



Youth, memory, and resilience in African literature: A comparative analysis of Sundiata Epic and Weep Not, Child

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a literary analysis of how African literature reflects the continent's socio-cultural and historical legacies through the interwoven themes of youth, memory, and resilience. By examining D.T. Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, the study compares the coming-of-age journeys of Sundiata and Njoroge, two protagonists shaped by distinct socio-political contexts, to reveal how Africa's historical legacy continues to shape its literary expression. Grounded in reader-response, postcolonial, and narratology theories, the study adopts a literary analysis as a scientific method rooted in observation, hypothesis, and synthesis. The discussion explores how Sundiata's destiny is guided by oral tradition and prophecy, while Njoroge's fate is marked by the trauma of colonialism. Through comparative analysis, the study reveals that both characters embody resilience as they confront inherited cultural memory and undergo personal transformation in the face of adversity. Ultimately, by placing these protagonists side by side, the study underscores the enduring power of literature to illuminate the struggles of African youth while demonstrating how African narrative forms reflect both identity and empowerment through the protagonists' pursuit of self-realisation within the broader tapestry of African history. Based on these findings, future studies should broaden their scope to include female voices, diverse perspectives, and interdisciplinary frameworks, thereby enriching understanding of the evolving nature of African youth literature and transnational connections.

Keywords: Epic, Fiction, History, Protagonist, Resilience, Transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature depicts humanity in the world they live. It is a window through which people perceive the world around them. It is a tool for societal change par excellence. According to Sharma (2025), literature serves as both a mirror for personal reflection and a catalyst for societal transformation. African literature is no exception. Through diverse literary forms, African authors portray people's life across different epochs (Okiche, 2018). Hence, oral tradition and modern writings reflect the powerful modes of transmission of African culture, on the one hand, and resistance to life challenges on the other hand. Djibril Tamsir Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* fall into this category. They are the pools from which readers draw insights on African culture, their history, traditions, social values, heroism, virtues, and even vices (Nayana, 2024). This implies the word and the world whereby human beings are subjected to memory and history. The two literary works are distinct but complementary genres that explore how African young generations are responsible to reconcile their personal growth and historical forces around them.

In a literary context, this way of negotiating between traditional values while confronted by politico-economic factors generally influences the coming-of-age journey for transformation. According to Hewett (2005), the coming of age denotes both personal cultural awareness and self-discovery. This involves literary generation striving to find their voice in a changing world. Generally, people are born and grow up gradually, facing the ups and downs in the world around them. This physical and mental growth goes with life experience, paved with challenges and opportunities through which people are transformed from adolescents into ready-made adults.

Genres such as epic poem and written novel serve as a window through which we perceive this world. Critics (Merchant qtd in Bazimaziki, 2017a; Mbele, 2018; Rutherford, 2008; Baldwin, 2020; Okpewho qtd in Bazimaziki, 2017a; Reitz & Finkmann, 2019; Islam & Khatun, 2023; Nethercut, 2020) argue that an epic narrative poem is the most compelling literary form that is centred on a heroic figure, Sundiata, for example, to convey a sweeping vision of life,

encompassing divine relations, moral struggles, social roles and the connection between past, present and the future. His heroic deeds reflect extraordinary courage and unmatched bravery among ancient and contemporary Africans (Adebayo & Alabi, 2025).

Regarding the novel, the term evolved during the Renaissance, springing from the Italian ‘novella’, which means a short narrative or tale. Initially used to describe short fiction, the term gradually expanded to encompass longer, and more complex narratives. Today, a novel refers to a long fictitious prose narrative that explores multifaceted human experiences by placing characters in varied challenging situations. Among these characters, protagonists are central figures who drive the plot forward, often embodying moral strengths, resilience, and transformation.

In African literature, Thiong’o (1964) presents Njoroge as an archetype of African protagonists. He is described as a young boy, whose aspirations for education and national liberation reflect broadly postcolonial struggles. His quest is emblematic of the tension between the dreams and societal upheaval, a theme emphasized in other African fiction like Chinua Achebe’s (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, through Okonkwo’s tragic arc illustrating the clash of tradition and colonial influence. Additionally, critics such as Irele (2009) and Gikandi (1992) echoed how African novelists present protagonists not merely as narrative devices but as symbols of historical and ideological shifts. Characters of this type make African fiction a compelling ground not only for literary but also socio-political analysis.

Hence, this study explores how African literature navigates the terrain between memory and history, tradition and modernity by re-imagining cultural identity while confronting colonial legacies. By focusing on these themes, this study supports Caldeira’s (2016) view that memory is a tool for re-imagining the future identity, Woods’s (2018) study that highlights how African writers use storytelling to subvert dominant historical narrative and reclaim cultural memory. It also supplements Newell’s (2018) findings that the power of African literature lies in reconstructing history, bridging ancestral memory with contemporary realities.

1.1 Research Questions

- i. How do *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* and *Weep Not, Child* reflect the intersection of memory and history in shaping African youth identity?
- ii. In what way do *Sundiata* and *Njoroge* confront inherited cultural legacies within their respective socio-political contexts?
- iii. To what extent do African narrative traditions empower or constrain young protagonists in their pursuit of self-realisation and social transformation?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This section discusses three theories that guided this study. First, Reader- Response theory is reviewed in light of the study aim. Second, Postcolonial theory is discussed as the literary text under study is situated in Postcolonial Africa. Finally, Narrative theory is considered based on its relevance to oral tradition, the source from which *Sundiata* epic was drawn. Fried (2020) conceptualises theory as a tool, a set of guiding principles that underpin a quest to uncover the unknown within human experience shaped by where individuals live and with whom they interact. Theories explain what occurs, has occurred and why it happens (Dankasa, 2015). As theories connect to real world issues (Bingham et al., 2024), they permeate various domains and are widely applied in research, including literary studies, to describe phenomena and examine the interplay of variables that account for anticipated outcomes (Thomas, 2017). In this vein, this literary analysis is grounded in a three-dimensional lens. It is primarily anchored in reader-response criticism, and contextualized through supporting concepts from postcolonial reading, which illuminates the socio-political backdrops of the texts, and narrative theory which facilitates discussion on how oral versus written forms influence reader engagement. The subsequent section explores how each theoretical framework contributes to analytical approach of this paper.

2.1.1 Reader- Response Lens

The reader-response theory emphasizes that understanding a literary work depends on the reader’s perspective rather than the text itself (Rosenblatt, 2014). This literary framework asserts that meaning is not fixed within the text. Rather, it is plural, and shaped by the reader’s personal engagement, experiences and emotional responses through close interaction with the text. Fish (1980) argues that the meaning of text is not inherent but dependent on the reader’s interpretation, considering their background, their community, and the interpretive strategies they employ. By claiming that interpretation is not the “art of construing but art of constructing”, the author confirms that readers do not uncover preexisting meaning but actively create it through their reading process. Thus, reader-response is a criticism framework that bridges literary scholarship (Freund, 1987).

2.1.2 Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial theory is a critical framework that examines how a literary work reflects, challenges, interrogates, and reshapes the enduring legacy of colonialism, focusing on issues of power dynamics, cultural identity, and resistance. It foregrounds the way in which colonial literature has constructed the “other”, and how the colonized society reclaim their voice through storytelling. Applied to African literature, postcolonial framework reveals how African writers respond to imperial representations and assert indigenous perspectives. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, African literature becomes a terrain of resistance, cultural preservation, and historical values.

By introducing Orientalism, Said (1978) critiques the portrayal of Africa as inferior and subordinate within Western texts, exposing the ideological underpinnings of colonial authority. Bhabha (1994) expands this critique through the concept of hybridity and mimicry, showing how African writers resist domination by subverting colonial norms. Similarly, Ashcroft et al. (2002) introduce abrogation and appropriation as strategies through which postcolonial literature resists linguistic dominance and reconstructs cultural identity. These theoretical insights are worth applying to Thiong’o’s (1964) *Weep Not, Child*, which confronts colonial violence and cultural disintegration, and the *Epic of Sundiata*, which preserves precolonial African leadership and oral tradition.

It distinguishes between story (the chronological sequence of events) and discourse (the way those events are presented), emphasising that narrative form, such as time manipulation, focalisation, and voice, plays a central role in interpretation. In African literature, narrative theory is especially relevant for exploring oral traditions, nonlinear storytelling, and communal memory. Texts like the *Epic of Sundiata* and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* challenge Western narrative conventions by foregrounding cyclical time, collective experience, and indigenous epistemology (Prince, 2003). These works demonstrate how African narratives resist colonial frameworks and assert cultural identity through unique storytelling techniques (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

2.1.3 Narrative Theory

Also called narratology, narrative theory is a critical lens that analyses how stories are structured and how this structure shapes the meaning. By distinguishing between story and discourse, it emphasises that narrative form—including time manipulation, focalisation, and voice, plays a key role in textual interpretation (Conrad, 2010). This theory focuses not on what the story tells, but how it is told and understood. Particularly, it examines generic elements such as plot, time, perspective from which a story is told, and the voice, to understand how meaning is shaped through the interaction of form and content (Bal & van Boheemen, 2009).

This theory is relevant to the study of African literature, especially in the analysis of nonlinear plot and oral tradition stories. Applying this lens to the study of *Sundiata, An Epic of Old Mali* and *Weep Not, Child* can reveal how these stories challenge the Western narrative conventions by foregrounding collective experience and indigenous ideologies because the two literary works illustrate how African storytelling resists colonial frameworks and asserts cultural identity through strategies rooted in African tradition.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, comparative research design to explore the theme of coming of age in two African literary works, Djibril Tamsir Niane’s *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child*. Grounded in literary analysis as a systematic method (Jekins, 2012), it follows observation, hypothesis and experiment, while extending this model through triangulation to enhance validity (Gupta, 2024). Literary analysis is treated not merely as interpretive practice but as a scientific framework for engaging with textual form, language, and thematic structures.

The comparative framework guiding this study is structured around three interrelated dimensions such as textual form, socio-political context, and cultural legacy. By systematically contrasting the oral epic tradition of *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* with the modern form of novel *Weep Not, Child*, the study seeks to demonstrate how narrative structures shape the trajectories of protagonists’ coming-of-age journeys. The analysis further situates pre-colonial Mali indigenous sovereignty against Kenya’s colonial struggles to illuminate the sociopolitical forces that condition identity formation across distinct historical contexts.

The third dimension of this comparative framework emphasises cultural legacy, examining how oral tradition and written narratives function as vehicles of value transmission, and shape of identity. Supported by a range of secondary sources selected based on their relevance to the topic (Bassot, 2022), this tripartite comparison provides a methodological rigorous basis for comparison, integrating textual, contextual, and cultural analysis.

Besides, three theoretical lenses guided the discussion. Reader-response theory is used to interpret the protagonists’ journey while postcolonial perspective is used to interrogate colonial and cultural power structures. Additionally, narrative theory is used to analyse plot structure and storytelling techniques. Findings are cross-referenced across these perspectives to ensure to ensure interpretations mutual reinforcement.



While Noble and Smith (2024) claim that it is essential for qualitative research to apply strategies and methods that strengthen the study reliability throughout design and implementation, this study operationalised such principle by integrating methodological rigour at each stage (Tripathi & Chaturvedi, 2023). Drawing from varied academic repositories, a combination of diverse secondary sources, multiple theoretical perspectives, and contextual analysis, all strengthened the study validity. Inherently, the researchers' positionality is acknowledged with reflexivity employed to mitigate potential biases such as privileging one lens or the most recent sources. The study is constrained by the focus on only two core texts supported by secondary sources. The researchers ensure ethical considerations by respecting oral tradition and avoiding misrepresentation of African identities. Finally, reliability is ensured through peer review, transparent analysis, and engaging with contemporary scholarship (Osei-Tutu, 2022; Mirza et al, 2023).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This section discusses the protagonists in two narrative stories. It draws attention to the word in terms of memory and tradition in *Sundiata's* story. The section further focuses on the world of history and disruption as reflected in *Weep Not, Child*. It winds up by measuring memory and history, considering the two protagonists. Sundiata epic contextual analysis draws on Mbele (2018), who underscores the power of the African epic as a vehicle of history and cultural values. On the one hand, discussion on Njoroge is underpinned by Irele (1981) and Thiong'o's (1986) belief that the postcolonial African novel is a tool, a site to resist the imposed historical challenges and reaffirm cultural sovereignty.

Indeed, through the three research questions, the authors examined how African youth is shaped by the intersection of memory, history and narrative traditions. In addressing the first research question, the study demonstrates how textual traditions and historical contexts are foregrounded. By this, the study shows how the epic of Sundiata situates identity within collective memory and heroic destiny. It further demonstrates that the colonial realistic novel *Weep Not, Child* reflects fractured subjectivity under colonial oppression. Taken together, these conditions influence youth identity formation, showing how memory and history function as both empowering and destabilisation forces.

The second question highlights cultural legacies such as prophecy, lineage, and ancestral continuity. These are reflected in Sundiata's narrative. Contrariwise, disrupted traditions, land dispossession, and colonial education in *Weep Not, Child* determine how much the protagonists have to act and influence their world. While Sundiata confronts inherited legacies by fulfilling prophecy and consolidating leadership, Njoroge struggles against colonial structures that undermine his educational aspirations. This reveals agency shaped by socio-political context.

The third research question situates African narrative traditions that either empower or constraint transformation. Actually, the epic tradition empowers Sundiata's self-realisation and collective transformation, while the novel *Weep Not, Child* exposes the constraints of colonial violence on Njoroge's justice. These mappings show that African narrative traditions are dynamic frameworks where form, context, and heritage influence youth identity, agency, and transformation.

Weep Not, Child offers a poignant portrayal of Kenya's colonial past under British domination. This story unfolds against the backdrop of rising tensions and resistance, capturing the struggle of ordinary Kenyans as they seek liberation from foreign rule. Through its characters and events, the novel explores the deep impact of colonialism and the fight for national independence. Unlikely, the Epic of Sundiata offers a compelling reflection on West African precolonial history, leadership and identity. Building on this foundation, the following sections examine how these dynamics unfold in practice, highlighting the interplay between narrative form and socio-political realities.

4.1 Sundiata and Njoroge's Crucible of Youth

The reader-response has it that meaning of the text is not fixed. It is constructed by the reader's cultural and historical contexts. For example, an African reader might explore *Sundiata* as a powerful symbol of African heroism, resilience and unity, especially when viewed through the lens of African oral tradition. Contrariwise, a reader unfamiliar with African oral tradition may miss these cultural nuances. Similarly, Njoroge from *Weep Not, Child*, can be analysed as a representation struggle for change within an oppressed society, reflecting broader themes of resistance and hope rooted in postcolonial identity. This agrees with Iser (2000) that texts contain "gaps" which readers actively fill, interpreting a dynamic process. Text meaning is thus not objective but dependent on the reader's contextual interpretation and response to it.

4.1.1 Sundiata's Early Trials

Youth generally carry diverse meanings. In this context, the term "youth" generally refers to children and adolescents across a range of age; from early childhood to late adolescence, that is up to 17 years old (Domagalski, 2023). However, it may deeply connote empowerment, transformation, growth, maturity, adaptation, readiness to cope with hurdles, healing the wounds of the oppressed, the quest for experience, among others. In Sundiata epic, youth denote a surface trait of a young prince born with physical disability, but later grows into flame firing warrior, and

consummate leader (Niane, 2006). According to Domagalski (2023) young people's account of stressful experience can significantly affect personal growth, family dynamism, and societal conditions. His youth is associated with transformation marked by physical growth, learning and exile. Bazimaziki (2017b) echoed that Sundiata's youth embodies resilience, divine destiny, and communal hope. His initial vulnerability contrasts sharply with his later heroic exploits, underscoring the idea that greatness often arises from adversity. Within African society, this arc serves as didactic, illustrating that patience, perseverance and faith in destiny are essential virtues. These are nurtured through communal beliefs and cultural tradition. Hence, Sundiata's youth is described as a promise of greatness as, say, he was born as the "child who would make Mali immortal" and it happened so.

Taken together, Sundiata's youth is portrayed as a destiny that was fulfilled; shaped by prophecy and realized through his good leadership. His quest translates into both physical and spiritual growth which culminated in resilience and unity as he restored hope among his followers. He is a protagonist forged into fire. Symbolically, his youth becomes the bedrock of Mali Empire building, embodying cultural strength and continuity. In contrast, Njoroge's youth is marked by shattered dreams, crushed under the heavy weight of colonial injustice. His growth is internal, characterized by intellectual and emotional awakening, but finally is disillusioned. For Njoroge, hopes once vibrated, but faded out through betrayal and violence. His youth does not become a symbol of triumph but a deferred dream of violence.

4.2 Memory: Sundiata versus Njoroge

In art tapestry, the role of the spoken word is culturally weaving. It powerfully serves as a means of educating by interlacing stories, values and history to preserve community identity, and understanding of their role where they live. This power of words is also perceived in African tradition. It does not only describe community life but also creates meaning within it. According to Mbele (2018), the word shapes a community's understanding of their world, culture and truth. He underscores that through epics, storytellers use words to connect genres such as myths, history and moral values. Hence, epic poems not only entertain but also serve as road maps that guide the community to remember their past.

4.2.1 Sundiata's Memory

Among other African epic poetry, Sundiata's story is a foundational and culturally rich literary form. Mbele (2018) posits that Epics serve as community historical archives, values, and identity as they preserve genealogies, heroic exploits, and ethics, and are often transmitted through generations by oral poets. Through the lens of narratology, readers are shown how the narrative's architecture, the prophecy, and the protagonist's heroic return hold together to shape the story's meaning. Indeed, Sundiata's epic revealed how the storyteller uses poetic language to connect Sundiata's miraculous birth, his founding of the Mali Empire, and moral values, including destiny, resilience and leadership.

In *Sundiata: the Epic of Old Mali*, Sundiata's early life powerfully reflects memory and tradition, especially within the framework of West African oral storytelling and cultural heritage. The story demonstrates how historians prophesize the birth of the hero. This preservation of the prophecy connects his childhood to a collection of memories of destiny and divine purpose (Niane, 2006). These griots, historians and custodians of cultural memory embed the story of Sundiata into the foundational myth of the Mali Empire, shaping identity through narrative (Conrad, 2010). Sundiata's physical weakness as a child is central to this myth. His inability to walk until he is seven is a powerful symbol of resilience and faith. Despite his early struggles, he carries within him an unwavering conviction to return, as reflected in his mantra of resilience and determination, "I will return, ...I will return..., I will return..." (Niane, 2006), embodying the collective hope of his people. His eventual triumph is remembered as both personal victory and cultural perseverance (Johnson, 1986).

Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali depicts youth and identity formation. Sundiata is a young protagonist whose journey is primarily shaped by prophecy and oral tradition. His identity is reflected through the storytelling of the griot, connecting the hero to an ancestral legacy. For example, Kuyaté's words put it clearly, as he says, "I am a griot. It is I, Djeli Mamadou Kuyaté, son of Bintou Kuyaté and Djeli Kedian Kuyaté, master in the art of Eloquence. [...] By the spoken words, we bring to life the deeds and exploits of Kings for younger (Niane, p.1). These words, as spoken by the griot, show how storytelling connects youth to historical figures, shaping their identity through heroic examples. In the same vein, ancestral virtues serve as a tool for youth as future leaders to model themselves because, the griot says, "I teach the Kings the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve as examples. In fact, African history reveals that the son of a king was often trained to become one. Historically, a griot in West Africa held an important role as entrusted with educating royal heirs on history, ethics, and leadership, among other things.

Recent studies (Chhabi, 2020; Doornbos & van Binsbergen, 2014) underscore that African traditions, including royal education, are preserved and transmitted through rituals and oral narratives. In this vein, identity is shaped by cultural heritage, where youth are groomed within traditional landscapes to carry out leadership tasks. Thus, in precolonial Africa, oral education was essential, especially in royal families to train children in how to assume a

leadership role. The role of the griot storytelling implies that they were educators, historians, and political advisors to shape the identity and destiny of the future leadership of their kingdoms.

Thus, tradition is evidently embedded in the role of diviners and the oral transmission of Sundiata's story. It serves as a vessel for cultural continuity. The prophecy surrounding his birth, the symbolic naming of Jara, which means lion, and his quest through various kingdoms embody rituals, beliefs and storytelling customs that have been preserved and retold across generations. Conrad and Djanka (2004) and Kertzner (2025) echoed the same point highlighting that these practices reflect the enduring values of the Mandi people, linking individual destiny to communal heritage through griots' active role to responsibly preserve, protect, and pass down history. Consistently, Adebayo and Alabi (2025) assert that oral tradition holds a vital role within African societies. They serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as vehicles of value transmission. By honoring epic heroes, oral tradition inspires young towards excellence and societal ideals.

4.2.2 Njoroge's Youth and Memory

Unlikely, for a postcolonial surface reader, Njoroge is described as a schoolboy in colonial Kenya, full of dreams and innocence. His youth is defined through education, family ties, and hope for a better future as he believes it through these words, "... The land is dark now, but the future will be different [...] But one day the land will return to us. I work here waiting for that day" (Thiong'o, 1964). In light of postcolonial lens, he symbolically means a new beginning, a representation of break from the past. His education is seen as a rebirth for Kenyan society oppressed a great deal. He is the healer of these scars of colonial rule. Unfortunately, while "he had believed in the future, he now knew that there was no future" His youthful hope was shattered as he finally said, "I have lost everything- my education, my faith, and my family [...] I feel guilty. [...] Oh, God! But there was no God now. There was nothing. [...] He took the rope out of his pocket. He waited for the darkness... and now night covered him. The rope was ready. Hanging from the tree." He wanted to commit suicide which reflects a failure, disappointment, and disillusionment, but her mother saved him. That is why he feels guilty, as he said, "I am a coward" (Thiong'o, 1964: 79).

These words reflect memory on three levels. First, Njoroge's guilt and self-condemnation embody emotional memories, rooted in his father's request to care for the mothers in addition to his brothers' encouragement to wait for the new day. These recalled expectations, coupled with the painful memory of being saved by his mother, haunt him strongly. Second, his reflection on the loss of education, family, and faith underscores the collapse of his belief in the future. Moreover, his invocation of God and his subsequent denial of God's presence illustrate an existential memory, marking a spiritual crisis. Njoroge thus becomes a subject of traumatic recollection, where the memories of loss and failed expectations continue to shape his emotional and psychological state, which culminates in a suicidal plan. This character is predominantly portrayed through mental and relational processes, such as thinking, hoping, and dreaming, which emphasize his reflective nature (Mwinlaaru, 2012).

4.3 Implications

African writers often draw from storytelling techniques rooted in oral tradition (Irele, 2009). Within this context, epic and novel, though distinct, intersect thematically, mainly in their portrayal of transformation quests. The quest for transformation is one of these similarities. Drawing the formal and thematic parallel between epic and novel, studies (Bazimaziki, 2017b; Mullan, 2006) underscore that both forms are powerful literary mediums for reconstructing African history and reshaping identity through characterisation, conflict and cultural symbolism. By dramatising the tension between personal agency and historical forces, these stories reclaim cultural memory and affirm collective identity.

Both the protagonists in an Epic of Old Mali, and in a novel set in Kenya, reflect this framework. They represent how stories in African literature depict history and identity. According to Okiche (2018), these characters are archetypes which hold a didactic role. Through them, one can learn African cultural practices, people's challenges, and the way they lived or live. While Sundiata's journey ends in heroic fulfillment, Njoroge's quest for identity ends in disillusionment. Therefore, oral African tradition and fictional prose expose their audience to the power of literature in depicting the sociocultural situations of human beings in their settings (Woods, 2018). Consistently, this agrees with other findings by recent research in the same contentions (Kumar, 2023; Eslit & Villanueva, 2024) noting that storytelling serves as a powerful tool for transformation and empowerment for characters and readers to confront challenging circumstances, and find hope amidst despair.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study explored the theme of youth at the crossroads of memory and history in African oral tradition and written novel. By analysing *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* and *Weep Not, Child*, the study highlights that, narrative tradition, be it oral or written, is more malleable than it may initially appear. Albeit rooted in cultural memory and



history, it was found that these literary forms offer a space for personal transformation. Analysis of characters such as Sundiata and Njoroge revealed that African young protagonists engage with inherited legacies while reshaping their identities in light of their personal hurdles and socio-political upheavals.

Taken all in all, literature reveals aspects of reality by arranging its conventions in ways that prompt critical reflection. African oral tradition provides a cultural foundation while African literature serves as a compelling tool for reshaping society. Far from being a static vessel of tradition, storytelling emerges as a dynamic force that shapes and challenges young characters through the complex journey of transformation, growth, and resistance. Njoroge's hope is driven by his belief in education and liberation stories, while his ideals are shattered by colonial violence. Likewise, guided by oral prophecy, Sundiata rises from weakness to heroic leadership. Together, the two protagonists' quests underscore the enduring power of storytelling to mould identity, inspire growth, and propel the pursuit of justice across generations. While Njoroge is the voice of a fractured legacy, mourning a lost heritage, eroded by colonialism, Sundiata is by contrast the embodiment of cultural continuity, celebrating a lineage that survives triumphantly. Although separate in terms of centuries and genres, both stories advocate for the enduring African quest for dignity, justice and self-determination.

5.2 Recommendations

This literary study offers a comparative analysis of two authors' characters by juxtaposing an epic and a novel. The study can be recommended for students doing comparative literature. However, although it is strongly grounded in integrated theories, its scope is narrow as it focuses solely on two male protagonists in African literature. This scope can be broadened to include diverse African voices, female perspectives in particular.

Future research should also integrate other interdisciplinary and theoretical frameworks like cultural memory, psychoanalytical theory, and trauma theory, among others. Finally, the study recommends an exploration of evolving nature of African youth literature, and its transnational connection. A study of this kind can highlight the role of narrative flexibility in the reinterpretation of memory and identity in response to the changing societal realities.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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