Issues of Ethic-identity Crisis in Ngugi's Matigari and Mda's *The Heart of Redness* in the post-colonial era

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Abstract

Postcolonial identity takes on various guises in the newly independent African states after the demise of colonialism. In considering these guises, this article examines the various manifestations of post-colonial identity crisis in a comparative study of Matigari by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1998) and The Heart of Redness by Zakes Mda (2000). The characters in both novels depict two groups in African society during the post-colonial era; namely, those who aspire to Western values, culture, and beliefs and those who aim to revive their traditional African beliefs and culture. This identity crisis is furthermore exacerbated in terms of those who are aligned to the new nation-state since they feel privileged and connected, and those who feel marginalised and disconnected from the nation-state as they are forced to live on the periphery of society. In discussing the post-colonial identity crisis in the two novels, common themes such as the influence of Western values and culture on African society, conflicts between past, present and future, the petit bourgeoisie, the alienated and the outsider protagonists will be examined comparatively as they are depicted in the novels. The themes shed light on how ethnic-identity crisis is manifested in post-colonial society and how this has an impact on the success of the nation-state.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a post-colonial nation, the questions of identity arise when one must define him/herself in the context of a rapidly changing society. Traditionally, a large part of one's identity is derived from one's past, education and the socio-cultural milieu in which one matures. According to Sofield (1999, p.1) where we come from and who our ancestors were form the foundation upon which we build. Consequently, we use what we learn to position ourselves within our society. But what does one do when the society and culture one's grandparents and great-grandparents knew is suddenly disappearing under the feet of a disparaging, disrespectful colonising force? What is one to learn when the available education system was created and is still dominated by a foreign culture? How does one find a niche in a society obsessed with stigma?

Franz Fanon, an important theorist of anti-colonial resistance aimed to invoke the self-determining powers of colonised people so that they could overcome oppression in society. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), he called for the colonised to decisively resist the arsenal of complexes, paranoia and feelings of inferiority created by the colonial system. This, however,

did not materialise after colonialism, as the previous white dictators were replaced by black ones. In his book *Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Fanon is highly critical of the new black elite for their excesses, corrupt practices and use of brute force to ensure their supremacy. According to Fanon (1963) to decolonise thoroughly implies that the indigenous must be forcibly substituted for the alien in literature as in life, and the entire structure of the colonial society has to be transformed.

Montle (2020) opines that there was a major repositioning of identities in Africa after the colonisers left the continent. In this regard Waldt and Prinsloo (2019, p.1) aver that since ethic-cultural identities signify a level of cohesion or polarisation among the group, the demise of these identities could lead to the creation of an institutionalised crisis in society. Consequently, as pointed out by Tembo (2016, p.9), the revival of African identity has come to "affirm the humanity of black people and imagine socio-political and cultural space of urgency free from white racism and demeaning forms of political intercourse". However, since the colonialists were able to manipulate Africans into adopting Westernised identities, this led to the creation of an African identity crisis in the post-colonial era. Montle (2020, p.84) is vocal in his assertion of how the colonisers robbed Africans of their "cultural identities, heritage, land, wealth and got subject to tyrannical leadership, slavery, hardships and destruction". This is further substantiated by Baytar and Ivcu (2023) who assert that since the colonisers proclaimed their language and culture to be superior to that of the colonised, they used this to justify their control over them. Consequently, when the power dynamics of colonialism are reinforced by culture "it makes it more difficult for the colonised to resist the status quo or to challenge it" (Baytar & Ivcu, 2023, p.27). Furthermore, imposing cultural norms and values on the colonised led to what they refer to "as the erasure or marginalisation of indigenous cultures and practices" (Baytar & Ivcu, 2023, p.27). Hence during the post-colonial era, the colonised find it increasingly trying to return to their indigenous cultural practices, since they were colonised into new ways of knowing and being during the colonial era. This ultimately leads to ethnic identity conflict during the post-colonial era, as the colonised are essentially confronted with a hybrid culture. Thus, the exit of the colonisers from Africa did not signal a revival of African culture leading to an African renaissance, as many hoped for, but an ethnic identity crisis, which different African societies are forced to contend with in contemporary African society (Afisi, 2009).

Boehmer (1995) asserts that the nation-state, at the time of independence from the colonial power, was seen to represent the most achieved form of self-realisation for oppressed people. Following the incisive analyses of Benedict Anderson (1983), the process of national self-making in story and symbol is often called imagining the nation. This implies that the nation is a symbolic formation rather than a natural essence. Boehmer (1995) further contends that it exists in so far as the people who make up the nation have it in mind or experience it as citizens, soldiers, readers of newspapers, students and so on. According to Van der Merwe and Saunders (2001), the theme of colonisation is loosely connected to that of identity because it not only leads to the loss of political and economic freedom for the Indigenous people but also to a loss of their social values and traditional identities. This implies that the colonisers not only took possession of the land but also colonised the minds of its people. Hence Fanon's (1967) dream of the creation of a completely decolonised state by overhauling the structure of colonialism, was unattainable.

According to Sofield (1999), any person desiring a complete reversion to pre-colonial society will discover that those values and norms no longer exist. This is because they have been replaced by a set of hybrid values and norms which are problematic and sometimes tragic for an individual struggling to make peace with who s/he is or to unravel his/her identity.

After independence, as pointed out by Boehmer (1995), colonised writers represented themselves as subjects of their past in their desire to cancel colonial stereotypes and to search for evidence of a rich and varied pre-colonial existence. Consequently, the focus was on tales of military victory against colonial forces and portraits of defiant or self-determining leaders. Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), for example, set during the four days leading up to Uhuru in 1963, telescopes the emergence of the Gikuyu nation from earliest times. The focal point of that history is the *Mau Mau* struggle which is told in the form of recollection by a group of historically represented characters both collaborators and heroes of the resistance. The post-colonial request was thus to establish control over the past and to give it form so that history could be rewritten from the perspectives of the previously marginalised and oppressed members of society.

All post-colonial societies, however, are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved the problem of inequality and oppression in society at large. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995), post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction as a result of the emergence of new elites, neo-colonial institutions, internal divisions based on race, language and religion and the unequal treatment of Indigenous people. This view is also shared by Brydon and Tiffin (1993) who argue that post-colonial signifies the lingering legacy of the imperial/colonial relationship in all its positive and negative aspects. Many countries are officially independent yet suffer the continuing pressures of economic and psychological dependency. According to Brydon and Tiffin (1993), these countries share a tension between an imposed or inherited language and culture and an experienced place. This leads Ashcroft et al. to aver that "all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved the problem" (1994, p.2). Hall defines the emergence of identity in this context as a "kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between several intersecting discourses" (1989, p.10).

Hence it is with this background in mind that this article aims to examine how the post-colonial ethnic-identity crisis finds expression in Ngugi's *Matigari* (1998) and Mda's, *The Heart of Redness* (2000). This study aims to examine both novels comparatively to ascertain how the authors engage with and depict the post-colonial ethnic identity crisis through the themes and the characters.

2. COMMON THEMES RELATED TO THE POST-COLONIAL ETHNIC-IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE NOVELS

Both novels illustrate that it is difficult for African states to return to the selves that they once were, since certain forces once set in motion are impossible to reverse.

An in-depth analysis of the post-colonial ethnic-identity crisis in the two novels led to the identification of the following themes namely: the influence of Western values and culture on Africans, the conflict between past, present and future, the petit bourgeoisie, the alienated and the outsider protagonists, which will be interrogated in the subsequent sections.

2.1. influence of western values and culture on Africans

A common theme which both writers explore is the influence of Western values and culture on the identities of the characters in post-colonial society. Both Ngugi (1998) and Mda

(2000) demonstrate in their novels how easily indigenous Africans are prepared to relinquish their cultures, languages, and belief systems in favour of Western values since they perceive the latter to be superior to theirs. This is depicted by two of the characters namely John Boy in *Matigari* and Xoliswa in *The Heart of Redness* who regard African culture as repressive, debilitating and backward. These characters represent the petit bourgeoisie in post-colonial society who regard their cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions as inferior to Western culture. This leads Fanon (1967) to suggest that the previously colonised becomes 'other' to himself when he attempts to 'mask' this 'otherness' by becoming 'white', by mimicking white actions and perspectives. According to him, this consequently manifests in an identity crisis leading to an abrogation of indigenous language, knowledge, and culture.

One of the characters in *The Heart of Redness*, Xoliswa Ximiya, the newly appointed principal at the secondary school in the small village of Qolorha-by-Sea, refers to the Xhosa culture as being backward and restricting. As a representative of the 'unbelievers', she fervently believes that the Xhosas should relinquish their backward ways for a more civilised Western culture. Her obsession with the lifestyle, dress and culture of the West leans towards the absurd at times, since she buys her mother dresses and her father suits in the latest European styles to transform them from "backwardness and heathenism" to becoming "enlightened" like her (Mda, 2000, p.48).

When Xoliswa meets Camagu, one of the protagonists in the novel, who has been in exile in the United States for 30 years, she is confident that he will choose her over Qukweza, since both of them lived in the "land of the free and the brave" (Mda, 2000, p.74). Mda depicts Xoliswa as having moved away from an African communal-based philosophy to a Western individualistic one. Xoliswa's view is that Camagu will not choose Qukweza, since he is more of her class than Qukweza's, who is more rooted in Xhosa traditional beliefs. Her reference to class indicates that she has distanced herself from the community-based African worldview and adopted the Western model of society based on class instead. She regards herself as being bourgeoisie due to her Western education and the fact that she has completed a course in teaching English as a second language at a college in America. Xoliswa's perception of civilisation is aligned with that of a capitalist, western view since she favours the Western model of progress in Qolorha-by-Sea, which she expresses as follows in her conversation with Camagu during their initial meeting:

…Of course, I am right. You have seen how backwards this place is. We cannot shop civilly. Just because some sentimental old fools want to preserve birds and trees and an outmoded way of life (Mda, 2000, p.75).

Later when Camagu decides to resist the establishment of a shopping mall and the destruction of what he regards as an idyllic and serene area, she is livid and accuses him of encouraging her people to remain backward. Since she expected him to be a proponent of progress as he spent so many years in the U.S.A., she expresses her dissatisfaction with his viewpoint as follows:

My people are trying to move away from redness, but you are doing your damndest to drag them back. The skirt is part of our redness. It is a backward movement. All this nonsense about bringing back African traditions. We are civilized people. We have no time for beads and long pipes (Mda, 2000, p.184).

In *Matigari* one encounters a similar dissatisfaction with traditional practices as expressed by John Boy Junior, a representative of the newly formed African elite when Matigari, the freedom fighter, who has returned from the forest after many years, is determined to claim settler William's house and land, which he believes rightfully belongs to him. John Boy describes his western education in England as follows:

There I got a number of diplomas in administration. I used to eat dinners in the Inns of Court, where I learned how to dress like a gentleman and from where I was called to the bar (Ngugi, 1998, p.40).

When Matigari reminds John Boy that he was the boy that the community supported financially so that he could study abroad and deliver the country from slavery, John Boy makes a scathing attack on African communalism and attributes his success to his hard work. He articulates this disgust for the African culture and philosophy and the superiority of Western culture as follows:

Our country has remained in darkness because of the ignorance of our people. They do not know the importance of the word 'individual' as opposed to the word 'masses'. White people are advanced because they respect that word and therefore honour the freedom of the individual, which means the freedom of everyone to follow his whims without worrying about others. Survival of the fittest. But you black people? You walk about fettered to your families, clans, nationalities, people, masses. If the individual decides to move ahead, he is pulled back by the others. (Ngugi, 1998, p.40).

The worldviews expressed by both John Boy in *Matigari* and Xoliswa in *The Heart of Redness* indicate that they have relinquished their African roots in favour of the Western worldview. Both characters perceive blacks as being synonymous with backwardness, heathenism, and regression, whilst whites are associated with progress, advancement, and a superior culture. The tone that John Boy uses to address Matigari as "you black people" (Ngugi, p.40), highlights the identity crisis that plagues many Africans in a post-colonial society. The Western education, which they received abroad, contributes to the world views which they espouse making them believe that they are superior to other Africans. These two characters represent individuals in post-colonial society who have relinquished their African roots and identity for an identity in post-colonial society synonymous with capitalism and co-modification. They have been assimilated into Western culture to such an extent that they are oblivious to the value of their own African culture, traditions, and beliefs. Fanon (1967) asserts that the donning of a white mask by a black man is because he thinks of himself as a universal subject; equally participating in a society that advocates equality in a quest to escape the association of blackness with evil. In this way cultural values are internalised or epidermalised into consciousness, creating a fundamental disjuncture between the black man's consciousness and his body (Fanon, 1967). This leads Fanon to opine, "the black person attempts to cope by

adopting white masks that will somehow make the fact of his blackness vanish" (Fanon,1967). In this way, as highlighted by Ana Loombia (2007) black skin/white masks reflect "the miserable schizophrenia of the colonised's identity" (2007, p.124). The manipulation of African-traditionalised identities to Westernized identities by the colonisers resulted in what Montle (2020, p.84) refers to as "paving the way for the manifestation of African identity crisis in the post-colonial era".

Under these conditions, as illustrated by both Xoliswa in *The Heart of Redness* (Mda, 2000) and John Boy in *Matigari* (Ngugi, 1998), the black man is necessarily alienated from himself.

2.2. Conflict between past, present and future

Both Ngugi (1998) and Mda (2000) use historical references to highlight the development of post-colonial identity. In *The Heart of Redness,* Mda (2000) creates a novel where the past and present run parallel to each other. In his novel, there are constant references to the atrocities perpetrated by the British against the Xhosa nation and the strategies employed by the British to suppress the Xhosas into submission and to accept assimilation. The conflicts between those who believed in the prophecies of the girl prophetess Nongqawuse and those who did not believe in them continued in post-apartheid South Africa amongst the people in Qolorha-by-Sea. The narrative of past imperialism and the cattle-killing is woven into the contemporary bildungsroman utilizing flashbacks. Similarly, Ngugi (1998) uses *Matigari*, to make us aware of the role of the freedom fighter in the liberation of the country. Through Matigari's eyes, the readers are made aware of the atrocities perpetrated by the Settlers against Blacks in Kenya. According to Frederick Cooper's (1994, p.1528) argument, Ngugi takes the path many African scholars have taken by putting "more emphasis on showing that Africans had history than on asking how African's history making was complicated in establishing or contesting power".

Both novels highlight the conflict between past, present and future which has an influence on post-colonial identity construction. There comes a point, however, when one must confront these to recognise an identity described by Achebe (1997, p.191) as the crossroads:

The crossroads does have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple-headed spirits, but also he might be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision.

Achebe (1997) views the conflict of identity facing a post-colonial citizen as containing the potential for disaster – but more importantly, when properly handled, from which one could draw strength and vision that will be beneficial to the nation. In both *The Heart of Redness* (Mda, 2000) and *Matigari* (Ngugi, 1998) we are introduced to characters, who have not successfully navigated these crossroads but succumb to a crisis of identity. In Xoliswa's case in *The Heart of Redness*, the dilemma was introduced by Western education which alienated her from her traditional African lifestyle.

The emphasis on material development and progress at the expense of African culture, traditions and resistance movements feature prominently in both novels. Both Ngugi (1998)

and Mda (2000) use various characters effectively to highlight this contradiction in post-colonial society. The desire to relegate African history and culture to the dustbins of the past is most aptly summed up by the Provincial Commissioner at the meeting with the workers in Matigari, as follows:

Let us all now forget that such people as Matigari ma Njiruungi ever existed. Let us with one accord like loyal parrots, agree that Matigari ma Njiruungi was just a bad dream. That bit of history was just a bad dream, a nightmare in fact. We have qualified professors here who can write a new history for us (Ngugi, 1998, p.99).

This obsession with progress and the desire to identify more closely with Western capitalism is highlighted by the Commissioner, when he decides to change the name of the village from Trampville to Progressville, and when he implores people to forget that Matigari ma Njiruungi ever existed. He, like the minister and other high-ranking officials in the government, is very protective of the colonisers, as they continue to be supported by the imperialists both financially and morally.

A similar viewpoint is expressed by Bhonco, Xoliswa's father, in *The Heart of Redness* (Mda, 2000) when he expresses the desire to break away from archaic practices, which stifle the people's development and progress. As far as Bhonco is concerned the 'believers', who uphold African traditional culture and believe in the importance of Nongqawuse, want the Xhosas to remain in their wildness. He equates wildness with redness as Xhosa women smear red ochre on their faces to demonstrate their attachment to the earth and their closeness to nature. Bhonco regards this as a stifling and demeaning practice which will prevent them from achieving any progress in their lives. He expresses his disgust at remaining caught up in traditional practices as follows:

They (the believers) want us to remain in our wildness!! To remain red all our lives! To stay in the darkness of the redness! (Mda, 2000, p.79)

In his quest to break from tradition, he has resorted to wearing suits bought by his enlightened daughter Xoliswa and has tried to persuade his wife to do away with the red and to stop wearing the Isikhakha skirt which represents backwardness. Both Bhonco and his wife NoPetticoat were indoctrinated by Xoliswa Ximiya to alienate themselves from traditional practices and repressive culture. Bhonco's fervent belief in the advantages of Western culture and advancement is highlighted as follows:

We want to get rid of this bush which is a sign of our uncivilised state. We want developers to come and build the gambling city that will bring money to this community. That will bring modernity to our lives, and that will rid us of our redness. (Mda, 2000, p.105)

Although he desires progress and advancement at the expense of African culture and tradition and identifies with capitalism, he is thrust into an identity crisis at times as he still upholds certain cultural practices like the dance borrowed from a certain group and his beliefs in the ancestors. Both Bhonco and NoPetticoat are confused about their identities in post-colonial/apartheid society. They are not sure where they really fit in, and although they seem to lean more towards advancement and progress synonymous with the West, at times they revert to traditional cultural practices. They represent people struggling to make meaning of their identity construction in post-colonial society as they are not sure what path to follow. Although both initially support their daughter wholeheartedly in her belief in Western progress and development, later when bees sting Bhonco, he believes that they have been sent by the ancestors and NoPetticoat finds consolation in her traditional isikhakha skirts, beaded ornaments and African handbags. When Xoliswa, their 'supposed' enlightened daughter, chastises them for reverting to their heathen beliefs, NoPetticoat tells her that she is starting to realise that there may indeed be many different paths to progress. According to Tsao (2005) "a survivor of a colonial identity is caught between helplessly imitating the colonizer in an attempt at originality or returning to the roles that colonization has imposed on him." Crisis, which is one of the aftermaths of colonialism, leads societies and individuals to a state of confusion, as they struggle to come to an understanding of who they really are and where they fit in (Dizayi, 2019).

2.3. The Petit Bourgeoisie in post-colonial society

Both Ngugi (1998) and Mda (2000) provide insights into the petit bourgeoisie who become the leaders in the newly formed capitalist state. In *The Heart of Redness* (Mda, 2000, p.36) describes the aristocrats of the revolution as:

> …an exclusive club that is composed of the ruling elites, their families and close friends, some of them were indeed leaders of the freedom struggle, while others had used their status and wealth to smack their way into the very heart of the organisation. Jobs went to sons and daughters of the aristocrats of the revolution.

In a quest to ensure that there is no opposition to their viewpoints, strategies, and projects they are prepared to use brute force to ensure that their positions are safeguarded. In *Matigari* (Ngugi, 1998) the Minister of Truth and Justice warns the workers that communists will be detained without trial and strikes are banned by a presidential decree.

> …I abide by the law and the law abides in me. I have been taught the law and I staunchly believe in it. I am the guardian of the law today. I make the law and ensure that it is kept (Ngugi, 1998, p.85).

It emerges from this excerpt that the state is prepared to use draconian measures to uphold its philosophies and beliefs and will cling to power at any cost for the attainment of material wealth, but not to serve the people. This absolute power exerted by the state on the population at large is also highlighted in *The Heart of Redness* (Mda, 2000, p.232) when Camagu expresses his rejection of the casino and townhouse development at the meeting convened by the new CEO of the black empowerment company, Lefa Leballo, Lefa warns all present at the

meeting that they would go ahead with their plans whether the community approved or not as they had the backing of the government.

> We are going ahead with our plans. How will you stop us? The government has already approved the project. I belong to the ruling party. Many people in the ruling party are directors of this company. The chairman himself was a cabinet minister until he was deployed to the corporate world. We'll see to it that you don't fail our efforts.

The tone of the speakers in both excerpts is arrogant and indifferent, completely disregarding freedom of speech. Both the Minister of Peace and Justice in *Matigari* and Lefa Leballo in the *Heart of Redness* are rigid in their resolve to ensure that they achieve their ends, which are steeped in capitalism and allegiance to the West. Inherent in these excerpts is the view that the two speakers are there to uphold Western values, promote capitalism and suppress the workers.

Like John Boy and the Minister of Truth and Justice, Xoliswa in *The Heart of Redness*, is equally perturbed by her people's backwardness and heathen beliefs as she aligns herself more to Western values and the capitalist system. Eventually, she decides to leave Qolorha-by-Sea for Pretoria in search of greener pastures where she believes instinctively that she will secure a good position in the government because of her contacts there. Her desire to break her ties with this 'uncivilized place', as she describes the village, and her yearning desire to be part of a capitalist society is highlighted as follows when she informs her mother that she will be leaving:

> I am going to Pretoria to make personal applications. Many of my former schoolmates are high up in the ruling party. They will lobby for me. I must go because it works out much better when one is there. It is high time I went to live in more civilized places. (Mda, 2000, p.260)

It is evident that she has become alienated from her culture and has been lured to Pretoria for the material benefits which she could derive from a position in the government. Unlike Camagu in *The Heart of Redness* who was unable to secure a job in the country as he was not prepared to lobby for a position, Xoliswa is prepared to sacrifice her morals to secure a position in parliament, even if it entails nepotism. She was eventually able to secure a position as Deputy Director in the Department of National Education. Xoliswa, like John Boy, and the Minister of Truth and Justice have been assimilated into the Western lifestyle characterised by individualism, materialism and capitalism.

According to Cesaire (1974, p.104) no matter how hard Africa tries to break away from colonial identities it is unable to do so which contributes to the African identity crisis which he articulates as follows:

"…wherever colonization is a fact, the indigenous culture begins to rot and among the ruins, something begins to be born, which is not a culture, but a kind of sub-culture which is condemned to exist on the margin allowed by a European culture. This then becomes the province of a few men, the elite, who find themselves placed in the most artificial conditions, deprived of any revivifying contact with the masses of the people.

The alienation of the characters from their traditional African culture signifies a loss of ethnic-cultural identities which, according to Waldt and Prinsloo (2019), leads to the creation of an institutionalized crisis in society as so aptly articulated by Cesaire (1974).

2.4. The alienated

While the petit bourgeoisie in post-colonial African society aligns themselves with the promotion of Western values and culture, there is a group of individuals in post-colonial society who are disenchanted with the new nation as they feel ostracised and alienated. Both Ngugi (1998) and Mda (2000) highlight their dissatisfaction with the way ordinary citizens, who made tremendous sacrifices for the freedom of the nation-state, are sidelined by the new elite and relegated to the periphery of society. This leads them to question the sincerity of those in power to address the concerns of all the people, thereby inhibiting any notion of patriotism towards the newly developed state. This underlying tension between those who have made sacrifices for the benefit of the nation, and those who now enjoy all the material and financial benefits, ultimately leads the former to be polarised from the nation-state, which is aptly summed up by one of the daggasmokers *(marijuana smokers)* in *The Heart of Redness* (Mda, 2000, p.34) as follows:

…Everything now…fruits of liberation…are enjoyed only by those from exile from ………land…Yet we were the ones who bore the brunt of the bullets. We threw stones and danced the freedom dance.

There is a strong feeling among this group that they were merely used as pawns so that the new elite could gain power. Another one of the daggasmokers articulates their unfair treatment at the hands of the petit bourgeoisie as follows:

…Yes, while they were having a good time overseas, we were dying here. We were the cannon fodder for those who are eating softly now (Mda, 2000, p.35).

The viewpoints expressed by the characters in both excerpts highlight the sense of betrayal felt by people who were at the forefront of the struggle, "dancing the freedom dance" (Ngugi ,2000, p. 36). On the other hand, although Camagu, the chief protagonist in *The Heart of Redness* is also a returning exile from the United States, he is unable to secure a job in the new South Africa even though he is highly qualified because he is not prepared to allow anyone to lobby for him to get a job or to be part of the "cocktail circuit" (Ngugi, 2000, p.36). Camagu, like the other marginalised members in the new South Africa, feels alienated, since he is not

able to secure a job on merit, but needs to align himself to an elitist group to be considered for a position.

The oppressive regime in post-colonial society that replaces the colonial one, alienates itself from ordinary people to such an extent that, as argued by Fanon (1963), it starts to sow the seed of discontent which finds expression in strikes, mass action and return to violent forms of armed resistance. Although Mda (2000) glosses over this dissatisfaction in *The Heart of Redness*, Ngugi (1998) vents his anger at the post-colonial government for their brute force and repression. Consequently, he is regarded as a threat by the government, is incarcerated and eventually goes into exile. Ngugi's dissatisfaction with the post-colonial government in Kenya is articulated by the group of people in Matigari who have been flung into jail for various misdemeanours. One of the inmates sums up the leaders' attitudes towards the general populace as follows:

> Our country is truly as dry as the concrete floor Our leaders have hearts as cold as that of Pharaoh or even colder than those of the colonialists. They cannot hear the cry of the people (Ngugi, 1998, p.44).

This excerpt in *Matigari*, like the one in *The Heart of Redness* is indicative of the extent to which the new regime has alienated itself from ordinary people and its obsession with power and material wealth. In both *Matigari* and *The Heart of Redness* the native bourgeoisie are characterised as mere 'watchdogs' of foreign capital who are reduced to reckless imitators of Western values rather than innovators. According to Ogude (1999, p.37), the Kenyan petit bourgeoisie in *Matigari* are portrayed as wanting to simply limp after the image of the western bourgeoisie, rather than being their own masters. Those who want to be their own masters, like Matigari, are eliminated. This is further supported by Bhati (2015, p.18) who argues that colonialism mixed with neo-colonialism "has led to consistent and structural subjugation of the colonial subject (Other)".

2.5. The Outsider Protagonists

In both *Matigari* and *The Heart of Redness*, Matigari and Camagu, return from exile to their native countries to become a part of the nation-state and to exercise their rights as citizens of the newly formed country. Both are, however, disillusioned with their experiences and find it difficult to identify with the petit bourgeoisie who exert power over the masses. Whilst Matigari girds himself with the belt of peace in search of truth and justice in a democratic state, after spending many years in the forest in pursuit of settler Williams and eventually killing him, Camagu is on a journey of self-discovery to find his roots in South Africa after being in exile in the USA for thirty years.

After Camagu is unsuccessful in securing a job in the new South Africa because he was not a member of the "aristocrats of the revolution" (Mda, p.36), he decides to return to America but changes his mind to instead search for NomaRussia, a lady whom he met in Johannesburg. His journey in pursuit of NomaRussia leads him to Qolorha-by-Sea where he becomes embroiled in the feud between the 'believers' (those who believed in the prophecies of Nongqawuse and the propagation of African culture and tradition) and the 'unbelievers', namely those who were in favour of advancement and progress. As outsiders, both Camagu

and Matigari become painfully aware of the conflicts in the respective societies in which they find themselves, and as they grow in self-knowledge, they grow in stature and make decisions, which may appear to be unpopular, but which give them direction and ensure that they do not lose sight of who they are and what they want to achieve.

Both characters illustrate that they are not prepared to lose sight of the principles that they uphold. When Camagu has to choose between the liberated and educated Xoliswa, who aligns herself with Western values and culture and Qukezwa, a young country girl who finds consolation in nature, he chooses the latter, because he values her simplicity and humility. Although Camagu initially aligns himself with the 'unbelievers' since he feels that progress is important for the village, later as he grows in self-knowledge, he eventually supports the 'believers' in their quest to uphold their culture, values, and customs. Consequently, he opposes the erection of a casino and townhouse development in the village but instead proposes a holiday camp focusing on eco- and cultural tourism. Eventually, this vision is realised, and the feud between the 'believers' and 'unbelievers' is resolved.

Similarly, Matigari identifies with the plight of the oppressed masses represented by the street child Muriuki and the prostitute Guthera, both of whom he befriends and who support him to the bitter end. He also identifies with the inmates in the prison cell and the workers on strike. This is indicative of his resolve to ensure that the plight of the workers remains in focus and is addressed. During the meeting addressed by the Minister of Truth and Justice, Matigari expresses his dissatisfaction with the inequalities perpetrated in post-colonial society and his inherent desire to fight for the rights of the impoverished masses until they achieve victory. He expresses this viewpoint at the meeting as follows:

…The house is mine because I built it. The land is mine too because I tilled it with these hands. The industries are mine because my labour built and worked them. I shall never stop struggling for all the products of my sweat. I shed blood and I did not shed it in vain. One day the land will return to the tiller, and the wealth of our land to those who produce it. Poverty and sorrow shall be banished from our land.   (Ngugi, 1998, p.104).

The viewpoint that Matigari expresses indicates that he supports the plight of the workers and favours a socialist state instead of a capitalist one adopted by the regime. The difference between the two novels, however, is that whilst in *The Heart of Redness* the conflicts are eventually resolved and there is a measure of optimism, in *Matigari* the conflicts are not resolved and there is an ominous message at the end of the novel that the struggle against capitalism and oppression, in all its guises, will continue. The fact that the young boy Murriuki returns to the forest to pursue the struggle against the oppressors symbolises the emergence of a new revolution to annihilate the petit bourgeoisie so that peace, truth, justice, and equality can become a reality in society. According to both Fanon (1967) and Said (1993), post-colonial identity is influenced by the impact of colonialism and the crisis of identity could be ascribed to the development of a feeling of inferiority that has been implanted in the colonised psyches due to Western systems. Consequently, as highlighted by Dizayi (2019, p.86) "impersonating Western or colonizer behaviour and style becomes one of the identities of recognizing one's sense of identity". Hence the sense of inferiority experienced by returning exiles and immigrants results in them feeling alienated and homeless, which not only leads to an identity crisis but estranges them from the newly formed nation-state (Dizayi, 2019).

3. DISCUSSION

Both Ngugi and Mda explore issues of post-colonial ethnic-identity crisis effectively in their respective novels *Matigari* and *Heart of Redness*. The characters in their novels serve as mouthpieces through which ethnic identity crises in post-colonial society are interrogated and engaged. They serve to represent the various voices within post-colonial African society who have to grapple with the tensions of living between the world of the colonisers, into which they were assimilated, and coming to terms with their own indigenous African heritage during the post-colonial era.

In their quest to find meaning to their existence in the newly created society and nation-state, and to come to terms with who they are and where they fit in, they are confronted with ethnic-identity crises, which both writers engage with so poignantly in their novels. The process of meaning-making and coming to terms with one's identity can sometimes lead to trauma, which will hurt one's psychological well-being. Montle (2020, p.85), for example, is vocal in his contention that the "newly-fashioned African identity" which was reconstructed by the colonisers, "immobilised the aboriginal African identity that Africans embraced before the emergence of colonialism" which is described by Asma (2015, p.51) as a "false identity" since it does not develop naturally, but was imposed by outsiders. The consequence of this identity is a sense of loss as to who one is, culminating in an ethnic-identity crisis. Hence the issues that the novels explore can be applied beyond the characters in the novels to those inhabitants of the nation-state who have to live between the tensions of the colonial and post-colonial era in their identity construction. Montle (2020) describes this ethnic identity crisis as an apex problem that threatens peace, unity, a sense of belonging and cultural heritage, which leaves Africans confused about who they are and where they fit in. The puzzling question that they are confronted with as espoused by Tembo (2016, p.20) is: "How do we go about imagining socio-political and cultural spaces of agency in contemporary African situations when the main conceptual tool of liberation, which is African identity is stuck between essentialism and anti-essentialism?"

Many scholars, who have explored the concept of African identity, acknowledge that since the aboriginal African identity has been shifted and diluted by the coloniser there is a sense of urgency to address this issue.

Today as highlighted by Montle (2020), Africa is confronted by issues of identity crisis such as Eurocentric ideals of beauty, skin whitening, hair straightening, racism, tribalism and xenophobia. According to Tembo (2016, p.102) since Africa needs to constantly reflect on the division between "the majority of life forms of the native (traditional societies) and that of so-called civilized society that colonialism had created", African identity is in a state of flux as it still needs to be thought and re-thought (Montle, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

A comparative study of the novels indicates that both Ngugi (2000) and Mda (1998) are perturbed by the continued influence of Western values and culture on post-colonial African society, and how they contribute to identity formation in a post-colonial era. In their examination of the characters, they demonstrate how various forces, within the newly formed nation-state, contribute to the development of post-colonial identity. The article argues that through the themes that they explore in their novels, they are able to interrogate the various manifestations of post-colonial identity construction thereby making us aware of those in the newly formed nation-state who feel that they need to embrace Western values and culture because it frees them from backwardness, those who are not sure where they really fit in and those who are married to their cultural practices and beliefs. The comparative study of the two

novels indicates the commonalities in identity formation in post-colonial society and how these identities influence the newly formed nation-state.

Ultimately a key issue that both novels explore, relating to identity formation in the newly formed African state, is the contradiction between how the newly formed state was imagined to be, and how the characters within the novels view their experiences in the nation-state. This is what ultimately leads to an identity crisis amongst the people in post-colonial African society.

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