

Nationalism, Ethnicity and Gender in Ngugi's *The Black Hermit*

by

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Abstract

From a gender-sensitive perspective, this article explores how Ngugi wa Thiong'o's play *The Black Hermit* interacts with the dominant nationalist and ethnicist discourses operative in Kenya in the wake of the newly achieved political independence. The characters of Thoni and Nyobi gain centrality in the analysis. Despite serving the nation in accordance with the rules assigned by the dominant discourses, all a woman gets is oppression and exclusion from the places of state power and recognition. Focussing on the complex aspects of gender oppression against women which takes place as regards the nationalist and ethnicist discourses —while analysing *The Black Hermit*— the article is, therefore, an attempt to understand the politics of dominance and subordination informing the interaction of gender, nation and ethnicity in the context of the newly independent African nation-state. In so doing, it shows how Ngugi's text can lend itself to a gender-sensitive reading.

Introduction

Much scholarly work has been devoted to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's plays, short stories, novels and essays. However, most of the works have concentrated on his later works, especially the novels like *Petals of Blood* (1976), *Matigari* (translated by Wangui wa Goro from *Matigari ma Mjiruungi*, 1986) and *Wizard of the Crow* (*Muruugi wa Kagoogo*, 2006). One of his earliest writings, the play *The Black Hermit* (first published in 1968; premiered in 1962) has only gained attention in terms of Ngugi's initial struggle to formulate a specific mode of resistance to neocolonialism or the arrested independence in Africa in general, and Kenya in particular. In other words, it is regarded as a text that registers Ngugi's initial dilemma: being an English-educated Gikuyu *athomi*¹ what should be his approach towards the discursive field of socio-cultural practices in Africa/Kenya, which was fraught with the troubled relationship between nationalism and ethnicity? In the words of James Ogude,

In the early 1960s, when Ngugi was writing, the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism was clearly a vexed one. For one, the site for constituting the nation lay in reconstructing the past. But if one turned to history it had of necessity to be ethnic, an area of experience at which many writers tended to look with disdain. Alternatively, attempts to resolve this issue would seem to have involved the unwitting adoption of an anthropologically evolutionist position which posited ethnic polities as an earlier form of social organisation that would wither into the modern state. (15)

Simon Gikandi's insightful and comprehensive study of Ngugi's works published in 1997, namely *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (2000) contains an analysis of *The Black Hermit* which considers the play (along with other early dramatic works of Ngugi collected in *This Time Tomorrow* which was broadcast on BBC African Service in 1967) as an exploration of the dilemma of the "'modern [male] subject' emerging from colonial institutions such as the university and the church, striving to reconnect with old traditions, only to discover that more often than not, the ideas of nationhood are at odds with 'tribal' affiliations and practices" (166). The analysis centres upon Remi, the modern "black hermit in the city" who strives to reconcile the demands of modernity with those of tradition, of the dominant discourses of nationalism and ethnicity in a newly independent African nation like Kenya or Uganda. This article is an attempt to reread the play *The Black Hermit* from a gender-sensitive perspective that focusses on how nationalism, ethnicity and gender are discursively intermeshed together. Hence the female characters of the play, especially Thoni and Nyobi, take the centre stage.

In this article "nationalism" and "ethnicity" refer to discourses that purport to narrate the communal. Worth mention is Benedict Anderson's argument: "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (5). An ethnic group or *ethnie* comes into existence by virtue of the discourse(s) of ethnicity which depend(s) upon some "empty" signifiers of homogeneity like the myth of common culture, shared memory, common ancestry. As nationalism constructs an imagined community as a nation, ethnicity constructs an imagined community as an ethnic group. Thomas Eriksen argues in *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, nationalism "and ethnicity are kindred concepts, and majority of nationalisms are ethnic in character;" but a "nationalist ideology is an ethnic ideology which demands a state on behalf of the ethnic group" (144). In the words of Richard Jenkins, "to consider ethnicity and nationalism in the same analytical breath" is now an "anthropological common sense" (12). Interestingly, the word "ethnicity" has its genesis in the Greek "*ethnos*, which seems to have referred to a range of situations in which a collectivity of humans lived and acted together...and which is typically translated today as 'people' or 'nation'" (10). That ethnicity, like other identity categories such as gender, race, caste and class, is discursively produced, consumed, regulated and represented as emphasised by Stuart Hall ("Ethnicity" 83-85; "New Ethnicities" 446). Ethnic and national identities are based on certain senses of "groupness" or group membership; but they are neither fixed nor essential.

The base of such identity formations is the “process of identification” in which there “are no implications of homogeneity, definite boundaries, or, crucially, coordination of collective action” (25). Rather, they stem from individual perceptions and idiosyncratic senses in the world, and though divergent, these acts signify cultural practices and perceptions that are collectivised. Hence, the perceptions are inclusionistic as well as exclusionistic and thus, depend upon the distinctions between “us” and “them.” Stressing the congruence between the politico-scientific theories of nationalism and anthropological theories of ethnicity Thomas Eriksen argues that like “ethnic ideologies, nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents and, by implication, it draws boundaries vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders” (10). And he also notices unacknowledged connections between nationalism and ethnicity in theories of nationalism, especially those developed by Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson (Eriksen 119-21). As Yuval-Davis succinctly stipulates, “[w]hile it is important to look at the historical specificity of the construction of collectivities, there is no inherent difference (although sometimes there is a difference in scale) between ethnic and national collectivities” (22).

In contrast, the definition that “Gender” is “a social category imposed on a sexed body” is now outdated (Scott 1056). It would be naïve of us to say that “sex” is natural/biological and “gender” is socially constructed. As David Glover and Cora Kaplan contend,

Sex and gender necessarily overlap, sometimes confusingly so. As a rough approximation we might say that “sex” is the name we give to the language through which we speak and come to know our desires, while “gender” denotes the cultural practices or cultural media that enable these desires to be played out. (16-17)

Exploring the relation between “gender” and “sex” is not the scope of this article, however, in dealing with the dominant discourses related to nation and ethnic group it explores how Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The Black Hermit* addresses the issues of gender via the cultural practices informed by the power politics involving the roles of men and women in nationalist and ethnicist discourses vis-à-vis a newly independent African nation. Thus, the central argument is that in a new nation-state fraught with conflicting ideologies concerning nation and *ethnie* women have to serve the nation in accordance with patriarchal norms, and women’s service to the nation/nation-building is subordinated to men’s by patriarchal nationalist discourses.

Contextualising Thoni and Nyobi

Baptised as James Ngugi and having attended Church of Scotland Mission at Limuru, Kenya, then Manguu Gikuyu Independent (*Karing’o*) School, then Alliance High School at Kikuyu, and then Makerere University College, Uganda, the early Ngugi was troubled with “the issues of ethnicity, individualism and nationalism, uneasy bedfellows at the best of times” (Ogude 7).

The crucial ideological shifts —first caused by his reading of Marx and Fanon at Leeds University; second was his famous “renunciation” of English— were yet to occur. The power of his early works, such as *The Black Hermit*, is engendered in the conflict between his awareness of how the duality of nationalism and ethnicity affects roles of men and women and his inadequacy in suggesting a remedy for the same. “In 1962 Uganda became independent and the society wanted ‘something original,’ a break with the past, for their own contribution to the *Uhuru* celebrations....*The Black Hermit*, first produced at the Uganda national theatre...was the child of that demand” (Ngugi, Preface). Obviously, the play concerns itself with the national issues which were prominent at that time. As Simon Gikandi argues, even before Ngugi adopted a strong Marxist approach towards literature, “he knew that the euphoria of decolonization was clearly in danger of being misinterpreted and its desires misplaced” (31). Ngugi, instead of celebrating the newly achieved independence, cautions against the pitfalls of the same, thereby shortening its “run at the Uganda National Theatre” (162). The play opens with a direct address to the semantics of womanhood in the dominant nationalist discourse: womanhood is satisfied in the combination of wifehood and motherhood. That is to say, a woman can be a woman if she is someone’s wife, performs the conventional wifely duties, and bears and rears his children. Nyobi, the mother of Remi, the protagonist, is “pained to see the gradual waste of” Thoni’s “maidenhood” (Ngugi 2). And Remi has left Thoni, his wife and the widow of Remi’s deceased brother, hence she (Thoni) “cannot now go to a third husband” and turn into a “common whore;” nor can she “do without a husband, without a man to warm” her bed (3). Yet, she enumerates what she needs in order to exist:

A man to ask for a meal in the evening,
A man to make me wash his clothes;
And a child of my own,
A child to call me mother,
To make me feel a new self. (3)

Here, the text seems to represent the combination of wifehood and motherhood as existential necessities for women. The third identity that Thoni may have is not of a “woman” but of a “fallen woman,” namely “a common whore.” However, in the very next moment Nyobi adds a rejoinder: “The lot of women will never change” with Independence (3). She is quick to collectivise the plight of Thoni. Hence, Independence has been partial to men and “a woman’s joy is scolding her children...in seeing their smiles and cries... [and] a woman without a child is not a woman—”, a lesson she has learnt through experience (4).

The nation thus urges women to fulfil the duties that are assigned to them. According to Nira Yuval-Davis, women reproduce nation “biologically, culturally and symbolically;” they are the “intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine, and, of course, the mother-tongue” (21, 25). Hence they need to demonstrate “culturally ‘appropriate behaviour’” (25), and must show a commitment to the national culture whenever they get opportunities to do so.

Drawing on Partha Chatterjee's thesis on Indian cultural nationalism, it might be said that in a post-colonial nation women or the feminine domain becomes the locus of national culture as it is presumed to be "set outside colonial economy and statecraft" (6). Women's "social and sexual behaviour becomes loaded with political significance," and thus turns into a perennial subject of scrutiny by the custodians of national culture (Blacker 488). The clitoridectomy controversy, which gained prominence during the Kenyan anticolonial struggle, especially in the 1930s, can be taken as a case in point. The missionaries, colonial administrators and some local leaders allied with the colonists and deemed it barbaric. On the other hand, the Gikuyu nationalist protestors agitated against the missionaries and other allies upholding circumcision as a necessary part of the initiation to Gikuyu manhood and womanhood. Thus, the *Muthiriigu* dance and song performance, a part of the ceremony, became a major vehicle of this protest. And furthermore, the Kenya Central Association (KCA), "a nationalist party of which Jomo Kenyatta was the general secretary," was instrumental in the transformation of the native discontent into an organised political protest (Nicholls 34).

Hence, a Gikuyu boy became a "man" and girl a "woman" through the initiation ceremony of circumcision, and accordingly, becoming a "man" denotes attaining the right to own property, wife and father children; while becoming a "woman" signifies being entitled to conceive. According to Brandon Nicholls, "the result of the circumcision debate was the production of a regime of signs in which the Gikuyu patriarchy and the colonial patriarchy colluded to silence Gikuyu women" (39). A woman belonging to the Gikuyu ethnic group could be a "Gikuyu woman" only by undergoing circumcision, and on the other hand, she could be a "Christian woman" only by renouncing circumcision. This is how the Gikuyu nationalist anticolonial patriarchy and the British colonial patriarchy colluded to undermine the agency of the Gikuyu woman. Thus, Nicholls continues,

The female body becomes politicized or ideologically inscribed in the clitoridectomy debate — women's bodies become a metaphor for the emergent Gikuyu nation....In other words, women's anatomies and identities became symbolically bound to motherhood and in turn to the emerging nation — at the expense of female sexual and political agency. The cultural suppression of the clitoris enabled women's reproductive functions to eclipse other kinds of female agency. (40)

Therefore, it might then be argued that Thoni in *The Black Hermit* cannot be "a common whore" as she has "womanly" responsibilities to the newly independent nation, and thus, she cannot be a "woman" independent of the combination of motherhood and wifeness. In this context, Nyobi's words of wisdom become an ironic critique of the nationalist discourse that oppresses women. Moreover, she adds that she has also learnt that for a mother the joy of child rearing is followed by her renunciation by the son in future — as Remi has left her (Ngugi 4). The remedy that Nyobi suggests Thoni sounds radical: "take a man" (4).

It does not matter whether the “man” and Thoni beget an illegitimate child. Perhaps for Nyobi, Thoni has the right to do justice to her reproductive potential which is now falling “into bits like a cloth long hung in the sun” (4). She seems to consider Thoni’s reproductive capacities as independent of her responsibilities toward the nation. That is to say, for Nyobi, Thoni first owns a biological body capable of reproduction; then she has something else — in this context, cultural responsibilities to the nation. Hence Thoni can mother a child not being a wife, yet in the dominant discourse of nation woman has reproductive as well as cultural responsibilities. In other words, Thoni, has to be morally appropriate being the transmitter as well as emblem of cultural values of the nation, thus she cannot have children outside her marriage. But strangely, Thoni admits that she has an urge that she needs to resist:

Yet Christ,
Rid me of this thing,
This temptation harping on my weak flesh.
No, no, no.
I will not go with another,
But him I call my husband,
Even if I wait for twenty years and more,
I shall bear all. (5)

It is possible that she is referring to her desire for a child and a husband; that her desire is not only concerned with sexual pleasure but duties of wifhood and motherhood that the nation urges her to perform. If so, she is caught up in a double bind: her national duty to embrace the womanhood which finds its fulfilment in the combination of wifhood and motherhood, and on the other hand, her losing her first husband and being rejected by the second. Moreover, later, we come to know that after the death of Remi’s brother Remi had to marry Thoni because of the custom of their ethnic group, that is, “Marua,” to which he belongs (34). For Thoni seeking husband for the third time may then be considered as an assertion of her autonomy on one level², or perhaps a way of fulfilling her duty towards her nation in the dominant discourse of the nation which urges her to be the national womb performing the duties of a wife. Therefore, the nub of Thoni’s plight is in the tension created by the demands of her responsibilities toward her nation and ethnic group as it is her national responsibility to remarry and reproduce posterity being a lawful wife; but her ethnic ties do not permit her to leave Remi.

Nevertheless, Nyobi (the mother of Remi) continues to emphasise Thoni’s reproductive capacities. However, later her ideas about Thoni lose their apparent radicalism; that is to say, later, Nyobi’s concern for Thoni’s reproductive capacities and/or sexual desire pursues a dominant nationalist agenda which has heteronormative implications. When Nyobi meets the Pastor pleading him to bring Remi back, she posits Thoni’s youth as one of the main causes for demanding Remi’s return. In so doing, Nyobi metaphorically refers, first, perhaps, to Thoni’s libido (she will “dry up in the heat of desolation”), and second, to Thoni’s reproductive potential:

She is a seedling
Whose eventual fruit
Will be a blessing to us all.
But a seedling needs a gardener. (19)

Nyobi's idea is conservative because the popular gender stereotypes of men as active agents and women as passive receptors—man as gardener and woman as seed—are reiterated by her. The “eventual fruit” is the metaphor for development, liberation and/or unity of the people of the nation. It seems Nyobi's concept of the union between Thoni and Remi has the potential to “naturalize a patriarchal and heterosexist order of things in the name of national liberation and unity” (Amoko 36). In his analysis of Ngugi's *The River Between* (1964)³ Simon Gikandi points out that in the narrative of nation-building ideals of heterosexual love plays an important role (68). And in case of Nyobi's concept of nation-building, heterosexual union between Thoni and Remi is found to be serving the same purpose as harping upon Thoni's reproductive potential, Nyobi bolsters an age-old cultural normative sexuality by evoking its relevance to the project of nation-building. Thus we should not consider Nyobi's concern for Thoni's sexual desire to be radical as ultimately, it does not indicate any alternatives to the normative narrative of nation-building.

Remi as Ethnic and National Political Saviour

In *The Black Hermit* Remi is considered to be the political saviour of his ethnic group as well as the nation in several occasions. The Elder laments that with his education Remi could have saved the ethnic group in forming a political party (Ngugi 8). He could have uplifted Marua ethnic group to political power. In fact Remi had a vision in which the Marua would become powerful “[d]ominating the whole country” (10). However, due to Remi's subsequent escape to the city, as the Leader of Marua says, their group “waits under a government composed of other tribes⁴” (13). Clearly, instead of a peaceful multi-ethnic nation-state, the Maruas want an ethnic polity. Hence an interesting situation since the first government of the independent Kenya was Gikuyu-dominated wherein the dominant nationalist leaders of the Kenya African National Union were advocating for an “ethnic polity” (Amoko 36). And as Eghosa Osaghae argues, in Africa, “[e]thno-nationalism, which is mostly anti-state in character, was high in the immediate post-independence period” (4). Second, the proximity of many Gikuyu with the colonial capital and education contributed to the rise of this hegemonic Gikuyu nationalism which envisioned a post-colonial ethnic polity in the name of nation-state⁵. However, in this mix, Remi tries to maintain his nationalist propensity: “Has our nationalist fervour that gave us faith and hope in days of suffering and colonial slavery been torn to shreds by such tribal loyalties? All my life I believed in the creation of a nation. Where are we now?” (Ngugi 41). Therefore, the implication is that Remi should work as a custodian of the nation-state; for Marua elders, though, he should be instrumental in political and economic empowerment of his ethnic group only (37-40).

In this leadership position, gender is present, and as Jan Jindy Pettman argues, “[i]n a complex play, the state is often gendered male, and the nation gendered female—the mother country—and the citizens/children become kin” (35). Here, although the state is not imagined as gendered male, it is Remi who has the onus of recuperating the state for his *ethnie* as well as the nation. But Remi has escaped his political responsibilities and has become a hermit in the city. On the contrary, though she cannot take part in the state power and governance, Nyobi continues to contribute to nation-building. She tries to reconcile native ethnic customs with colonial religion: to bring Remi back, she wants the coalescence of “the power of Christ” and the “power of the tribe” (Ngugi 13). Pertinent to this is the emergence of the independent school movement of the 1920s in Kenya, and in the second and third decade of the twentieth century, there were tremendous native discontents against the colonial government in Kenya (Ogude 19). The interconnected independent school movement and church movement were thus repercussions of the unfavourable tax laws imposed by the British on the Kenyan people and of the colonial ban on female circumcision (Thomas 2; Ndeda 37). There were native churches that had their genesis in breaking away from the missionary churches. Through these churches along with the independent schools the people—like Nyobi—tried to reconcile native ethnic customs with colonial religion⁶. They believed in Christ but took issue with the British government and how the missionary churches were acting against native customs and rituals. On the one hand, along with the establishment of independent churches there were reinterpretations of the *Bible* obscuring “the distinctiveness of the Christian message as missionaries sought to convey;” on the other hand, the cultural dialogue ushered in reorientations of African religious beliefs and practices” (Spear 6). It is also to be noted that the degree of women’s participation in these native churches was more in comparison with that in missionary churches (Ndeda 38). Therefore, the movement of independent churches in Kenya has some correspondence with Nyobi’s attempt to reconcile.

Despite performing their duties to the nation women are always relegated to the private sphere, which is politically irrelevant (Yuval-Davis 21). Whereas men are considered as “chief agents [of the nation] and, with statehood achieved, emerge as its major beneficiaries” (Wilford 1). However, “the public realm cannot be fully understood in the absence of the private sphere” (Yuval-Davis 21). Interestingly, Remi himself somewhat recognises this fact when he says, “Surely a man’s public life is given meaning only by the stability of his private life;” but it seems that his brand of nationalism thrives in the rhetoric of masculinity: he vows, “I will no longer be led by woman, priest or tribe. I’ll crush tribalism beneath my feet, and all the shackles of custom. I was wrong to marry her who was another’s wife, a woman who did not love me” (Ngugi 41, 65). Returning to his village Remi tries to inculcate a robust male-centric nationalist spirit. Contrary to the reconciling spirit of Nyobi’s adherence to nationalism, the village receives a strong message from Remi’s nationalist ideals: they will “crush” what they deem unnecessary. It might be argued that through his dissociation with the two women with whom he had intimate relation and whom he once loved, namely Jane and Thoni respectively⁷, Remi unwittingly endorses the nationalist discourse in which the nation is an “imagined virile fraternity,” “a horizontal and brotherly comradeship⁸” which legitimises “men’s control of women” (Wilford 12).

Remi's idea of nation seems to be based on a homosocial bonding among men; whereas women would only be in the private sphere which had no relevance to the political power structure, therefore, the keys to power would be with men only. Consequently, Ngugi's play indicates in the penultimate scene in which Thoni goes to commit suicide, an impending chaos of "strife and sorrow" through an anonymous woman of the village:

I fear for her [Thoni] and for Nyobi
I fear for the ridge and the village
Whose peace and solitude will now be torn by
strife and sorrow. (Ngugi 69)

Later, the same woman rebukes Remi not for his rejection of Thoni but for his trampling "mercilessly on wives everywhere"; also, she mocks at Remi by saying that he has "succeeded at politics" (71). The concern of the woman is rather collective and for both men and women⁹. Remi has not only rejected Thoni; he has also indicated the emergence of a nation-state which is overtly male-centric, which may be the nub of fear for women.

Conclusion

This presentation interrogates *The Black Hermit* from a gender-sensitive perspective vis-à-vis the dominant nationalist and ethnicist discourses. The first part engages the semantics of womanhood in the dominant nationalist discourse wherein women have reproductive/biological and cultural responsibilities towards the nation, which are imposed upon them. Hence, their cultural behaviour has to conform to standards set by the nationalist patriarchy, and at the same time they must reproduce a national population. An analysis of Thoni's plight in *The Black Hermit* provides that she is found to be trapped within a double bind: on the one hand she has commitment toward the nation being a legitimate¹⁰ reproducer of posterity, and on the other, her ethnic ties prevent her from remarrying even after her present husband has rejected her. And in contrast, the other prominent woman of the play, Nyobi, shows her continuous commitment to nation-building in accordance with the norms of the dominant nationalist discourse: she must have lost her reproductive potential because of her age; but she still urges Thoni to perform the latter's reproductive duties, and envisages a heteronormative nation-building.

The second section of this paper deals with the political responsibilities of Remi and the way in which he advocates a nationalist discourse in which nationhood is seen as a brotherhood that politically disempowers women. Despite contributing to nation-building in terms of the dominant nationalist discourse and torn by the conflicting demands of nationalism and ethnicity, Nyobi and Thoni respectively are relegated to the margins; and contrary to Nyobi's reconciling spirit, the robust nationalism of Remi aims at thriving in undermining whatever it considers to be detrimental to the nation.

In short, this gender-sensitive reading of *The Black Hermit* highlights how women are oppressed by the dominant discourse of nationalism, and in spite of serving the nation in accordance with the rules assigned by the dominant nationalist discourse, all a woman gets is exclusion from state power and recognition. And by focussing on the complex ways gender oppression against women takes place in nationalist and ethnicist discourses in analysing *The Black Hermit*, there is an attempt to understand the politics of dominance and subordination that inform the interaction of gender, nation and ethnicity in the context of a new independent African nation. In so doing, it shows how Ngugi's text can lend itself to a gender-sensitive reading.

And although women actively participate in nation-building processes as cultural/biological reproducers, their agency is often appropriated by patriarchal constructs (Wilford 14). However, one must note that in post-colonial multi-ethnic/cultural nation-states like Kenya, where people always may not have a common origin to strengthen their sense of national identity, they construct their national identities predicated upon the belief that "their futures are interdependent;" therefore, "any national collectivity" requires "perpetual processes of reconstruction of boundaries" (Yuval-Davis 22). Thus, if national identities need continuous reconstruction, the lopsided equation of gender roles can also be destabilised and challenged through gender-sensitive readings of particular situations.

Notes

1. As Bruce J. Berman notes, the "developing petty bourgeoisie [amongst the Gikuyu] was commonly referred to as the *athomi* (literally, the 'readers')" (197). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *athomi* were somewhat alienated from the rest of the *ethnie*—or *Agikuyu*—because the former embraced English education and missionary Christianity for their manifold material benefits (Spear 14). However, later some of the *athomi* tried to dissociate themselves from the colonial education as they were disenchanted with the same. Ngugi wa Thiong'o falls in the category of disillusioned *athomi*.
2. Thoni is designated as a "daughter of the tribe" by a village elder (Ngugi 8). Hence Thoni has to take the consent of the *ethnie*. The Elder also remarks that Remi was not the husband of Thoni only; he was "also the new husband to the tribe" (8). Thus Thoni is equated to the ethnic group Marua. She becomes an emblem of the ethnic group and this has twofold gendered consequences. First, for Thoni it is impossible to have the third husband; second, for Remi, betrayal to Thoni is a betrayal to Marua.
3. The work of Ngugi which had the working title "The Black Messiah" can be read as a novelistic counterpart to *The Black Hermit*. The protagonist of the novel, Waiyaki, is torn apart by native Gikuyu tradition and colonial modernity like Remi.

4. When Ngugi composed the play the word “tribe” was not considered to be pejorative. Later, anthropologists dealing with ethnicity urged for the replacement of “tribe” with “ethnic group.” They deemed the word “tribe” as condescending, involuntarily perpetuating the politics of the racist binary “civilised”/ “tribal.” For a detailed discussion on the semantic transition in anthropology from “tribe” to “ethnic group” the second chapter of Richard Jenkins’ book *Rethinking Ethnicity* can be referred (17-27).
5. It must be noted that the consideration of ethnicity as an objective category runs the risk of neglecting or downplaying other factors, such as economy, which play significant role in an underdeveloped —or, more politely, “developing”— nation-state like Kenya (Yieke 15; Osaghae 11). It was the colonial administrators who segregated Kenya into eight provinces, and each province into districts, along ethnic lines (Yieke 9). In the colonial era, anticolonial nationalism in Africa “amounted to the right of the state;” but the post-colonial African states could not become nations as the peoples had been loyal to ethnic and other anti-national/anti-nation-statist identities (Osaghae 4). Consequently, in the post-colonial era, the “process of nation-building entails reversing the order to make national identity and loyalty stronger than those to the sub-national groups [like ethnic groups]” (4).
6. Incidentally, Ngugi’s novel *The River Between* draws heavily upon this act of reconciliation.
7. Jane is a woman of (supposedly) British origin. She has been a partner to Remi’s city revelry. However, she feels cheated when Remi vows to return to his village to “crush” tribalism. Learning about Remi’s previous marriage, Jane leaves him. Remi had nurtured passion surreptitiously for Thoni before she was married to his brother. Remi leaves Thoni after his marriage because, as he states, he still considers her to be the wife of his brother assuming, without any strong reason, that she does not love her. However, the suicide note which Thoni leaves for Remi seems to be a testimony of her love for him (Ngugi 72).
8. Obviously, it echoes the key words in Benedict Anderson’s thesis. Wilford refers to Anderson’s thesis focussing on the fact that the horizontal comradeship is actually virile in nature where there is no place for women (12).
9. She asks Remi rhetorically: “What you have done to the lives of many? / To the hearts of many a man / Who looked up to you for guidance?” (Ngugi 71).
10. That is to say, she should be someone’s legitimate wife not a “fallen woman.”

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