

# Consolidating what Unite and Overcoming what Divide: African Literature and Border Issues

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► **To cite this version:**

Chimdi Maduagwu. Consolidating what Unite and Overcoming what Divide: African Literature and Border Issues. *Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines (Université de La Réunion)*, 2011, Straddled Borders, pp.93-108. hal-02340740

**HAL Id: hal-02340740**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02340740>**

Submitted on 31 Oct 2019

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## CONSOLIDATING WHAT UNITE AND OVERCOMING WHAT DIVIDE: AFRICAN LITERATURE AND BORDER ISSUES<sup>29</sup>

### THEORETICAL CLARIFICATIONS

**B**oundaries, borders and lines (of demarcation) exist at two major levels of human interaction, namely: the visible and the invisible, which may conform with Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar's concepts of respectively social and symbolic boundaries. (1) The visible or the social is the physical or geographical boundary, which African literature captures through the artistic technique of setting. According to Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar, they "are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities. They are also revealed in stable behavioral patterns of association, as manifested in connubiality and commensality," in other words, the social borders are all lines of demarcation that serve social purposes and can be concretized. They are visible to the senses, especially the senses of sight and touch. The invisible or the symbolic, on the other hand, are the non-physical boundaries and borders, depicted in literature as themes, attitudes of characters and atmosphere (as setting). This paper identifies some of these social and symbolic boundaries, which African literature has consciously and unconsciously portrayed and how they are capable of contributing to the never-ending debate of borders in Africa.

Borders and boundaries highlight definitions by drawing lines, albeit, strong and remarkable lines between entities, objects, peoples, concepts, states, etc. They essentially show contrasting attributes, though sometimes, they also indicate complementary qualities. The social scientist, Borneman, views borders as conveying a sense of inherent duality and promoting a "process of mirror imaging" (1992a 17). In other words, borders show that there is an "other," which engenders a sense of difference. In essence, there are at least two concepts and entities, which have distinguishing features. But in contrast to this view of borders and boundaries, Bowker and Star be-

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<sup>29</sup> The topic is taken from a conference of Africa people that held in Bulawayo Zimbabwe in 2000.

lieve that Leigh Star *et al.* understand borders as interfaces facilitating knowledge production. They also anticipate an understanding of conceptual boundaries capable of exploring how interrelated sets of categories, *i.e.* systems of classification, come to be delineated (5); so borders become means of communication, as opposed to division, and thus, essential to the circulation of knowledge and information across social worlds.

Borders and boundaries are quite useful when considered in the direction of relationships between concepts and contexts as well as classes and groups at the social and symbolic levels. All these definitely would have cultural, social, psychological, geographical (some kind of physical structures), economic and aesthetic implications. Various internal and external issues – social, cultural, economic, psychological, geographical, aesthetic – have generated concepts which in turn continue to lacerate Africa. Construction of borders across types and groups appears to be predominant in Africa. For instance, there are obvious borders between ethnic and tribal groups, occupational and economic groups, groups with similar social interests, religious groups, cults and cultural groups etc. All these, according to Lamont Michele and Molnar Virag “may generate new theoretical insights about a whole range of general social processes present across a wide variety of apparently unrelated phenomena – processes such as boundary-work, boundary crossing, boundaries shifting, and the territorialization, politicization, relocation, and institutionalization of boundaries.” While this work does not claim, like Lamont and Virag, that it is about to embark on a grand synthesis of border issues, in relation to Africa through an analysis of African Literature, however, it does venture into isolating the fragments of hitherto united Africa and looking at the possibility of uniting the present fragments by recommending a cross border consideration and the strengthening of issues which unite.

Both social and symbolic projections of boundaries have functional ways of highlighting “the otherness” or differences. At the physical level, this shows in landscapes, locales, persons and groups of persons, while at the non-physical level, “otherness” manifests in actions, attitudes and manners of people (known as characters in literature), among other issues. The physical and non-physical are basically different in appearance. While the former

is concrete, like brick walls, mountains, hills, seas, lakes, rivers, valleys etc., and can thus appeal directly to human senses with which the human being interacts with the external world; the later is more or less abstract, like thought, imagination, race, language ethnicity, belief systems, culture etc., and appeals more to deep feelings of the human being. While the former can be determined rationally, the later is more emotionally discerned. Also the former can be erected or demolished at times and within terms agreed upon by persons or parties concerned resulting in the concept of “boundary shift” or “border elimination;” the later, like all emotional issues, is much more difficult to grapple with because elements of the “otherness” are buried deep inside the consciousness and psyche of the persons or parties concerned.

As the world moves towards greater co-operation and tolerance, new options are opening up in relation to boundary management, whether at the social (visible) or symbolic (invisible) level. Creative African literature has also made and is still capable of making significant positive contributions to boundary issues in Africa.

### **DISCUSSION: THE BEGINNINGS**

Africa has passed through some peculiar experiences all the way from a supposed savage and barbarian culture, through the first contacts with aliens that resulted in both trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic slave trades; then colonialism, and therein, struggles for independence and the subsequent political and constitutional independence of African States; to the post-independent dependence of African States on Europe and America, and current struggles for economic independence. At every point of these unique African experiences, a number of issues have generated lines and divides, in the form of boundaries.

In the traditional system, all human endeavors and activities are governed by a special form of human development where there is transparency and mutual understanding of codes of life, especially in relation to interpersonal and group relationships. These also include thoughts and impressions of physical or social and non-physical or symbolic boundaries, both at the in-

terpersonal and group levels. There has always been the natural tendency in the Africans, as in all men, to identify and guide what belongs to them, in other words, to properly protect what they consider theirs; thus, there were, in the remote past, “lines and divides,” but mostly transparent, very thin and friendly. For instance, families, kindred, clans, ethnic groups were identified with special physical and non-physical traits from stature, special “tribal marks,” complexion (physical), manners, occupations, socio-cultural practices (non-physical) to the languages they spoke, residential portions they occupied and farm lands they tilled, etc. (again physical). Quite often, different folks appropriated natural phenomena as authentic landmarks, which provided reasonable boundaries at the physical level. The most prominent natural occurrences that enhanced boundary erections were rivers and seas, hills and mountains, remarkable forests and trees, valleys and caves etc.

Although these “natural boundaries” appear integral to human existence, they however predate human life in areas where they are found. Virtually, all myths of creation attest to this. An African writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, in his novel, *The River Between* (1965), draws upon oral tradition (myth), to demonstrate the preexistence of physical structures or social boundaries. From his visions, it is obvious that the natural phenomena existed before they would eventually become strong instruments which transcend physical structures and going further to initiate basic significations of a deep divide between groups, at both physical and emotional levels:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept the deep sleep of their creator. (4)

In Ngugi’s artistic consciousness, the landscapes (settings of his novel *The River Between*) were there before the foundation of life, or the settlement of humans. The same natural phenomena were later to be appropriated by humans. The ridges, Kameno and Makuyu, become places of habitation, and the valley between them (Kameno and Makuyu) is made to serve

as a tool for demarcation or borderline. This is physical boundary. Being separated therefore, by this valley, two ridges, Kameno and Makuyu, mark out two distinct communities. These communities, in turn, construct their personal definitions based on some existing and emerging disparate socio-cultural elements. Although the physical essence or object of demarcation, the valley is natural and clear; the deeper symbolic or non-physical considerations eventually become the tough determiners of the separateness. The elements, which bring about division in the socio-cultural lives of the communities setting of Ngugi's *The River Between* draw mainly upon religion, which in turn shapes all other activities. So religion becomes the major source of "symbolic boundary" in the novel. Two religions, Christianity and the traditional worship of the Gikuyu people constitute the two practices, in the setting of the novel, which guide their spiritual strength. Based on the existing physical demarcation, the people create this formidable boundary. It is insinuated in the story that the two ridges were rivals; in other words, they had, before the arrival of external influences, looked for advantages over each other, such advantages that would help one party gain ascendancy over the other. Christianity arrives in time to the supposed advantage of one ridge over the other. It is an alien religion, introduced much later in the socio-cultural life of the people, but it puts pressure on the entire culture as it claims to be the only true and pure religion. It insists that it provides the only way to salvation of the souls of men, and as it is practiced in the settings, it avoids contact with non-practitioners because such contacts may violate the purity of the converts. The converts may be acting in obedience to the code which guides association within the faith, and this states: "do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers..." (2Cor. 6:14)

This new development creates a deep gulf in communities, Kameno and Makuyu, that hitherto existed with few disparities and more tolerance. It is therefore easy to observe how human beings appropriate natural phenomena, and build some strong elements of differences around them. What ordinarily would have been physical boundaries have been expanded, in terms of meaning and significance, to symbolic levels. The two distinct ridges become symbols of Christianity and Traditionalism. They cease to be just physical erections but deeply emotional and symbolic constructions. Inhabitants

of one of the ridges now see themselves as different from those of the other. Their differences are not in terms of physical looks, languages, foods, or other cultural activities that are easily identifiable at the physical level because they are all blacks and ethnic Africans; but it lies in their beliefs. Their inner convictions of life mark them out as not belonging together. Christians must stay separate from non-Christians.

Other writers broach the issue of religion in border determination from some other perspectives. The mythic consciousness of the Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka in his poem "Idanre" (1967), his novel, *The Interpreters* (1965), and a number of his plays establishes a functional relationship between deities (gods) and human beings but maintains a "boundary." This is another approach to boundary issues. Soyinka is a mythic symbolist and uses deities to symbolize a class of human beings who wield power and authority over others. The deities live in "Idanre hills" a unique natural landscape akin to the classical Greek mount Olympus, the abode of gods. Like their ancient Greek counterparts, as noted by Edith Hamilton (4), Soyinka's Yoruba deities also appear to have been created by human beings. The different environments in which they dwell suggest there is a boundary between them and human beings. However, if Soyinka's symbolism is stretched out, Idanre creatures (deities), according to Maduagwu, in an essay, "Atunda Consciousness and Constructive Rebellion..." represent the all-powerful and domineering human beings, who occupy the upper echelon of the societies (the powers that be; 511). Thus, while at the symbolic level we are faced with a case of a boundary between deities and human beings, the literal reality is a functional boundary between human beings (of a lower kind) and human beings (of another, higher, kind) in the same society. In other words, strong beliefs, supported by some perceived supernatural forces reinforce boundaries.

African Writers, who consciously or unconsciously engage Literature in addressing boundary issues, speak of the validity of their own experiences (culture); thus, they write with a high flavor of Anthropology and Social History. According to Boehmer (1995), "they cast their meaning across a wide textual spectrum, producing anthropological studies, social history and journalism as well as poetry and fiction to promote their cause" (100). A general

look at their works reveals that they have common experiences and thus seem to project the same messages, all of which are deeply anthropological and historical or, one may say, cultural. So African writers explore and adapt their unique experiences in broaching unique boundary issues.

### DISINTEGRATION

For over two hundred years, Africa has been under various forms of exploitation by Europe, and later by other developed nations of the world. Particularly, European activities in Africa have left deep and painful “marks” on the entire continent and her people. The most gruesome and traumatic experience is the obnoxious trans-Atlantic slave trade. All Africa came under this irreverent human ordeal. Although, Africa had earlier battled with the incursion of Arabs who were equally slave dealers, but the magnitude of trans-Atlantic experience made a mockery of the Arabs’ trans-Saharan adventure. Africa is still nursing the wounds of slavery. Consider this:

IN THE EVERLASTING MEMORY  
 OF OUR ANGUISHED ANCESTORS  
 May those who died rest in peace  
 May those who returned find their roots  
 May humanity never again perpetrate  
 Such injustice against humanity  
 We, the living, vow to uphold this.  
 (Inscription at Elmina Castle [observed by the author])

Slave trade created the biggest gulf among Africans (what divide), by uprooting and carting away hundreds of thousands of simple Africans to distant places of America, the West Indies and Europe. The present generation of Africans, in Diaspora, is separated from the rest of Africans at home, both at the physical and non-physical levels. While the physical gulf is obvious, the non-physical is often not easy to identify. Many writers have laid bare the problems of boundaries that came about as a result of this and have also, through creative literature, proffered solutions to such problems. In her play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1995), the Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo, highlights the gulf between the Africans, outside Africa and those within the con-



continent. The hero (or anti-hero) of the play, Ato Yawson, a full-bred African, migrates willingly to America to acquire Western education. While there, he marries Eulalie Rush, an African American, who is African, only by identification (race and color). This co-operation is achieved outside Africa and when they return home to Africa, it is discovered that Eulalie is unable to integrate into the society. She is a symbol of the splinter of DISINTEGRATED Africa, separated from other homeland Africans. Eulalie's values (as an African-American) are at par with indigenous African values. For instance, respect for elders, the position of the wife as subservient to her husband, unequivocal submission of the wife to both her direct husband and the members of her husband's family and most of all, child bearing, are not extremely serious issues for the African American, while they are the utmost determinant of womanhood for the indigenous African woman. Eulalie is to learn the indigenous values and cross the boundary created by slavery hundreds of years before her generation in a marriage with Ato. Ato is equally to help in constructing an enabling atmosphere for this boundary crossing, towards integration.

Slavery resulted in the disintegration of Africa and has created a formidable boundary between the African American and the home based African. But through literary art, Aidoo brings them together in order to work out the much-needed co-operation and understanding for a necessary and lasting zero-boundary situation, between the African American and the home based African.

Other writers like Tchicaya u'Tamsi, and Bode Sowande have variously drawn upon the theme of slavery in relation to boundaries in and among Africans. Utamsi, perhaps the most bitter of the writers in relation to slavery and exploitation of Africans by the West, makes it obvious that the boundaries created by slavery and colonialism will be difficult to demolish. However, attempts towards the demolition of the boundaries should begin with a collective resolve of all Africans, to follow the steps of the Caribbean writer, Aimee Cesaire and "Return to their Native Land," Africa. This return is not a physical exodus as some black Jamaican Africanists would advocate, but consists of believing in Africa and the African tradition. Utamsi personally projects African religion, what outsiders refer to as heathenism as a uniting

factor. Asked what he wished most, in a prefatory note to his collection of poems *Selected Poems of Tchicaya U'tamsi*, he replied “to be a heathen in the heathen reincarnation of the world” (3). In other words, to be truly African, he needs to pull down the boundary between Africans like him, cultural mulattoes, and other blacks in Diaspora separated by slavery; and the full bred Africans. On the other hand, the question of religion must be addressed.

The slave trade (and perhaps other trades) opened the door for a deep but dubious interaction between Europe and Africa. This interaction graduated to colonialism. Colonialism in Africa was as debilitating as slavery. Both, hand in hand, resulted in complete disintegration of Africa. The first permanent settlement of aliens at the cape (one end of Africa) was established by the Dutch in 1652. Later, real and sustained presence of Europe became obvious. Many European countries settled in Africa with their cultures and ways of life because Africa held multiple promises for them. They imposed such cultures on Africa, divided and laid claims (ownership) of the various African nations without giving consideration to their individual qualities. Eventually, physical boundaries became artificial in Africa and this is sustained till date to a large extent.

As a result of this, Africa assumed an appearance of the ad hoc, and was considered along the lines of her usefulness to contending European powers. There was a partitioning (of Africa), which resulted in the establishment of areas of colonial influences. These areas became fragments of the hitherto whole entities. Cultural affiliations were subsequently unsettled and new units emerged but without cohesion. Boundaries automatically came up, breaking ethnic groups up and randomly placing them in new geo-political formats. Native Africans were given new orientations in the direction of the ideologies of their “colonial masters.” For instance, the Yoruba nation became fractured and her fragments are in present day Nigeria, Togo, Benin, the first received British orientation while the last two were doctored in French culture; so also are the Hausa and Fulani who are in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon etc. Rather than be bound by their ethnic lineages, they eventually submit to the new colonial arrangement of supposed city-states

and nations; and more importantly, to the new colonial languages and culture.

The greatest negative impact of the partitioning of Africa is the disintegration of cultural affiliations on one side, and its attempt to force into uncomfortable mergers, distinct, autonomous but closely related cultures on the other hand. Westerners did not understand the thin and cooperating lines which marked out and decorated the diverse African peoples and cultures before their arrival, so they assumed that Africa was one large village, made up of insensitive beings that could be pushed about.

Colonialism in Africa was, in this case, different from that in other areas, especially the colonized white territories. In the process of colonialism, Africa did not have to battle, like Australia, according to Boehmer “to give shape to an everyday reality in resistance to images of the beautiful and the normal transmitted by colonial literature” (109). The reverse is the case here; writings from Africa struggle to reconstruct the original image of Africa brutally distorted by colonialism; to bring about a reintegration of the fragments of the fractured mother Africa as a result of colonial incursion, and to carefully untwine, through some cultural surgery, the abnormal unfavourable societal norms forced on the people of Africa by colonialism. However, like Australians, Africans need to reinvent their cultural art and appropriate literary forms for authentic African expressions. That, at least, will help to pull forces together in fighting a common course.

African writing thus has to assume the uphill tasks of bringing all Africans together and dismantling negative representations and sustaining themes, which express cultural pride. The early African writers faced these challenges. Aimee Cesaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Birago Diop, David Diop, etc approached the challenges from the cultural perspectives, developing and pursuing the literary philosophy of Negritude. They excavated the rich cultural treasures of Africa, and used that as a rallying point for all blacks and Africans, inadvertently confirming “what unite” in the universally acknowledged beauty, nobility and permanence of BLACK. Gerald Moore observes that Jean-Paul Sartre noted as he studied the emergence of Franco-phone African Literature that “the African writer is already exiled from himself that he feels this need to declare himself. So he begins with an exile,

a double exile...of his heart... the exile of his body offers a magnificent image..." (xvii). The series of exiles identified by Sartre indicate lines, or divides which translate into boundaries. These boundaries within are reflected externally also. However, the works, in question, generally depict black and Africa as blissful and exotic, even though her images have been very much distorted and fragmented by ignorant and prejudiced colonial writers.

In addition to the obvious exponents of Negritude, whose works parade themes that express unity of Africa through her cultural pride, other African writers have produced works that are spiced with African culture and tradition, capable of healing the fractures and equally reintegrating the splinters. These writers consciously or unconsciously domesticate literature as a medium that can project "what unite and overcome what divide." Chinua Achebe of Nigeria and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O of Kenya are prominent in this second category. Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, presents a relatively straight forward and unprejudiced pictures and images of a typical African locale. There are virtually no indications of serious cultural and geographical 'divides' in the setting of the novel. From all indications, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, another novel by Achebe, traverse the entirety of Igbo African tradition in symbolic terms. These works show that traditional Africa parades a complete human system with definite social pattern, economic structure, political frame that includes democratic justice, and religious worship. All these aspects of human existence bind the people together.

Of particular significance in terms of examples of African unity is in *Arrow of God*, where Achebe narrates how eight clans decide to come together to found a god, Ulu, who will be their protector and a symbol of unity among them. This religious bond affects the totality of their lives. The reverence for, and worship of Ulu further translate into reverence for all social norms and values associated with Ulu and hence the people. Ulu determines the seasons (planting and harvest), rites and observances, leadership hierarchy, dispensation of justice as well as punishments for offences. The unity and bliss (under the deity, Ulu) continues until fractured by the forces of colonialism and Christianity. These forces introduce diversities to the hitherto holistic society governed by a belief in Ulu. Christianity pushes forward another God, British colonialism projectes another pattern of social interac-

tion and the western adventurers come forward with new ideas about commerce. All these new trends create “divides” as they exist side by side with the indigenous practices. Achebe’s works of cultural and anthropological flavors have largely been accepted (by the external world) as authentic pictures of Africa, thus demonstrating how creative literature can consolidate, through its thematic preoccupation, “what unite,” in other words, it is capable of highlighting and eradicating lines and divides, which exist at the symbolic level. It is so because these initial endeavors to reintegrate fragments of battered African culture and to reshape them for public consumption serve as a pillar of unity especially during the colonial period.

One major point of unity amongst Africans (in respect of their colonial experience) is the rather unconscious submission to Boehmer’s suggestion in “moving away from colonial definitions, transgressing the boundaries of colonial discourse... borrowing, taking over, or appropriating the ideological, linguistic, and textual forms of the colonial power.” (105-06). The early intellectuals achieved a movement away from colonial definitions. Not just Achebe, but several other writers like Senghor, Soyinka, Ngugi, Aidoo, Utamsi etc., in very special ways challenge colonial positions on Africa history, culture and tradition. While in the process of redefinition, they also appropriate both linguistic and textual forms of the colonial power. This is achieved through general education. In this area, imperialism inadvertently yields to poetic justice to a certain degree. It provides the necessary infrastructure – education – for articulation of self-representation by its subjects. Through this, subjects are able to encourage themselves unto unity and to subsequently resist unto freedom, from the obnoxious grips of colonial cruelty. Literary artists like Peter Abraham (*Tell Freedom*), Achebe (*No Longer At Ease*), Ngugi (*Weep Not, Child; The River Between*) etc, depict this. In their works, characters like Lee (*Tell Freedom*); Njoroge (*Weep Not, Child*); Waiyaki (*The River Between*); Obi Okonkwo (*No Longer at Ease*) all pass through peculiar traumas. Their anguish emanates from colonial subjugation. However, it is somehow punctuated by a glimmer of hope, hope given substance by the possible acquisition of education and modern skills by few natives. Lee goes to school and eventually becomes a writer, who volunteers information on the actual condition of Africans under colonial

(apartheid) South Africa. Both Njoroge and Waiyaki battle through difficulties and while at school, they seek ways of reintegration among Africans who have been forcefully separated by colonialism. Obi Okonkwo is sponsored to go and acquire education for community development but he decides to channel his experience towards overcoming what divides, as he attempts to consolidate a relationship with Elsie who belongs to another class (of the un-touchables or Outcasts) in the society.

Colonial education, more than anything else, introduces complications to boundary issues in Africa. On the one hand, it imposes on Africa, new foreign languages like English, French, Portuguese, Spanish etc. which create boundaries; but on the other hand, these new alien languages become veritable instruments for boundary crossing because they eventually gain ascendancy over the native African languages and are used across many communities today. Through the acquired colonial languages, there have been massive cross-cultural exchanges and agreements, and these have also largely been made possible by creative literature. Achebe's novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* may have unearthed and explained the culture and tradition of Igbo people of eastern Nigeria more than any systematic course in Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy, Religion or History could do. Creative literature has literally demolished the partitions between diverse African cultural groups by making details of norms and forms obtainable in one culture available to others. Today, Achebe's Igbo, Soyinka's Yoruba, Ngugi's Gikuyu, Camara Laye's Mandinka, Dangarembga TsiTsi's Shona, Miriama Ba's Wolof / Toucouleur, Kunene's Zulu, Okara and J.P. Clark's Ijaw etc., have become fluid and like tributaries, flow into the big universal pool of African culture.

## REINTEGRATION

African literature has played and is still playing a major role in identifying and consolidating WHAT UNITE as its contribution to border issues and Pan-Africanism. In a very emotional story, Ngugi, in *The River Between*, presents how literature can consolidate unity. He creates a set of young characters and pitches them against an older set; all caught in the web of

colonialism and its strong element, Christian religion, which has introduced a big gulf among people of similar origin. The young characters, Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni, somehow discover that they belong to a new generation that needs to distinguish itself from the previous generation of their parents. In order to do so, they need to initiate new ideas and concepts, which can functionally address the problems of their generation. While they appreciate the features of the generation of their parents, the strong emotional attachments involved, and are not willing to betray them, they somehow realize that the standards of that generation are incapable of providing adequate solutions to the fresh challenges and problems of the new generation.

Waiyaki finds himself in the camp of traditionalists, while Muthoni and Nyambura are in the opposite camp of the Christians. The boundary between them is a valley. However, they meet because both of them have tasted western education provided by the Christians (what is capable of uniting). In a very dramatic development, the need for a close relationship between the two disparate ridges that the young people represent arises when Muthoni, a daughter of the Christian leader, Joshua, decides to attain tribal purity by registering for the ritual of initiation, against the faith and belief that her father acquired and transferred to her. Unfortunately, her bid to return to “tribal purity” becomes sacrificial. She loses her life. The loss draws Waiyaki and Nyambura close, into a firm conjugal relationship with a strength that erases the lines, which divide the opposing ridges. So Muthoni’s selfless act constructs a bridge across the valley and this is reinforced by her sister, Nyambura, and friend Waiyaki, showing that... “What divide can be overcome and what unite can be consolidated.”

Ngugi’s characters in *The River Between* can be contrasted with Achebe’s characters in both *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*. In *Arrow of God*, a gulf is created, again by the new religion, Christianity. The new religion acquires converts and adherents, who develop a new community of believers with distinct social behaviour. They are exposed to Western education and life style and because they must obey the new commandments of Christianity, they clash incessantly with traditional values. At the end of the novel when Ezeulu, the custodian of traditional culture is taken away by the European administrators and as a result is unable to eat the sacred yams

which in turn prevents him from announcing the date for the new yam festival at the appropriate time, the gulf between the Christians and the traditionalists become prominent. There are no characters like Waiyaki and Nwambura who could initiate a reconciliatory move between the two opposing sects by harnessing the things that unite and playing down the things that divide. This results in the destruction of Ezeulu and his deity, Ulu.

In *No Longer at ease*, Obi and Clara are two major modern characters that first meet outside Africa and again reunite when they return to Africa. Obi is shocked to discover that he is unable to marry Clara because of some lines of division between them. They belong to different sects within the same tradition. Like Waiyaki, Obi and Clara are reasonably equipped to address the nagging boundary problem before them with a combination of native wisdom and acquired modern knowledge. Unlike Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura, Obi and Clara fail to effect positive changes. They thus symbolize the group of Africans who, at the point of realizing the importance of unity in their generation, betray it, while Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura, on the other hand, represent those who act otherwise, in a rather positive direction.

The actions, reactions and inactions of these two opposite characters illuminate the two opposite approaches presented by literature to border issues. In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi's weak action and Clara's inaction are incapable of confronting and overcoming "what divide." In *The River Between*, Muthoni's action, Waiyaki's reaction and Nyambura's inaction or better still support, provide a rounded joint attack on "what divide" in order to emphasize "unity." They succeed in redefining purity and togetherness. Their action, reaction and inaction sum up to project a realistic self-discovery and functional reintegration of values which are capable of sustaining a new Africa of diverse values – inherent and acquired – yet without lines and divides.

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