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Research Article

## Literature and Society: A Reading of the Narrative of the Crisis in the River between By Ngugi wa Thiong'o

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**Abstract:** Among other roles that literature could play, it actively participates to the daily actions of men in dealing with crises that humanity is often faced with, and it also sharpens and allows the rebirth of peoples. The River Between is one of the books of Ngugi where the text focuses on the crisis and some means of liberation for the Kenyan people. Through eminently literary formulas, Ngugi succeeds in finding tools needed to heal the Kenyan society and thus, the African people.

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**Keyword:** literature, crises, rebirth, freedom, healing.

### INTRODUCTION

Literature can be a necessary tool of conciliation, of search for solutions to crises. Thus, many African writers among which we can quote Ngugi will give voice through their writings to stigmatize the different crises (Cultural crisis, economical crisis and African identity in colonial and postcolonial times) in their living environment, the African continent. Ngugi has then dealt with the crises in Africa and mainly in Kenya, their causes and also possible solutions for the African people. Through the texts that address this question of crisis in his different books, the Kenyan author identifies and criticizes everything that participates to the crisis. So, the critics tries to know how through writing the Kenyan writer comes to stigmatize the crisis. How does the crisis that seems to take part in the real space is invited in the literary text? What are the textual tools used to represent the above mentioned crises.

The task here is to see how Ngugi's writings tackle the crisis. Thus, we will first see how the characters and the crises of identity are written in the book by the Gikuyu author. Then, we will try to analyze the narrative of time and space and finally, see how by the aesthetics, the text of Ngugi reveals the crisis.

It is through a socio-critical approach, where literature has meaning only when it takes into account the real concerns of the people (Cook; Okenimkpe, 1983 : 19), that we will try to understand Ngugi who seems, by his iconoclastic verve, to seek at all costs the independence and the total liberation of his people formerly subjected by the colonizer and which today is still caught in the trap of the new socio-political reality of the post colonial era.

### I. THE CHARACTERS OF THE CRISIS: BETWEEN AMBIGUITY AND PARADOX

The conditions of production of the crises seem to indicate the deep causes of several writers' texts. From colonial literature to the committed literature, the African novel seems to be the expression of a deep crisis which despite its dynamic history can not be taken away. One of the marks of the novel as a genre is to report a universe of dissatisfaction, of questioning of the collective order previously agreed as a collective standard. The novel is the expression of the dissatisfaction of the individual in front of a world collapsing. That's why the crisis is at the heart of fiction. In Africa, where we are witnessing crises because of the tumultuous meeting during the colonial adventure, the novel can not be away from that symbol of identity. More than elsewhere, the novel is the echo of that crisis and that realism of opposition to the standards in force.

Thus, the text of Ngugi is interested in the political, military, socio-cultural and economic crises. Therefore, here, we have to examine the characters involved in the the plot in *The River Between*. Before that, it is important to know what is meant by character. The character of a novel is a *being of paper* created by using words and sentences. However, he appears to the reader as a real person and proposes him a certain vision of human beings. The universe of the novel is populated by a multitude of characters who are involved in the action or narrative that takes place in the plot.

Before dealing with the crisis related to the characters in *The River Between*, it should be noted the following information on Ngugi. By his refusal to be called "James" and to take a name typically African: Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Killam, 1980 : 1), the attitude of Ngugi is indicative of the identity crisis which is raging in the colonial space and mainly in his native country, Kenya. It is about the extra-diegetic life of Ngugi who had to abandon his first name "James" as a sign

of a strong awareness of the alienation by a foreign culture, that of the colonizer. This sign is all the more significant that the Kikuyu writer, in his books, through his characters, shows himself as a true defender of enslaved people.

Thus, Ngugi draws some crises in his works and tries to provide appropriate solutions to them. The characters in scene in *The River Between* are indicative of the multifaceted crisis in Africa in general and in Kenya in particular. Names like Mugo, Kinuthia, Waiyaki, Chege, Nyambura, Muthoni, Joshua, etc. are indicative of the desire of the narrator to repair an identity crisis and a realism that commands to draw from the local culture so as to give a local color to the story.

If it should be given to make a pause on the character of Mugo, it is without doubt his presence in many books of Ngugi. *Mugo* is almost always mentioned on the first pages. If this presence for example is seen on page 3 of *A Grain of Wheat* where the first word of the novel mentions the name Mugo, *The River Between* also points it out very early on page 2, where the first character mentioned by the narrator is exactly Mugo. We must analyze and interpret this name which does not seem to be mentioned without any purpose.

The crisis in Africa and mainly in Kenya seems to take place in the presence of Mugo who seems to be an eyewitness. He is faced with the new Kenyan reality dominated by colonization. He appears as the keeper of the culture and property of Kenyans spoilt by the new strong man, the colonizer. Mugo, from his positioning in the book, seems to be the visionary to be detected. Mugo appears as the wise, the prophet who announces through images the arrival of the settlers in Africa: "*You could not cut butterflies with a panga (...), you could not spear them until you learnt their ways of movement, trap and fight back*" (Ngugi, 1965: 20).

This quotation refers to Chege, the guardian of the tradition and of the soul of the Kenyan people who bequeathed this teaching received from Mugo to his son Waiyaki. Reading this message under a metaphorical figure, we must understand that the prophecy of Mugo shows skilled and strong people that must be fought with intelligence and strategy. Mugo seems to be the voice of the soothsayer that predicts the future, the arrival of invaders, of colonizers. Certainly, he appears in the first position in the role of the characters of *The River Between* to announce the crisis that will take shape in the book and perhaps give the remedies so as to find appropriate solutions.

An other character indicative of the crisis in our corpus is Chege. As the bearer of the torch of tradition, he fights to hold the flame of the African culture. If European medicine has virtues that Chege does not deny, he recognizes the healing potential of plants in Africa. That's why he decides to bequeath his power or his knowledge to his son. Each plant has a meaning and some are used to commit evil while others allow to come back to life. Sometimes, he teaches that although the same tree has its roots and its bark that heal, its leaves can be a real poison for men: "*The bark of that tree is*

*good for a fresh wound. The roots of this plant are good. When your stomach bites you, you boil them in water. Drink the liquid and sometimes it would be a warning against that tree, whose fruit is full of poison*" (Ngugi, 1965: 14). It is the instruction for awareness in the human action that Chege is teaching here. Chege himself recognizes that the African needs awareness and discernment in his actions. He must be able to choose what is good and what is not.

It is a warning, but also an invitation to understand that everything in African traditions is not satisfaction and freedom. He recognizes that some aspects of African traditions are not to keep and improve. The walk of Waiyaki with his father Chege in the forest seems to get/all its meaning because it is a teaching for the survival of the Kenyan people under colonial rule.

If the son of Chege has received teachings on the African culture, we must know that other characters, in opposition, have embraced the teaching of Christian religion and do not intend to return to the African culture that for them should be avoided. The characters concerned are Joshua and his henchmen. In their mind, everything that comes from the African culture is satanic. Therefore, any idea that does not cope with Christianity must be destroyed. To succeed such enterprise that aims at the destruction of the African cultural properties is not easy. Everybody and even Muthoni should be part of it. That is why the idea of excision of Joshua's daughter according to Nyambura is to prohibit so as to avoid the wrath of Joshua who thanks that only Christian religion is good: "*Circumcised? At last Nyambura find her voice. But father will not allow it. He will be very cross with you. And how can you think of it? Nyambura could visualize Joshua's fury if he heard of this.*" (Ngugi, 1965: 25).

This quotation clearly indicates the cultural conflict which is going on between the characters of *The River Between*. We can notice the presence of the custodians of the African traditions who do not want to mention Christian religion, and on the other hand, stands this other group of extremists who wishes the total disappearance of the African culture for the benefit of Christian religion in which they believe. That's why the children of Joshua are worried even when they simply intend to go back to African culture. Muthoni who wishes circumcision and her sister Nyambura, both, have awareness of this uncontrollable anger in which Joshua, their father, will get involved when he will be informed.

We must understand that these followers of European values who struggle fiercely for the destruction of African traditional values will be confronted not only with a moderate group of people but also to extremists of the African culture. Thus, if the struggle for the restoration of the African culture is done by guardians of tradition embodied by Chege and his son Waiyaki, we should know that Muthoni will rise against her father Joshua so that the latter could understand that far from being opposed, African religion and European religion, in their diversities, are complementary. For Muthoni, one does not mean the destruction of the other. The two should rather

coexist for the benefit of the African people and points it out here:

*Look, please, I – I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges. But Father, remember him. Why? Are we fools? She shook Nyambura. Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. (Ngugi, 1965: 25)*

This quotation reveals two key ideas: the refusal to abandon African traditional religion and the possible lesson of conciliation of the latter with the religion of the whiteman. This is the concern of Kihika, another character of Ngugi in his fiction entitled *A Grain of Wheat*. For him, African culture should, under no circumstances, be destroyed for the benefit of the European civilization. He thinks that the Bible stands in any way against African culture. It is only the manipulation of the biblical narrative that allows the colonizer and his henchmen to act so and say for example that circumcision is a sin prohibited by the Bible, while for Kihika, this assertion is nowhere mentioned in the Bible (Ngugi, 1967: 75).

We must understand in this narrative that if circumcision is to be prohibited for questions of health, we should not omit to raise the zeal of Kihika's school instructor who compulsorily wants him to accept that this passage on circumcision is from the Bible although it is not. Muthoni also, like Kihika, understands that circumcision or African religion in short, is not a sin in the biblical narrative. She is convinced that African tradition and Christianity can coexist without being a danger for the African (Ngugi, 1965: 25).

The idea of conciliation of cultures by Muthoni meets without doubt the anger of her father Joshua who is defined as the Apostle of the new religion and does not intend to present the African culture, but in a satanic way. So, for him, it is inconceivable and unacceptable for the pastor he is, to see his daughter embracing the African culture. No mixtures can be tolerated. It is the injunction given not only to his daughter, but also to the Christian community of Makuyu.

Two other characters that we should also mention are Gikonyo and Mumbi who, according to the Gikuyu legend, have stayed in Kenya and namely in Kameno and Makuyu (Ngugi, 1965 : 2). The myth of Gikonyo and Mumbi created by the characters of Ngugi seems to be the equivalent of the Adamic myth. Thus, like the Christians who believe that Adam and Eve are the first men on earth, the traditional Gikuyu people also believe that the first men on the Kenyan earth are Gikonyo and Mumbi. So from that point of view, we can understand that if Adam and Eve were created by the God of Christians, then Gikonyo and Mumbi come from the gods of Africa. The crisis starts from the moment where the God of the Europeans comes to occupy the space of Africa.

## **II. TIME AND SPACE AS MARKERS OF THE AFRICAN CRISIS**

Can we talk of literary time and space? This question is all the more important that in the exercise of representation of the world, it seems impossible to avoid these postulates. One cannot mention the novel without referring to literary time and space. Here, the world disappears to give place to the language which builds the literary space and time. The writer goes away from the real world to create a space where "*l'œuvre est en souci de son essence*" (Blanchot, 1989: 51), that is where the book is devoted to its *essence*.

Moreover, Bourneuf and Ouellet are all the more convinced that as soon as one addresses the issue of the novel, three essential times are to be taken into account. It is the times of adventure, of writing and reading. (1989: 106). Space and time are bearers of meaning and allow the critics to better perceive the literary text.

Thus, through time and space categories depicted in *The River Between*, the reader comes to better understand the crisis that takes place in the Kenyan space which constitutes the referential space of our corpus. The space is an essential constituent of a literary work. To be more explicit, we should refer to Fischer for whom the narrative space is a place, a benchmark [...] Where an event can occur and where an activity can take place (1981 : 125). For Michel Butor who seems more explicit, "*Space is a fundamental theme of any novelistic literature*" (1964: 44).

Thus, the Kenyan space in our corpus undergoes a cultural and religious crisis. The two villages that are Kameno and Makuyu appear to be responsible of that crisis. If we should mention the crisis between these two above mentioned spaces, we must understand that even Makuyu alone is or at least has been the source of crisis because this village now lives according to the ways of the colonizer, of the extremist Christian who refuses any possible cohabitation with the African culture. In addition, we should notice the awakening of consciousness of some inhabitants of Makuyu that creates an internal crisis. While some want to remain closely linked to the European civilization, others wish a conciliation of the two cultures. Is this not one of the concerns of Samuel Huntington in *le choc des civilisations ?* (1997: 37).

Without doubt, the inhabitants of Kameno are warned and remain on their guard for fear of being subsumed by the new religion. One must therefore be suspicious and prevent everything that could betray or harm that village, cradle of African cultural principles.

Other important spaces also appear in the novel and deserve the attention of the critics. Those spaces are the mountain, the river and the forest. They also play a significant role in the development of the plot and are co-authors of the presence of the crisis dealt with in our corpus.

The river named *Honia* seems to bear witness of the cultural crisis between Europeans and Africans in the Kenyan space. The narrator of *The River Between* presents simultaneously water and the rival villages of Kameno and Makuyu in conflict. At best, the space where the river is located is

meaningful. It separates the two rival villages (Ngugi, 1965: 2) as if it was trying to prevent them from being in contact or fighting each other. Wherever there is a conflict, a mediator is needed and the water seems to act as a force of interposition whose objective is to keep peace and establish conciliation between the above mentioned villages. Moreover, in this colonial rural world where rivers were the only drinking water available, the populations of the two rival villages, Kameno and Makuyu, did not have any other alternative than settling their conflict in order to ensure their survival.

In addition, water comes to purify the two villages Kameno and Makuyu and makes them understand that they are indeed talking about the same gods using different approaches. That is why to reach the supreme, if the Christian uses water for the baptisms, the traditional African will use it for libations to reach the spirits. With the presence of water, the two brotherly peoples involved in the conflict should understand the need of living together.

The mountain and the forest seem to show the same image (Ngugi, 1965: 14-15). Through Chege and his son Waiyaki, the narrator of our corpus seems to teach that if modern medicine can help Africans, African traditional medicine shall be preserved because it has its own virtues. The forest has many medicinal properties that can provide Kenyans with a sustainable health. This idea is supported by Lawino whose husband Ocol appears to be uprooted and swears only by what comes from Europeans in the poem of Okot P'Bitek:(1964: 50).

Beyond the health issue, the teaching is about conciliation of religions. The teaching provided by Chege to his son takes place in the forest, on a long pathway leading to a mountain. On top of that mountain, there is a tree, a sacred tree that Waiyaki is discovering for the first time (Ngugi, 1965 : 15). According to the narrator, it is the worship place of African deities. The narrator reveals that it is also the place of conciliation, of perfect harmony:

Far beyond, its tip hanging in the grey clouds, was Kerinyaga. Its snow-capped top glimmered slightly, revealing the seat of Murungu. The ridges slept on. Kameno and Makuyu were no longer antagonistic. They had merged into one area of beautiful land, which is what, perhaps, they were meant to be. Makuyu, Kameno and the other ridges lay in peace and there was no sign of life, as one stood on the hill of God. (Ngugi, 1965 : 16)

From this quotation, we have several interpretations. In addition to the fact that Chege is teaching local traditional culture to his son who is the symbol of the Kenyan people's survival and future, Ngugi's narrator is revealing here the metaphor of Jesus through the way of the cross. The close link between Christianity and African deities is underlined in this space. If Christ goes to Golgotha to save his people from sin, Chege will go on top of a mountain to worship the spirits of Murungu, the god of his people, to receive forgiveness and bring together Makuyu and Kameno, two Africa peoples in

crisis.

Space is also indicated by the signifier as written trace and also as an intertextual space (Genet, 1966: 93-99). On page 12 in the *River Between*, Ngugi wrote a short and isolated paragraph worded as follows:

*Ali-li-li-li-li-li*

*Old Waiyaki is born*

*Born again to carry on the ancient fire*

To indicate Africa's hope through the birth of Waiyaki, Ngugi devotes a paragraph to show the emergence of a new era for Kenya. If the old Waiyaki, the guardian of the African society and cultures, is no longer living, Africa will not stay without a leader. There is a substitute, another Waiyaki who will keep the flame of the African identity alive. So, there is no need to worry about the survival of the African culture.

The biblical intertext also covers a space which gives meaning to the crisis occurring in our corpus. From that space which is deeply rooted in the African tradition, raises an intertextual discourse which questions all the hope placed in Waiyaki for the survival of the African culture. This concerns the announcement of the new religion, the Christian religion which upsets the prophecy of Chege:

*Behold, a Virgin shall conceive*

*And bear a son,*

*And shall call his name Immanuel. (Ngugi1965 : 29)*

There is a strong opposition between this quotation and the preceding one. While African people want to go back to their own gods, Joshua, a former guardian of the African cultural power, now converted to the religion of the colonial power, also announces a new era, that of Christianity. He is opposed to any idea of a new birth of Waiyaki. So he seems to spell the end of the African tradition.

Apart from space, time also appears as an important issue in the analysis of the crisis in *The River Between*. Here, a study of time that will permit us to discuss the narratological categories of analepsis, prolepsis, the speed of the narrative, etc., that are important linguistics items to understand the fight for freedom and emancipation in our corpus.

As mentioned by Gérard Genette, it is almost impossible for a narrator, to do without the temporal categories in the narrative composition, because he must necessarily tell the story within a present, past or future timeline (1972: 228). Depending on the time of the narrative with respect to the story told, we can distinguish the *previous and subsequent* narratives (1972: 65-278). The analepsis and the prolepsis are part of this statement by Genette. The prolepsis is a figure of speech which consists in anticipating the future, projecting into the future, while the analepsis is a contrary figure of speech. It consists in a flash-back which certainly allows a critical reading of the novel. This idea is also adopted by Paul Ricoeur who says that there is a necessary transcultural, anthropological link between the act of telling a story and the time based on human experience (1983: 85).

Thus, the prolepsis and the analepsis in our corpus allow us to understand the intrinsic link with the plot. *The River Between* starts with a step backwards to set the story in its context (Ngugi, 1965: 1). Here, the narrator indicates the space where the plot shall occur. In the past, the river *Honia* connecting the two villages, now rivals, was the water of life and unity. That water was pure and served as a place for symbolic purification. And the two villages, Kameno and Makuyu, used to share the same African religion and culture.

The temporality in the novel is indicated by the rhythm and the speed of the story. It is important to set a relationship between the duration of the fiction and the length of the narration. From "long ago" on page 1 to "now", on page 4, we can see how fast the narrator seems to get rid of the presentation of the past of Kameno and Makuyu. This past is subject to an elliptical narrative that seems to deal with the summary of the history in which less important details are dropped out. The emergency of the narrative requires to focus the narrative on the present whose reference to the past shows simply the difference between the two historic moments. The present is contradictory to the past and the values of the two periods of time seem to be opposed. From a space and a lifetime characterized by peace, homogeneity and harmony during the pre-colonial period, Kameno and Makuyu have become antagonistic spaces. Religion and colonial policy reached those places and broke this harmony which existed in the past. In any case, time has an impact on the narrative and contributes to the search for freedom, equality and conciliation between European civilization and traditional African culture.

In addition to time and space elements which reveal the presence of the crisis in *The River Between*, it is also important to analyze the aesthetic efforts of the writer to account for the crisis because between the true and social ugliness and the literary narrative accounting for it, there is a gap which is art and aesthetics. In fact, one can talk of ugly things or of crises using a beautiful language. Here then, we can meet the true definition of art.

### **III. WHICH AESTHETICS FOR A SOCIETY IN CRISIS?**

Jean Rousset defined the novel as a secret and a key of that secret which uses reality only to abolish it and gives it a new reality standing between the poetic sensitivity and the real sensitivity. (1970: IV). For him, a novel is a form, because it is an artwork (1970 : XI). That is why he invites the reader to be mimetic, what compels him to renounce to any judgment. The reader must support and restore the emergence of a poetic sensitivity where beauty, aesthetic can be found (1970 : XVI)

The works of Ngugi and mainly the one under study reveals the creation and the idea of beauty. The borrowing of the English language, his evolution towards a writing in Gikuyu language, the use of a hybrid language, of the aesthetics of dissatisfaction describing the state of existential and political dissatisfaction and the realistic language through words and scenes that are shocking, account for the crisis in *The River Between*.

Thus, the iconoclastic verve of Ngugi when writing the novel in a foreign language, the English language, provides some originality to the text. Using a writing which links the two languages of his education, English and Gikuyu, the narrator of *The River Between* intends to reach two categories of readers: African readers and readers outside the Gikuyu people, particularly the offspring of the former master, the English colonizer.

Figures of speech, images, proverbs and other linguistic tools of the traditional discourse in our corpus reveal the aesthetics, the beauty that takes place in the plot. The text of Ngugi is full of stylistic elements such as comparison, metaphor as well as concepts referring to symbols that reveal a society in search of identity. At the beginning of the narrative of *The River Between*, the narrator gives a description of Kameno, Makuyu and many other ridges: "They were like many sleeping Lions which never woke.". Mentioning this wild animal at the start of the incipit prepares the reader to forthcoming violent events, because when the lions will wake up, surely, the seemingly peaceful atmosphere prevailing will disappear and give place for fear and danger. The lion is a strong and ferocious animal. Is it not the image of prophecy that is going to occur in the narrative? Anyway, through this image of suspicion, the narrator is announcing danger, inevitable conflict or destruction.

Indeed, metaphor is also present in our corpus to reveal an aesthetics of crisis. This concept clearly appears in the work of Pierre Fontanier as the tropes of similarities which consist in presenting an idea under the sign of another stronger or well-known idea, which in fact has nothing to do with the first one, except a certain conformity or analogy linkage. (1977: 99). Thus, the narrator of *The River Between* very often tries that linguistics figure. So, on page 3 of our corpus, the author uses a set of metaphorical elements that can be found in this extract: "There were the people whose blood and bones spoke the language of the hills. The trees listened, moaned with the wind and kept silent".(Ngugi, 1965: 3)

From blood and bones which speak, we now have trees which listen and shut up as if one was indicating human beings. This is the metaphor of the presence of the spirits and African gods in this space. For Gikuyu people, the initiated persons can speak to the spirits living in waters, trees, mountains and other natural elements. Here, nature is not only nature. It has a spiritual relationship with the traditional African peoples.

Perhaps, that's why instead of using for example, a person to separate the two villages, Makuyu and Kameno, the writer uses this strong image of water represented by the symbol *Honia* which seems to be the river which will settle the conflict and separate the parties. This is the image lying behind the title of the novel, *The River Between*. What can be the meaning of water, when talking about crisis, fighting, where the only force of interposition should be a superior force? Water could then be that superior force which comes to establish justice and beauty. Beauty then is revealed through the image and the symbol raising from that natural element.

The fight for the African identity recommends several approaches. There is no matter whether the strategy used is good or not, if it is right or wrong. Here, the most important thing is to strike the enemy with anathema and overcome him at any cost. That's why, if it is chocking to see African fighters betraying the common oath, it is also shocking to know that Joshua and his daughter Muthoni, the representatives of Christianity, are acting against the prescriptions of the Church. This amazement appears in the following discussion:

So tonight Waiyaki knew that Muthoni had actually run away. Her aunt, living in Kameno, was going to take charge of her. In some villages people could not believe this. They said that Joshua had a hand in it, probably to appease the angry gods of the outraged hills. Was it not known that Joshua took beer secretly? Strangely, nobody had ever seen him drinking. But they said they knew. (1965 : 42)

For the narrator, the only way out seems to be resistance with intolerance towards the other. In the conflict between the indigenous people and the colonizer with his new religion, there is somewhat an ambiguity in the behaviors of some characters revealing an aesthetic at the border of paradox. Rather than working for a Manichean aesthetics, the narrative shows characters standing between two sides. Muthoni is a good illustration of this trend of opening to the Other without renouncing her values. She is part of this category of ambivalent characters who participate to the realism of the narrative by presenting a true world made up of extremists and beings whose sense of moderation prevent the narrative from a manichaeism that could have been harmful to the credibility of her ideological choices. When Muthoni accepts Christianity, this does not mean a rejection of Gikuyu culture and does not intend to stay the same. She embodies that realistic aesthetics in question. That's why she is a scandal not only for her father but also for the other members of the community opposed to her father. By so doing, she confuses both Joshua's version of Christianity and the extremists of Gikuyu tradition. She just wants to be a Christian without renouncing to being a Gikuyu, a Christian who wants to be circumcised and be educated according to the ancestral rituals of her people.

The narrator seems to be ironical about the attitudes of the two sides. Joshua is subject to wild rumors because the aim is to portray him negatively. He is accused of bad behaviour, he who, based on rumors, was accused of drinking alcohol. If the intolerance of Joshua is proven and even expressed through the rejection of his own daughter, that of his opponents is criticized with the same irony.

On top of shocking scenes, Ngugi uses a language which is at the borderline of academic English and Swahili. For the Kenyan writer, it is all about domesticating the English language in order to convey his message easily. That's why he indicates this important message in Gikuyu Language: *Kagutui ka Mucii gatihakagwo Ageni*. (Ngugi, 1965: 3). In fact, it is a proverb which says that the foreigner

should not be provided with the oil of the host house. Here, the oil is synonymous of what makes the house shine. This is the image of the African culture as the identity of African peoples that the narrator refuses to sell out to the colonizer.

Sometimes, Ngugi seems to use different narrators. This seems so clear that the writer gives the impression that there is a narrator in the gikuyu language and another that seems to be the English language translator. This is what Ngugi reveals through the following lines:

*Maikaritethi Utuku  
Ariitchia Mhuri  
Murekiowa Ngai niokire  
Nakeakimera o uu.  
While shepherds watched their flocks by night.  
All seated on the ground  
The angel of the Lord came down  
And glory shone around. (Ngugi, 1965: 132)*

Though Ngugi could have used only the English language in the novel, he decided to write as a pillar the above song in Gikuyu language. Certainly, as any translation seems to be betrayal, (Du Bellay, 1905 : 76), Ngugi provides simultaneously the Gikuyu and the English version of the song. It is up to the reader to go back to the Kenyan culture to better understand that song. Also, this juxtaposition of the same idea in the two languages allows the critics to understand the need for a conciliation of European civilization and African culture for a better world.

## CONCLUSION

At the end of this work, we noticed that the study of characters, space and time and aesthetics which accounts for the crisis has revealed that the narrator of Ngugi succeeded through images, symbols and other literary tools, to gather Makuyu and Kameno using elements and parallel events that set confusion among religious extremists in the plot. The hybrid language, the corrupted setting in which African people live requires awareness for the rehabilitation of his people's traditional culture, formerly destroyed by the colonizer. The paradox in the struggle for independence lies clearly in the fact that African people blindly adopt the bad deeds of the colonizer. It is the leitmotiv of *The River Between* that seems to fight for a conciliation of cultures and religions for a better Africa.

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