

**THE “SACRED” IN A CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CHANGE; AN  
ANALYSIS OF ARMAH’S FRAGMENTS, ACHEBE’S NO LONGER AT  
EASE AND N’GUGI’S THE RIVER BETWEEN**

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**Abstract**

The encounter between different cultures, be it brutal or soft engenders most of the time a shift in the habits or practices of these people in general. It cannot be otherwise in as much as every culture has a dynamic character. In effect, it has to adapt itself to the changes occurring in time and space. This process which is also known as culture change brings about not only disruptions in the old order, but it equally creates a situation of uncertainty and doubt as regard religious observances or else a cultural hybridism as it can be perceived in African literary productions.

**Key words:** culture change, practices, disruption, religious observances, hybridism, African communities.

## 1. Introduction

In his constant research for a better living standard, man, as a thinking animal creates, invents, explores.... Thus, he contributes to the enrichment of his culture. This view is shared by Marcien Towa who states that “la culture, c’est l’ensemble de tout ce qu’il a inventé ou créé” (culture is a set of everything that man invents or creates)(our translation). Further, he defines tradition as being “la culture constituée et l’action de la transmettre” (*Recherche, Pédagogie....* n° 56, 32) (the constituted culture and the action of transmitting it) (our translation). This constituted culture we may guess consists of the adaptation and development process, solving problems, matters of social relationship, the establishment of institutions, techniques, doctrines, a language, etc.

We may accordingly deduce from the above that the establishment of a new order in a given community will be more than difficult. Unfortunately, the industrial revolution in Europe with its needs of new markets will precipitate the phenomenon of the invasion of the African continent by the Europeans known later as colonization. One of the impacts of colonization is of course culture change which can be defined as “the process by which the existing order of society, its organization, beliefs and knowledge, tools and consumers’ goods is more or less rapidly transformed” (*The Dynamics... VII*). This transformation of the existing order into a new one creates mutations in every sector of life. Changes in this paper will take into account the case when two societies meet and when the second, here (the African society) is imposed abruptly the new order, creating thus a cultural traumatism. Religion, being an essential pillar on which African tradition rests, it goes without saying that it will suffer from many upheavals.

To come to the second concept of this work, the ‘Sacred’, Emile Durkheim defines it as “un ensemble de valeurs consacrées au culte qui inspire respect et vénération” (a set of values dedicated to the cult and which inspires respect and veneration) (our translation). In it, he sees “un ensemble de figures symboliques redoutables et radicalement opposées au monde des hommes par lesquelles le groupe exprime sa propre existence et les valeurs morales”(a set of symbolic and dreadful figures and diametrically opposed to the humans’ world through which the group expresses their own existence and their moral values) (*Le sacrifice dans les religions ...16*) (our translation). Such defined, the sacred appears fundamental in every culture since it is interconnected with religion. Our analysis will consider the sacred in its

traditional form (African beliefs), for, taking the Judeo-Christian aspect will not answer the goals of this research.

Concerning the novels to explore, *Fragments* is the story of Baako, a been-to who failed to satisfy the expectations of both his family members and a materialistic post-independence Ghanaian society and who finally succumbs into a psychological crisis. *No Longer at Ease*, the second novel is about Michael Obi Okonkwo, another been-to, who was also trapped between the demands of his society and his new status of an alienated intellectual. Finally, he will be convicted of bribery and jailed. As for N’gugi’s *The River Between*, it enlightens us on the breakdown of a society and unity of tribal life vested in the uncertain balance between the pursuit of materialism and the observance of religious practices and tradition in Kenya. Briefly summarized, it clearly appears that the three novels share a common characteristic; the disturbances or perturbations both in African societal order and within the characters. Accordingly, this paper wants to point out the way the sacred (in its traditional form) in a context of social change has undergone upheavals, disintegration, denigration... impacting thus the societal norms and creating internal conflicts among characters at loss in a now hybrid environment. This reflection will be sustained by intertextuality and postcolonial criticism. As for the narrative text itself, we will first consider the denigration and the disintegration of societal norms and we will finally analyze the characters’ behaviour in connection with the change.

## **2. Denigration of the Sacred and Disintegration of Societal Norms**

If we agree on the fact that one of the aspects of post-colonial criticism is to expose the mechanism and the evil effects of colonialism on the colonized, then we can argue that the mechanism used by colonizing Europe to subdue Africans was that of denigration. Denigration which is nothing else but a defamatory act, is a dreadful weapon aiming at sowing the seeds of disintegration, doubt or uncertainty in the mind of a given person or people. Cultural exchange normally entails interactions between two cultures. But here, as it has been rightly observed by C. L. Innes: “the analysis of those interactions acknowledge the imposition of power relation...the degree to which the colonizer imposes a language, a culture and a set of attitudes” on the Africans (*The Cambridge Introduction...*, 2). We will analyze these interactions at two fundamental levels: religion and education.

### **2.1 As Regard Educational Approaches**

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In traditional Africa, culture and religion were interconnected in so far as a person was educated according to religious principles. The society was thus governed by religious laws which represented in the same time the moral code of conduct. This is the reason for which boys and girls were educated both to either male or female principles according to the case. This formation, even if informal constituted the basis of oral tradition which characterized and still characterizes the African societies and which was and is still transmitted from generation to generation. Unfortunately, the introduction of formal education through the establishment of Christian schools will aim at discrediting the tribal education and even the tribal religious observances. Tribal culture which was sacred has been disinherited by the European one. The outstanding example is the case of Siriana mission school in N’gugi’s *The River Between*<sup>1</sup>.

Siriana mission school had a symbolic value. It was a tool meant to alienate the Africans’ minds from their own culture. This is clearly perceived through the attitude of Waiyake during the sacred rite of circumcision. In fact, “he could not feel being at one with the clan, but he had accepted to go through initiation because he did not want to disappoint his father” (p.39). For him, circumcision has no symbolic value in his new universe. Here, we will mark a stop to comment upon the sacred rites of circumcision and clitoridectomy in Gikuyu people’s ideology. In fact, for these people “circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together bound to the tribe. It was the core of the social structure and something that gave meaning to a man’s life”. If you put it an end, then “the scriptural basis of the tribe’s cohesion and integration would be no more” (*TRB*, p.68).

Reading across these lines, it clearly appears that the practice is more than a simple rite. It introduces people into the human life cycle, not to say, the different stages in human life, here, that of maturity. Jomo Kenyatta goes further to assert that “it is a taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation” (*Facing Mount Kenya* 127). This affirmation is extremely important as in traditional Africa “disregarding the norms and taboos of the society was to commit sin” (J. Omosade, *Sin and its Removal...*,275). In fact, in Gikuyu’s set of beliefs, “a girl who was uncircumcised could cause the death of a circumcised husband. Moreover, an uncircumcised woman would be barren” (Waciuma, quoted in *Undwinding Threads...* 84).

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<sup>1</sup> All further quotations from *The River Between* as well as Armah’s *Fragments* and Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* will directly appear within the text under these forms: *TRB*, *Fg*, *NLAE* followed by the page number.

The family, through marriage, we all know is the basis, not to say the oldest social institution of mankind in as much as it has the sacred role of perpetuating the survival of a family name and by extension, of an entire community. This is the reason for which sterility in Africa appears as “la négation de la féminité et de la vie” “the negation of womanhood and life”. For “la femme stérile est infâme et morte dans la vie”, “the barren woman is vile and dead in life” (Memel Foté... 40) (our translation). Considering everything said above, it goes without saying that the rite of circumcision is anchored in Gikuyu’s religious observances as it is practiced in a symbolic place; the Honia River. This approach of the space in the celebration of the sacred rite leads us to consider the question of the land.

## **2.2 The Land in Gikuyu’s Belief**

In African belief in general and Gikuyu’s in particular, the land is a gift from God, the creator. It was given to them by Murungu (God) to their first parents, Gikuyu and Mumbi. The prophecy went that way: “This land I give to you, oh man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity” (*TRB* p.2). From then on, the land in the minds of the Gikuyu people had a sacred and symbolic connotation as it establishes a divine relation between them and the Supreme Being. It represents their cultural identity and their best tool of socialization. More, the land serves as a place of worship for individual and common deities as well as for their ancestors in a polytheist environment. We discover that importance in the revelation made by Nguni in the same Ngugi’s *Weep Not Child*. As for him, land alienation “was a spiritual loss. When a man was severed from the land of his ancestors, where would he sacrifice to the creator? How could he come into contact with the founders of the tribe, Gikuyu and Mumbi?” (p.74). These series of questions show the degree to which Gikuyu people have undergone prejudices of all sorts from that brutal cultural exchange. For, not to be able to sacrifice to the ancestors means simply the death of the family. In fact, the land exists both to supply the Gikuyu people with their material needs and to allow them to perform their sacred and traditional ceremonies in serenity without any disturbance. Thus, the Gikuyu’s expropriation of the land constitutes an infringement to the code of their way of life, their customs (including the societal norms) and a denigration of their religious observances as it is going to be shown in the following lines.

## **2.3 Denigration of the Religious Beliefs**

One of the strategies adopted by the missionaries and the colonists in general is the denigration of African traditional beliefs on which their entire reason of living rests. This is clearly perceived through our corpus fundamentally in NgugiWaThiong'o's *The River Between*.

Religion in pre-colonial Africa we may state was part of the cultural tradition based on orality. This, of course, implies the transmission of sacred rites and rituals' performances orally. That was the case of the prophecy explained further above. The strategy put forward by the missionaries was to teach writing to the would-be converts. Through the settlement of Siriana missionary school, people were taught writing and the new language of the colonist. Ngugi himself goes in the same line of thought when he says: "... since the new imposed languages could never completely break the native languages as spoken, their most effective area of domination was the third aspect of language as communication, the written" (*Decolonizing The Mind* 7). Thus, through the new form of education, the formal one, the social and cultural lives of the people were transformed and even interrupted by the colonial forces.

If one of the aspects of postcolonial criticism is to see plurality and otherness as source of energy and potential change, here otherness takes the form of an inferior race or culture in the minds of the colonists so that the change should be marginal and radical. Accordingly, it was taught that "those who refuse him (the Christian God) are the children of Darkness; these sons and daughters of the evil one will go to hell; they will burn and burn forever, more world unending" (*TRB*,p.29). This teaching is further exemplified as we learn that at Siriana School, the pagans who took part in the initiation ceremonies were simply dismissed.

The denigration process is not conducted only by the colonists through the white missionaries, but equally by the converted natives themselves. On this aspect the words of Reverend Samuel Ikedi of St Mark's Anglican Church on the occasion of Mickael Obi Okonkwo's departure to England are telling:

The people which sat in Darkness  
Saw a great light  
And to them which sat in the region  
And shadow of death  
To them, did light spring up?

And further, he concludes:

“In times past... But these were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the lamb of God” (*NLAE*, pp. 7-9).

Casting a glance on the above assertions, we can conclude partially without too great a risk of mistaking that the natives themselves have accepted their status of inferior people without any cultural heritage, without any true religion. The use of the relative pronoun “which” translates into facts the state of savagery into which the Africans lived. But the light that sprang is the education, the Christian education which is enabling Okonkwo to travel abroad. This sort of attitude cannot but impact the societal norms and the ideological considerations of a given people.

#### **2.4 Disintegration of Societal Norms**

The denigration of a people’s culture and beliefs creates within this people a certain malaise or uncertainty and even doubt while having a disruptive influence as regard the practice of these beliefs. Consequently, traditional education based on orality and beliefs were being questioned by the natives themselves who saw in the colonist, a powerful conqueror. As a matter of fact, they could no longer speak with the same voice and some of them even sought to penetrate the new universe. Unfortunately, for those natives, it was, most of the time, the leading figures of the tribal ideology; the chiefs.

In *TRB* old Chege decides to send his son Waiyaki to Siriana Missionary School. He tells him: “you could not cut the butterflies with a panga, you could not spear them until you knew their ways or movements. Then, you could trap, you could fight back” (p.20).

In Ngugi’s *Weep Not Child*, N’joroge’s father assumes that only western education would help them to re-acquire their lands. For him, if people had education, the white man would not have taken all the land (p.37). Equally, education in the eyes of N’joroge’s mother is a source of pride as “she could tell people... look, I have a son as good and well educated as any you can find in the land” (p.16). Traditional or tribal education through these argumentations proves unworthy in the new environment. Roland Barthes is right to argue that “every text is an intertext” (quoted in PiegayGros Nathalie... ch1). For, in effect the same decision to send their sons or brothers to Missionary schools is developed both by Mumbi in Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* and by Ezeulu in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*.

Mumbi did her best to pay for her brother's school fees. The reason is perceived in the lines below: "I paid his school fees. In him, we saw the hope for the future. There is nothing like education" (128). She certainly means western or Christian education. The chief priest of Ulu, the protective deity of Umuaro, Ezeulu, also sees in the formal education, a strategic tool to comfort his power over the community. He says: "I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there... The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying 'had we known tomorrow'" (AOG, pp.45-46).

Reading through the above argumentations, it goes without saying that the foundations of tribal education based on orality on the one hand and the observance of religious beliefs on the other hand were thus being questioned and deserted by the tribal authorities themselves. Accordingly, it was the whole black societies and their norms that were falling apart. Of course, this situation could only engender clashes or conflicts both at internal and external levels. We will be concerned here with the first case.

### **3. Social Change and Internal Conflicts**

Social change, cultural change or social or cultural exchange are terms which are all interconnected. In fact, every change brings about a state of hybridity which can be defined as "a concept which involves the mixing together of previously discrete cultural elements to create new meanings and new identities" (Chris Barker (2004), 89). If such is the definition of hybridity, in the case of our study, it must be noted that these new meanings had not been well welcome by some members of the tribal communities whose ideology was based on conservatism. Conservatism may be defined as the inclination to preserve the existing state of affairs and avoid especially sudden or radical change. Here, the colonists wanted a radical change, so the clash was inevitable, but more inevitable when some members of the once united communities became engaged in foreign norms' adoption. It cannot be otherwise in so far as a total adoption of foreign culture would simply mean the extinction of tribal considerations. We will analyze the case in the three novels under consideration.

#### **3.1 In *The River Between***

It is crystal clear that formal education goes together with the teaching of Christianity as well as informal education constituted the basis of African beliefs and customs.

Consequently, the followers of the new faith will create a situation of conflict in as much as the Gikuyu people's religious lifestyle was completely opposed to that of the British. Polytheism constituted the basis of their belief; each god playing a specific role in their lives under the guidance of a supreme god as well as the departed ancestors whose role was to intercede for them, the alive. Such a conception of course was rejected by Christianity who preaches monotheism.

In the novel, we notice that the advent of the Christian religion has developed an extreme antagonistic relation between the inhabitants of the two ridges already infected by ancient tribal differences. Makuyu to name it, was controlled by the new converted Christians while Kameno remained faithful to the traditional faith. Describing the ridges, Ngugi writes: "The two ridges ... were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept the big deep sleep of their creator. A river flowed through the valley of life ... the river was called Honia, which means cure, or bring back life" (*TRB*p.1).

And yet when one stands in the valley, then one better understands their antagonistic relation. Facing each other, they resemble "two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region" (*TRB* p.47). Kameno ridge is the symbol of the continuation of indigenous cultural traditions including polytheism and rites of circumcision and ancestor worship whereas Makuyu ridge had espoused Christianity and British educational systems. As a result, the people of the two ridges ceased to talk to one another. Kinship bond can under these circumstances but know a real degradation. This assertion is characterized by the total rejection of her daughter Muthoni by Joshua the zealous convert on the simple pretext that she had paid a visit to her aunt on Kameno ridge. The text reads: "From that day Muthoni ceased to exist for him. In his heart she had brought an everlasting disgrace to him and his house, which he had meant to be an example of what a Christian home should grow into" (*TRB*p.36).

Reading along these lines we come to understand the degree of seriousness of the crisis, for family ties are sacred in Africa. Rejecting one's own daughter to the detriment of a new religion lets the reader know that the malaise within the Gikuyu people has reached its climax. Similar concerns are also perceived both in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Armah's *Fragments*.

### **3.2 In *No Longer at Ease***

Achebe's novel reveals to us a conflictual or rather an antagonistic relation between the main character Michael Obi Okonkwo and his kinsmen. Back from England, the community of Umuofia saw in the been-to a real investment, the dividends of which would be shared now among the community members in terms of financial help, or else material, or giving a position in the civil service, etc. But all this should be done according to the traditional norms. This is the reason for which the president of the Union in Lagos could not accept that tradition be turned upside down. He said "I have heard that you are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking of marrying her..." (p.75).

Indeed, despite modern education and Christianity, the Igbo still believe in ancestorship because they think that it is part of their cultural tradition. Consequently, going around or marrying an Osu girl is considered as an abomination, for, this sub-group (the Osu) in Igbo's ideology are said to be people dedicated to gods who should live apart. They should not marry nor be married to the other Igbo. But what the president had forgotten is that Obi, thanks to his western education, now belonged to a universe in which sacred rites and rituals or traditional values had no longer a symbolic value. The words of the president put him out of his head and his answer sowed the grain of a deep crisis between him and his kinsmen: "you may cut off my two legs if you ever find them here again" (p.75). The crisis was further deepened when he paid a visit to his parents to let them know about his intention to marry Clara, the Osu girl. Despite the fact that they were zealous Christians, Obi's father and mother opposed themselves to the idea. As for the father, the fact of being a Christian doesn't give any right to marry an Osu, for Osu is "like leprosy in the minds of their people". So bearing children with an Osu girl excluded de facto any possibility of marriage with a "free born". Concerning his mother, the reaction took the form not only of a complete refusal but also of a curse. "If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more" and further "But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself" (p.123). Considering the tragic end of the hero (prison), one may conclude that his strongheadedness to marry Clara has on the one hand precipitated his mother's death and on the other hand has made the curse operate as he will end in prison. Concluding partially, we can paraphrase G.D. Killam in asserting that "the new converts' education based on Christianity and European norms have made them strangers in their own land" (*The Novels of ...*50). The same critical situation prevails in Armah's *Fragments*.

### **3.3 InFragments**

The “cargo mentality” or the materialistic assumption of the people developed in post-independence Ghanaian society violates the elementary rules of religious observances, creating thus conflicts within families. Two cases deserve scrutiny in Armah’s *Fragments*. In effect, on the eve of the main character Baako’s departure for abroad, his uncle, as the tradition commanded was requested to perform the ritual of libation to ask the ancestors to protect the child. But, despite the beauty of the words he pronounced, Foli in reality was keeping the drink for himself. This situation somewhat compelled Naana, the old woman to transgress the customary laws of libation reserved to men, to conduct the ceremony by herself to the dissatisfaction of uncle Foli (pp.11-12).

The second case is more telling. According to the Akan tradition, the outdoor ceremony also called Kpodziemo or going out ceremony for a new born is usually held on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after its birth. It is believed the child has thus survived seven dangers and is worthy to be called a person. That is the reason for which Baako reminds his mother the tribal prescription. “I thought there were fixed times for these things”. The answer to the question came unexpectedly from his mother: “An outdoor ceremony held more than a few days after payday is useless” (p.125). For sure, tribal prescriptions have no more place in a society where money has become the new god and where profit-making is a golden rule. The ceremony has thus been brought back to five days. The decision, we may guess angered old Naana who recalls Baako his duties of an uncle giving him the powers to stop the ceremony. But the question raised by Efua put an end to the conflict “what is troubling you, Naana?” – “Nothing, Efua I am not troubled” (p.140). Here again, the conflict of generation has been won by Efua since Baako seems to be helpless before the case: “Naana”, Baako said with some irritation, “I understand what you have said, but the world has changed... I cannot stop them from doing what they want with their own child” (p.140). Consequently, it is both the sacred right of the maternal uncle for Baako, and the belief to ancestorship and the observance of sacred rites which are all transgressed creating of course internal conflicts within Baako’s family. In the following lines, we will analyze some key characters’ behaviour in connection with the changing society.

### **4. Characters in the Changing Society**

In a work of art, a given character is known according to what he says, he does, he thinks and what the others think and say about him. Character revelation is in connection with the social milieu in which he/she operates. The transformations imposed on the communities or adopted by some members or else the situation of hybridity engendered by the change are worth being considered here. We will accordingly study the characters of Joshua and his daughters, Waiyaki and Kabonyi in *TRB*, Michael Obi Okonkwo and his father in *NLAE*, and Efua and her mother in *Fg*. We will start by characters who have completely adopted the new faith, desecrating thus traditional beliefs, then those who still defend the traditional faith and its practices, and we will end by hybrid characters, or characters at loss in a changing world.

#### **4.1 The Defenders of the New Faith**

##### **4.1.1 Joshua (*TRB*)**

To express his complete adoption of the new faith and his negation of old traditional beliefs and ways, Joshua starts by breaking the conformity with old habits. This is clearly expressed through the description of his house among his kinsmen's. The text reads:

The round thatched huts standing in groups of three convey a picture of conformity broken only Joshua's house which has a tin roof and is rectangular. The very presence of the house is an indication that the old isolation of Makuyu from the rest of the world was being taken down (p.28).

From the above description it comes out that Joshua has completely lost faith in the old religion, finding in the new one a certain material and moral comfort. As a zealot, Joshua embodies the demand for a total cultural and religious transformation. He will go further to forbid his daughters to take part in the rite of clitoridomy. His only focus was on baptism. This partly explains why he disowns his daughter Muthoni who just went to visit her aunt on Kameno ridge (p.36). He is thus like Enoch the Zealous Christian in Achebe's *Arrow of God* who went as far as to unmask an "Efugwu" in public, creating an open conflict between the church and the clan. Not only does Joshua condemn every ritual connected with the traditional faith, he also believes that it was a sin to be circumcised. The following prayer addressed to god to forgive him for having married a circumcised woman justifies our assertion: "God, you know it was not my fault, God I could not do otherwise, and she did while I was in Egypt" (p.31). As it can be seen, Joshua is the prototype of the new convert for

whom religion only means Christianity and traditional beliefs, barbarism. How about the defenders of the old religion?

## **4.2 The Defenders of the Traditional Religion**

### **4.2.1 Kabonyi (*TRB*)**

Kabonyi is diametrically opposed to Joshua and later on to Waiyaki. Defender of the oath of the Kiama, he sees in traditional education, hence the traditional faith, the only way of life. After Chege's death, he was the one to lead Kamenno community and to administer oaths to guarantee allegiance to the ways of the ridges and defend them against the influence of the white man. He sees western education and religion as a cultural danger. His question to Waiyaki is telling on that aspect: "Do you think the education of the tribe, the education and wisdom which we all received is in any way below that of the white?" (p.95). Already he has perceived the spreading of the new education as a contamination (p.72). In his mind, following the white man's way was simply to add an alien culture to an alien religion in an already disunited tribal community.

### **4.2.2 Naana (*Fg*)**

Aged and old, Naana believes ancestorship she defends. But, things have changed in a changing society and with them, old practices. She seems to have understood when she declares: "... I am of no use to anyone" (p.2). If on occasion of Baako's departure abroad, she succeeded in imposing her own will on Foli about the libation (p.12), it was not the case in the outdoor ceremony when her voice and her remarks were turned aside by both a greedy daughter Efua and a grand-son who has espoused modern laws and practices (p. 140).

## **4.3 Hybrid Characters**

Hybridization can be defined as the mixing within a single, concrete utterance of two or more linguistic consciousness (Bolland, *Language and the Quest...*, 17). But, in a conflictual environment like the one in the novels under consideration, hybridization of characters becomes somewhat destructive. It creates characters at loss, turned between the demands of both their ancient and new communities. The following cases are revealing.

### **4.3.1 Nyambura and Waiyaki (*TRB*)**

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Both have embraced the new education and religion which worthed the latter his dismissal from Siriana school. As it is rightly put by Bolland “the domination of a people’s language by the language of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized” (*Language and the Quest...*, 3). This comes true for the above mentioned characters as their mental universe was completely transformed in an environment where still prevailed tribal considerations. They feel both ill-at-ease and their effort to master the events prove unworthy. Nyambura’s inner question to herself reveals the degree to which she was at loss in the changing society.

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. – Surely there is no tribe that does not circumcised or how does a girl grow into a woman?(p.26).

Such a question raises the issue or doubt or uncertainty on the part of a converted girl who however wants to be a true Gikuyu woman, that is to say circumcised. Her sister Muthoni goes further to be more realistic despite her conversion; “I want to be a real girl, a real woman knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges” (p.26). Waiyaki’s breaking of the oath of the Kiama by entertaining a relationship with Nyamsura, an uncircumcised girl will precipitate him into a tragedy. Just like Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*, he comes to think that love is a private affair and that people had not to interfere into his private affairs of love (p.81). What he seems to forget is that in the eye of the tribes, he has chosen to contaminate the tribe with impurity and as such his action cannot be considered otherwise but as a betrayal for which he should pay. This partly explains why his catalyst actions of uniting the tribe will fail. How about Isaac Okonkwo and his son in *No Longer at Ease*.

#### **4.3.2 Isaac Okonkwo and Michael Obi Okonkwo (NLAE)**

Isaac Okonkwo is the zealous convert and catechist of Iguedo (Umuofia) well known for his radical opposition to everything non-Christian. For having been a catechist at the church Missionary Society for twenty-five (25) years, he is the only one just like Joshua in *The River Between* to possess a zinc house (p.8). Isaac as a faithful practitioner has forbidden his wife to tell traditional or folk stories to his children which he meant to be heathen, as well as eating heathen food (pp.52-53). The conversation he held with the ancients on the occasion of his son’s return about the rain-maker and thunder deeds as Satan’s accomplishment is a sufficient

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proof of his total alienation to the new religion. And yet it is the very man who first refused and then accepted the breaking of kola nuts in his home and who finally rejected his son's will to marry an Osu girl. He said:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family... who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters (p.121).

Obi's mother remark is more pregnant with meanings: "But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself" (p.123). Accordingly, we are well at ease to conclude partially that the native Christians in general were still under the influence of traditional beliefs, making them appear somewhat ridiculous.

Michael Obi Okonkwo, he, is a character completely at loss. Just like Waiyaki, he has broken a sacred oath, the one of espousing an Osu, a clan forbidden to true "Igbo" according to the customs. Despite his effort to remain himself and an Igbo man, his new status is somewhat irrelevant to his status as an individual in a complex and even contradictory society like the Igbo's. In spite of his attempt to convince his father with biblical references, he simply failed because "that matter was deeper than he thought" (p.120). Okonkwo's father attitude gives right to Aloysius who argues that "for many people, combining traditional religion to either Christianity or Islam is also a way of life" (*African Traditional Religion...* 13).

#### **4.3.3 Efua (Fg)**

Efua is Baako's mother as well as Araba her daughter's. Certified teacher, she is thus a modern woman living in Accra, the capital city of independent Ghana. She is from the Akan group, a group very much attached to traditional norms or practices. The Akan practice ancestorship, a view which seems ironically shared by Efua. According to the Akan as reported by Mbiti,

If the living-dead are suddenly forgotten, this means that... their personal immortality is destroyed and they are turned into a state of nonexistence. And this is the worst possible punishment for anyone. The departed resent it, and the living do all they can to avoid it because it is feared that it would bring illness and misfortunes to those who feared their departed relatives (*African Religion ...* 27).

As such believing ancestorship means believing the ghost or spiritual world to which a new born still belongs before the outdoor ceremony. But the case is that here, the customs seem to have died to the benefit of an altered form which has nothing to do with their original spirit. The society in change has transformed the whole Ghanaian society into a materialistic society (the pursuit of materialism embodied by money) to which Efua belongs. Her greediness and love for money will lead her to precipitate her daughter's son's naming ceremony to the fifth day after birth simply because "an outdoor ceremony held more than a few days after pay day is useless" (p.125). As one can see, the sacred here together with the spirits have been simply neglected for self-interest causing thus the anger of the latter and the early death of the baby.

At the end of this session, we will simply state that the Sacred in its traditional form in a context of social change or exchange has impacted diversely the communities described in the novels under consideration and the people living in those communities either favorably or unfavorably depending on the adoption or the rejection or else, the adaptation of these communities or individuals to the new cultural patterns.

## **5. Conclusion**

If it is true that social change brings about culture change or cultural exchange. Taking into account the dynamic character of human evolution and culture itself, it must not be forgotten that in some cases, as the ones expressed in our study, this social change has taken the form of a change imposed by one culture upon another culture; the European upon the African. All along our study, we have noticed that the colonists, together with the white missionaries have succeeded through their education based on Christianity and their language in destabilizing the African ways and norms and beliefs. N'gugi is then right to assert that "linguistic domination serves a material aim, the control of the colonized through the destruction of indigenous economic relations, modes of production and consequently of the "real life" in which their linguistic consciousness was rooted" (quoted in Bolland: *Language and the Quest...* 4).

Such an enterprise creates among the dominated people, internal conflicts in as much as their culture and their education based on the principles of traditional religion is being questioned and denigrated by the new religion that is to say Christianity. More, it creates post-colonial

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characters ill-at-ease in a now hybrid environment; characters under a tension between themselves and their respective communities. On the one hand, we notice an almost complete disruption of the old order, and on the other hand, a situation of doubt and uncertainty in the minds of characters at loss and further, it occasions the birth of a new class of characters who use traditional beliefs as a tool to satisfy their own materialistic goals. Under these circumstances, the Sacred, in its traditional form cannot but know some hindrances in its practice as it has been debated further above in this research and in the African literary productions at large.

Patrice Nganang, dealing with African literature asserts: “on ne peut plus écrire aujourd’hui en Afrique comme si le génocide de 1994 au Rwanda n’avait jamais eu lieu ... . Il n’y a aucun pays Africain dans lequel les conditions de ce qui s’est passé sur les collines des grands lacs ne sont pas remplies” (*Manifesto pour...* 25-26). We can no longer write today in Africa as if the Rwandan genocide of 1994 had never taken place... There is no African country in which the conditions of what happened on the hills of the Great Lakes are not met (our translation). We can well paraphrase Nganang by stating that “we can no longer deal with African literature today in all its dimensions as if the brutal encounter between Europe and Africa had never taken place”, because post-colonial Africa in its social and cultural transformation is but a reflection of the social, cultural, political or economic exchanges that derived from it.

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