



## READING ACCULTURATION IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *A GRAIN OF WHEAT*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with acculturation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*. The study reveals that acculturation comprises cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism. In the narrative, the "House of God" represents Christianity whose principles are opposed to Gikuyu tradition. Through the building of the church in Gikuyu world, one can see a peaceful coexistence of two contradictory cultures: African and western one. The Gikuyu people do not understand the white man's language; but they befriend with him. Although, the train is an imported element from western civilization, it has a great impact on the life of every Gikuyu. Additionally, the text reveals the bestiality and brutality of colonialism. Gikuyu people are considered as discard things which must be thrown in the rubbish-bin. Unlike Africans, pets are highly regarded in this fragmented society. The study also reveals that cultures never meet together but the people who carry these different cultures do.

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### INTRODUCTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's third novel, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) chronicles Kenyan people's fight for independence from British rule. In the book, the village of Thabai symbolizes Kenyan society. It is depicted as a community whose inhabitants are astonished by the discovery of a betrayer of the Mau Mau movement on the eve of independence. One of the major themes of the novel is acculturation. In this study, it is multidimensional not only in terms of the independence of heritage-culture orientations but also with respect to the components that are assumed to change (Berry, 2006) As such, psychological and sociocultural adaptations occur because of colonialism, military invasion, migration and sojourning. For Sakski Semwal, *A Grain of Wheat* stands for Ngugi's revolt against colonialism. He writes: "Ngugi was baptized as James Ngugi, which was the direct effect of colonialism on black people. When he realized that his Gikuyu culture and values were underestimated, he rejected Christianity which he regarded as a sign of colonialism" (2015:1).

Ngugi uses local languages as a weapon against the colonizer. This can explain the overuse of Swahili words. The freedom fighters also use Uhuru as a rallying cry. As a committed writer, Ngugi believes that the cohabitation between African and European cultures is an unintended one. This raises the following questions: what is the essence of the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized people? To what extent can one consider colonialism as a necessity for African countries development? Is cultural communication a source of rapprochement or a quest for cultural identity? To decipher Ngugi's text, we will lean on semiotics and sociological criticisms. In this perspective, our paper intends to analyze the unintended alliance of African and European cultures, the cultural clash as a failure of cross-cultural dialogue and the recognition of cultural identity.

#### Unintended Alliance of the two Cultures

In need of resources for their industries, many European countries undertook trips outside their continent.

They conquered many parts of the world and introduced their own systems of government, economic organization, religion and education. They therefore divided the entire African continent. The British, the French, the Germans, the Italians, the Spanish, the Belgians, and the Portuguese set about implementing strategies for a long-term occupation and control of Africa. Berlin of 1884 was implemented through the sword and the Bullet. The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. Whereas the former was visibly brutal, the latter was visibly gentle, a process best described in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* where the methods of the colonial phase of imperialism is described as consisting of knowing how to kill efficiently and so to heal with the same art (Ngugi, 2005: 9). In *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), when Kenyans realized that they were exploited and were dominated by alien forces, they created the Mau Mau movement to fight for independence:

Nearly everybody was a member of the Movement, but nobody could say with any accuracy when it was born: to most people, especially those in the young generation, it had always been there, a rallying centre for action. It changed names, leaders came and went, but the Movement remained, opening new visions, gathering greater and greater strength, till on the eve of Uhuru, its influence stretched from one horizon touching the sea to the other resting on the great lake. Its origins can, so the people say, be traced to the day the Whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands. (10).

This passage clearly shows that the quick appearance of the white man creates fear and disorder in the Gikuyu land. Gikuyu people were not ready to welcome red strangers with a book (Bible) and an iron snake (train): "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay" (Achebe, 1958: 29). Like the Igbo, they considered these people with the Bible as good people and give them plots of land to settle down, demonstrating African hospitality and friendship. The Bible helps understand that the first Europeans came to Kenya as missionaries. They believed that Africans were sinners. So their mission was to save these sinners from suffering and sins. When the missionaries built their huts, they also built the "House of God". In the narrative, the "House of God" (10) represents Christianity whose principles are opposed to Gikuyu tradition. Through the building of the church in Gikuyu world, we can see a peaceful coexistence of two contradictory cultures: African and western one. The Gikuyu people do not understand the white man's language; but they befriend with him. They regard him as their brother and share many things with him. Some Gikuyu even follow him in his church:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. (15) Here, Kihika and Mubia are depicted as the first Gikuyu people who adopt Christianity.

In the text, "the church", "the white robes", "the Bible" and "the sword" are symbols of paramount importance which epitomize the "material representation of western religion" (Eco, 1980: 21). They show that Kikuyu people are engaged in a process of cultural appropriation. The presence of Kihika and Mubia in "their church" can be read as a form of participation in the dialogue between Gikuyu and European cultures. Through the term "their church", the narrator demonstrates that the natives or the Gikuyu have borrowed new values from the dominant culture and integrate them into their local one. In this respect, "Kihika believed in prayer. He even read the Bible every day, and took it with him wherever he went" (22). Despite, the use of the Bible and Christian principles, Kihika is still rooted in Gikuyu tradition. He is even portrayed as the charismatic leader of the Mau Mau movement and the fight against colonialism.

The narrative reveals that Kihika becomes Christian because he wants to learn the Bible and uses it as a "cultural bomb" (Ngugi, 1986: 3) against the missionaries and their allies. Kihika's attachment to the Bible also appears when Gikonyo shuffles through the small Bible lingering on verses underlined in black and red. Gikonyo reads a few red lines in Kihika's Bible: "He shall judge the poor of the people; he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. For he shall deliver the needy when he cometh; the poor also and he that hath no helper" (22). As it can be seen, Kihika finds the Bible very interesting because it teaches to protect and defend the poor. Ngugi also depicts the Bible as a source of motivation and resistance of the freedom fighters: "The Movement remained, opening new visions, gathering greater and greater strength, till on the eve of Uhuru, its influence stretched from one horizon touching the sea to the other resting on the great Lake" (10). Consequently, Kihika successfully uses some verses to denounce the evil sides of colonialism. In this intercultural communication, acceptance and mutual respect are the key ingredients. Cultural appropriation is then seen as an adoption of foreign rituals, aesthetic standards and behavior by the Gikuyu. The Bible becomes as a part of Kihika's cultural heritage. The use of the Bible together with Gikuyu culture in the same text highlights the cultural hybridity. Ngugi combines songs, poems, Bible references to express the dialogue between Gikuyu tradition and European one.

Furthermore, the symbols of modern education: "school, the old exercise-book, the pencil, the penknife" (29), "the librarian, the table, the file" (40) and "the library" (42) help the reader understand the adoption of western education by Gikuyu people. In the novel, the missionary school is mainly dedicated to the kids of the convert Gikuyu. The traditional elite Karanja befriends with the colonizer to facilitate the dialogue between both civilizations. He then encourages his children to become Christians so that they can benefit from the knowledge and know-how of the missionary school (Lèfara, 2014: 404). Mugo Gatheru (1964) talks about Karanja's attitude vis à vis Christianity in the following words:

Karanja was, and still is, living like a western oriented Christian, but at the same time he maintains some tribal practices and beliefs too. He never became a Christian, but he encouraged his children to be Christians. I believe he did this because it was through Christianity that his children could get an education, and he wanted them to be educated. But he himself and his wives did not need education and

therefore there was no use in their becoming Christians. (Mugo, 49)

Through Karanja's attitude, one can see the dialogue between European and African traditions. Although he is deeply rooted in Gikuyu tradition, he promotes western values in his family. He heartens his children to adopt western lifestyle through Christianity and school. In this context, we might say that Ngugi implicitly invites Gikuyu people to borrow new cultural values from European tradition in order to improve their own. European science and technology play a significant role in the daily life of Gikuyu people. They are fond of the "train" as the railway platform becomes a best place of their social meetings:

Later, the railway platform became the meeting place for the young. They talked in groups at home, they went for walks in the country, some even went to church; but in their minds was always the train on Sunday. [...] They just went there to meet one another, to talk, to gossip, to laugh. Love-affairs were often hatched there; many marriages with their attendant cry of woe or joy had their origin at the station platform. (71).

The railway platform is a place where different social antagonisms are manifested and solved. Kenyans regarded the train as an "iron snake" (71) that coughed and vomited smoke "as it rattled along". The metaphor of the "snake" is used to describe the train, a modern means of transportation. In its symbolism, it represents a significant element of colonialism. When the British settlers came in Kenya, they brought western technology, such the railway. Kenyans were suspicious because they believed that the train was an "iron snake" which was going to "bite" them as it was "quickly wriggling towards Nairobi for a thorough exploitation of the hinterland (12). In the text, the train is a bridge between the colonized people and the colonizers.

As the narration reveals, no Gikuyu can go without the sight of the train. The narrator argues that "The train became an obsession: if you missed it, sorrow seized your heart for the rest of the week; you longed for the next train. Then Sunday came, you went there on time, and immediately you were healed". (71) Although, the train is an imported element from western civilization, it has a great impact on the life of every Gikuyu. Ngugi believes that, even if the station symbolizes British power, it is also used by Kenyans for their own benefit: "At the platform things were different. Nobody thought of starting a fight. There, the man who beat you the previous Sunday and took away your woman was a friend. You talked and laughed together" (72). The railway platform is also described as a place of reconciliation, forgiveness and entertainment: "Guitar players occupied a place of honor in this community; beautiful girls surrounded them and paid tribute with their eyes. Men bought dances when a person bought a dance, the guitarist played for him alone, praising his name (72). As such, "the guitar" is a modern musical tool which symbolizes the adoption of western dance by Kenyans. In the narrative, Rung'ei Trading Centre participates in the dialogue between cultures. It is a place where people from different social classes congregate to sell and buy food and exchange gossip. The market is then a social agent of cultural adaptation and peaceful coexistence. The narrator asserts:

Indian traders from Nairobi had also discovered this market, where they often came, haggled over prices with the women, let slip one or two dirty words which sent

women into fits of dirty laughter, and then took the vegetables and other wares to Nairobi where they disposed of them to the city people at a much higher price. Other Indians had settled in the area, a few minutes' walk from the African shops bought you to the Indian place, where buildings, also in two straight rows, were made of corrugated-iron sheets. These Indians also brought potatoes, peas, beans and maize grain from Rung'ei Market during the harvest. But they stored them at the back of their shops, and later sold them during the hard times. (70)

The market puts people from different "social classes" together. For instance, the Black, the White and the Indians share the same market. Through trade, they intercommunicate and change their behavior, their living conditions and their ways of speaking. Language also plays a significant part in cultural appropriation or adoption. This is the reason why Indian traders during their transactions with native women, "let slip one or two dirty words which sent women into fits of dirty laughter" (70). In so doing, language becomes a factor of integration social. The involvement of Kenyans in trade can be read as a form of cultural adoption because farming is the daily activity of men in traditional Kenyan society. The meeting of the two civilizations changes Gikuyu's ways of building houses. In this view, Rung'ei is a true symbol of social mutation. The African shops, though often roofed with rotting tin, had the unsurpassed virtue of having stone or brick walls. People claimed that Rung'ei was the first centre with such buildings in all Gikuyu country. Rung'ei had other virtues too. The iron snake had first crawled along this plain before climbing up the escarpment on its way to Kisumu and Kampala, for a long time Thabai was the envy of many ridges not so graced with a railway line. (70)

Rung'ei is represented as a tangible sign of social change. The development of Kenyan society can be seen through the new buildings: trade center, market, shops, rooms with rotting tin, stone or bricks walls and railway. All these infrastructures borrowed from western culture partake in the cultural communion. This cultural appropriation takes place without a real understanding of why Gikuyu culture must participate in the different activities of colonial administration. Additionally, cultural appropriation is also perceived as a by-product of imperialism, capitalism, oppression and assimilation. The alliance of African and European cultures becomes a complex structuring. As a matter of fact, cultural appropriation is turned into cultural imperialism, a clash that deserves scrutiny.

### **Cultural Clash as a Failure of Cross-Cultural Dialogue**

Cultural conflict must be regarded as a kind of conflict between different cultural values and beliefs. Here, the notion of cultural clash is used to explain the violence and crimes of cultural imperialism. To Turner (2005: 83), "this conflict occurs when people's expectations of a certain behavior coming from their cultural backgrounds are not met, as others have different cultural backgrounds and different expectations". William Kornblum also defines it as a conflict that prevails when conflicting norms create "opportunities for deviance and criminal gain in deviant sub-cultures" (2011: 191). In this sense, the missionaries in Ngugi's novel use Christianity to impose colonialist ideology on Gikuyu people and promote western values. The new converts trample down Gikuyu tradition to the detriment of European ways:

The few who were converted, started speaking a faith foreign to the ways of the land. They trod on sacred places to show that no harm could reach those protected by the hand of the Lord. Soon people saw the Whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled down the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the Whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword. (12)

Because of their alienation, the new converts perceive only the beauty of Christianity. Consequently, they behave like the hens that destroy their own offspring to survive. In the plot, the narrator portrays the new converts as the destroyers of the Gikuyu world. Their misbehavior is the core of the strife between the two civilizations. These alienated Christians wage a cultural war against their own society. Beyond their deeds, there is a conflict between modernity and tradition. Therefore, the "big love affair" between African and European cultures becomes hatred and "the Elders of the land protested" (12). Through this protestation of the Aged, the reader can see the resistance the Kikuyu people against colonialism:

Waiyaki and other warrior-leaders took arms. They iron snake spoken of by Mugo. Wa Kibiro was quickly wriggling towards Nairobi for a thorough exploitation of the hinterland. [...] The Whiteman with bamboo poles that vomited fire and smoke, hit back; his menacing laughter remained echoing in the hearts of the people. [...] They flocked to his meeting, waiting for him to give the sign. Harry denounced the Whiteman and cursed that benevolence and protection which denied people land and freedom. He amazed them by reading aloud letters to the Whiteman, letters in which he set out in clear terms people's discontent with taxation, forced labour on white settler's land, and with the soldier settlement scheme which after the first big war, left many black people without homes or land around Tigoni and other places. (12)

Here, the conquest of Gikuyu land is done through bloodshed and humiliation. The white man wages a merciless war against Gikuyu people to deprive them of their land, cultural heritage and freedom. As revealed in the text, the white colonizer murders many Gikuyu leaders to achieve the goals of colonialism and imperialism: "Waiyaki had been arrested and taken to the coast, bound hands and feet. [...] Waiyaki was buried alive at Kibwezi with his head facing into the center of the earth" (12). Waiyaki's blood contains within it a seed, a grain, which gives birth to a movement whose main strength thereafter springs from a bond with the soil. He is symbolically buried alive like a seed in the ground. Behind the murder of the Gikuyu charismatic leader, Waiyaki, we see the death of many freedom fighters who sacrifice themselves as scapegoats in the fight against colonialism. Winning freedom comes at a price. Many people must make personal sacrifices for the good of the majority. In this perspective, one of the freedom fighters says: "In Kenya we want death which will change things, that is to say, we want true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for, we become a sacrifice for one another" (95). In the narrative, Jomo Kenyatta, a real-life character, is often mentioned. He is regarded as someone who makes sacrifices of his personal profit for that of his community. Kihika is like Kenyatta as he,

too, is a great fighter who pays for Kenya's freedom with his life as he is hanged by the British: "Kihika was tortured [...]. Kihika was hanged in public, one Sunday, at Rung'ei Market, not far from where he had once stood calling for blood to rain on and water the tree of freedom (17). Such notions as "taxation", "forced labor", "white settler's land" "soldier settlement scheme" and "big war" all reveal the economic, political, geostrategic, cultural, and scientific motives of the colonial and imperialist expansion undertaken by the industrial powers. Daniel Mengara in his autobiography, *Mema* (2003), also satirizes the crimes of colonialism and cultural imperialism. Here, white people are described as men with stony hearts. He then talks about the malice of white settlers in the following terms:

The Fulassi are white people, just like the Dzaman and the Nguess. They are all merciless conquerors who took over our lands. My mother used to tell me about the authority of the Fulassi who were very severe with us black people and forced everyone to learn their language and obey their laws. When one did not obey their laws, one was often beaten to death. Some youths were taken from villages for no reason and sent to work for the white man, who was building roads. He needed to build roads because he was cutting down big trees that he wanted to send back home for his people to use in the land of the Fulassi. My mother told me no one was paid for this, and several people from my village who were taken away never came back. Old people though they did not return because they had died. My mother often heard stories of people being chained together as prisoners because the white man did not want anyone leaving work. (Mengara, 2003: 1-2).

The white man is portrayed as a dangerous conqueror who uses his cunning to deprive the colorized people of their properties. When the white man arrived in Kenya, people took him for a missionary and followed him. Once, he settled down, he took off his cloth and revealed himself as a true usurper and a thirsty for power.

As revealed in the narrative, Gikuyu land is in turmoil because the missionary has become a soldier who holds a gun in his right hand and a Bible in the left one. This "priest-soldier" subjects Gikuyu people to forced work. In this regard, he does not hesitate to implement a brutal system of labor on Kenyan people. The traditional elites are compelled to organize work in their villages. Black workers are overexploited: "People being chained together as prisoners because the white did not want any leaving work" (2). Additionally, the text reveals the bestiality and brutality of colonialism. Gikuyu people are considered as discard things which must be thrown in the rubbish-bin. Unlike Africans, pets are highly regarded in this fragmented society: dogs are used as symbols of white power. They are used to terrify and subdue Kenyans. Karanja still remembers his fear of Dr Lynd's dog that is even well-treated than any black man in Gikuyu land. As such, "between the houseboy and the dog had developed a friendship which was very touching to see" (45). Dr Lynd never cries whenever Gikuyu people are killed. But she bitterly cries when a white man's dog is beaten or killed by a car. This clearly shows that white men have "stony hearts". The roads, the schools and the churches built by white men are meant for their own use. In this perspective, Mengara argues that "the white man needed to build roads because he was cutting down big trees that he wanted to send back home for his people" (2003: 2). Through

the white man's capitalist ideology, the reader realizes that the colonizer has come to make money in Kenya. For this reason, Dr Lynd said "she had come to Kenya to do a job not to play politics. She liked the country and the climate and so had decided to stay" (45). In his novel, Ngugi (1986: 3) denounces the crimes of imperialism when he says:

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, their languages, their environment, their heritage of struggle [...]. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. (1986: 3).

Ngugi believes that the white man uses culture as a bomb to fight Gikuyu people. In this way, they are bound to deny their cultural heritage. In Gikuyu world, culture is the cement of social life and cohesion. But when this cohesion or collective consciousness is corrupt, the members of the community cannot speak with one voice and look in the same direction. It becomes easy to dominate and exploit them. This citation helps the reader to understand the strategies used by developed countries to keep developing ones in poverty. The white man knows that when he attacks the culture of a given community, he can surely break its soul. This explains in a certain way, why Gikuyu people are forced to resist in order to retrieve their lost land. The narrator lays bare the yearning of Gikuyu people for revenge when he states:

Kenya belongs to black people. Can't you see that Cain was wrong? I am my brother's keeper. In any case, whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Ukabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the white man. And even if it did, shouldn't everybody have a share in the common shamba, our Kenya? This soil belongs to Kenyan people. Nobody has the right to sell or buy it. It is our mother and we her children are all equal before her. She is our common inheritance. Take your white man, anywhere, in the settled area. He owns hundreds and hundreds of acres land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal, wheat and yet only get ten shillings month. (97-98).

The above cited passage is a lament to recall the evils of colonialism. The narrator urges the white oppressor to leave Kenya for Kenyans when he claims that "Kenya belongs to black people" (97); "The soil belongs to Kenyan people" (98). Through these words of the narrator, one perceives an awareness of Gikuyu people of their enslavement. Ngugi's text can be regarded as a call for love, brotherhood, unity and reciprocity. Kenya, the land, the common shamba is portrayed as a mother for all Gikuyu people. Every Gikuyu is then invited to play his part in the fight against colonialism and

cultural imperialism to set free Kenya from bondage. For "a people without land was like a child without a mother. A child was able to know who he was, where he came from and where he was going only when he had a mother. Without a mother, the villagers said, a child was lost" (Mengara, 2003: 3). This representation of Kenya as a mother highlights the social significance of land and freedom. In this view, Ngugi and cross-cultural dialogue will be analyzed in the last part.

### Ngugi and Cross- Cultural Dialogue

In this part, we intend to show Ngugi's contribution to cross-cultural dialogue. As a sensitive needle, Ngugi dedicates his writing to the promotion of the dialogue between cultures. He focuses on the peaceful coexistence of African and European cultures. This approach is also seen through his use of Gikuyu, names: Mau Mau (55), Uhuru (63), Swahili proverb (15), song (21), poem (39) and chorus (79); which sheds light on the hybridity of the novel. Ngugi talks about the importance of cross cultural communication when he writes:

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as medium of expression. I have endeavored in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people. [...] I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings (Ngugi, 2005: 8).

The analysis of this paragraph suggests that cultural appropriation occurs when different cultures meet together. The use of African language and European one in the same text can explain the interdependence of both cultures. The union of the two cultures symbolizes a sort of alliance between them. Ngugi also commits his life to the protection and defense of Gikuyu cultural heritage. He reveals as a committed writer. In the narrative, Ngugi stands against the cultural rape committed by British colonists. As such, *A Grain of Wheat* is an invitation to self-affirmation and the recognition of our "Africanity". In Joseph Ki-Zerbo's view, "without identity, we become an object of history, a tool used by other people. In identity, language is of a paramount importance. The disappearance of African languages will be disastrous for African identity because Africans cannot use forever alien cultural elements" (2004: 8). For Ngugi, "language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. [...] In parts of Kenya and Tanzania, and particularly in Zanzibar, Swahili is inseparably both a means of communication and a carrier of the culture of those people to whom it is a mother-tongue (2005: 13)". Beyond this affirmation of cultural identity, one perceives the role of the artist in a fractured society. Ngugi believes that the artist or novelist is duty bound to show his people the way out of bondage. He is the one who should lead his people to the "promised land". Connectedly, he cannot accept the destruction of the culture and the tradition of his forefathers. He therefore turns out to be a "liberator" and an

advocator of the Gikuyu tradition. Ngugi's work is meant to restore the dignity of Kenyans and Africans. As Kobena Mercer argues "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (1990: 43). This identity crisis is revealed in the following words of the narrator:

Waitherero suddenly died of age and over-drinking. For the first time since their marriage, her daughters came to the hut, pretended they did not see Mugo, and buried her without questions or tears. They returned to their homes. And then, strangely, Mugo missed his aunt. Whom could he now call a relation? He wanted somebody, anybody, who would use the claims of kinship to do him ill or good. Either one or the other as long as he was not left alone, an outsider. He turned to the soil. He would labour, sweat, and through success and wealth, force society to recognize him. (8).

In fact, Mugo is in quest of his identity. This quest is expressed through his relations after the sudden death his aunt Waitherero. Mugo is regarded a lost child because he has no relations. He lives alone like an orphan. As a Gikuyu, he finds loneliness as a kind of prison. He knows that in Gikuyu land, no normal man remains aloof from the society. Mugo is then in quest of social recognition. But he can only acquire this through courage, determination, hard work, success and wealth. In so doing, he impels his community to cooperate with him. As seen in the text, no social failure has a room in this fictionalized Kenyan society. Ngugi's novel is also a call for unity and self-sacrifice in the fight against imperialism. The narrator highlights the importance of self-sacrifice in the following extract:

All oppressed people have a cross to bear. The Jews refused to carry it and were scattered like dust all over the earth. Had Christ's death a meaning for the Children of Israel? In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that is to say, we want true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. Christ then is not one person. All those who take up the cross of liberating Kenya are true Christs for us Kenyan people (95).

Ngugi heartens every Kenyan to sacrifice himself to save his people like Christ. The "cross" stands for the different hindrances Gikuyu people have to overcome in their quest for identity and freedom. The text also highlights the specificity of Gikuyu people. They are portrayed as men who believe in several gods. This is why Kihika worships the white man's God and Agu, Gikuyu traditional God. In Kihika world view, the unity of the people is the sole remedy against British imperialism.

'It's a question of Unity,' Kihika explained excitedly. The example of India is there before our noses. The British were there for hundreds and hundreds of years. They ate India's wealth. They drank India's blood. They never listened to the political talk-talk of a few men. What happened? There came this man Gandhi. Mark you, Gandhi knows his white

men well. He goes round and organizes the Indian masses into a weapon stronger than the bomb. (88).

Obviously, a people united in faith is stronger than the bomb. They shall not tremble or run away before the sword (191). Through the mentioning of Gandhi in the text, the writer invites his people to walk in the footsteps of Gandhi. This simply means that Kenyan people and Africans as a whole have to adopt Gandhi's non-violence method to break colonialism into pieces. Through this Gandhian method, Ngugi implicitly shows that in Gikuyu collective consciousness, the community is before the individual. As such, "a few shall die that the many shall live (191).

Also, in *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi also affirms or re-affirms his cultural identity. In this view, he combines poetry, Gikuyu traditional songs, elements of oral literature and verses of the Bible. The novel starts by a verse: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain" (I Corinthians 15: 36). The structure and the form of this verse foretell the fragmented nature of the novel. This approach shows the writer's refusal to follow the principles of universal writing. Ngugi's work is a mixture of Gikuyu technological materials and English. In so doing, he creates dialogue between cultures in the text.

## Conclusion

It comes out that cultural acculturation comprises cultural adaptation and cultural imperialism. The study also reveals that cultures never meet together but the people who carry these different cultures. As such, the nature, the importance and the meaning of cultural change depend both on the interactions between individual and the socio-economic context of the society where these meetings take place. In Ngugi's work, cross-cultural dialogue between Africa and Europe is turned into cultural imperialism because Europeans refuse to recognize African culture and tradition. The white man uses colonial institutions like the church and the school to promote colonial ideology. This situation brings about a cultural clash. Throughout his novel Ngugi questions the survival of African tradition in the new globalized society. He then invites Africans to rehabilitate or reconsider African novel so that it can meet the demands of globalization. Beyond Ngugi's writing technique, the reader sees the image of an advocator of Gikuyu tradition. The meeting of the two cultures should be positive if they select the positive values from both sides to build a new cultural identity.

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