

Depictions of the Land and Nature:
Postcolonial–Ecocritical Reading of
Ngugi’s *The River Between*

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Master’s Thesis

Degree Programme for Language Specialists, Department of English

School of Language and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities University of Turku

August 2022

Turun yliopiston laatu järjestelmän mukaisesti tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -järjestelmällä.

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

School of Languages and Translation Studies / Faculty of Humanities

TEMONEN, JOONAS: Depictions of the Land and Nature: Postcolonial–Ecocritical Reading of Ngugi’s *The River Between*

MA Thesis, 40 pp., appendices 5 pp.

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In my thesis, I discuss how Ngugi wa Thiong’o uses nature to perform social critique and as a symbolic tool in his novel *The River Between*. I analyse the novel as postcolonial literature, using the theoretical framework of postcolonial ecocriticism to analyse how nature is depicted in Ngugi’s work. I use Huggan and Tiffin (2010) as my most important theoretical source, as it directly discusses postcolonial ecocriticism. In my thesis, I also discuss the social, cultural and political context behind the events of *The River Between*, and touch upon Ngugi’s personal life as a source of inspiration for his works.

In the analysis, I discuss the different depictions of nature and how Ngugi’s critique and symbolism is present in those. The elements of nature that I analyse are the two ridges upon which the villages are built, the land of the Gikuyu, the Sacred Grove present in the novel, Mount Kerinyaga (Mount Kenya), the Honya River, and the sun.

In my analysis I argue that Ngugi uses the depictions related to the land serve as critique towards colonization. Ngugi is criticising colonialism and the loss of culture and disunity it created for the Gikuyu. I also present two different arguments: one arguing for the existence of hybrid thoughts, and another which is direct critique against them, arguing that hybridity in itself denotes submissiveness towards colonization. I also argue that the depictions of the river and the sun are mainly critique against uncentricity, which is reoccurring in Ngugi’s works.

Keywords: *The River Between*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, postcolonial ecocriticism, ecocriticism, postcolonial literature, nature, depictions of nature, environment, Africa, East Africa, ecological imperialism, postcolonial critique, African literature, Gikuyu / Kikuyu, postcolonial analysis, uncentricity

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1. Introduction

All human life is surrounded, supported and sustained by the nature and the environment around it. As nature is instrumental to all life on the planet, it is normal that there are a multitude of cultures with differing relationships with nature.

Furthermore, these relationships have been changing at a rapid pace due to reasons that are relatively new like modern globalisation, or if we were to look further into the past, colonisation. Nature and culture thus go hand in hand, and if one is to look at nature and its portrayals in literature it is important to also look at culture and the anthropological aspect. This is doubly so for theses that analyse postcolonial works, as in these works nature often reflects how colonisation is viewed by the author. I will now introduce my research topics and the novel in question, which also serves as my primary source for this whole thesis.

This thesis is an analysis of the novel *The River Between* by Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o (known earlier as James Ngugi, which he later changed into a traditional Gikuyu name). *The River Between* as a novel is clearly postcolonial, having its setting in colonised East Africa. It is a very much researched novel, especially from the point of view of postcolonialism. My focus, however, will be on nature. I am highly interested in postcolonial studies, but as my focus is nature, a simple postcolonial reading will not work. Thus, this thesis is a postcolonial ecocritical reading of *The River Between* to combine nature and the postcolonial into a single theoretical framework.

My thesis aims to answer the following question: how are postcolonial themes, and the fact that this is a postcolonial work, reflected on the nature represented in this novel. I will go through all the key elements of nature present in the work (e.g., the great mountain Kirinyaga, the Honya River). These elements are present in almost every chapter, so they are clearly a major part of the setting, and the characters of the novel constantly interact with them. My analysis will thus centre on how these elements of nature are described and portrayed, and what are the meanings they carry. The analysis of this novel will be on nature itself, thus requiring a different framework from just postcolonial analysis. To repeat and summarize the research questions I aim to answer: How do Ngugi's depictions of nature reflect the postcolonial themes of *The River Between*, and how does Ngugi use these depictions to perform postcolonial critique on socio-political, cultural and historical levels.

My hypothesis regarding the answer to the research question is the following: nature is portrayed in a way that reflects the postcolonial themes already present in *The River Between*. Thus, I argue that nature is one of the tools that Ngugi uses to reinforce the postcolonial feeling and themes (e.g., Otherness, loss of culture, theft of resources). Furthermore, as Ngugi has been one to push for the revival and appreciation for his native Gikuyu culture (and other East-African cultures, too), I will also be interested how Ngugi's portrayal of nature compares to other portrayals in African and more specifically East African literature.

Like mentioned earlier *The River Between* is a very much researched novel, and Ngugi is an extremely researched author. In fact, some of Ngugi's works are in the required reading list in, for example, the department of postcolonial studies' PhD program in the University of Waterloo (University of Waterloo). Similarly, this very novel is one of the novels chosen for the University of Turku's course on Contemporary Literature (which is where I was introduced to it). To study *The River Between*, a fresh point of view is necessary for there to identify a significant research gap. Luckily, postcolonial ecocritical readings of *The River Between* have not yet been exhausted. The postcolonial ecocritical framework is still quite new, but it has been used for other postcolonial works from Africa and East Africa. Thus, there exists a research gap, and there also exist parallel studies of other works making this a very productive topic for my thesis.

To summarize, nature is a part of colonialization that is often forgotten, as postcolonial theory is often very anthropocentric. However, culture is always combined with nature. It is important to include nature into the many themes of postcolonial analysis (although through a slightly different theoretical framework) so that postcolonial understanding and analysis truly encapsulates all important points. Ngugi is a postcolonial critic, and he performs this criticism through his depictions of nature as well. This thesis will analyze how he uses nature, and what are its meanings and relationship with his culture. The relationship between culture and nature is important, as loss of culture is one of the consequences of colonization.

The thesis will be outlined in the following way explained in the next paragraphs. This first chapter is the introduction, where I will introduce the topic and research questions of the thesis. The second chapter will be an introduction and explanation of postcolonial theory and ecocritical postcolonial theory. In this chapter I use Graham Huggan and

Helen Tiffin (2010) as my main theoretical source. The chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks on a general and theoretical level. The third chapter will then go more in depth, as I will focus on Ngugi wa Thiong'o, East Africa in general and the Gikuyu. More precisely, this will be from the scope of postcolonial ecocriticism. To summarize, chapter 3 will focus on the actual African context of *The River Between* and Ngugi, and I will approach this context by applying postcolonial ecocriticism.

Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on the analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on how the lands present in *The River Between* are depicted, meaning the lands where the story takes place. These are the twin ridges where the villages of the Gikuyu are situated, the lands of the Gikuyu in general, the Sacred Grove and the Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya). The following chapter, chapter 5, discusses depictions of nature that are not part of the land of the Gikuyu. These are the Honya River, which has an extremely central role in *The River Between* (as the very name implies), and the depiction of the sun in the novel, which is also extremely symbolic in nature. The sun is not exactly a part of nature, but its light and warmth sustains life on Earth. The sun is thus part of the natural ecosystems of the planet. After these, I conclude the thesis with chapter 6, the conclusion which acts as a final note and summary of the thesis and my arguments, also providing some suggestions for further research.

However, before we can move to the second chapter and past the introduction, a brief plot summary is still required. I will shortly explain the plot and main characters of *The River Between*, after which I will make a transition into the more theoretical sections of this thesis like I explain above. In essence, the novel is the coming-of-age story of a Gikuyu boy named Waiyaki, who is the son of the village chief. The setting is the following: there exist two villages which used to be enemies, Makuyu and Kameno. Between these is the sacred river Honya, which is – together with the sun – the source of life of the valley and the two ridges. The story revolves Waiyaki's relationship with the events and the cultures around him. A big focus is on the native culture and rites of the Gikuyu people, and how the political and social environment begins to change after the British arrive to colonise these lands.

Waiyaki's father, Chege, places upon him great expectations, telling him he must liberate the hills from the the colonizers. He sends Waiyaki to a missionary school for him to learn the knowledge of the Caucasian colonisers so he can be better prepared to

lead his people against them. Waiyaki also meets Nyambura and Muthoni, the daughters of a Gikuyu man, Joshua, who had converted to Christianity. Muthoni rejects her father's faith for her native culture but dies in the initiation rite (female genital mutilation) of the Gikuyu. This is one of the major turning points for Waiyaki, as he starts to feel estranged from his own culture due to these events and his Christian education.

Waiyaki cares for his people a great deal, and even though he is enveloped in a feeling of otherness towards his environment, he attempts to lead his people in the best way he can. He builds schools for the children, independent from the church. This gives him great fame and the position of spiritual leader of the ridges. However, Waiyaki, in his feelings of otherness and his pragmatic drive towards investing in the education of his people is driven to not focus on the cultural aspect of tutoring. This, coupled with the fact that he develops romantic feelings for Joshua's other daughter, who is a Christian, gives his enemies a great pretext to plot his downfall.

Kabonyi, an influential traditionalist elder of the tribe dislikes Waiyaki, as he is a young leader with no proper respect for the old and seasoned tribe leaders. He is also a man clearly jealous of Waiyaki's position. Thus, although Waiyaki only wants what is good for his people, Kabonyi manages to twist his actions (his love for a Christian, his innovative spirit, his Christian education and his sidelining of Gikuyu culture) into seeing as if he is an enemy of the people who aims for the Christianisation of the hills and has no respect for his native culture.

In the end, Waiyaki is rejected by his people and probably executed. The novel has a very depressive ending where Waiyaki gathers his resolve to lead his people even though he is haunted by feelings of not belonging and otherness, only to be rejected by all factions. Joshua and the Christian faction reject him due to what happened with Nyambura and Muthoni, Kabonyi's traditionalist faction rejects him due to his innovation and the jealousy they feel towards him. And lastly the people themselves reject him due to Kabonyi's machination, even if he was almost a hero to them before. Nyambura, another character between cultures and values, and his good friend Kinuthia are the only characters to not reject him. Waiyaki's feelings of otherness are one of the major themes I study through nature in this thesis.

2. Postcolonialism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism

In this chapter I discuss my theoretical framework from a very general point of view. I discuss postcolonialism in general, as well as postcolonial ecocriticism which is the main theoretical framework of this thesis. I also delve deeper into the topic and discuss ecological imperialism. Lastly, I touch on some ethical issues regarding this thesis and its writing. Like mentioned, this chapter will discuss things on a general level while Chapter 3, the next chapter, will discuss things in a more precise manner, providing the actual context necessary for this literary analysis of *The River Between*.

2.1. About Postcolonialism in General

“Postcolonial theory takes on the politics of the study of ‘English’ literature and culture from the perspective of those who were colonized by it,” is how Mary Klages (2006, 152) explains postcolonial literary theory. Klages (2006, 153) explains that one of the primary aims of postcolonial literature is to give a voice to the colonized, and to serve as critique and counter to the imperialist discourse of the western colonizers. It examines how colonists exert their power and invade the culture of the colonized (ibid.). To give another definition of postcolonial studies, Michael Ryan (2017, 215) defines it in the following way: “Postcolonial studies takes two forms – the study of writing by ‘postcolonial’ writers, usually the indigenous peoples of countries colonized by countries such as England, and the study of the discourse and literature of imperialism.”

If we were to adhere by the definition for postcolonial studies provided by Ryan, *The River Between* is clearly a postcolonial work, meaning that a postcolonial study and analysis is very appropriate for its discussion. Like I summarized in the introduction, Ngugi’s story’s setting is in colonized Africa, serving as a direct example of a postcolonial setting written by an indigenous person of an imperial colony. In fact, according to Simon Gikandi (2000, 71) some of Ngugi’s works “were written in the shadow of colonial rule in its most violent form.” Furthermore, Gikandi (2000, 98) also explains that Ngugi’s works are most often interpreted as critical writings of the imperialist colonization of his homeland. As postcolonial works often have a critical side to them, the symbolism found within the works is most often critical in their comprehension and analysis.

This is seen in *The River Between* in many forms. To give a very clear example, the ending itself is critique towards white colonization, as the African people are turned against each other due to the arrival of Christianity, leading to a loss of culture and alienation between themselves. In the end, Waiyaki who does not believe in the Christian faith loses his place in the community and becomes a public enemy due to his relationship to the Christian girl Nyambura.

Rebellion by the colonized is another element that is often present in postcolonial novels. For example, Waiyaki starting his own schools separate from the Christian Missionary schools was a clear act of rebellion towards the western colonizers. Christophe Diouf (2014) agrees with this, and further explains that this is based on real events in Kenya. He explains with a self-translated source (Larson 1974, 182–183) that there actually were independent schools that were formed as a rebellion against the missionary schools and their imperialistic education.

Post-colonial readings of *The River Between* are not rare. In fact, I would say they are the most common type of reading of the novel. However, like I mention in the introduction, what I will be conducting in this thesis is a postcolonial ecocritical reading. While there also exist ecocritical readings of *The River Between*, postcolonial ecocritical readings are not common, and there are none with the focus I am using in this thesis. To summarize, I will be analysing the elements of nature present in the novel and discussing how postcolonial ecocriticism is present in these elements. I have explained that there exists a research gap regarding my exact topic, thus, I will next explain in more detail the theoretical framework of choice. Furthermore, in chapter 3 I will also show that not only does there exist a gap in research regarding this focus, but that it is also a topic that is currently trending, making its research productive and important in current academic topics.

2.2. Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Throughout *The River Between* Ngugi presents and describes nature in a multitude of ways. Nature is extremely prevalent through the novel, being present in different forms in every single chapter of the book. My argument is that this is not a coincidence, but a statement. In this thesis, I analyse how nature is shown in the novel using postcolonial

ecocritical theories as the backbone of my analysis. The fact that nature is always present in the novel already means that its analysis is meaningful and productive. In addition, this postcolonial ecocritical framework is very close to the themes that are present in the novel, making it an extremely good combination. In this subsection I will present postcolonial ecocriticism on a general level. In chapter 3 I shall give more context towards how the theory is compatible with Ngugi's works and its relevance as the chosen theoretical framework for this thesis.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is a fairly recent theoretical framework which, according to Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 2), is both arduous to define and to combine. These are two theoretical frameworks that do not share many similarities in their methods of interpretation. Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 3) further explain in their book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* that a postcolonial framework clearly focuses on humans and culture, meanwhile ecocriticism is observation and discussion of nature and the environment. Furthermore, there exists another difficulty regarding the combining of these frameworks. Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 2) explain that there is a divide between Northern and Southern environmentalism. The former is described as "rich (always potentially vainglorious and hypocritical)" while the latter one is described as "environmentalism of the poor (often genuinely heroic and authentic)" (ibid.). As we can clearly see, the former of these has no relation with postcolonial studies, so there must be great care in combining ecocriticism with postcolonial studies. The way in which the theoretical framework is combined is important for it to properly function.

However, regardless of these issues and the juxtaposition between the elements of observation between these literary theories, it is argued that postcolonial ecocriticism is not only a productive theoretical framework but also a necessary one. Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 2) make use of a quote by Pablo Mukherjee (2006, 144) which acts as a great, concise argument for the necessity of postcolonial ecocriticism:

Surely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism and imperialism (let us call it postcolonial studies) cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species.

I am using the same quote here as I feel that paraphrasing would only dilute the message in the authors' quote. Mukherjee touches on the core issue which is the following: even if postcolonial studies and ecocriticism have different focal points, to discuss colonialism is to discuss nature. Culture is intertwined with nature, as nature shapes culture, and nature is also a resource, a subject of great interest for imperialistic goals. Thus, matters of nature cannot be discussed without acknowledging the political and historical situation around them, and similarly culture cannot be discussed without mentioning the environment in which the culture exists.

Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2007, 79) argue that the most important thing that postcolonial ecocriticism accomplishes is showcasing the complex and everchanging relationship between humans, nature and animals. Cilano and DeLoughrey (ibid.) also explain the relationship between nature and culture is one of the principal things to discuss, as it is culture that shapes and guides the relationship. That is why, in the later chapters, I will be discussing the relationship of the Gikuyu with nature that we see in *The River Between*.

Earlier I made the distinction between Southern and Northern environmentalism. Postcolonial ecocriticism is clearly meant to represent southern environmentalism, as it aims to showcase how the exploitation of nature is shown in literature, as well as the above-mentioned cultural relationships with nature. Thus, in the following subsection I present various ways in which nature is exploited according to the postcolonial ecocritical theoretical framework. I will explain the term Ecological Imperialism, and present the main definition I will use in this thesis.

2.2.1 Ecological Imperialism

Imperialism, its effects and how it is done is one of the main studies of postcolonial studies. The same is true for postcolonial ecocriticism, but it adds an environmental focus to this. One of the first to use this term was Alfred Crosby (1986) in his study of the same name, along with an earlier one called *The Columbian Exchange* (Crosby 1973), the author explains that it was in fact the consequences of ecological imperialism that were the most apparent. Imperialism has always been a highly discussed topic, but

ecological imperialism has not been given enough importance due to lacking a clearly anthropocentric focus.

Regarding the definition of ecological imperialism, Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 3–4) present three different forms of this type of imperialism. The first of these is Val Plumwood's (2001) definition of the term. According to Plumwood, ecological imperialism is derivative of the Western idea of seeing nature and the environment as 'other'. This creates a distance between humanity and nature and makes nature not part of normal human needs. It downgrades nature, an essential and integral part of human life, to the position of a dispensable resource to be used until it has run out.

This definition of ecological imperialism is one I will use in my analysis, as it neatly incorporates western disregard for nature. In my thesis, one of the main topics of analysis is the growing distance between nature and humans, in other words, of the Gikuyu and their own culture. This is a theoretical framework that I utilise to show how Ngugi uses nature as one of the tools for performing imperialistic critique, which he is very well known for. My thesis also discusses the main character's, Waiyaki's, feeling of otherness towards nature and his own culture, which I explain and analyse through Plumwood's definition of ecological imperialism. As I noted earlier, even though ecological imperialism is mostly about physical nature, I will also discuss the effects ecological imperialism from a cultural point of view. Before we move further with the thesis, I will also provide the other two definitions for ecological imperialism. They will not be as important for my thesis, but providing the other definitions will make my focus clearer, and also provide clarity towards the differences between the definitions. In other words, it will clearly show the point of view I will use while simultaneously also showing the foci that I will not use.

Thus, to continue presenting the different definitions of ecological imperialism, Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 4) call the second definition biocolonisation. Biocolonisation as a term is used to discuss, for example, the technological experiments of the west and their effects on the biopolitical level (ibid.). Huggan and Tiffin (ibid.) give concrete examples such as biopiracy and genetic modifications that are patented by western powers. This second definition, while being a good theoretical framework for many research papers, does not provide much for my thesis.

The last form is named environmental racism which Huggan and Tiffin (ibid.) explain in the following way:

Environmental racism is perhaps best understood as a sociological phenomenon, exemplified in the environmentally discriminatory treatment of socially marginalised or economically disadvantaged peoples, and in the transference of ecological problems from their 'home' source to a 'foreign' outlet (whether discursively, e.g., through the more or less wholly imagined perception of other people's 'dirty habits', or materially, e.g., through the actual re-routing of First World commercial waste).

Again, this theoretical framework is not as applicable to my own thesis as the first one, but I will introduce it nonetheless. The quote showcases very current issues like the relationship between the west and the poor countries regarding topics such as waste management and the clothing industry. These are extremely important topics, but they do not fit well within my focus. To understand the term ecological imperialism, it was necessary to give all these definitions. However, in this thesis I will be focusing on Plumwood's definition of the term.

2.3. Ethical Concerns: Native or Postcolonial

The terms native and postcolonial are intertwined and often used together. However, in a compilation of studies, Gillian Whitlock (2015, 14) reiterates an important notion that native and postcolonial are not the same thing. In essence, what Whitlock means is that not all native literature is postcolonial, as native cultures and narratives have existed long before colonization. He further states that categorizing all native literature as postcolonial is in fact imperialist, as it claims the preimperial native narratives as part of western postcolonial narrative, which acts as appropriation of native culture. This is an important difference to make in general, but the reason for its importance within this thesis is due to the topics that are discussed within this work.

While *The River Between* as a primary source for this thesis is clearly set in a postcolonial setting, to properly understand and analyse the text I must also present elements of precolonial narrative within these settings, as the postcolonial settings of postcolonial novels are always built upon the pre-existing precolonial culture and values. So, although I analyse the novel from the scope of postcolonial ecocriticism, I also present the necessary context for nature before colonization began. Thus, while

providing this precolonial context into a postcolonial analysis, I fully acknowledge that the information I provide is of native origin independent of later western influence and appropriation of culture. Furthermore, in the concluding paragraph I offer some ethical concerns regarding this thesis.

While throughout this thesis I show that I have done the necessary research to be an informed and academic speaker on the topics discussed, it is still imperative to mention my background. I am a Caucasian male, the most privileged group that one can belong. Furthermore, I have never been to Africa, meaning I cannot comment on the situation as it would be seen from one's own eyes as I have never seen it. This of course does not discredit my thesis in any way, but I believe it is important to mention due to multiple reasons. One reason is for my privilege to become apparent. I am in the position where I can analyze and research this topic without any personal connection, which is probably both a good and a bad thing. Good in the sense that I can easily stay neutral, but bad in the sense that I am quite distanced from the topic. Thus, I declare that if this research were to be done with someone with a different background to mine, it could ultimately end up looking very different. Again, this is not a bad thing, just something that needs to be said and an interesting proposition for further research for future readers of my thesis.

3. Sociocultural and Political Context

The purpose of the previous chapter was to present the theoretical framework in a very general manner and discuss some points that need to be addressed before focusing on the less general topics of the thesis, like the above-mentioned ethical concerns. In other words, its purpose was to give general context into the theoretical framework and thesis. In comparison, the aim of this third chapter is to give actual, more precise context for the theoretical framework. This chapter ties in the story of *The River Between* with its social, cultural and political context, and within it I explain how postcolonial ecocriticism more closely relates to the East-African situation and narrative with the use of similar postcolonial ecocritical studies. In addition, the discussion regarding East-African and African postcolonial ecocritical research and its context in historical events will mostly happen below, I will also intertwine it with the analysis chapters (chapters 4 and 5) when I deem it more appropriate to present it side by side with the analysis of the novel.

3.1. The Gikuyu and Ngugi wa Thiong'o

The Gikuyu are a Bantu tribe around modern Kenya, situated next to Mount Kenya ("Kikuyu" 2020). In fact, Mount Kenya is one of the most important elements of nature present in *The River Between*. In the novel Mount Kenya is discussed by its Gikuyu name, Kirinyaga. This land around Kirinyaga, where the events of the novel mostly take place is the ancestral home of the Gikuyu (Muriuki 1974, 26). The Gikuyu are important to mention before we move on to discuss Ngugi and his history, as Gikuyu history is something that has clearly shaped Ngugi's works. The Gikuyu are the largest ethnic group in Kenya (around 20% of the population) and they are accredited with being the leaders of the resistance against colonization which ultimately led to independence ("Kikuyu" 2020). They resisted the British colonial agenda and instigated a rebellion (the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s) which led to the Gikuyu being oppressed due to their unwillingness to submit to the colonizers (ibid). In the end the Gikuyu were the frontrunners for independence, and they obtained social prestige after independence due to their efforts. However, before this they were the ethnic group that was most targeted by British rule due to being seen as instigators.

All of the above is reflected in both Ngugi wa Thiong'o's life and his literature. Nicholas Kamau-Goro (2010) argues that Ngugi's style has evolved throughout the years, starting as a liberal writer who argued for the potential union of Western and African culture in Africa by taking the best aspects of both. This, for example, is seen in *The River Between* (his first work, although not his first one to be published), where the ending can be read as critique towards the rejection towards compromise. In the ending Kabonyi and his purely traditionalist values win, and Waiyaki is apathetically defeated (him being a hybrid character between cultures who only wants the best for his people).

However, later in his career Ngugi clearly becomes more radicalized in his relationship with the English language and the West. He starts advocating for literature in native languages and aimed to abolish the English department of the university he worked at entirely (Chandran 2005). K. Narayan Chandran also explains that Ngugi placed a great importance on the teaching of oral literature as one of the pillars of culture. The importance he gives these oral traditions can very much be seen in his works as well. For example, Dustin Crowley (2013, 16) explains that Gikuyu myths are immensely present in Ngugi's works, and they are the main tool through which he portrays precolonial Africa. Ngugi's works are postcolonial, so he uses these myths to create a sense of connection. Crowley (ibid.) adds that it is through these myths that a sense of shared culture and past is created. This can be seen in *The River Between*, where these myths are the very backbone of society and politics of the Gikuyu society. The arguments between Kabonyi and Waiyaki are portrayed through the use of these myths and the novel itself begins with the origin story of the land they inhabit.

In *The River Between*, most of these myths are related to the land somehow. They are related to Mount Kirinyaga, or the Honya River, or to how the Gikuyu heroes came and were given the sacred land. They are all related to the environment in some way, because, as I have discussed, nature is the origin of culture. Thus, the myths he uses in his literature are culture itself. Through these myths and his portrayal of nature, Ngugi is discussing precolonial Gikuyu culture. However, I also argue that simultaneously he is using these same elements of nature to critique postcolonial society and circumstances. This is not seen only in nature, but also through the relationship with nature that the characters hold (mainly Waiyaki). This means that analysing how nature is portrayed in his works is very productive and important. Ngugi's nature carries a lot of meanings and

interpretations, so it is important to analyze these from many perspectives for research to advance. I argue that this is what makes my thesis unique and creates a gap in research. Later, in the analysis chapters I will show through examples and arguments that my earlier thesis statement is true.

Another theme that is strongly present in Ngugi's works is religion. Although it is not overtly related to my theme of nature, Ngugi's works contain so much religious symbolism and references that it needs to be discussed at least shortly, as otherwise my analysis would be left lacking. Douglas Killam and Rose Rowe (2000, 239) explain that to discuss literature from Africa means to always discuss religion, as religion is an undeniably major part of the African worldview. According to the prior statement, religion must be addressed in some form to perform literary analysis of African works.

Nicholas (2010) also discusses the religious symbolism in Ngugi's works. Earlier, I explained that Nicholas (ibid.) had argued that Ngugi's relationship with the West and Christianity has changed throughout the years. However, Nicholas (ibid.) also points out what always has stayed the same: "He continues to mine Christianity for tropes, metaphors, symbols, and an idiom of representation" (ibid.). These metaphors are very much present in the characters, event and elements of nature of *The River Between*. Ngugi discusses the elements of nature from the point of view of Gikuyu tradition, but also discusses them from Christian points of view. It is during these discussions where Ngugi showcases Waiyaki's hybrid duality the most. These are often directly related to nature, reinforcing my argument that Ngugi uses nature as a tool for postcolonial critique and discussion in *The River Between*.

3.1.1. Ngugi as a Postcolonial Author

Ultimately, Ngugi is a postcolonial author to his very core. His goal is postcolonial critique that resists imperialism and aims at deconstructing the imperialist influence that came through colonization. Ngugi (1972, 25) himself explains his sentiment well with the following quote from a collection of his essays that discuss African culture, literature and politics:

The traditional concept of the African community should not be forgotten in our rush for western culture and political institutions which some regard as the ready-made solution to our problems. In the African way, the community serves the individual. And the individual finds the fullest development of his

personality when he is working in and for the community as a whole. Land, food and wealth is for the community. In this community, culture belongs to all. For the rich and the poor, the foolish and the wise are all free to participate in the national life of the community in all its manifestations. Perhaps that is what some have meant when they talk of African Socialism. If so it is a worthy ideal.

Through Ngugi's own words we can see his agenda. He wants African solidarity that is not dependent on the imperialist structures that came to be through colonization. His words are clearly a rejection of imperialism and colonization. Apollo Amoko (2005) explains that there have been readings that argue that Ngugi, and *The River Between*, are not quite as anti-imperialistic as what I have argued. Amoko (ibid.) explains that these readings argue that Ngugi "embraces Englishness" in *The River Between*, but Amoko (ibid.) and I disagree with these arguments. Amoko (2005) explains that what some have called "embracing Englishness" in his earlier works is too ambiguous to be considered that, especially due to being irregular with the themes of his other works.

James Ogude (1999, 44) also holds the opinion that Ngugi's texts are a clear counternarrative to colonial history. In other words, Ngugi wants to offer a different telling of the events than those found in history books. Ngugi's literature is a critique towards the history written by the West, and a critique to imperialist policies and colonial power. This can also be seen in the events that Ngugi's works discuss. Eriks Uskalis (2005, 87) explains that the main reasons for Western and Native tensions were the following: female circumcision, religion, land relocation and education. Uskalis (ibid.) adds that "[g]overnment and mission schools had sought to deny access to education for female students who had been circumcised, and 'Kikuyu Karing'a' independent schools had been set up as radical alternatives." These are all themes that are without a doubt some of the main themes in *The River Between*, except maybe land relocation. Thus, *The River Between* is clearly a postcolonial work that criticizes imperialism and aims at rewriting the imperialist history through literature.

Furthermore, these are events that historically happened during his lifetime. He makes use of the culture and events he has experienced to perform this critique and create postcolonial literature. In his autobiography, *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngugi 1986, 10-13) Ngugi explains how his childhood education of the Gikuyu traditions made him proud and aware of his culture. Earlier, Ngugi (1975, preface) had also stated that in his literature he combines politics and history with his own personal experiences to give

birth to his own literary style. Crowley (2013, 14) explains that this literary style merges local and global events into one story.

Ngugi's style contains clear anti-imperialist themes and the primary tools that he uses for his literary rebellion against the colonizers is a revival of culture. This is something that is seen in Ngugi's literature and in his actions (e.g., when he argued for the abolishment of the English department). This shared resistance against the colonizers and cultural revival are both seen in *The River Between*. This rebellion through cultural revival is also seen through the elements of nature in the novel, which I will show in chapters 4 and 5. I have now given the political and cultural context for analyzing *The River Between* as a postcolonial work and Ngugi as a postcolonial author. In the next section I will also show why Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the discussion of nature are just as meaningful in an East African context.

3.2. East African Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Postcolonial ecocriticism is very topical. So is East African Postcolonial Ecocriticism, as just a year ago, in 2021, Alex Nelungo Wanjala (2021) published an article called "(East) African Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Revisiting Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Prisoner*." In his article, Wanjala not only discusses p'Bitek's works but East African literature's relationship with nature as a whole. Wanjala (2021, 2) says the following:

As was highlighted at the 1965 symposium mentioned above, a love for nature and the environment has always been part of East Africa's cultural heritage and this was depicted in the literary texts that emerged from the region even in pre-independence times and has been addressed in critical studies of African literature, in one way or the other since then. Concurrently, over the years, and especially since the 1970s, various paradigms of environmental literary criticism have been developed in the Global North that do not really reflect the approaches used by writers from the Global South in their critical evaluation of nature writing from their regions.

As we can see, Wanjala is discussing the same issues that were key in birthing postcolonial ecocriticism. He also discusses briefly the relationship the people and African culture has with nature, which differs greatly from most culture from the Global North. In Wanjala's (2021, 2) reading of *Song of Prisoner*, he argues that "p'Bitek uses imagery that is drawn from East Africa's natural environment in a way that evokes issues that are an assault on the prevailing social and political order in East Africa at the

time, in a nuanced manner.” Wanjala also argues that this is a tool used to preserve the environment and nature of East Africa. I believe Ngugi’s work does the same. It is an attempt to encapsulate and preserve the nature of the Gikuyu before colonization transforms it into something entirely different. Wanjala argues that this is one of the reasons why postcolonial ecocriticism is so fitting for *Song of Prisoner*, and I argue that the same is the case for Ngugi’s *The River Between*.

Ngugi is an extremely influential East African author. Mark Mathuray (2009, 1) thinks his style has similarities with other influential African authors like the Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Ngugi is part of an East African trend, he is one of the most influential writers in East African literary history. Thus, I think the reason for a lack of postcolonial ecocritical readings of Ngugi’s works is mainly due to how fresh the theoretical framework is. There are a lot of influential works that discuss nature in literature in the Global South and more specifically in Africa. For example, Rob Nixon (2011) has written a very influential text regarding the Global South’s environmentalism. Similarly, Fiona Moolla (2016) has a text that discusses of the environment is depicted in literature from Africa. These are both works that have influenced this thesis. There are even articles that combine both of these excellently, like Chengyi C. Wu’s (2016) article which merges Nixon’s ideas with a clear and specific focus on African studies. Thus, many argue that African literature is an excellent place to practice postcolonial ecocriticism.

However, while postcolonial ecocriticism is definitely very applicable to East African and African literature, Dan Wylie (2017, 113) argues that “[w]e still await, I think, a field-defining text from Africa for African ecocriticism, something of the nature of, say, Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence*.” Wylie acknowledges the impact of Nixon’s (2016) work, explaining that something as influential has yet to come from African postcolonial ecocriticism. Julia Martin (2017, 178), on the other hand, explains in her review of Nixon’s work that African environmental issues are extremely complex on a political, historical and social level, meaning that they often bring up more questions than actually answering them.

Anthony Vital (2008, 1) seems to agree with Wylie’s opinion, but adds that “there is no good reason not to develop an African ecocriticism, one that engages in debating what a society’s assigning of significance to nature (in varieties of cultural products) reveals

about both its present and past.” I agree with Vital’s thinking that while there may not be one work that is extremely influential from this field, it is still important to keep researching, as eventually an influential and field-defining work will emerge. This thesis aims at taking one step forward to fostering East African postcolonial ecocriticism. Ultimately, my goal is the same as Wanjala’s. It is to use postcolonial ecocriticism to analyze how nature is depicted and used to provide social commentary on postcolonial issues (Wanjala 2021, 18). In the following chapter 4, I will move away from theory and finally begin the analysis of *The River Between*. There will still be some theory intertwined with the analysis, but the focus will be on the latter.

4. Land of the Sleeping Lions

This is the first out of the analysis chapters on *The River Between*, and it will focus on the actual land of the Gikuyu. First, I will discuss the two ridges upon which the villages, Kameno and Makuyu, are built. A large part of the story happens on these hills, and they have a lot of meaning to the characters of the story. The other section will discuss “the Hills,” by which I mean the land that they live on. It is not very sharply defined what actually constitutes as the land or the hills, but its meaning is “the land with which the Gikuyu have a bond.” In other words, the land that they have inhabited for years. The Gikuyu myths talk about this land, which they know very well. This knowledge is inherited through oral tradition like is shown when Waiyaki’s father, Chege, teaches him about the land and its secrets. Lastly, in this chapter, I will also discuss the Sacred Grove, which Waiyaki sees after he is led there by Chege. After that, I also mention Kerinyaga, the Holy mountain of the Gikuyu quickly, as it shares similar symbolism to the sacred grove.

4.1. The Antagonistic Twin Ridges

At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the two ridges, Kameno and Makuyu as “sleeping lions which never woke” (*The River Between* 1, henceforth abbreviated as TRB). G. M. M. Grobler (1998) summarizes it well: Kameno is the village which wants to embrace tradition and rid themselves of Christianity, while Makuyu has welcomed the new faith and has rejected traditional customs like circumcision. Thus, the two ridges are juxtaposed against each other, which is apparent from the very beginning due to how the narrator describes the ridges: “Looking at them from the valley, they antagonistically face each other ‘like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region’” (TRB 1).

From this quote we can see that Ngugi uses nature as something symbolic. In this case, Ngugi uses it as a symbol of the duality present in the Gikuyu society. This duality is one of the main topics of *The River Between*, as I will show in this section. Overall, these dichotomies are very present in Ngugi’s works. For example, Crowley (2013, 15) lists a few of the dichotomies that are often found in Ngugi’s literature: tribalism vs. imperialism, unity vs. disunity, global vs. local and Christianity vs. Gikuyu. These are

all present in *The River Between*, and the twin ridges serve as a symbol of this dichotomy.

Furthermore, Waiyaki as the main character attempts to unify the ridges and pacify their antagonism. The whole story of *The River Between* is Waiyaki's journey to quell the antagonism and lead his people. However, in the end, Waiyaki fails to unite the ridges, as it is hinted at: "Only from a God's eye point of view the ridges can be seen as united" (TRB 16). Before discussing this duality and disunity further, Honya River must be mentioned as well. The ridges are antagonistic, but they are together, and this is due to the Honya River that unites and divides them. Adriaan van Klinken (2014) shares the same thoughts, commenting that: "This paradox of unity and division, evoked by the image of the river, is deployed by Ngũgĩ to narrate the story of the two Gĩkũyũ." The Honya River is an important part of the story, but I will discuss it in the next chapter and focus here on the two ridges.

Thus, like I mentioned, the two ridges symbolize their duality creating the setting for *The River Between*. This divided setting is what gives birth to the struggles of the hybrid characters who are "between the ridges." These are Waiyaki, the main character, and Muthoni, Nyambura's sister who perishes after rebelling against his Christian father and getting circumcised of her own will. Nyambura, Waiyaki's love interest is also a hybrid character. Ogude (1999, 126) states that Waiyaki acts as the mediator in the novel, he is a hybrid entity trying to keep the hills together. Waiyaki tries to be inclusive and be a good leader, but in the end this deepens his status as a hybrid character, ultimately confusing him. I will discuss the otherness felt by Waiyaki in the Sacred Grove chapter.

Uskalis (2005, 86) states the following about Waiyaki: "Waiyaki habitually desires to appeal to the people through notions of comradeship and brotherhood, but he continually deals with matters of decision by relying on his own, personal strength, a move that alienates the community." Uskalis is talking about how Waiyaki makes independent decisions about what is best for the community without really consulting them, only acting through what he sees is the best course of action. As a hybrid character, Waiyaki's world view is considerably different from the normal Gikuyu person of *The River Between*. Waiyaki places such importance on education and leadership that he fails to consider his crumbling spiritual relationship to the tribe and its customs.

Muthoni, the other hybrid character, who although is a Christian and believes in the Christian god, wants to feel a part of the tribe through their customs and traditions. She did not abandon Christianity to pursue tribalism, but instead wanted to belong to both. Brendon Nicholls (2003, 48) agrees with me with the following statement:

Muthoni's hybrid status is further confirmed by her final words: "I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look. I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe.... [Tell] Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman. beautiful in the tribe ..." (53). Nevertheless, Muthoni's death functions to negate the possibilities that the text affords her – she constitutes a failed attempt at an ideological synthesis of the Gikuyu traditionalist and Christian stances in relation to clitoridectomy.

Another thing of interest here is Nicholls' last statement. Nicholls argues that Muthoni is a failure of ideological synthesis, which I believe to be true as well. After Muthoni perishes due to complications from the procedure, she is rejected by all but the hybrid characters Waiyaki and Nyambura. Her father and the Christians believe she has been punished for sinning, while the tribe believes she died due to being tainted by Christianity. This all serves to reinforce the symbolism of the two ridges: the duality and division that exists on the very surface of the land itself that cannot be pacified and brought together. Nyambura shares the same fate, as after she declares her love for the tribal leader Waiyaki, she is cast away by her Christian father. However, in the same way, she is still seen by the tribal Gikuyu as a Christian traitor, ending up as a hybrid character with no place.

Waiyaki's enemies use their love as proof that Waiyaki has betrayed the hills and the Gikuyu for his love for the Christian god. Waiyaki's and Nyambura's ultimate fate hints at the same as Muthoni's, as they are most likely executed due to their love and supposed betrayal of the tribe. Elias Bongmba (2001) summarizes my own thoughts well: Waiyaki thinks the future of the community will resolve by reconciling and disregards the hostilities between him and the Kabonyi-led Kiama (council of elders). However, like mentioned before, the Kiama argue that Waiyaki is a traitor to the Gikuyu and a Christian sympathizer. The Kiama win against Waiyaki due to the notion that hybrid characters cannot exist. Waiyaki's actions have alienated the tribe, thus, he must be a Christian sympathizer.

Amongst all of this discourse and the events of the novel, the following question is in my mind: what is Ngugi trying to say? What is he arguing for and what is he criticizing?

Earlier I state that Ngugi uses nature as a tool for critique, and I believe this is clearly the case here. He is using his depiction of the ridges to discuss the duality and hybridity of the novel, but what is his stance on the issues? I believe this to be the most controversial part of *The River Between* as there are multiple opinions on this. Tatang Iskarna (2018) summarizes the discourse well:

The River Between offers counterdiscourse against colonial hegemony through the representation of the British oppression to the native Kikuyu. Besides, the arrival of the Christianity becomes the source of broken relation amongst the families, clans, and neighbours of Kikuyu people. However, in this novel it is Christianity and its education which play significant roles in making the colonized Kikuyu aware of their condition and problems. It indicates that the colonial hegemony is not at all rejected and resisted.

Like the quote shows, on one hand, Christianity and education are not discussed in a completely negative way, in fact they are the main tools Waiyaki uses to lead and advance the tribe's position. However, Ngugi is clearly critical of British oppression and the novel is clear counterdiscourse to the Western imperialist narrative. Did Ngugi try to advocate for the possibility for a hybrid ideology that uses the knowledge of the colonizers to liberate themselves from them, or is he trying to argue that although a hybrid approach may seem useful, only through complete rejection of colonialist-taught values may the Gikuyu be liberated.

The ending of the novel hints perhaps more at the latter, as all those who try to advocate for hybridity end up dead or at least presumed so. However, this in itself might also be critique at society's rejection of the hybrid and the need to juxtapose values and refusal to combine ideologies. However, were we to analyze Ngugi's stance overall throughout the years, the former sounds more probable. Kamau-Goro (2011, 68) explains that during his earlier works Ngugi identified as a Christian, but throughout the years he became increasingly radicalized of Christianity. Of course, Ngugi has from the very beginning been critical of colonization and imperialism.

It might even be that Ngugi himself is not sure whether through this critique on the divide he is arguing for either an absolute need to choose one side or the combining of ideologies as possible, as this is chronologically his first literary work. Ultimately, I do not believe it is important to arrive to a definite conclusion on what Ngugi's argument was. It is more important to present both sides of the argument and explain that Ngugi is clearly discussing the division of the people that colonialism caused, and also starting

his career with a strong interest in hybridity. I believe both of the stances are feasible and he might even be arguing for both, or just trying to raise awareness on the issue. This issue of duality is extremely interesting, but luckily, the other critique that he performs through depictions of nature are of a more straightforward nature, requiring less pondering on what the author is trying to say.

4.2. The Hills of the Gikuyu

The lands, or the hills, are where the actual story of *The River Between* takes place. They mean not only the two ridges, but all of the land that the Gikuyu are connected to. In *The River Between*, the hills serve as a metaphor for the Gikuyu people and their myths. It is synonymous to Gikuyu culture, and it is through this metaphor that Ngugi performs his societal critique, as I will show in this subchapter. Before discussing the critique, I will show how Ngugi builds the Gikuyu's connection to the land through their traditions and myths. Crowley (2013, 16) summarizes Ngugi's environmental place and scale extremely well:

From his first novels, Ngũgĩ represents even the intimate, 'isolated' space of the Gikũyũ ridges as a contested place of multiplicity and change. This is still true when he invokes a mythical and spiritual connection between the people and their land, though admittedly at times the appeal to myth seems aimed at grounding an ahistorical, natural, uniform association of people and place.

Like Crowley says, Ngugi uses various myths to slowly but steadily create a connection and synonymity between the Gikuyu, their culture and the land. Although the hills are quite isolated, they are very much alive and changing in *The River Between*, which is a metaphor for the changing society of the Gikuyu. The last sentence in the Crowley quote discusses that Ngugi has probably taken some creative liberties, and not fully based everything on history. I argue that this in itself is form of postcolonial critique, because as I earlier discussed, rewriting of western history and revival, or unification, of culture are two main ways in which to perform postcolonial critique.

I agree with another statement by Crowley (2013, 16) that the Gikuyu are "identified by the myth and sustained by keeping to 'the ways of the land' (13), the people and place become mutually linked and defining." The quote he takes from the novel to support this is the following: "These were the people whose blood and bones spoke the language

of the hills” (TRB 3). This quote, and Crowley’s opinion, support my argument that the land and the Gikuyu people are synonymous in *The River Between*. The quote says that their bodies speak the language of the hills, that they have a special bond that allows them to connect with nature, and that this nature is not only a part of their customs, but a part of them, a part of every Gikuyu.

To further substantiate my argument, I present the following quote from the novel: “They became strangers to the hills. Thereafter, the oilskin of the house was not for them. It was for those who lived inside. These were the people whose blood and bones spoke the language of the hills” (TRB 3). With this quote I show that this connection to the land is more important for Gikuyu identity than ethnicity or birth conditions. The quote is discussing the great heroes of the Gikuyu, like “Mugo, the great seer; Wachiori, the glorious warrior; Kamiri, the powerful magician” (TRB 3). Even the heroes of Gikuyu myths become strangers to the land, and to the Gikuyu, once they leave. They are no longer part of the community and once they physically leave, the bond between themselves and the land is broken. This strengthens my following arguments: first, that Ngugi creates culture through myths and through bonds with nature, and second, that in *The River Between*, “the hills” is a metaphor for the Gikuyu people and that this bond with the land is the primordial aspect of being Gikuyu.

Ngugi uses these myths to build the setting in other works as well. Miriam Maranga-Musonye (2019) discusses that in Ngugi’s trilogy *Njamba Nene*, the protagonist of the same name naturally uses proverbs in a liberal manner, although he is of a very young age. This supports my belief that myths and proverbs (often about the land) are the tool which Ngugi uses to connect land and people. The fact that even young characters are used to establish these myths even in somewhat unnatural settings, speaks of Ngugi’s agenda. I argue that this agenda can be seen in Ngugi’s nature as well.

Crowley (2013, 14) explains that Ngugi has a unique style of combining the global and the local to discuss postcolonial themes like anti-imperialism, culture revival and a unified resistance against colonizers. This can be seen in *The River Between*, where these global issues are discussed from a smaller, local perspective (the two villages of Kameno and Makuyu). The myths are clearly a part of the culture revival, but I argue that the tone of *The River Between*, where the main characters lose their bond with the land, is also postcolonial critique. I argue that “the hills” and this bond with the land is

Ngugi's postcolonial critique towards the loss of culture caused by ecological imperialism and the arrival of the colonists.

A main trait of ecological imperialism, like I explained in the theory section, is seeing nature and non-anthropocentric concepts as other, as something discardable and not connected to humanity. The events of *The River Between* are a direct critique against this aspect of ecological imperialism. Iskarna (2018) summarizes the situation in Makuyu in the following manner:

Most of the traditional customs in Kikuyu lands vanish since the arrival of Christianity. The destructive effect of this new religion on the local culture can be felt by Kikuyu people. The worship of the ancestors is removed, the ritual of the traditional succession is replaced by the church, or the respect to the elders is not practiced anymore as the leadership is in the hand of the Christian priest, not the tribal chief.

The christianized ridge of Makuyu slowly loses their customs and Gikuyu traditions through the arrival of the colonists, all traditional values are slowly lost and they start to become disconnected with the land and their culture. The quote explains the various ways in which culture is disappearing. However, the main way in which the loss of Gikuyu identity is seen is through Waiyaki. I believe this discussion deserves its own subsection, so I will continue this directly below, as I have presented my main arguments regarding the depiction of the hills in *The River Between*.

4.3. The Sacred Grove

The Sacred Grove is a holy site of pilgrimage in *The River Between*. Waiyaki's father Chege takes him there when he is young, and later in the novel Waiyaki travels there independently to look for answers. Ngugi uses the Sacred Grove in a symbolic way to show Waiyaki's disconnection with the Gikuyu people, land and culture. The Grove holds other symbolisms as well, like concepts such as enlightenment and fertility, which was taught to Waiyaki by his father. However, the more meaningful events happen when Waiyaki travels there alone in the later part of the novel. Lastly, although the themes are similar to the last chapter, the Sacred Grove is its own element of nature with its own depiction, so I felt like it deserved its own section.

Waiyaki, in his feelings of otherness and not belonging, journeys to the Sacred Grove in search of enlightenment and answers. However, when he arrives there, he feels no connection to the Grove, his visit culminating in the following line: “The sacred grove had not lit the way for him” (TRB 142). The reason for why this disconnection is so meaningful is that it signifies a symbolic change in Waiyaki, as it is a direct contrast to the nature of his first visit. During his first visit, Waiyaki learned of many Gikuyu myths and Chege taught him about the land, the journey served to strengthen his bond with the land.

However, the revisit has none of that connection. Waiyaki’s character has changed a lot since then. He went to school in the Christian mission, he suffered a traumatic experience through Muthoni’s death which alienated him from the tribal connection, he physically left the land which I argued was one of the ways in which Ngugi portrays the breaking of the bond between person and land. Lastly, Waiyaki submitted to Christianity and its values, at least to some extent. Again, I argue that the events in *The River Between* present Ngugi’s critique towards colonization and ecological imperialism. Waiyaki’s relationship with the Sacred Grove, which shows Waiyaki’s otherness and the disruption of his bond with the land, displays critique towards the loss of culture induced by colonial acts and ecological imperialism.

Lastly, I would like to extend my discussion on Waiyaki’s hybridity from the ridges section. Bongmba (2001, 386) explains that the problem with Christianity is that it is trying to replace African culture, instead of evolving to be a part of it without replacement. Bongmba (2001, 384) argues that Waiyaki as a hybrid character attempting to unify the hills is Ngugi’s argument for accommodation, giving the leader an open mind to end the divide between the Christians and the traditionalists. Bongmba (2001, 385) also discusses that Waiyaki “has come to see his mission not as liberating the people from the corruption of the ways of the white man, but as reconciling the two traditions that his people have to live with now.” The mission his father originally gave him, during his first visit to the Sacred Grove was to go to the missionary school to learn the knowledge of the colonizers, so that he can use his new knowledge of the white man to liberate the Gikuyu from them, like was long prophesied.

However, I want to offer a counterargument, similar to one of the arguments from the ridges section. My opposing argument is that Waiyaki’s hybrid nature is not Ngugi

arguing for the pacification between Christians and Gikuyu, especially considering Ngugi's radical criticism and the defeat Waiyaki suffers in the novel. I argue that, perhaps, Ngugi is criticizing Waiyaki's hybrid nature, and his "indecisiveness" in some way. Waiyaki was at first connected to the Grove and the land on his first visit. Perhaps Ngugi is trying to argue that it is due the fact that he partly submitted to Christianity and became a hybrid entity that his bond with the land was severed. I am still divided between both of these arguments, and cannot say which one is Ngugi's stance. However, were we to use the latter argument, Waiyaki's nature as a character would be critique against ecological imperialism and an argument that by staying hybrid or 'in between', one is betraying traditional values and submitting to the colonists.

4.3.1. Kerinyaga

In *The River Between*, Mount Kerinyaga (Mount Kenya) is a holy mountain, with many myths related to it. It is the holiest place for the Gikuyu, and the mountain of god. Dominica Dipio (2014) comments that Ngugi describes the mountain's holiness in an overwhelming manner. Kerinyaga's engulfing impact is one of the reasons why Waiyaki accepts the prophecy as his calling in such a strong manner. As far as symbolism goes, Kerinyaga is a continuation of the themes of the Sacred Grove chapter, which is why I allocated it a subchapter of its own. This is because it provides a different depiction of nature, even if the symbolism is the same. Also, it is such an important element of Gikuyu culture that I want to give it its own, even if brief, space.

Kerinyaga serves as a symbol for connection to the Gikuyu traditions and values through its holy nature. Waiyaki witnessed Kerinyaga during his first visit to the Grove, and felt connected to it due to him not having evolved into his hybrid self. However, later in the story during his second visit, Waiyaki comments the following which is the culmination of all of his feelings of otherness:

The country was below him again, but it did not have so much power over him as when he had stood there, a child, with his father. The sun was up and he could not see Kirinyaga. And the sacred grove seemed to be no more than ordinary bush clustering around the fig tree. (TRB 140)

Like I mention in the previous chapter, I believe this visit to the Sacred Grove a point of no return for the character of Waiyaki. Here it becomes obvious that he cannot bring himself to be Gikuyu, and his existence as a hybrid character is finalized. This severing

of the ties between himself and the land is showcased in an ultimate and final manner in the line from the quote where he cannot see Kerinyaga. It is commented that the sun is in the sky and that it is clear, but he still cannot see the second highest mountain of Africa and the holiest place for the Gikuyu. This is the ultimate symbol for his otherness towards his Gikuyu self, a true point of no return. This can be seen in his comment about the Sacred Grove as well, speaking of it in almost a degrading manner.

In this chapter about the land, I have provided arguments for how Ngugi depicts the land of the Gikuyu in its various forms to discuss concepts such as hybridity, otherness and Gikuyu identity. I argue that he uses these depictions to perform various types of postcolonial critique. In the following chapter, I will discuss depictions of nature that are not part of the land of the Gikuyu.

5. Other Depictions of Nature: The River and the Sun

In the previous chapter, I discuss how Ngugi's social critique, metaphors and symbolism can be seen in his depiction of the lands in *The River Between*. The land is a very important concept, like I explained, as it is directly tied to the Gikuyu people and their culture. However, Ngugi practices postcolonial critique in other depictions of nature as well. Thus, this chapter will discuss important depictions of nature in the novel that are not related to the land. First, I will discuss the Honya River, which is an extremely focal part of the novel, giving it its name. The second depiction I discuss in this chapter is the depiction of the sun, as it is highly symbolic. This depiction of the sun is amply defined by Ngugi's Christian aesthetic and critique, which will be discussed in length. The unifying factor between these two depictions is that I argue that both of them serve as Ngugi's critique towards unicentricity, which I explain further in the chapter itself. This is the second and final analysis chapter, after which I will present the conclusions of my thesis.

5.1. The Honya River

The Honya River is an extremely important and impactful part of *The River Between*, so much that the very name of the novel comes from it. The Honya River is important for many Gikuyu traditions, like circumcision, for example. It is responsible for creating what is called in the novel as the valley of life. The river is the reason for why the two villages exist, thus simultaneously uniting and dividing them, which will be the main theme of this chapter. The river is always described as unfazed and independent in the novels, unlike many other depictions of nature, which is interesting. Dipio (2014) agrees with my dual meaning to Honya, explaining that the antagonistic relationship between the two villages is only possible due to how they are divided. This division is due to their relationship with the river, which cuts the valley in two. Dipio (ibid.) also discusses that since the two ridges share a culture and a history, their division is questionable as the only thing that stands between them is the river that allows them to exist.

I agree with Dipio's thoughts, I also argue that the division is but an illusion, as they are the same people. The river is an arbitrary dividing line that logically should have no

impact in dividing the people. I believe Ngugi builds the stage for his critique using this fact, and the river is one of the tools through which he performs this critique. However, before I discuss Ngugi's critique, I believe it is important to consider the different arguments for why the river can symbolize either unity or division. This is an issue that has academia divided, as there are those who argue for both. I argue that both are true and this is what creates the setting for Ngugi's critique. I agree, for example, with van Klinken (2014) discussing that the river indeed is the life source that unites Kameno and Makuyu while simultaneously dividing it into the two ridges. Arguments towards Honya symbolizing unity is not very extreme as an argument, as it is the literal reason for why the ridges exist together as a settlement. Michael Rice (1984, 126), for example, argues exactly this, that the villages are unified by Honya as their binding element despite the antagonism.

A more interesting argument is the one for division, as it has more literary analysis included, which I will spend more time on. This does not mean that I argue for it more strongly than for the argument that Honya is unity, however. Grobler (1998, 67) argues that the river from the novel reflects Ngugi's "deep-settled resentment of colonialism, as well as his utter disappointment in post-colonial independence in Kenya." Grobler argues that the Honya River reflects the brutal effects of colonialism and Christianity on the Gikuyu culture, which is why the river is often described in a pessimistic and gloomy tone. Grobler (ibid.) comments that the river is unable to bring peace and thus contains Ngugi's disappointment in a symbolic manner. These are definitely solid arguments, as they are in line with Ngugi's general topics of writing.

However, I argue that since both of these arguments are plausible and quite straightforward, Ngugi's argument probably lies elsewhere. I argue that since the Honya River is a metaphor for both unity and division, the Honya River exists as a hybrid entity, "stuck" between the conflict of the villages. Honya is a metaphor for Waiyaki and the hybrid conflict found in the novel. Charles E. Nnolim (1984, 140) agrees with this notion, commenting that Waiyaki stands between the conflict of the villages, and is unable to pacify and unify them, just like the river between them. Dipio (2014, 97) also compares Waiyaki to Honya River in their similar ambivalence. Both are ever changing and hybrid entities, difficult to grasp. Dipio (ibid.) uses the following metaphor which I think describes Waiyaki's character development and hybridity quite well: "Waiyaki,

who acquired Western education to keep the ways of the tribe pure, is like the river that signifies continuity and discontinuity at the same time. It appears the same but, as a flow, it is never the same; undercurrent change is constantly happening.”

I firmly believe that Ngugi intended the river to serve as a mirror to Waiyaki, existing as a hybrid entity that fails at unifying the divide, forced to be in the middle as the mediator. I believe that behind this lies the true critique that the depiction of the Honya River symbolizes. I argue that although all of the above is true, the Honya River is also a critique to unicentricity. I argue that since the river divides the people into two villages, which is nothing more than arbitrary and illusory, Ngugi is criticizing the arbitrary division of the people in general. I believe Ngugi is trying to say the following: why must it be either Kameno or Makuyu that leads, if both are the same people with the same culture and history. Ngugi is asking for the people to unite and lead together, instead of arbitrarily divide themselves into conflicting groups. Dipio’s (2014) statements bring proof to my argument, as she argues that Ngugi has continually challenged unicentricity. Dipio (ibid.) thinks that Ngugi is arguing for the following: “Unicentricity of any sort leads to the marginalization and even silencing of other options and ultimately to the impoverishment of humanity.”

I agree with Dipio’s sentiments, I firmly believe that *The River Between* and the Honya River are a strong argument for unicentricity, as it can have extremely dire consequences like the quote above explains. Thus, Ngugi is calling for decisions to not come from a small body of individuals. This is comparable to the “awakening of the hills” which is discussed on many occasions in *The River Between*. Ngugi wants the people to awaken, stop petty conflicts, and unitedly lead the nation in a better direction without extremely centralized leadership that only defends its own interests. This chapter serves as a discussion towards Ngugi’s critique against unicentricity on a macro scale, “why must one village lead,” The next section, discussing the depictions of the sun is similar to this but on a smaller scale. In the chapter I explain that Ngugi is using the sun to perform similar critique, although in a much smaller scale. I argue that the messianization of Waiyaki, and his ultimate failure, is similar critique towards unicentricity. What I argue in the next chapter is that is Ngugi is saying: “Why must one person be the one to bear the burden of leadership.”

5.2. The Sun and Messianic Heroism

This is the last analysis subchapter, and it will discuss the sun. This one is the least connected to Gikuyu myths, as the sun is shared by all and not directly connected to the Gikuyu in the same way as the land surrounding the tribe. The sun is depicted in a very religiously symbolic manner, which is not uncommon for Ngugi. Like Kamau-Goro (2011, 68) explains, Ngugi is an avid user of the bible and its myths for symbolism and aesthetics. My argument, however, is that although Ngugi incorporates religious symbolism and presents Waiyaki as a messianic character, what Ngugi is actually critiquing does not have to do with religion itself. Ngugi uses religious symbolism as a tool to discuss other issues in his depiction of the sun.

In the novel, Waiyaki was given the following prophecy:

I am old, my time is gone. Remember that you are the last in this line. 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. ... And keep on remembering, salvation shall come from the hills. A man must rise and save the people in their hour of need. (TRB–2021)

This prophecy puts the great burden of being the saviour of the hills on him, it gives him the goal that drives him throughout the novel. Kamau-Goro (2010, 12) adds that the prophecy carries various nuanced idioms of Christian salvation. In fact, *The River Between*'s original name was meant to be *The Black Messiah*, reinforcing the religious symbolism. Waiyaki also bears some similarities with Christ, which is clearly what Ngugi had intended. Van Klinken (2014) explains that it is when he receives the prophecy from his father that Waiyaki is infused with what van Klinken calls messianic masculinity. I agree with van Klinken, and believe that Chege's prophecy becomes the driving force for Waiyaki's way of being and actions later in the novel. However, before I further discuss Waiyaki as a Messianic figure, I want to discuss the sun symbolism in the novel further.

The sun is described at various points in the story. Mostly, it is associated with two characters: Waiyaki and Joshua. Furthermore, the moments in which the depictions of the sun are present alongside these characters are those where hope or heroism is involved. For example, the first time the sun is explicitly depicted is when Joshua is giving a religious speech with extreme fervor. Joshua is determined to save the tribe through his Christian leadership, which the sun acts as a symbol for. Later in the novel,

at the very resolution of the story, the sun shines strongly again with extreme heat. This is a symbol of Waiyaki's hope for the tribe, for his messianic leadership. However, when Waiyaki's defeat becomes imminent, this is seen in the depiction of the sun as well.

When Waiyaki's loss is confirmed, the sun is described in two ways. One is that it is setting, or in other words, it is disappearing, darkness encroaching the land after the failure of the hero. The other descriptions directly signify Waiyaki's defeat as the following quote shows: "And suddenly people who stood on the hills or up the slope saw big yellow flames emanated by the setting sun. The flames seemed near and far and the trees and the country there were caught in the flames. They feared" (TRB 145). This is quite clearly symbolic of Waiyaki's fall, and of the loss of hope for the hills. To add to this, the reason why Kabonyi, the third spiritual leader of the novel, is not involved with the sun is due to him not being related to Christianity. The heroism and hope that the sun represents in *The River Between* are very Christian in nature, just like the provisional title Black Messiah, or the concept of a Messiah in general. Thus, Joshua (a Christian) and Waiyaki (a hybrid character with conflicts related to Christianity) are part of the symbolism surrounding the sun, but Kabonyi is not. Another further reason could be that despite Waiyaki's and Joshua's flaws, they both seem to care deeply for the tribe and try to enact the tribe's salvation in their own ways, while Kabonyi's driving force seems to be based more on pettiness, a want for power and revenge against Waiyaki and his father.

Van Klinken (2014) comments that it is fascinating how Ngugi creates a black messiah combining Christian symbolism with the colonial context of *The River Between*. He continues, adding that he believes that this portrayal reflects Ngugi's criticism towards "a type of Christianity that is irrelevant to the daily concerns and social, cultural and political challenges faced by its adherents." I agree with his notion that Ngugi uses this depiction as a way to critique Christianity. Van Klinken (2014) also adds that simultaneously Ngugi's depiction also reveals the author's hope that "an alternative, contextually meaningful configuration of Christianity is possible." This is definitely one interpretation, but again, I want to add the other possibility as well. I believe this could also be Ngugi's way of saying that Christianity cannot be ethically practised in Gikuyu

society, as it represents colonization, ecological imperialism and ultimately a submissiveness towards the Christian colonizers.

Dipio (2014) comments that Ngugi uses the characters of Kinuthia and Nyambura to idealize Waiyaki into the messianic existence that he has in the novel. Waiyaki is needed to take the stance of mediator between sides, alone as a hybrid character trying to patch the divide of the ridges. Dipio (2014) explains that this serves to both simultaneously marginalize and empower Waiyaki at the same time, which I completely agree with. I agree with the argument that Waiyaki's martyrlike defeat as a messiah is critique towards Christianity, as was explained above, but I want to introduce another idea as well. I believe Ngugi is simultaneously critiquing a reliance on "heroes," or heroic individuals.

Waiyaki fails due to not listening to the people, but simultaneously at the end of the novel, the people also suffer defeat. They are placing all their hopes on Waiyaki as the leader, and when it seems he has betrayed them, they quickly abandon him and let the antagonism of the ridges carry on. Nicholls (2010, 46) ponders why Waiyaki's potential is never developed, instead remaining a hybrid character that fails at his goal. Nicholls (ibid.) then follows with a comment that perhaps Waiyaki's death does not equal his potential impact disappearing. He references Waiyaki's similarities with Jesus Christ and alludes to Waiyaki's death having an impact that might bring salvation (ibid.).

Considering the above, I argue that Ngugi wrote Waiyaki's death in the way he did to give him a martyrlike death. This death is Ngugi's criticism towards relying on single heroes or leaders. It is criticism towards the inaction of the people. In the novel, after Waiyaki's defeat, we are not told how the story continues. I believe this is done intentionally, leaving it open how the common people react to the events of the story's finale. There is a lot of discussion of "the awakening of the hills" in *The River Between*. It is a message that a single saviour will not come, and that the hills, the people, need to be responsible for their own awakening. This is direct social critique, and I believe that the ending can be seen as a clear call for action for everyone. Ngugi has always been radical, and this serves as a radical metaphor that the people must unite to preserve Gikuyu traditions, and to combat colonization and social predicaments.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I started this thesis with the introduction, which was followed by the theoretical section. In this section, composed of chapters 2 and 3, I give the necessary background information about postcolonialism and show that *The River Between* is a postcolonial work. I also introduce and explain my theoretical framework, postcolonial ecocriticism and important terminology like ecological imperialism. I also touch on important ethical issues. In chapter 3, I give the sociocultural, political and historical context needed to analyze the novel. I discuss the history of the Gikuyu, and Ngugi's own life, which he used as a direct source for inspiration. I also talk about Ngugi as a postcolonial author, after which I discuss how postcolonial ecocriticism has been applied to African and East African literature. After this, I present my analysis in chapters 4 and 5.

In chapter 4, I discuss the various depictions of the nature that I consider "the land of the Gikuyu." I discuss the symbolism and meaning behind these depictions, and argue that Ngugi is using them to criticize colonialism and its dire consequences, like loss of culture. Ngugi uses these depictions to bring alive the myths of the Gikuyu, also serving as revival of culture, a method of revolution against imperialist history writing. In chapter 5, I argue that the sun and the river are used to critique uncentricity. I argue that Ngugi is trying to awaken and unify the people through his critique. I also discuss hybridity throughout the analysis chapters, but I do not arrive on a definite conclusion on whether Ngugi is advocating for it or arguing against it. These are the main findings of my thesis.

To continue, I believe it is also important to mention some of the limitations of my thesis. One is that I could have incorporated some discussion about the Cold War. There are various sources that discuss Ngugi as a cold war author, and how its impact is seen in East Africa, Kenya and Ngugi's writing. Regarding nature itself, the thesis could discuss even more topics depending on what is defined as nature. For example, if we were to regard fire as a part of nature, the events where the Christian preacher's hut could be analyzed in the same manner as other elements of nature in this thesis. However, I decided to leave it out, as the fire was a manmade act of arson. Another similar case would be discussing the moon, as I do discuss its traditional opposite, the sun. However, I felt like discussing the moon would not be productive enough. The last

limitation would be, like I mentioned in chapter 2, my own point of view. I believe my physical distance from Africa coupled with my privileged point of view potentially do limit my analysis of the subject, although they do also allow me to remain unbiased.

I have now discussed the limitations of my thesis, but I believe that these limitations can give birth to exciting ideas for further research, for both myself and others. Like I mentioned earlier, research about how the Cold War can be seen in Ngugi's use of nature would be extremely interesting. For example, Monica Popescu (2014) has discussed Ngugi and the Cold War quite extensively. Furthermore, Ngugi himself has discussed the impact of the Cold War in his works. For example, Bhakti Shringarpure and Monica Popescu (2019) is an interview of Ngugi where the discussion centers on the Cold War in his works and life. All of this leads me to believe there definitely is research and analysis to be done regarding the topic of Cold War and Ngugi, especially considering the recency of these sources. Another topic of further research would be to react to my opinions of how nature is portrayed, or alternatively, to further my analysis by touching on depictions of nature that I leave out, like the moon.

Overall, I believe that postcolonial ecocriticism as a theoretical framework is extremely productive and it will keep evolving as more research is conducted. I think that as a framework, it suits the African narratives excellently and using it to discuss African, and especially East African, literatures is extremely productive. Like Wylie (2017, 113) says, a research that defines African ecocriticism is still missing. However, Wylie argued that in 2017, after which many influential ecocritical papers have emerged that discuss Africa, like Wanjala (2021). I believe that the topic of this thesis is extremely important and topical, and alongside other postcolonial ecocritical works that discuss Africa, the field is constantly moving forward at a rapid pace due to the importance and topicality of these issues.

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Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

Johdanto

Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee Ngugi wa Thiong’on romaania *The River Between*. Tutkielmassani käsittelen, miten kirjoittajan luonnon kuvaukset heijastavat hänen postkoloniaalisen yhteiskunnan ja kolonialismin kritiikkiään. Argumentoin, että Ngugin tapa kuvailla luontoa heijastaa teoksen postkoloniaalisia teemoja ja on suoraan yhteydessä teoksen postkoloniaalisiin teemoihin ja kirjailijan postkoloniaalinen kritiikki näkyy juuri tässä tavassa heijastaa edellä mainittuja teemoja luontoon. Kysymykseni, johon pyrin tutkielmassani vastaamaan ovat seuraavat: Miten postkoloniaaliset teemat heijastuvat romaanin luonnon kuvailuun, ja miten Ngugi käyttää luonnon kuvausta kritisoimaan kolonialismia ja sen tuomia ongelmia. Johdanto-osiossa keskustelen myös luonnon tärkeydestä ja siitä, miten luonto ja kulttuuri ovat erottamattomia, käsi kädessä kulkevia käsitteitä. Tämän lisäksi johdannossa teen myös yhteenvedon romaanin juonesta.

Teoria

Teoriaosiossa osoitan aluksi, että *The River Between* -romaanissa on paljon postkoloniaalisen teoksen piirteitä. Teos on kirjoitettu postkoloniaaliseen aikaan ja siinä keskustellaan teemoista, jotka liittyvät suoraan postkolonialismiin. Selvimmät tunnusmerkit, jotka paljastavat romaanin postkolonialistiseksi teokseksi ovat yhteiskunnallinen tilanne johon teos sijoittuu, eli brittien kolonisoima Itä-Afrikka. Sen lisäksi Ngugi on täyttänyt romaaninsa selvällä kritiikillä kolonisaatiota ja sen arvoja vastaan, joiden huomaamiseen ei vaadita sen syvempää analyysiä. Myös romaanin aihe keskittyy luontoon, joten seuraavaksi esittelen konkreettisen teoreettisen pohjan, jota käytän.

Valitsemani teoreettinen viitekehys on nimeltään postkoloniaalinen ekokritisismi. Saman nimisessä osioissani käytän lähteenä *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010). Esittelen postkoloniaalisen ekokritismin eri määritelmiä ja teemoja, joita Hugganin ja Tiffinin teos käsittelee. Annan myös hieman taustatietoa teoreettisesta viitekehyksestä. Postkoloniaalinen analyysi on hyvin antroposentristä, kun taas ekokriittisyys ei sitä ole. Siksi näitä kahta teoreettista

aihealuetta on hyvin vaikea yhdistää. Niiden yhdistäminen on kuitenkin tärkeää, sillä muuten luontoon liittyviä ongelmia ei voida käsitellä. Syy tälle on se, että maapallon pohjois- ja eteläpuoliskojen tilanteet ovat hyvin erilaiset. Klassinen ekokriittisyys ei ole sopiva kuvaamaan eteläisen pallonpuoliskon ongelmia, sillä se on luotu erilaisia yhteiskuntia ja olosuhteita varten. Tämän takia postkoloniaalinen ekokritisismi on tarpeellista. Pohjois- ja eteläpuoliskojen ekokriittisyys on luonteeltaan erilaista, joten siihen myös tarvitaan erilaiset teoreettiset näkökulmat.

Postkoloniaalinen ekokriittisyys yhdistää postkoloniaalisten yhteiskuntien tilanteet ekokriittisyyden kanssa. Näin näistä ongelmista voidaan keskustella rinnakkain, sillä ne kuuluvat erottamattomasti yhteen. Minun tutkielmani kannalta tärkeimmät teoreettiset ideat ovat ajatukset siitä, kuinka kulttuuri ja luonto ovat osa toisiaan, ja kuinka luonnosta ei voida keskustella ilman kulttuurin huomioon ottamista. Jos luonnon tärkeyttä vähätellään, niin myös siihen sidoksissa oleva kulttuuri saattaa vahingoittua. Toinen tärkeä konsepti on ekologinen imperialismi. Käytän Plumwoodin (2001) määritelmää, jolla tarkoitetaan länsimaisen kulttuurin näkemystä jakaa luonto ja ihminen erikseen, mikä itsessään häivyttää luonnon merkitystä ja hävittää ei-länsimaisia arvoja. Kuten sanottua, kulttuuri ja luonto kulkevat käsi kädessä useissa kulttuureissa, ja sen kieltäminen tai kiertäminen on imperialistista.

Teoriaosiossa avaan myös tutkimukseni eettisiä ongelmia. Näillä tarkoitan omia lähtökohtiani, sillä teen tutkimusta afrikkalaiseen kulttuuriin ja historiaan liittyen, josta minulla ei ole lainkaan omakohtaista kokemusta. Minulla ei myöskään ole kokemusta koloniaalisista yhteiskunnista, sillä olen asunut koko ikäni Euroopassa ja olen valkoihoinen mies. Näiden aiheiden jälkeen vien keskustelun konkreettisempaan kontekstiin, eli romaanin ja sen kirjoittajan yhteiskunnallisiin, kulttuurisiin ja historiallisiin konteksteihin. Aluksi kerron Gikuyu-kansan tilanteesta postkoloniaalisessa Keniassa, jossa he toimivat kolonialistisen yhteiskunnan purkamisen kulmakivenä. Gikuyu-kansa johti Kenian itsenäistävää vallankumousta, jonka jälkeen kansa toimi itsenäisen Kenian johtavana voimana.

Tämän lisäksi keskustelen Ngugin omista lähtökohdista, joista hän on saanut paljon inspiraatiota teoksiinsa. Hän on ollut ensimmäisestä teoksestaan lähtien kolonialismin sekä englannin kielen vahva kritisoija, ja on aina ajanut imperialismin vastaisia arvoja. Hän on ollut kulttuurien henkiin herättämisen puolestapuhuja, joka on tärkeä tapa

kapinoida kolonialismia vastaan. Tämä kapinointi näkyy selvästi hänen teoksissaan. Teoria osion lopuksi keskustelen vielä postkoloniaalisesta ekokritisismistä Itä-Afrikan kontekstissa. Todistan, että postkoloniaalinen ekokritisismi on hyvin ajankohtainen aihe, käyttäen Wanjalan (2021) tutkimusta esimerkkinä. Keskustelen myös siitä, että afrikkalaisesta postkoloniaalisesta ekokritisismistä ei ole vielä julkaistu tutkimusta, jolla olisi ollut alansa läpimurto. Tällä keskustelulla todistan että oma tutkielmani on ajankohtainen, ja vie akateemista diskurssia eteenpäin erittäin tärkeässä aiheessa.

Analyysi

Analyysilukuja tutkielmassani on kaksi. Ensimmäisessä käsittelen luontoa, jonka määrittelen Gikuyu-kansan maaksi. Tällä tarkoitan sitä maata, jonka kanssa Gikuyu kansalla on historiallinen ja kulttuurinen yhteys. Käsittelen kappaleessa romaanin kahta harjannetta, joiden päälle tarinan kaksi kylää, Kamenon ja Makuyun, sijoittuvat, sekä Gikuyu-kansan maaperää, joita he kutsuvat termillä ”mäet”. Näiden lisäksi keskustelen pyhiinvaelluksen kohteesta, jota kutsutaan ”Pyhäksi Lehdoksi” sekä Kerinyaga-vuoresta (Kenia-vuori). Toisessa kappaleessa käsittelen sitä, miten Ngugi kuvailee tärkeää Honyajokea sekä aurinkoa romaanissaan.

Analyysiosion ensimmäisen luvun teemat ovat klassista postkoloniaalista yhteiskuntakritiikkiä. Gikuyu-kansan ”mäet” ovat metafora itse kansalle, sekä sille miten imperialismi hitaasti mutta varmasti hävittää Gikuyu-kulttuuria. ”Mäkiä” käsittelevässä osiossa keskustelen ekologisesta imperialismista, ja siitä miten se näkyy romaanissa. Kerinyagaa ja Pyhää Lehtoa käsittelevät analyysikappaleet liittyvät samaan teemaan, mutta eri näkökulmasta.

Romaanissa Pyhä Lehto ja Kerinyaga ovat myös työkaluja, millä Ngugi rakentaa päähenkilön, Waiyakin, sisäistä konfliktia. Waiyakin konfliktina on kokemus voimakkaasta toiseudesta. Toiseus on postkoloniaalisen kirjallisuuden isoimpia ja yleisimpiä teemoja. Waiyaki tuntee, että hän ei kuulu heimoon eikä kristilliseen osaan kansasta. Pyhä Lehton ja Kerinyaga-vuoren kuvailu näyttää lukijalle, kuinka Waiyakin suhde hänen heimoonsa ja kulttuuriinsa muuttuu. Romaanin lopussa Waiyaki ei enää tunne minkäänlaista yhteyttä Pyhään Lehtoon, eikä kykene ”näkemään” Kerinyaga-vuorta, joka viittaa siihen että hänen suhteensa Gikuyu-kulttuuriin, -kansaan ja luontoon

on katkennut. Nämä kaikki aiheet ovat Ngugin monimuotoista kritiikkiä kolonisaatiota ja sen aiheuttamaa yhteiskunnallista jakautumista vastaan.

Luku, joka käsittelee harjanteita, joille kylät ovat rakennettu, keskittyy myös hybridihahmoihin. Ngugin näkökulma hybridihahmoista ja -olemuksista on aihe, josta on käyty paljon keskustelua akateemisessa kontekstissa. On esitetty esimerkiksi argumentti, että Ngugi yrittää kannustaa hybridisyyteen, mutta kritisoi yhteiskuntaa joka ei ole valmis hyväksymään hybridiolemuksia. On esitetty myös, että Waiyakin häviö ja oletettu kuolema on Ngugin tapa ilmaista, että hybriditilanteessa oleminen on alistumista koloniaalisille arvoille. Päästäkseen vapaaksi imperialismista on otettava radikaali asenne sitä vastaan. Tutkielmassani en puolla selvästi kumpaakaan näistä näkemyksistä. Sen sijaan pohdin niitä molempia, sillä mielestäni kumpikaan ei ole absoluuttisesti oikea.

Seuraavassa kappaleessa keskustelen auringosta ja Honya-joesta. Ngugi käyttää aurinkoa tapana toteuttaa kristillistä estetiikkaansa, joka on hyvin tyypillistä hänelle kirjoittajana. Tämä ei kuitenkaan tarkoita, että Ngugin hyväksyy kristinuskon aiheuttamat ongelmat, sillä hän on aina ollut kristinuskon ja sen vaikutuksen kritisoija. Romaanissa aurinko on metafora siitä, miten Waiyakiä ylistetään Jeesuksen tapaiseksi pelastajaksi. Waiyakin lopullisen tappion voi kuitenkin tulkita kritiikkinä: Ngugi kritisoi yksinjohtajuutta (unicentricity) laittamalla Waiyakin yksin pelastajan asemaan, jossa koko kansan kohtalo on ainoastaan hänen harteillaan. Ngugi on kritisoinut ennenkin yksinjohtajuutta, eikä tämä myöskään ole romaanin ainoa kritiikki tätä ilmiötä kohtaan.

Argumentoin, että jos aurinko ja Waiyakin tilanne ovat kritiikkiä yksinjohtajuutta vastaan yksilön tasolla, niin Honya-joki ja sen kuvaus on kritiikkiä samasta aiheesta suuremmassa mittakaavassa. Honya-joen kuvaus on jatkoa Ngugin keskustelulle hybridihenkilöistä. Akateemisessa kontekstissa on esitetty ristiriitaisia näkemyksiä siitä, että symboloiko Honya kansan yhtenäisyyttä vai pikemminkin sen jakautuneisuutta. Itse näen, että joen aiheuttama jakauma on pelkkä illuusio. Vaikka kylillä on eri nimet ja ne ovat vihamielisiä toisiaan kohtaan, kylät jakavat silti samat juuret ja kulttuurin. Jos tällainen jakauma on olemassa, niin se on pelkästään ihmisten mielissä. Joki symboloi Ngugin kritiikkiä kansan mielivaltaista jakautumista ja erimielisyyttä kohtaan. Ngugi yrittää kehottaa kansaa olemaan luottamatta johtajiin, joiden agendasta ei ole tietoa, ja yhdistymään kolonialismin vastaiseksi voimaksi.

Lopuksi

Loppuluvussa käsittelen tutkielmani löydöksiä. Kertaan siinä, mitä käsittelin jokaisessa luvussa, ja esittelen pääargumenttini sekä löydökseni. Luku 4 käsitteli sitä, miten Gikuyu-kansan maata oli kuvailtu. Argumentoin, että kuvailullaan Ngugi herättää henkiin Gikuyu-kulttuuria, ja tämä on yksi tapa taistella kolonialistista historian kuvausta vastaan. Samanaikaisesti, Gikuyumaan kuvailu toimii kritiikkinä koloniaalisia arvoja ja seurauksia vastaan, kuten imperialismista johtuvaa kulttuurin menetystä, joka uhkaa Gikuyu-kansaa. Luku 5 keskittyi auringon ja tärkeän Honya-joen kuvailuun. Pääargumenttini tässä kappaleessa oli, että näiden molempien kuvailu on samankaltaista kritiikkiä yksijohtajuutta vastaan. Esitän myös, että tämä on yksi Ngugin yleisistä kritiikin kohteista. Sen lisäksi analyysikappaleissa keskustelen hybridihahmoista. En kuitenkaan pääse varmaan johtopäätökseen siitä, yrittääkö Ngugi kannustaa hybridiajatteluun vai pyrkiikö hän pikemminkin esittämään sen virheenä. Yhteenvetoluvussa pohdin lisäksi tutkielmani rajoituksia, sekä ideoita ja suuntaa mahdolliselle jatkotutkimukselle.