be promoting a culture of alienation which was the target of colonization. On the contrary, through African languages the dominated periphery (Africa) henceforth contests the hegemony of the centre, (mainly Europe). Ngũgĩ's quest for originality would actually be a peaceful break of "colonial codes" (Moura, 1999, p.127). In clearer words, the choice he made aimed at refusing western languages and education which have been used by the colonizers to impose and spread their dominating ideology on the Africans.

On top of the decision that Ngũgĩ made by writing his fictional works in kikuyu, he later on opted for hybridization, a key feature of the postcolonial writing. In fact, the corpus is dominated by a mixture of English words and kikuyu ones. Items such as *lasso* (in *Matigari*) (p.32), *Matatu Matata Matamu* (p.20) and *Kitenge* (p.43) (*Devil on the Cross*) are incorporated in the narrations. Here the purpose of this association of two languages (Kikuyu and English) is to contest a so called supremacy of European languages on African ones. The novelist tends to denounce and criticize the European model. The message conveyed by the writer is that both languages are on the same wavelength and because colonization is over, both languages can harmoniously live together. This way, there is no reason, for Africans to develop an inferiority complex. By resorting to this technique, the writer falls in line with one of postcolonial perception : the contestatory dimension.

The purpose of the writer is to define a new framework of the African identity. For him, this identity redefinition can be carried out through the mixture of languages which is known as hybridization. This technique serves a specific purpose : to present a new model of identity. Ngũgĩ is not promoting a static identity nor is he defending a fall back on his kikuyu identity. He is rather pleading for a dynamic one, a moving identity. Such an identity can be recognized through its capacity to enrich itself from the others. As a matter of fact, an identity which does not open itself to others is a dangerous one, a mutilated since it is likely to bring about chaos and disorder within the community. This dark side of some identities is highlighted by Maalouf when he refers to "Les identités meurtrières" (Maalouf, 2003). Because as Séry Bailly puts it, in his tribute to Memel Fotê : "identities are made to meet and enrich one another. " (Séry Bailly, *Notre voie*, 2008, p.12)

In his quest for the redefinition of an African identity, Ngũgĩ resorts to a variety of techniques among which there is hybridization: a mixture of languages. In addition, he resorts to a scatological writing. This technique whereby faeces and dirt are referred to is a representation of the ugliness of the postcolonial world. By revealing the reality in all its nakedness, the author shows the real identity of the postcolonial society he lives in. The writer refuses to hide the reality and implicitly decides not to be an accomplice of the corruption and the destruction of the society. This way, sequences where human faeces are presented or where some characters do not bother to talk about genital organs are laid bare. Even the environment experiences this new form of corruption. Indeed, the writer accounts for the pervasive and repulsive dirtiness of Nairobi which goes along with the new postcolonial identity. The society is so worried about

business and making money that it doesn't care anymore about the poor state of the environment.

Have you never visited the slum areas of Nairobi to see for yourself the amazing sight of endless armies of fleas and bedbugs marching up and down the walls, or the sickening, undrained, full of ditches, full of brackish water, shit and urine, the naked, the naked children swimming in those very ditches? ... Human shit and urine and the carcasses of dead dogs and cats- all these make the area smell as if it were nothing but pure putrefaction. (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.130)

The semantic field displayed in this passage dominated by the idea of putrefaction, fleas, ditches, shit, urine and carcasses of dead animals gives the reader an impression of vomiting and is accordingly likely to repel him. This way, the reader who can smell, to some extent, the stench, may stop reading the novel as he feels disgusted by the narration. Therefore, through the scatological writing, the writer gives a genuine image of what characterizes the Kenyan society, hence its identity. In other words, the novelist wants to convey a message according to which the postcolonial society is a violent one as it has given birth to a "new form of violence" to take up Mbembe's words (Mbembe, 2000, p.139).

Once the new African identity is depicted in its reality, the writer invites the society to act for its reformation. For him, practices such as moral or physical corruption, which have ended in a negative transformation of his society, should be abandoned. The description of the environment was actually a criticism of all the negative behaviours which impedes the blossoming of the Kenyan society. As long as Africans keep on promoting negative values (theft and robbery, selfishness and betrayal), they cannot be happy since they will be living in a dirt environment, a repelling world which cannot attract a single visitor. If the African identity is depicted through stylistic technique, we can see, through the corpus that major characters don't remain inactive. They rather initiate measures which are worth analyzing to unveil their will to develop new attitudes : resilience and self esteem.

### **III. A NEW SENSE OF IDENTITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

Resilience can be broadly defined as the capacity to stand before a difficult situation. It can also be understood as the ability of a system to withstand changes in its environment and still function. In literature, this notion refers to the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress - such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. This way, being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress.

Garnezy views this notion as something which is "not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behavior that may follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event." (Garnezy, 1991, p.38).

Resilience is a topic that is developed by many postcolonial writers who perceive it as a reply of the periphery to the oppression of the centre. In the chosen corpus, characters' resilience can be perceived not only through their words but also through their behaviour. What seems striking is that women are presented as the spearheads of the construction of the new identity through resilience. By giving the lead of the struggle to women, the novelist tends to highlight men's incapacity to build a fairer world and breaks preconceived ideas and codes which have always identified some jobs to men. This choice can also be analyzed as the writer's disappointment about men as they failed in leading their population in the right way. In various stages, it is possible to see women fighting disorder, showing resilience and accordingly presenting a new facette of the African identity.

Wariinga, and Guthera are by far two major female characters respectively in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* whose attitude before men's oppression is amazing. Both share moral and physical oppression. In *Devil on the Cross* for example, Wariinga is first depicted as a submissive secretary but later shows that she is a two-faced character, a two-edged weapon. In fact, one can see her taking martial arts courses (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p. 224) and being a mechanic in a garage. These choices of occupation reveal that this young character is deeply interested in her self defense. By choosing to learn karate, she expresses her refusal of men's oppression and this is a case of self reliance ; for "her self- reliance was self- reliance" (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.216). Thus, she shows that her security is her own affair and imposes herself a new identity : an identity built on self reliance since she doesn't want to be ill- treated anymore by men.

Through Wariinga's case the writer is presenting a new type of identity. He redefines new identity standards which do not consider criteria such as gender, social class but rather personal convictions, thirst for justice and equity. This is also why Gaturia, though part of the ruling class, cannot support the oppression against the factory's workers. Wariinga's conviction, her optimism in a brighter future is so strong that she decides to be a mechanic, a job which is said to be specific for male. By opting for such a choice, she breaks some former codes and mistaken beliefs which praise a stratification between male and female. Beyond her choice to be a mechanic, it is actually the sick Kenyan society dominated by corruption, theft, violence, injustice etc. that she wants to redress.

In addition to ensuring her security by her own means, Wariinga also shows that she has considerably changed her mind. In fact, if she was previously alienated and keen on using European balms, now she doesn't want to be alienated. Her refusal of alienation can be explained as her emancipation in order to build a new identity : the identity of resilience. Because she resists European standards, it is possible to say that she is a resilient character who is only interested in her African values. The writer gives an idea of her refusal of western values and the great transformation in these terms :

This Wariinga is not the one who used to think that there was nothing she could do except type for others; the one who used to burn her body with *Ambi* and *Snowfire* to change the colour of her skin to please the eyes of the others; to satisfy their lust for white skins (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.216).

She is so confident that she no longer feels like using balms coming from Europe such as *Ambi* and *Snowfire*. But she is rather eager to promote the African lifestyle through her words and her behaviour. Resilience can also be seen in Wariinga's attitude, particularly when she chooses to promote the cultural values of her land. As a matter of fact, she gets rid of western clothes and opt for authentic Kenyan ones. This significant change is depicted by the narrator of *Devil on Cross* when he says: "Now she is wearing a long kitenge dress of red and white flowers. Her hair is tied in plaits running from the front of her head to the back." (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.224). She champions local values which deserve to be promoted and cherished, as revealed by the narrator:

Wariinga was dressed the Gikuyu way. A brown cloth, folded over a little at the top, had been passed under her armpit .... Around her waist Wariinga had tied a knitted belt of white wool, the two long, loose ends of which fell the length of the cloth to her ankles. On her feet she wore leopard- skin sandals. Around her neck were necklaces of white, red and blue beads, which sat beautifully on her breasts. She had Nyori- like earrings. Her hair was smooth, soft and black (Ngũgĩ, 1980, p.242).

Such a presentation with much attention paid on the way Wariinga is dressed highlights the African way of dressing which is simply beautiful, provided one dresses decently. But beyond this presentation of one specific cultural value, Ngũgĩ's claim is about the promotion of all African values and everything that follows it. Wariinga, at the same moment, is struggling for the restoration of local, national, Kenyan, African cultures and traditions since it is a relevant struggle.

Another major female character who shows resilience vis à vis male domination is Guthera. In fact, she is a particular whore who makes a distinction between her clients. This way she establishes a stratification because her choice to be a whore is for a good reason: to make her

father be set free "I will take money from strangers, thieves and even murderers, but I will never open my thighs to a policeman, these traitors whatever the money they a ready to pay." (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p.37).

The attitude of this female character can be perceived as an ardent desire for change. She pleads for a refusal of the masses oppression and the advent of a fairer world, a peaceful world characterized by love and justice. She is so interested in this value that she accepts to have sex with anyone except policemen she considers as evil doers who encourage the destruction of Kenya. This stratification in her choice falls in line with women's commitment for the transformation of the society which is recognized by Séry Bailly when he states that: " through their words, they will both refuse internal injustice and foreign submission." (Séry Bailly, 1987, p.538).

As we can see, in the corpus women are those whose responsibility is to reform a distorted and corrupt society. This noble task for the rehabilitation of the African values and identity is carried out through resilience, self esteem and dignity. If Guthera's choice to be a prostitute seems questionable, Wariinga on the contrary, is a female character who fully assumes her femininity, her responsibility. She is a character who breaks former codes and pleads for the renewal of the society, a new society where everyone is considered regardless his genre or social status.

## CONCLUSION

The history of Africa is made of domination and oppression. In fact, in their attempt to colonize the masses, Africans were either forced or convinced to abandon their values. This resulted into a cultural and political alienation of the African masses. Thus, the latter adopted a new identity by adopting western values such as christianism. In addition to the adoption of western beliefs, the seizure of power by African elites was characterized by a mismanagement of public affairs. This could be seen through rulers' corruption, masses exploitation and workers' oppression as well as the denial of their basic rights. This situation inspired Ngũgĩ whose novels, particularly *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* linger on this situation.

As one goes through the African literary space, we can see that it is so dominated by the identity issue that it seems to be its nomos. As a matter of fact, the history of the African literature enables to assert that early writers have always been preoccupied by the narration of their African values, their identity. Works either written into African languages or narrating

African values can then be considered as a way of displaying what is specific to Africans; their identity.

The task of displaying the African identity was pursued by their followers who highlighted, through their works, much interest for the same issue. For writers interested in postcolonial issues, the question of identity is a crucial one. In a globalized world, the question of identity has become a complex one in so far as it goes beyond features such as race and culture, language and history. Thus, it has become a very complex notion. Still, in the framework of this study it is considered in a specific aspect, the one where Africans have to “write back” to the West. In other words, it is about replying to any foreign theory and belief which tends to deny Africans the possession of an identity. While replying to the West, Africans must shape a new identity, based on new standards such as self confidence and resilience to cultural, political religious and economic domination.

Besides, the way solidarity is perceived in the corpus permits to grant it an identity value. In fact for the Mau Mau, it is synonymous of brotherhood and even self-sacrifice, a positive goal that is summed up by the motto : "few shall die so that many can live." (Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 1967, p. 167). As such, solidarity cannot go hand in hand with betrayal, henceforth they decided to hang anyone who dares betray his brothers.

Ngũgĩ also denounces a soulless and corrupt society and all the attitudes which contrast with the African perception, the Kenyan ideology. He rather advocates and promote the building of a new Kenyan society; a world of pure love, true justice and genuine brotherhood. The foundations of the world should also be based on African materials and values. In other words, self reliance should be the basis of the new African culture and identity. The choice of Wariinga to stop relying on men and to be a mechanic is to be understood in this sense. Through her resilience before male domination, she becomes the defendress of a new African identity based on justice, love and emancipation from the western values.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

ASHCROFT, Bill, 2002, *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Routledge, London.

BAKHTINE, Mikhail, 1978, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, Paris, Gallimard.

- ACHEBE, Chinua, 1958, *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann.
- ARMAH, Ayi Kwei, 1968, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, London, Heninemann.
- CANTALUPO, Charles, 1995, *The World of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, Trenton, Africa World Press.
- DJIMAN, Kasimi, 2011 « La prose romanesque Ngũgienne : une écriture du territoire » *Littératures africaines et territoires*, Christiane Albert (dir.), Paris, Karthala.
- GARNIER, Xavier, 2006, *Le roman swahili, la notion de littérature mineure à l'épreuve*. Paris, Karthala.
- GILROY Paul, 2010, *L'Atlantique noir, modernité et double conscience*, Paris, Editions Amsterdam.
- KLOHINLWELE Koné, 2013, *From Oral to Modern African Literature, The Signals of the Narrator's Identification in Thomas Mofolo's Chaka*, Libreville, Waves.
- MAALOUF Amin, 1998, *Les identités meurtrières*, Paris, Grasset et Fasquelle.
- MARTIN Denis-Constantin (dir.), 2010, *L'identité en jeux, pouvoirs, identifications, mobilisations*, Paris, Karthala.
- MBEM André Julien, 2005, *Mythes et réalités de l'identité culturelle africaine*, Paris, L'harmattan.
- MBEMBE Achille, 2000, *De la postcolonie, Essai sur l'imagination politique dans L'Afrique contemporaine*. Paris, Karthala.
- MOURA Jean Marc, 1999, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale*, Paris, PUF.
- NGORAN David, 2012, *Les illusions de l'africanité, une analyse socio-discursive du champ littéraire*, Paris, Publibook.
- NGŪGĨ, 1980, *Devil on the Cross*, London, Heinemann.
- NGŪGĨ, 1986, *Matigari*, London, Heinemann.
- SERY Bailly, 1987, *Ayi Kwei Armah et le problème de la libération africaine*, thèse d'Etat, Université Paris XII, Paris, Val du Marne.
- SERY Bailly, n° 3140 du 24 novembre 2008, *Notre Voie*, Abidjan, La Refondation.
- YOUNG Robert, 2003, *Postcolonialism, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.