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**Myth in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and Kateb Yacine's
Nedjma (1956)**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this modest work to all the members of my family particularly to my dear parents.

I would like also to dedicate it to all my friends.

Abstract

This research paper investigated myth in Kateb's *nedjma* (1956) and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). It examined the place and significance of myths in the reflection of African experience and highlighted the attempt of both writers to refine their respective cultures through the use of myths. To achieve my goal, I have relied on Okpewho's book entitled *Myth in Africa*. In my discussion, I have studied the different mythic constellations present in both novels. My approach then was comparativist and showed the importance of myth as a device for narrating different visional postcolonial communities. I have also tried to study the function of myth within these African novels. After having analyzed the two novels in the light of Okpewho's *Myth in Africa*, I have reached the conclusion that the two writers have revalorized and rehabilitated their cultures in the same manner.

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Introduction

The present work is a comparative study of two outstanding African authors, namely Kateb Yacine from Algeria and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O from Kenya. Both are prominent representatives of Modern African Literature through their literary contributions. Though they belong to different traditions, their novels were not written in the same language; and that they were from distinct countries, we shall try to find some parallels between their two selected novels. Throughout this comparative analysis, our aim is to show the mythical connection between two different cultures. Kateb and Ngugi share the same objective, which is to show the importance and proficiency of myths in recreating and illustrating one's history. Both of them represent their own countries and incite African people to protect and keep alive their oral traditions. The two authors convey the same African message through the use of mythology and legends. Our aim in this comparative study is to put on view the apparent similarities existing between both novels especially, the use of what can be called "the nationalist myth", which is part of the African oral tradition and the two authors' African oral legacy.

Oral tradition is considered to be one of the pillars for the teaching of cultural values which are fundamental elements for education and knowledge. Accordingly, it can be defined as the stock house of the oral narratives which enclose the whole body of beliefs, customs and various practices of a given community. It is commonly associated with the various forms of traditional stories such as tales, songs, legends and myths. One of the most significant features of these unwritten cultural elements is that they are preserved and passed on orally from one generation to another to keep alive the cultural heritage. In the African context, African people are identified as oral people who maintained and still maintain traditions as guides in their human conduct. Through time, the oral tradition was handed down and succeeded to gain its place in the different written documents especially literature.

The most dominant tendencies in contemporary African literature is that writers tend to go back to their traditional roots to see what can be borrowed from oral literature to enrich their writings. Thus, African writers are known for their use and reliance on the oral tradition in their different literary works. They lean to show the different realities of the African people and especially the beauty of Africa through its culture and the diverse folk narratives. As far as myths are concerned, they hold the power of explaining all what is happening in the modern times. They are conceived as those sacred stories of individual's search through the ages for truth and meaning of life. More importantly, they always had a great impact on the African literature. African writers lean upon them in their works because they teach many things in relation to human experiences in the universe. In this regard, it is said: "*The attempt to parachute the world of folklore and mythology into contemporary African fiction is a postcolonial weapon used to foreground the richness of African culture*"¹.

As many other African writers, Kateb Yacine's and Ngugi' Wa Thiong'O's use myth to suit their literary and ideological purposes. Since their respective works deal with almost the same experience which is colonisation, they recreate, in the same manner, central myths concerning their countries and countrymen's glorified pasts. Although numerous writers belonging to the times have written about the various concerns of the people of the day especially the impact of the colonisers on African cultures, Kateb Yacine and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O remain among the most representative writers. Kateb Yacine, for instance, in his well known and complex novel *Nedjma* (1956) written in French explores many themes concerning the Algerian life before and during the French colonisation. It embodies the history and culture of the Algerian people in a very significant manner. Though, Kateb Yacine has been a victim of a linguistic and cultural alienation caused by the colonial condition, he has succeeded not only to construct his Algerian identity, but also to "write back" to the French masters by using their own language. In *Nedjma*, he proceeds through the use of the

myth of origins for literary and political purposes. Since myths remain popular in African literature, he stresses on the heroic history of Algerian resistance and glorifies his ancestors throughout his *Nedjma*. Similarly to the oral tradition, written literature can be regarded as a mixture of the real and the extraordinary. The two authors namely Kateb Yacine and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o are among many other African writers who transform their oral cultures to a complex and significant written literature that portrays the Algerian and Kenyan histories and cultures. They incorporate folk tradition and myth into their creative works as an act of cultural refinement and rehabilitation.

Ngugi inserts fragments of Kenyan history in his literary works like *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), which can be considered as the most successful novels in African literature. The author makes his readers see the history of Kenya as the story of effective resistance to colonialism. He mixes fictional characters to non-fictional ones and depicts historical experiences through mythologies. He derives his creative energy and insights from the Gikuyu oral tradition and vernacular style in which the use of the narrative myths and the riddling style are prominent. In addition to this, he argues that the Kenyan story can be better told through literature. He promotes myths in his writing to make it best suited to the African tradition. In sum, Kateb's and Ngugi's literary projects aim to rehabilitate the history and culture of their countries, Kenya and Algeria, by using the same means. In *Both Nedjma and A Grain of Wheat*, there is a mythical narration of the characters and events.

The presence of myth in the novels can be an interesting field of research. The two writers emphasize the power of myth in reconstructing their peoples' histories and their oral cultures. Despite the long distance separating the two writers, they can be studied together through their common and comparable stress on the importance of myths in their works.

Review of the Literature

The two novels have received a great deal of criticism from many African and non-African reviewers. As an illustration, many critics consider Kateb Yacine's novel entitled *Nedjma* as a founding novel of Maghrebian Francophone Literature that was born within the French colonial period. This realistic work is characterized by its thematic richness. Being very much influenced by the other modern writers such as William Faulkner and James Joyce, Kateb in his *Nedjma* uses a very complex and particular narrative technique. In this vein, Charle Bonn writes:

Un tel lecteur ne peut être que déconcerté par un roman où les descriptions sont rares, où les récits sont multiples et enchevêtrés, tout comme les points de vue narratifs, où les chronologies ne semblent pas respectées, où certains passages sont répétés.²

The French critic explores the internal structure of the book *Nedjma* and refers to the difficulty of understanding the complex design of the novel. The critic sees Kateb as a producer of different myths which had a major task in showing the outstanding tribal history of the Algerian ancestors. Kateb Yacine, as many other authors, was fascinated by his people's oral literature; it was the springboard from which he got inspiration for his literary and dramatic works. Kateb considers the adoption of myths as a positive acceptance of a precious prehistoric reality. In this regard, Chiali Fatima Zohra points out:

C'est ainsi qu'à travers *Nedjma*, on assiste à une réécriture syncrétique de plusieurs mythes grecs, maghrébins et arabo-musulmans. De par leur mise en scène, l'Histoire est passablement oubliée. Les dates et les événements s'y rapportant n'ont qu'une valeur indicative. Seule la mémoire du mythe demeure, fonctionnant comme une machine à remonter le temps; l'écriture l'utilise comme mode de construction fait de gommage et de réécriture.³

Following nearly the same idea Vladimir, Siline states: "*Les mythes ont été perçus comme Vérité et comme une création du Peuple, et ils sont devenus objet d'admiration et de vénération*"⁴. The critic asserts that myths and legends are concepts and beliefs about the

early history of a race. So myths are used in the purpose of deepening the readers understanding of one's history. They reunite man to the human circumstance and expose the conditions and problems, social and personal, that people face in life. In this respect, Kateb's two other reviewers namely, Julien and Camelin declare:

De fait Nedjma construit un mythe, et, ce qui est étonnant, c'est que le détour par les mythes permet à l'écrivain non seulement de déchiffrer l'Histoire, mais de faire jaillir une parole en mouvement, orientée vers une société libre, l'Algérie indépendante.⁵

The reviewers write that, as a mythical work, the novel is a collection depicting a woman as a symbol of the Algerian nation and as a fatal woman who causes the failure of all those who approach her. The feminine character, whose name is put as the title of the novel, plays a central role as a very attractive and influential woman whose descriptions occupy important passages in the novel. For his part, Ismail Abdoun throughout his analysis of the key scenes in the novel, he asserts: "*une femme fatale qui divise ses prétendants et les pousse à s'entretuer pour elle.*"⁶

As far as *A Grain of Wheat* is concerned, critics have also considered Ngugi as an essential voice in African literature. He has been called the voice of the Kenyan people by certain commentators while others have considered his novels as being among the most overestimated and of highest quality to come from Africa. His early novels including *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Petals of Blood*, can be viewed as important documents in the history of postcolonial writing. Besides, his promotion of myths, many literary critics refer to Ngugi's use of oral tradition in order to preserve his cultural heritage. Carol M. Sicherman, for instance, writes that the phrase, as we hear, like Ngugi's so it is said, testifies both to the strong Gikuyu awareness of their own history in the Mau Mau period and to the power of myth to affect events.⁷ Following the quotation, we come to the idea that Ngugi uses the myths proper to his own country in order to reconstitute a history aggressed by the

invaders. He pushes for a national awareness of the history of Kenya through his appeal to myths.

Furthermore, in his novel *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi centers his writing on the myth of the Christian religion which was brought to Kenya for imperial purposes. This ideological religion first causes the alienation and mistaken the beliefs of the Kenyan community through its justification of colonization. However, Ngugi contextualizes this Biblical myth and appropriates it to counterclaim the colonial and religious discourse; he uses his text as a medium for the liberation of his countrymen from British imperial rule. In this context, Mrijike Van Vuuren writes:

His [Ngugi] use of Biblical myth is vital to his vision of the spiritual regeneration of a people. In his re-contextualization of scriptural material, he shows the Bible to be a site of contesting interpretations, which of course it has always been. It seems, however, that in dusting off the colonial dirt from the gospel and replanting it, Ngugi has chosen to overlook the spiritual and transcendent, and has simply appropriated the text for another political agenda.⁸

Furthermore, another critic claimed: “*Ngugi uses this epic model and reshapes it to construct his mythical narration of the nation: the narrator-storyteller presents the story of the movement as a succession of battles waged by heroic leaders against the colonizers*”.⁹ It derives from the above criticism that Ngugi chooses a particular way of narrating the events in Kenya and bring inspiration to nourish his imagination from the mythic archives of his country.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

It appears from our review of literature that the two novels have received a large bulk of criticism and many scholars have reviewed them separately. But, GADA Nadia’s Magister and Doctoral Thesis remain the only comparative research that has been done concerning the literary affinities prevalent in the two novels. She highlights the use of myth in both novels.

My aim then, in this comparative study is to carry on the tradition through a discussion of myths which is started by GADA Nadia and study deeper Ngugi's and Kateb's comparable attempts to use "nationalist myths" to refine their cultures. Our emphasis will be mainly on the study of myth and its ideological use by the two authors.

It is noteworthy to mention that our hypothesis in the dissertation consists of showing the possible similarities existing between Kateb's *Nedjma* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, knowing that they are not caused by a literary influence. Rather, it is due to the same colonial experiences lived by the two authors that the affinities come to exist. They have participated in the process of decolonization in the same manner which is through the use of literature and especially their creative imagination. Add to this, they have equally preferred to fight against the colonial dehumanization through the means of oral tradition precisely through myths. Thus, as a theoretical guideline, Isidore Okpewho's book entitled *Myth in Africa; A study of its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance* (1983) is selected since, in our view, it fits the perspective of this study. Okpewho focuses on the honorable African traditions and culture, which according to him, stand as the basis of everything. He also points to the creative elements within the oral narratives and to the preservation of such a precious heritage. Furthermore, many chapters deal with myths in their different characterization and positions, be it in the daily life or in the written documents such as literature. Throughout what follows, we intend to explore the attempt of Ngugi and Kateb to refine their respective cultures and create an activating method of decolonization through their use of myths. Both Kateb and Ngugi use the same scheme in their novels. Their comparable use of myths confirms our hypothesis, that there are possible links between both writers.

At the methodological level, the dissertation will follow the IMRAD method. In the Introduction section, we intend to introduce the concept of "Myth" and then review some of the literature written on Kateb's *Nedjma* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. We will then try to

establish our topic focus and issue and Working hypothesis. In the Methods and Materials section, we shall summarize Isidore Okpewho's theory developed in *Myth in Africa; A Study of its Aesthetic Values (1983)*. I aim also to provide summaries of *Nedjma* and *A Grain of Wheat*. In the result section, we shall reveal the results reached through our comparative study. In the discussion section, we will analyze the literary connections in terms of themes and Characters. Finally, i sum up the work by giving a general Conclusion that gives an idea of all what has been explored in the dissertation. It will be a kind of window opened to further research for the coming research on Kateb Yacine's and Ngugi's works.

Endnotes

¹Ayo Kehinde, *Intertextuality and the African novel*, Nordic Journal of African Studies (2003), 378.

²Charl Bonn, *Kateb Yacine: Nedjma (Réédition)* (1st Edition : Paris, PUF, 1990), 10.

³Fatima Zohra Chiali, *La Réécriture du mythe (À travers l'analyse des discours mythiques dans Nedjma de Kateb Yacine)* (Communication, lettres et sciences du langage Vol. 4, no 1 – Juillet 2010), 53.

⁴Vladimir Siline, *Le Dialogism dans le roman Algérien de langue française*. PhD diss., University of Paris 13, 1999.

⁵ A.-Y. Julien, C. Camelin et F.-J. Authier, *Kateb Yacine et l'étoilement de l'œuvre* (University Press : Rennes, 2010), 19.

⁶Ismail Abdoun, *Lecture(s) de Kateb Yacine*, (Alger: ISBN, 2006), 129.

⁷ Carol M. Sicherman, *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and the Writing of Kenyan History* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), Accessed 19 september 2012,

< <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819170>.>

⁸ Marijke van Vuuren, *Kihika's Bible: The recontextualisation of the Gospel in Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat* (Koers, 2000), 13.

⁹ Fabio De Leonardis, *The Anticolonial Struggle as a National Epic: Ngugi Wa Thinog'O's A Grain*

Of Wheat.

Methods and Materials

Myths for many centuries and in many different cultures and religions have been always regarded as important subjects that remain until today as much debated issues. Since they have existed in every society, they can be considered as crucial constituents of human culture. Myths can be defined as sacred stories which can be traced back to the fabulous ancient and archaic times when they were considered as the center of knowledge concerning the human conduct and sacred experiences. In the lack of scientific information of any kind, the primitive or antique man had explained the meaning of the world through different consecrated stories. Many scholars and thinkers have dedicated a lot of their time in order to define and examine the meaning and function of these myths within the human experiences.

Thus, when we come to define the word myth, we are faced with numerous interpretations and classifications which make the task very difficult. The stories, in fact, differ from the fairy tales or the other kinds on the basis that myths are almost always grounded in fact. According to the Merriam Webster's dictionary, the word myth stemmed from the Greek word "*Mythos*" which means "traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon." ¹

Besides, these myths remain as people's considerable sources for the understanding of the world and emerge in various types and sorts. David Leeming in his book *Myth A Biography of Belief* (2002) writes: "Myths reflect our spiritual and psychological development, our spiritual and psychological biography as a species, and it seems fair to hope that religions can also reflect that development"². Then, the author provides the major types of myths which are creation or cosmogony, Deity and Hero myths³. He argues that they are fundamental stories which influence individual's actions in nowadays society. Hence, the cosmogony myth counts for the explanation of the origins of the world and the ancestry of the individuals within it. The myths of hero (s) on their parts are the stories which enlighten the

great deeds of a culture hero in his journey throughout the world. Joseph Campbell, for example, addresses the monomyth theory which focuses on the different stages through which the hero passes. In a famous quote from the introduction to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell summarizes the monomyth as:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.⁴

It is important to note that many other sorts of myths exist, but what concern us within this comparative study are most importantly the myth of creation, the myth of ancestors, and the myth of culture heroes which can be seen as prominent in African cultures. The “nationalist myth” also emerges as imperative issue in both novels. Both authors re-actualize the mythic time of their ancestors and the mythic figures through characters who contribute to revalue their cultural heritage. Both Kateb Yacine and Ngugi Wa Thiong’O employ myths as a way to revive their countries’ history and as an ideology to say that African people inherited a culture from their predecessors. For instance, Ngugi makes references to the biblical myths dealing with the human sacrifices to transpose it to Kenyan sacrifice through Kihika in the novel.

As far as this comparative study is concerned, our study of myth will be based on the outstanding book of Isidore Okpewho entitled *Myth in Africa* as a main theoretical guideline. The book offers an opportunity for understanding the meaning and different approaches to the concept of ‘myth’, which is seen as an essence for the other oral traditions as well as being the significant store of the people’s cultural values concerning their lives and history throughout time. They are conceived as the ones which explain antecedent rituals and the different ceremonies done in different communities. Thus, Malinowski as stated in Isidore Okpewho’s book argues: “rituals, ceremonies, customs, and social organization contain at times direct references to myth, and they are regarded as the results of mythical event”⁵. Then, within the

same book, Clyde Kluckhohn in his classic article entitled *Myths and rituals: A General Theory* agrees that myths and rituals have the same objectives; it is that of protecting the cultural heritage. Using his own words, he asserts:

They provide social solidarity, enhance the integration of the society by providing a formalized statement of its ultimate value-attitudes, afford a means for the transmission of much of the culture with little loss of content – thus protecting cultural continuity and stabilizing society.⁶

We can understand from the above quote that Ngugi's use of myth is not innocent. It is intended as a weapon to counterclaim the colonial discourse as well as the official discourse about the Mau Mau fighters in Kenya.

Moreover, Okpewho provides a central statement concerning the different constellations of the word myth, he points that: "*myth is a type of tale which stands midway between 'history' and 'fiction' (whether 'folktale or literary fiction')...*"⁷. This means that myths are those stories which account for historical truth with some imaginative or fictional elements. They represent different ways of looking at the past. Furthermore, Malinowski regards mythology as '*The sacred lore of the tribe*'⁸ meaning the traditional knowledge or belief concerning a society's background. Myths, actually, were and still are prominent stories which have an explanatory mission concerning the nature of man as a cultural being.

Isidore Okpewho, in this study of myth, also locates the place of myths and other stories in the literary context and gives many instances of African contemporary authors. The creative writers actually attempt to show that they really own a marvelous culture and history long before the coming of the so called white civilization to Africa, which came for the deep purpose of colonization. Wole Soyinka as a creative Yoruba writer, for instance, has been very much influenced by his African (Yuroba) oral tradition and culture. He has been so much influenced by his culture that he inspires his work from the old mythic time and figures. He argues that these old tales have some 'timeless virtues' which can be guides for the future

generation⁹. In a view of that, African writers like Wole Soyinka in his 'Creative Alchemy' recreate traditional oral narratives in their respective works and rework them to make their readers never tire of their treasured cultural inheritance.

We also come to notice also that there is a stylistic difference between the oral and the written or printed tradition in the procedure of focusing either on the situation or on the individual characters. These writers attempt to refine their cultures through these stories and myths which are considered to be timeless channels for the coming generation. Hence, Okpewho asserts on Soyinka's works: "*We can only try to see how he has exploited the essences of Yoruba mythology in his portraits of the predicament of present day society...*"¹⁰

Myths and other traditional kinds, therefore, act as significant markers for the understanding of the human condition and destiny in the universe. So, these African creative writers guide their people with their productive works. The use of myths in their works acts not only as a reflection on the African history and experience but also as ideological means of expression against oppression and repression.

Materials

Summary of the Novels

***A-Nedjma* (1956)**

Nedjma is a novel which was written in French by the Algerian author Kateb Yacine. By using myths of his country, the author depicts one of the most memorable events which happened in the history of the Algerian people that is colonization. The central action of the novel takes place during the period following the nationalist demonstrations of 8 May 1945, which included the Sétif massacres. The colonial environment is reflected through mythologized characters like Nedjma, the female protagonist and the heroic figures of Lakhdar, Mourad, Mustapha, and Rachid. The first part of the novel deals with these four protagonists who witnessed the periods of upheaval and constantly the domination of the French masters especially in the building site. They have both experienced the exploitation, brutality and oppression of the French colonizers. At the same time, the four protagonists were similarly imprisoned due to either their revolts or their impatience towards the masters. In the other parts of the novel, the author uses flashbacks to portray the lives and youth of his different characters.

Moreover, Kateb's novel deals with many themes concerning the tribal life of his descendants known as Kebloutis which stemmed from Keblout, the tribe's ancestor's name. The particularity of this novel is that it is constructed around tribal myths such as the myth of origins. An important part is devoted to the story of Si Mokhtar, a Keblout descendant, who revealed the tribe's mythic leader known as Keblout. In fact, Si Mokhtar from his trip to the Nadhor accompanied by Rachid, has actually gone through the search for the roots of the tribe. Then, as a romantic novel as well, Kateb includes a beloved lady called Nedjma who is a real woman once loved by the writer himself. This fascinating woman takes a mythical

reflection through which she symbolizes Algeria. The latter takes a significant place in the whole novel which carries precisely her name.

B- A Grain of Wheat (1967)

A Grain of Wheat is a novel written by the Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O. As a multifaceted novel, it portrays the colonial environment in the Kenyan village “Thabai” and tells many stories related to the State of Emergency during which Kenyans struggled for independence against the British colonial power. The novel is divided into three sections. All of them cover a time period of four days leading up to Uhuru celebration, which is the Kenyan day of Independence. Ngũgĩ centers his narratives on the life and fate of his four protagonists who are namely, Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja and Mumbi. The novel starts with the story of the troubled Mugo who is an orphan raised by an unkind aunt. Apart from his depressing life, Mugo is usually recognized as being the hero of independence and the one who sheltered Kihika. He has been selected to commemorate the Uhuru Day where the freedom fighters of the Mau Mau movement will be honored. No one suspects him to be the true betrayer of the revolutionary hero, Kihika. Mugo remains a solitary person since his guilt-ridden consciousness prevents him to live happily as a betrayer and pushes him at the end to confess his treason to Mumbi. Through Mugo, the writer reflects ancient myths about the heroes of Kenyan resistance.

Another important character is Mumbi, Kihika’s sister and the one married to a carpenter named Gikonyo, who has been detained and transferred to the detention camp but his strong desire to return to his beloved wife leads him to betray his oath. But, once at home, he finds his wife nursing a child that cannot possibly be his. Mumbi betrays her husband with Karanja at the very moment when she learns about her husband’s release. It is noteworthy to mention the varying Gikuyu perceptions of the struggle for independence between those who keep the

oath and the ones who betray it. It is noticeable too that the ones who sided with the British authorities, became home guards, working for the British colonial administrators like Karanja.

Endnotes

¹Meriam websters dictionary.

²Leeming David, *Myth: A Biography of Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), x.

³Ibid, 7.

⁴Campbell Joseph, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 1949), 28.

⁵Okpewho Isidore, *Myth in Africa: A Study of its Aestitics and Cultural Values* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1983), 48.

⁶Ibid, 48.

⁷Ibid, 54.

⁸Ibid, 57.

⁹Ibid, 118.

¹⁰Ibid, 189.

Results and Discussion

A- Results

Throughout our dissertation, we tried to demonstrate the connection existing between two African novels, which are Kateb's *Nedjma* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* through the authors' appeal to myth. To do so, we have relied on the theoretical guidelines of Isidore Okpewho's theory of myth, which is developed in his book entitled, *Myth in Africa; A Study of its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance*. Our comparative study also revealed that both authors borrow the same way of writing in terms of their use of myths as revolutionary instruments against the colonial obliteration of African history and culture. In fact, we deduce that Kateb Yacine and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O felt the same need to recapture the image of their respective countries in times of war troubles through their use of cultural traditions.

The thematic analysis revealed that both novels converge in themes and the writers' attempts to refine their cultures. In the absence of any influence between both authors, it is noteworthy to mention that their literary affinities are caused by the same colonial experiences they lived. They are far from each other and use dissimilar languages but opt for the same style of writing in the sense that they adopt oral tradition in their novels. The similarities are shown at the level of the revolutionary themes and the representation of the characters and events as well. Both writers revolt against French and British colonial forces and contribute through their literary works to the process of decolonization and liberation by choosing oral narratives as effective weapons. Colonization as a general theme then is described through many protagonists in both novels. We recognize that the main characters in both works share some features. For example, Rachid and Nedjma in Kateb's novel share many points with Mugo and Mumbi in Ngugi's work. Their mythical and heroic connotations reinforce the affinities between both novels. Moreover, the first part of the discussion studied the way in

which one of the most important sorts of myths remains that of origins in both works. The study also revealed that the myth of ancestors plays a great role as a mobilizing device which awakens the national awareness of the concerned people and as a reaffirming tool of the national identity. It has been shown that the authors are equally motivated to explore the history and tribal past of their respective countries. The second part dealt with another pair of mythical characters who are Nedjma and Mumbi. Through their mythical connotations, both characters chiefly represent an archetypal image of their countries and symbolically incite the quest for the Algerian and Kenyan identities. The third part is devoted to one more duo of characters namely Rachid and Mugo who share many resemblances as mythical heroes in the novels. Finally, the last part investigated the function of myth as a subject matter in both novels. Other connections between both novels in terms of characters are highlighted through the depiction of political leaders viewed as the heroes of the past history of Algeria and Kenya, such as Jomo Kenyatta and L'Emir Abdelkader.

From all that has been said above, we may say that Kateb's and Ngugi's works contribute not only to the liberation of their respective countries, but they also stand as pieces of evidence that the oral tradition is a significant feature in the African literary works which are even concerned as an endless treasure for the Africans continent as a whole. Different African writers acquire similar inspiration from the old narratives and thus valorize in the same way their cultural heritage.

B- Discussion

Myth of Ancestors in the Two Novels

As we mentioned earlier, the African novel is rooted in African oral tradition in its various forms. It reflects the African reality by going back to history and most notably to the cultural heritage left by the ancestors. The oral words, then, occupy a significant place in the success of the emerging African novels since they stand as prominent sources which provide crucial information about the past life of the different societies. In addition, the African writers seek through their works to counter the colonial mythology which says that Africans do not have culture before colonialism.

Kateb's *Nedjma* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* are constructed on oral tradition, which comes to sight prominently, by the two writers' use of myths. Though the two compared novels were written in the colonizer's language, their contents represent and reflect definitely the authors' respective cultures and history. The two writers attempt to revalorize the past of their countries in an ideological way and through the mixture of historical and mythical discourses. Each of the adapted myths is exceptional to both authors' specific construction of the story. Ngugi and Kateb demonstrate correspondingly the mythic time of their ancestors and their great deeds. Kateb uses the myth of "Keblout" which tells the story of the Keblout ancestor and tribe and through which he aims to reconstitute the Algerian identity. Ngugi like Kateb incorporates the myth of the "Gikuyu" or "Kikuyu" ancestors through his characters of Mumbi and Mugo. In fact, the names of the two characters refer to the mythical figures of the founding fathers of the Gikuyu tribe.

As far as the myth of ancestors is concerned, it takes an important place in Kateb's novel, *Nedjma*. It sheds light on both individual and collective search for identity. It revives Algeria's glorious past through mythological means. Thus, the novel stands as an

autobiography of the author in the plural and, at the same time, as a collective history of the Algerian situation in a time of colonization. It evokes the founding myth of the Keblout ancestors which functions as a representative witness of the African and European historical confrontations. Centered on an oral tradition, the myth of Keblout can be considered as the link between the Algerian people and their origins. Thus, the protagonist Rachid in Kateb's fiction goes through the search for the Algerian true identity and the reconciliation with the ancestors, who have been dispossessed of their properties by the colonial powers.

The protagonists Rachid and Nedjma are referred to as the descendants of the ancestral tribe "Keblout" who ruled the ancestral land. Kateb Yacine, then, regenerates through these young characters and Si Mokhtar, the tribe's legendary founder who preferred to go eagerly to his death rather than kneeling down for the various enemies. Through their dialogues in the novel, we understand that they wish to follow the path of their ancestors and reconstruct their national identity as Algerians and precisely as members of the "Keblouti". We can understand that Kateb Yacine, as an oppressed African writer, feels the need to mystify the origins and uses myths as a substitution to history which can be linked to how Mircea Eliade perceives myths when writing:

Le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée ; il relate un événement qui a eu lieu dans le temps primordial, le temps fabuleux des "commencements." C'est donc toujours le récit d'une «création»: on rapporte comment quelque chose a été produit, a commencé à être.¹

Following the idea provided in Eliade's quote, it appears that myths play an important role in the process of understanding the secrets of one's history and how things come to exist. Myths then teach people about their tremendous ancient events.

The accounts of Si Mokhtar or the viewed spokesman, in chapters X and XI reveals the founding myth of the Keblout tribe which remains the most outstanding events within the

tribal life of the Algerians. The history of the tribe then, can be read as an oral legend transmitted from one generation to another with the popular language as announced by Si Mokhtar in *Nedjma*. Accordingly, as a descendant of “Kablout”, Si Mokhtar takes the initiative to save the tribe’s name and continuity. However, the information collected throughout the work of Jacqueline Arnaud bears that there exist three distinct versions concerning the origins of the Kablout ancestor. The first one tells that “Kablout” comes from “Ghmat”, in the High Atlas of Morocco after being brought from the “Seguïet-El-Hemra”. He came to Algeria through l’Aurès at the beginning of the Algerian conquest and established in “Aïn Ghrouf” where he has built the mosque with his own hands and has begun to teach. The second version on the other hand, reveals that the tribe arrives through “La Seguïet-El-Hemra” to the Nadhor and doesn’t state the stage of the Aurès². Thus, Kateb’s adaptation as counted by Si Mokhtar exposes the third version which says that the tribe comes from the Middle East, passes through Spain and stays in Morocco under the leadership of Kablout.³

The ancestor known as Kablout in fact is described as the great founder of the tribe with his moral and ethical values. As an exceptional person, Kablout is praised for his profound knowledge of the Coran that is the Islamic religion. Si Mokhtar in that case assigns to Rachid:

Plusieurs générations de Kabloutis ont exercé jusqu’à nos jours des fonctions particulières : ce furent des Tolbas, des étudiants errant ; ils étaient musiciens et poètes de père en fils, ne possèdent que peu de biens, mais fondant un peu partout leurs mosquée et leurs mausolée, parfois leurs medersas quand les disciples étaient assez nombreux ; ceci donne à penser que le premier Kablout ne dut être ni un capitaine ni un dignitaire mais un idéologue et un artiste.⁴

Said differently, the resort to the ancestral ideals in colonized Algeria remains one of the major responses to the colonial dehumanization of the colonized and likewise as a means of defense against the colonizers’ supremacy. Next, the ancestor Kablout is embodied with different characteristics throughout the novel such as that of a fierce tiger and a hunting eagle or vulture. Kateb asserts: “*Lui, l’ancêtre au visage de bête féroce, aux yeux sombre et malins,*

promenant son superbe regard sur sa tribu, la trique a portée de sa main"⁵. It is noteworthy to mention that the myth of ancestors is one of the most mobilizing identity myths and resides as the founder of every culture. However, it reflects the periods of dispossession, the loss of origin and the loss of identity caused by the French colonialists imposing presence from 1882 and their cruel expropriation of lands. This is precisely what Rachid says to Mourad in *Nedjma*:

Ce sont des âmes d'ancêtres qui nous occupent, substituant leur drame éternisé à notre juvénile attente, à notre patience d'orphelins ligotés à leur ombre de plus en plus pâle, cette ombre impossible à boire ou à déraciner, – l'ombre des pères, des juges, des guides que nous suivons à la trace, en dépit de notre chemin.⁶

According to the quotation, it is worth mentioning that the writer evokes the power of the ancestors in leading their descendents in to their struggle for liberation even during their absence. Kateb's novel therefore reflects the emblematical ancestors who were the great leaders through their resistance and defense of the country.

Moreover, *Nedjma* awakens awareness because the recourse to ancestral ethics can be considered as a crucial response and a means of defense against the cultural aggression. It contributes to the unity and cohesiveness of the tribe's members. So, the myth of "Kablout" reflects the affirmation of one's identity and confirms the revalorizing of the Algerian cultural heritage. Accordingly, we may say that mythology sometimes replaces history and safeguards one's identity especially after being transgressed by the oppressor. In this respect, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) writes:

But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics.⁷

Subsequent to what has been said by Levis Strauss, we can say that myths function as valid codes in both past and contemporary life. They still hold the power of explaining various human conditions in the same manner politics does. Besides, the use of myths allows the readers to see any community's past in a new light.

In addition, Kateb uses some other motifs that show his attachment to the ancient time. He refers, for instance, to the Nadhor, a legendary hill which symbolizes his ancestor's earth and most importantly the one which revives their significant history. The Nadhor, can be seen as the holly place which covers all the truths of their ancestors. Besides, the importance of such a place is to be shown when Si Mokhtar wants absolutely to reunite Nedjma and Rachid. He tries in vain to reconstitute the lost unity and innocence of the site. Then, he also employs the vulture, as a mythic creature that represents the power and authority of the ancestors. Thus the vulture in Kateb's literary work can be seen as a totem for the ancestor Keblout. Lemis Spence in his book entitled *An Introduction to Mythology* defines the word 'Totem' as follows:

Totemism is a phase of religion frequently encountered in myth. Briefly and crudely defined (and any brief definition of it must essentially be crude), the totem is an animal, plant, or inanimate object connected traditionally with a certain social group which takes its name from the totem or uses it as a symbol.⁸

Consequently, Kateb genuinely includes a central character in his narration, le Nègre, who proves to be the savior of the tribe's dignity and identity in the sense that he is the pure one as well as the one who preserves the links with his ancestors. He is depicted as an anxious and unknown being who wants to take back a tribe's daughter Nedjma. So, his only mission is to save Nedjma and bring her back to her true origin and tribe. Mebrouk stands for and elucidates that the ancestor Keblout wants to protect only the women and never the male person because the latter failed to preserve their ancestral ground. He is considered to be the protector of the ancestor's land and has the duty of capturing Nedjma which is ironically a

message for Algerians to recuperate their country. After having killed Si Mokhtar, the Nègre declares to Rachid: “*Keblout a dit de ne protéger que ses filles. Quand aux mâles vagabonds, dit l’ancêtre Keblout, qu’ils vivent en sauvages, par monts et par vaux, eux qui n’ont pas défendu leur terre...*”⁹. The quotation means that the ancestor Keblout cares only for the safety of women and treats the wandering men as savages since they did not succeed to defend and protect their land. This can be read as an ironic message for the Algerian people especially men to awaken their consciousness about the preservation of their country.

Similar to Kateb, Ngugi feels the urgent need to save the culture as well as the identity of the Gikuyu people, which has been violated by the British colonial authority. Ngugi then achieves his goal through his third novel *A Grain of Wheat* by his adoption of the Gikuyu oral tradition specifically the “Gikuyu Creation Myth”. He reestablishes vital links to Kenya’s cultural past and its national identity. Through his fictional characters exclusively Mumbi and Mugo, Ngugi refers to the ancestors, Gikuyu and Mumbi who are considered to be the founders of the Gikuyu society.

The novel is formed of multiple narrative lines and far from being linear in structure, is composed of a large number of flashbacks connected with the historical reality of Kenya. The use of myth, then, is central in the construction of the whole narrative since it functions as a renovating and strengthening device. Despite the fact that the creation of myth is not dealt with directly in the novel, Ngugi’s choice of the character’s names and use of symbolism steers the readers straight to the Gikuyu myth. As an oral tradition handed down verbally from one generation to another, the Gikuyu myth as announced by Jomo Kenyatta in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, tells the story of the founder of the Gikuyu tribe. He says that the man named Gikuyu is given by the God Mogai a wonderful land containing plenty of fig trees and asked to create his own homestead. The god Mogai has also provided him with a beautiful wife whom Gikuyu named Mumbi and with whom he had nine daughters and no sons. Then,

the man has been provided with nine young companions for his daughters that would continue the progeny. Thus, Gikuyu and Mumbi are measured as the primordial parents of the Gikuyu people¹⁰. Mumbi, therefore, plays an important role in the novel since she reincarnates the image of the “Mother creator”. She has been given the image of the ancestor Mumbi who is viewed as the founding mother of the tribe. Ngugi, subsequently, refers to these ancestors by the assimilation of the couple Mumbi and Gikonyo into his novel. They serve as the revived Gikuyu ancestors who have once been the creators of the Gikuyu nation.

Furthermore, the author depicts the theme of creation through Gikonyo’s work as a carpenter mainly when he carves the stool as a wedding gift in the form of a man, a pregnant woman, and a child. His possessive desire to carve the stool evidenced the longing for the rebirth of a new Kenya. Following the idea, Gikonyo’s reconciliation with Mumbi represents the revival of a recovered Kenya freed from the hands of the British control as well as the unfaithfulness of its people. In this respect, Ngugi (1967) points out:

For Gikonyo, these would be given to him by Mumbi, whose trembling hands, as she held the green leaves he could so clearly picture. His reunion with Mumbi would see the birth of a new Kenya¹¹.

Ngugi in a broader sense uses an epic representation and reshapes it to construct his mythical narration of the nation. He provides his work with mythical elements and presents the story of the movement as a chain of battles done by heroic leaders against the colonizers. He has incorporated myths to the historical concern that is the colonized Kenya brought up to its independence. The Kenya described in *A Grain of Wheat* then is a community which longs to regain its harmonious history. In the light of what has been said, Kathy Kessler argues:

By interconnecting strands of myth, historical fact, and localized fiction in *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi seems to be trying to establish a critical, revolutionary consciousness as a means of renovating and strengthening national identity.¹²

The reference to traditional hills is another comparable point between Ngugi and Kateb Yacine since both of them have given much importance to such sacred places. The Mount Kenya in Ngugi's novel indeed has a significant importance. It is believed to be the birth place of the Gikuyu people and the cradle of their culture and tradition. It bears the tribe's mythology of Mumbi and Gikonyu, the creators. In this respect, James Ogude says:

Gikuyu and Mumbi also humanize a world that would otherwise be the domain of abstract and inanimate objects. The legendary Gikuyu couple has a close association with Mount Kenya, possibly the small hill to which Chege takes his son Waiyaki to reveal to him the secrets of the tribe. This hill, Mount Kenya, is the resting place of their creator and deity, Murungu – elsewhere called Ngai, *Mwenenyaga*. Mount Kenya becomes the centre of the Gikuyu universe.¹³

Accordingly, Mount Kenya becomes the holly place where the great values of the Gikuyu tribe are born. The legendary place safeguards and reflects the true identity of Gikuyu people. Ngugi has well and truly chosen a symbolic place and has tied it to his ideological goals particularly decolonization. By making reference to such a mythic place, Ngugi reaffirms the Kenyan identity.

Myths and other elements of oral tradition, therefore, act as significant tools for the understanding of the human condition and destiny in the universe. In view of that, African creative writers guide their people with their productive works. Appropriately, Clyde Kluckhohn in his classic article entitled *Myths and Rituals: A General Theory* agrees that myths and rituals have the same objectives, that of protecting the cultural heritage, he asserts:

They provide social solidarity, enhance the integration of the society by providing a formalized statement of its ultimate value-attitudes, afford a means for the transmission of much of the culture with little loss of content – thus protecting cultural continuity and stabilizing society.¹⁴

It appears from the quote that myths are bearers of the cultural values and norms which are essential elements for the unity of any given society. They also serve a number of ideological purposes and assure the cultural continuity.

To sum up, we can say that as a reaction to the colonial ideology which disfigured the history and culture of the colonized Algerian and Kenyan, Kateb Yacine and Ngugi Wa Thiong’O stress with force the persistence of two cultures through their respective literary works. Thus, their resort to mythology gives an alternative to counter the Western ideology and is considered as an attempt to revive the ancient principles. Myths then can be viewed as techniques through which the authors attempt to counter the European cultural domination as well as to restore their prestigious origins. In this connection then, Kateb and Ngugi use mythology so as to reconstruct their respective cultures and nations. Correspondingly, we may clearly say that we identify Ngugi’s and Kateb’s mythical method as a way to understand the positive function of myth for African history. Their call in these novels is for Africans to come back to the way of the ancestors as the only means of recovery from total destruction and enslavement and the rejection of foreign values.

Nedjma and Mumbi as Mythic Symbols

In addition to the apparent myth of ancestors in Kateb’s and Ngugi’s fictions, their dazzling works are open to various interpretations and mythological connotations. The two novels enclose different themes concerning their positive exploitation of the rich oral tradition. The two novelists revive the myths of their people and strive to recreate them imaginatively to reflect the central meaning of the society about which and for whom they write. Both authors then embellish their writings with the symbolic description of the two heroines namely, Nedjma and Mumbi who gain a mythological implication in the novels. Their similar depictions remain as very emblematical and significant ones.

Beginning with the title of Kateb’s novel, it is to be said that *Nedjma*, meaning “star” in Arabic, incites to a symbolic reading of Algeria’s fate during its conquest. This referential woman, in fact, is one of the most important characters present in almost every author’s work.

Nedjma stands as the author's true beloved lady who has really existed and as a symbolic person reflecting the Algerian nation. Correspondingly, Kateb says in one of his conferences: "*Nedjma n'est pas une creation de l'esprit; c'est une femme qui a bel et bien existé. Il s'agissait d'un amour impossible. C'est une femme qui était déjà mariée*"¹⁵. Kateb's love fervor collides with the revolutionary requirement. He contributes through his literary work to the process of decolonization even before the Algerian revolution started. As an allusive novel, *Nedjma* reflects equally the author's eagerness towards a dear country and a beloved woman whom no one in the novel can disrespect.

Nedjma as a character takes a mythical connotation all long the novel. Although her appearances seem passive, she puts a great deal of significance to the construction of the whole novel. She operates as a strongly attractive woman that holds the interest of the four central characters. Nedjma embodies in a mythical manner Algeria which had been raped by the different invaders and the one pulled of its independence and dignity. Thus, she stands as the symbol and substitute for her Algerian nation, the symbol of her ancestral tribe and the figure of the most beautiful woman. Nedjma is that mysterious person and the unattainable idol married to Kamel against her will. She is nicknamed by different names related to her vividness and brilliance, such as "Astre" and "Etoile" meaning "Star". She is, however, the daughter of an unknown Algerian man supposed to be Si Mokhtar, and a French Jewish woman who is the notary's wife. She is the fruit of an adulterous relation between the considered father of the man she is married with that is Kamel and "the insatiable French woman" as she is described in *Nedjma*¹⁶. The cultural fusion has in a way or another elucidated the creation of Nedjma, the mystifying personality who is put in a labyrinth of mostly incestuous relations and compound quests. She is subject of a love quest from the four young men specifically, Mourad, Mustapha, Rachid and Lakhdar who fall in the trap of multiple quarrels and rivalries because of her intense seduction. Then, she is in the centre of a

filial search by her presumed father Si Mokhtar. Most importantly, she represents a symbolic search for identity. She has been kidnapped by Mebrouk, an enigmatic character who has had the task of bringing her back to her ancestral tribe. Both Nedjma and her ancestor, Keblout, are linked to the Algerian time-honored culture aggressed by the colonizer.

Furthermore, the evolution and emergence of Nedjma in the novel is shown through the stories and descriptions of Kateb's four protagonists. The author grants his female character realistic descriptions mixed to a number of unrealistic ones. Throughout the reading of the novel, the reader will discover that female which in Kateb's words is related to a 'chimère'. Just like a star then, Nedjma appears and reappears in different images and portrayals. Yet, Kateb seems obsessed with his descriptions of Nedjma in the sense that she is the one with "*l'ecrasante chevelure fauve*"¹⁷ and "*Vierge en retraite, Cendrillon au soulier brodé de fil de fer*"¹⁸. In addition, Kateb links her with his descriptions to her origins as being a Mediterranean woman. He declares:

Nedjma se développe rapidement comme toute Méditerranéenne ; le climat marin répand sur sa peau un hale, combiné à un teint sombre, brillant de reflets d'acier, éblouissant comme un vêtement mordoré d'animal.¹⁹

As a very beautiful and fascinating woman, Nedjma exercises a hypnotizing function towards the four young lovers. Her authoritative charm pushes the protagonists to link her to a supernatural being that is "la femme fatal". This French expression which means a "dangerous woman" is used by the author in order to emphasize the power his pivotal character Nedjma has over the four protagonists. Throughout the novel, her depiction is always related to her feminine prettiness, charm and sexual attraction. In almost all situations, she gets impressive descriptions by the young men as is the case with Rachid who says: "*Je n'avais jamais vu pareille femme à Constantine, aussi élégante, aussi sauvage, en son incroyable maintien de gazelle*"²⁰. For his part, Mustapha is amazed by the beauty and fatality

of Nedjma as he writes in his notebook: “*Incontestablement la fatalité de Nedjma provenait de l’atmosphère dont elle, fut entourée petite fille...*”²¹

Correspondingly, it is worthy to mention that the attributes given to Nedjma are in a way or another related to such a dangerous woman that wants each time to captivate and seduce her lovers. Such “femme fatale” is related to the mythology of evil and Nedjma is that person who causes troubles for all the revolutionists in the novel. In the passage where she takes her bath in a cauldron, Rachid says:

[]...Ou bien, remarquant le Nègre et me le faisant silencieusement remarquer, elle resterait dans son chaudron et redoublerait même de coquetterie (c’est toujours ce que suggère en pareille circonstance le démon de la femme).²²

In the same way, she implements a harmful influence towards everyone who challenges her. Having the status of the mythical figures as “La Femme Fatale” and “L’Ogresse”, she represents the Algerian nation and its cultural values in an era of depression and alienation. In order to contest those conquerors, Kateb goes back to the origins and mythical time of the Algerian community. Adding to this, this passage where she takes her bath does not only convey her attraction, but it also refers to her purity. As being a symbol of cleanliness, the water purifies her body and spirit from the dirtiness which surrounds her. Besides, through this multifaceted woman, Kateb reconstitutes imaginatively the mythic creature that is the Ogress. In fact, Nedjma incarnates the characteristics of such a savage being. Kateb identifies Nedjma as: « *Nedjma qu’aucun époux ne pouvait apprivoiser, Nedjma l’ogresse au sang obscur comme celui du Nègre qui tua Si Mokhtar, l’ogresse qui mourut de faim après avoir mangé ses trois frères.* »²³

It can be deduced that Nedjma does not take a permanent description, but it changes from time to time in order to take different roles and operations. She is meanwhile portrayed as being a negative person who always causes troubles for everyone who dares approach her.

Thus, it is to be deduced that Kateb Yacine through his heroine Nedjma refers to his dear country which fights against the invaders in the same manner as Nedjma does with her lovers. In fact, Nedjma represents the Algerian quest for identity which becomes a game in the hands of the invaders. She incarnates, in the same manner, the Algeria which resists vehemently and constantly against the different intruders. She is the circle around which the past values of her ancestors turn and take an important place in the progression of the colonized situation of her descendants.

Comparable in many aspects to Nedjma of Kateb Yacine, Ngugi introduces a female character who takes the initiative in the novel. Like Nedjma, then, Mumbi is the central and most important figure in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. She is also one among the most beautiful and attractive women in Thabai, her village. With her splendor and natural charisma, she is used to connect all the central themes, ideas, characters and even some of the symbols of the novel. Hence, right from the first pages of the novel, Ngugi describes her as being: "... *one of the most beautiful women on all the ridges. Some people called her Wangu Makere because of her look.*"²⁴ Ngugi makes use of a number of different ideas to convey his ideologies, it is in these themes that the reader comes across the specific characteristics of Mumbi and can really come to terms with the novel from a mythical point of view.

Mumbi is a woman married to a carpenter named Gikonyo, whom she loves very much contrary to Nedjma. She is Kihika's sister, one of the freedom fighters in Thabai and the one who is considered as being the true hero with his triumphant deeds. Thus, among all the other dominating male characters who play a significant role in the novel, Ngugi includes a female character and not a simple one but Mumbi, the one that plays a pivotal role in the smooth running of the events. Just like Nedjma, she is at the center of many rivalries especially between her husband and Karanja. In fact, when her husband was in the detention camp, she has betrayed him by having a sexual relationship with his enemy Karanja and sadly by

begetting his child. However, Mumbi's error is made in a harsh period when there has not been even a rumor about the survival of her husband and the other detainees. The guilty action is done in the very moment when she learns that her husband will be freed. She has been so happy and excited that she let the unfaithful Karanja make love to her. Yet, as a guilt ridden woman, she explains her act to Mugo in the following quote:

Something that caused me pain rippled in me, as if I had been paralyzed all over and blood and life was now entering into me. Please, Karanja, don't play with me." I stammered. My voice was broken. My heart was full of fear and hope. I would have done anything to know the truth.²⁵

The passage shows Mumbi's eagerness to know the truth about the situation of her husband whether he will be really released from prison or not. Her excitement leads her to commit an act of infidelity towards her husband and live with the feeling of guilt and culpability.

Regardless of her marital betrayal, Mumbi is put at the center of all the actions occurring in the story. She acts as a mother confessor to the guilt ridden Mugo who betrayed not only Kihika but his whole village. She is yet considered as the potency of the present and the past. Subsequently, the readers of *A Grain of Wheat* can observe through her dreams and performances, the inner force of the African woman in the Emergency period. In chapter 7, Ngugi describes his heroine in the station where she lays in the sun and hears the rattling of the train. When saying:

She lay in the sun and ardently yearned for a life in which love and heroism, suffering and martyrdom were possible[...]She had fed on stories in which Gikuyu women braved the terrors of the forest to save people, of beautiful girls given to the gods as sacrifice before the rain. In the Old Testament she often saw herself as Esther...²⁶

Hence, Ngugi through the depiction of the perfect devoted woman pays large esteem to the African women especially in those dark days. As an African woman, Mumbi represents and pays tribute to those black women. It is worthy to mention his influence on the Christian

religion and Bible. In the above passage, Mumbi compares herself to Esther, the beautiful wife of the Persian king Ahasuerus (Encyclopedia Britannica)²⁷. It is obvious that the author uses some references from the Old Testament. The author grants a symbolic position to such a prominent personality. She is regarded as the substitute and the image of her country which is Kenya. Ngugi similarly to Kateb Yacine in that case has also preferred to resist the aggressors of his country and culture by the means of the oral tradition. In order to convey well his message, he reenacts the traditional stories of his society known as myths such as the creation myth of the Gikuyu or Kikuyu tribe. David Leeming in his book entitled *Myth, A Biography of Belief* views the creation myth as follows: “*The creation myth reminds us of who we are; it brings into the present time what Eliade calls the energies of the childhood of our cultural being, and it renews us*”²⁸.

In other words, those creation myths function as diaries which reveal the secrets of the origins of the human beings and how the entire world comes into being. They can be considered as the exemplary model for all the other myths as they confess the most uncommon things related to the history of human kind. In addition, they reaffirm a county’s specific identity. Yet, Ngugi finds in such myths the inspiration for relating the amazing story of the Kikuyu tribe. The kikuyu creation myth, is therefore, represented by his idolized character Mumbi. She is related to her namesake, the founding mother of the tribe Gikuyu. So, in the words of Jomo Kenyatta in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, this myth of creation is linked to the man Gikuyu, the founder of the tribe with his wife Moombi known as the creator or molder. So, according to the legend reported by Kenyatta, the divider of the universe Mogai has given Gikuyu his part of the land on which he is supposed to set up a family with Moombi. This couple represents the mythical parents of the Gikuyu people and throws a retrospective eye to the beginnings of the Gikuyu culture and tribe. The aim of the author behind this story can be linked also to the themes of national restoration.²⁹ Once more, the

author exploits the cultural heritage left by the Kenyan ancestors and particularly the Gikuyu predecessors. Such myths operate as influential and continual sacred stories that will guide the generations to come in the same manner they did with the previous ones.

The image given to Mumbi as the mother creator of her tribe is of a colossal weight. In this sense, the author insinuates metaphorically that Mumbi can assemble again her people. Her strength and courage is uncontested in relating the fight for freedom. She has been the reason behind the confession of Mugo, the anti-hero and has been capable of surmounting all the imposing challenges and hardships caused by the British cruel authority in Kenya. Like the males, she has assumed hard works while her husband in detention camp. Therefore, the significance of Mumbi as a dominant female character in the novel is displayed and put in the center of all the actions. Mugo's confession in turn, enhances Mumbi's determination to forgive her husband. Gikonyo on his part has also stepped to forgive Mumbi and accept her child as his own. As an atonement for his sin he decides to carve a stool with a woman "big with a child"³⁰. There is a suggestion of reconciliation between Gikonyo and Mumbi at the end of the novel and this is seen as a symbol of a new Kenya.

Concisely, the idea to incorporate such myths in a work of literature is of great importance as they represent and at the same time characterize vividly one's respective cultures. In the process of cultural refinement too, one has to go back to the precious, exemplary and significant primordial tradition. Accordingly, Wole Soyinka, a Yoruba writer, is measured as the best African writer regarding his attachment to his Yoruba tradition. He has always been in search of innovative means in order to preserve his culture. His "creative Alchemy", in fact, incites him to the recreation of the old norms meant to fit the present day realities. Isidore Okpewho, actually in his book, *Myth in Africa* reports:

The tales in their old forms also had to go; but Soyinka is conscious that they contain some timeless virtues which would give future generations a true sense of earthing in their search for selfhood in a difficult and ever changing world.³¹

In a different way, the old tradition has to be preserved since it contains eternal and key aspects that would help the modern man in his potential life. Thus, Ngugi and Kateb, like Soyinka feel the urge to preserve and specially refine their cultures through their literary works and by using myths as framing devices. In their attempts to do so, they have been inspired by the mythical stories of their societies and improved them so as to have a brighter nature. After reading Ngugi's and Kateb's novels, certain similarities are revealed and among them their related heroines. Yet, again they contribute in the same manner to cultural refinement. Mumbi and Nedjma, in fact, are endowed with mythical descriptions and associations in order to glorify their indigenous countries. They incarnate the future of their respective countries and lay as their symbols.

Rachid and Mugo as symbolic heroes

Through our reading of Kateb's and Ngugi's novels, we come to notice the apparent similarities between the two characters namely, Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat* and Rachid in *Nedjma*. They share many common points even though they belong to different novels written by different authors. Their comparison can begin from their equal difficult childhood as they have experienced the same troubles as orphans. Both of them also have experienced almost the same situation in their adulthood. Add to this, the desire to make the myths eternal will be achieved as well through the extravagant accounts of these two protagonists. Their equal mythological status permits the two characters to have a great influence over the unfolding of the events. Colonialism and its imprisoning atmosphere is the first matter discussed in both novels and shared by the two anti-heroes. Therefore, their declarations help to give a picture to Kenya and Algeria in a period of depression and isolation.

By connecting the disconcerting narratives in *Nedjma*, we come to gather the information needed to identify the young solitary man known as Rachid. His declarations

however, are always stated in closed areas which reflect insistently his loneliness and alienation. His archetypal representation also is always linked to such expression as “Déserteur”, “Nomade en residence force”. The first part of the novel turns around the colonial relations and especially the hostility of the colonizer towards the Algerians made slaves. Thus, the first descriptions of Rachid as an adult begin in the building site where he has been working with the other three protagonists namely Mourad, Mustapha and Lakhdar. They reside in the same gloomy room with him and have experienced the brutal presence of French colonialism. But, after their separation, Rachid finds himself another time marginalized without any job wandering from place to place in the destination of Constantine. As a lonely wanderer, he finds himself again in a locked place which is the prison. He has been at a complete loss after his separation from Mourad, Mustapha and Lakhdar that he became an aggressive person. Due to his disoriented being, Rachid reacts in an irresponsible manner which conducts him to prison. Again, he finds himself marginalized and enclosed in a cell. There is an important passage where the situation of Rachid is to be compared to that of a spider. Kateb Yacine actually, describes: « *Ils font ensuite une sieste, mais Rachid sursaute à maintes reprises songeant à l'araignée qui le fixe, prisonnière elle aussi ; « on dirait qu'elle se sent seule, qu'elle cherche de la compagnie, des caresses peut-être* »³².

From these lines, we can notice that the author personifies the spider and uses it as an illustration of Rachid's situation. Through this fragile and at the same time sadistic insect, the novelist insinuates too, upon the solitude and trouble of Rachid. His first strange physical appearances are described by Mustapha in his notebook. This latter relates that Rachid as a man with brutal manners comes for the first time with Si Mokhtar who is twice older than him. While the other boys of his generation were at school, Rachid strolls from place to place with his aged master and false father Si Mokhtar. He himself suggests the fact of being a hopeless person who does not have any value in his society. He says: *Longtemps que je suis*

*revenue du chantier, longtemps que je suis sans travail, trois ans que je n'ai rien devant moi.*³³ The presentation and accounts of such a strange person is however, made little by little either through the other characters in different chapters or through his own voice. In chapitre IX, Rachid under the effects of the malaria fever, has revealed some accounts related to his past and that of his ancestors. It is also noticeable that he has a militant tone in his voice. He claims:

Ce sont nos pères, certes ; des oueds mis à sec au profit de moindres ruisseaux, jusqu'à la confluence, la mer ou nulle source ne reconnaît son murmure : l'horreur, la mêlée, le vide- l'océan – et qui d'entre nous n'a vu brouiller son origine comme un cours d'eau ensablé, n'a fermé l'oreille au galop souterrain des ancêtres, n'a couru et folâtré sur le tombeau de son père...³⁴

Following that, it is to be suggested that Rachid will have a narrative mission all through the novel. He announces his affection of his Algerian identity which is scrambled by the different intruders. Rachid reports about Si Mokhtar's declarations concerning the Algerian tribal history and the mythical founder of the tribe known as Keblout. Hence, the return to this old story can be seen as an act of reconstruction and continuity for the progression of the nation. Accordingly, the ancestral past, Rachid is telling about constitute a fundamental theme in the novel. It has been during the pilgrimage trip that Si Mokhtar recounts about the legend of the Keblouti. It is then on board of the ship that the old Si Mokhtar starts his story about the origins of his tribe which is at the same time that of the young Rachid. This episode insinuates to a profound longing to find again their true identities as members of the Keblout tribe. They are both of them linked to their origins and are obsessed by the idea of their national identity.

Rachid's voice throughout the novel is very considerable. He can be viewed as a hero in his journey towards the resolution of many key troubles. He wants imperatively to find the true murderer of his father but ignores completely that the one who has been an accessory in such a crime is his old companion Si Mokhtar. He is, in fact, inhabited by such a tragic event and the question of his true identity and origin since his father dies before he came to life. In

this respect, he claims: *“J’en parle sans avoir jamais connu mon père, car il mourut sous le feu de son propre fusil, tué au fond d’une grotte par un inconnu qui dut s’enfuir”*³⁵. Rachid immerses himself with Si Mokhtar in a mythical memory that could restore both the collective and individual identities. Their voyages towards the Mecque and the ancestral soil known as “Nadhor” can be seen as a mythical expeditions. It is then, in the two mythical places that the ancestral past is transmitted to Rachid. We can also observe that Si Mokhtar has another objective within the trip to the Nadhor which consists of reuniting Nedjma and Rachid. After having arranged a meeting between Rachid and the unknown girl revealed latter on to be Nedjma, Si Mokhtar has the purpose to capture his presumed daughter Nedjma and lead her to the Nadhor. The first meeting in the clinic then, has shown that Nedjma still unknown to Rachid implements on him a paralyzing influence. He has been completely captivated by her beauty. Still again another character that falls in love with Nedjma, the attractive woman that is in his own words like a “chimère”³⁶. It is in that inherited earth which is the “Nadhor” that we discover Rachid’s virtual rival known under the name of the “Négre”. The presence of the Nègre in the hallowed earth indeed, has a figurative meaning that consists of being the original and faithful caretaker of the premises.

The desire to find again a lost identity has pushed Si Mokhtar to kidnap his supposed daughter Nedjma with the help of Rachid and return to live altogether in the Nadhor. The old man has also wished to protect his son and daughter just like the legendary father Keblout has done with his people; the latter admits:

Je suis décidé à l’enlever moi-même sans ton aide, mais je t’aime aussi comme un fils...Nous irons vivre au Nadhor, elle et toi, mes deux enfants, moi le veil arbre qui ne peu plus nourire mais vous couvrira de son ombre...Et le sang de Keblout retrouvera sa chaude, son intime épaisseur.³⁷

But contrary to what is arranged, neither the trip to the Mecque nor the one of the Nadhor has been a success. As far as the anti-hero, Rachid, is concerned, it is striking to point to his

failure as a true hero in the novel. It is through his unfinished missions and delirious dreams that the reader comes to know the worthless Rachid. His first story about the Keblout legend is told when he has been suffering from the Malaria fever which means that in such a situation any of his accounts have to be unbelievable. It is also under the effects of the drug that most of his accounts are transmitted. All the more, he hasn't succeeded to enforce his connection to the Algerian history, particularly to the Keblout tribe. At the end of this itinerary to the Nadhor, Rachid's fate just like that of Nedjma and Si Mokhtar is noted down by the Nègre. On his part, Rachid has been excluded from the ancestral land. Then, Nedjma is captured back by the Nègre and Si Mokhtar assassinated. Thus the features of heroism don't fit such a character.

In the light of all what has been said on Rachid, it appears that Kateb portrays him as a mythological character who has got the role of retrieving the Algerian identity which his own as well. His heroic depiction sends back the readers to the ancient stories about the legendary heroes. Rachid participates in the quest for Algerian liberation and identity in the manner of mythic heroes. Parallel to Kateb's anti-hero, Ngugi's central character, Mugo has to demonstrate a misleading heroism within the colonial environment in Kenya. Indeed, the author begins the novel with Mugo who is also an orphan, raised by a pitiless aunt who scorns him at every occasion. The first chapter of the novel in fact, is devoted to the description of Mugo within his ambivalent and disturbing life. Being left in the hands of such a drunkard and cruel aunt, Mugo has not carried a normal life but always lives in confusion, "*He is haunted by his own inadequacy*"³⁸. Mugo is the last of the possible heroic characters and due to his presence throughout the novel, is perhaps the most important character yet. Moreover, his character is so well organized and our perception of him changes throughout the book. He is subject to many contradictory portrayals as it is confusing to learn that he is at the basis of a heroic action and later on perceive him as a betrayer. In chapter six for example,

we come to notice that he has successfully lead the Hunger Strike in Rira. In this respect, the author notes:

Two days later, people were to talk about Mugo in the eight ridges around Thabai; they told with varying degrees of exaggeration how he organized the hunger strike in Rira, an action which made Fenna Brokowi raise questions in the British House of Commons. His solitary habits and eccentric behavior at meetings marked him as a chosen man.³⁹

Following this quotation, it is to be said that Mugo has gained a great esteem from the members of his society and is considered as a brave man. Still another glorious and heroic deed done by Mugo is when he has saved a woman from a pitiless beating in a counter-insurgency trench. Moreover, he is even given a prophetic figure and a mythical image. Through his name, Mugo is associated to the mystical Gikuyu prophet “Seer Mugo Wa Kibiro”. Ngugi’s inspires his work from the Gikuyu traditional myth about the divine semi-mythical figure known as “Seer Mugo Wa Kibiro”. The latter has gone down in Gikuyu tradition as the seer who predicted the coming of the white man whose gun he compared with a rod that emitted fire. Accordingly, it is told that:

Cege Mugo wa Kibiro was the most famous Kikuyu Kenyan prophet in the nineteenth century. The precise dates during which he lived are not known. From an anecdote told about Chief Njiri wa Karanja, who lived between 1866 and 1974, however, it appears that Mugo wa Kibiro was an adult by 1888. In that year, Njiri was given special food by the prophet as a sign that he would be a chief in his community. Mugo wa Kibiro foretold that visitors would come from out of the big water to the east. The big water to the east was the Indian Ocean. These visitors, Mugo predicted, would have strange complexions. Besides the fact that their skins resembled those of small white frogs (white, pale-looking people), they would wear clothes that looked like the wings of butterflies. The strangers, Mugo further said, would construct an iron snake (a train) that would spew fire as it crawled its way from the big water to the east (Indian Ocean) to the big water to the west (Lake Victoria). Moreover, Mugo spoke of the destructive weapons that the strangers would carry. Their weapons would be like sticks (guns); but unlike ordinary sticks, they would spit fire. Mugo warned Kikuyu warriors against attacking these strangers with spears and arrows, for the spears would not match the sticks that spat fire. Through this metaphorical language, Cege Mugo wa Kibiro foresaw the coming of European colonialism to Kenya.⁴⁰

The quotation above shows Ngugi's use of Gikuyu myths since the image of the prophet "Seer Mugo Wa Kibiro" is recaptured by his character Mugo. The character Mugo as described in Ngugi's novel inherits the prophet's name and his semi-mythical values.

Mugo's life, then, gets disturbed when Kihika, a guerilla leader comes to his hut after shooting D.O. Robson, a vicious and murdering government official. Kihika, a local Mau Mau freedom fighter from Thabai, leads a group of Mau Mau forest fighters in an attack on Mahee Police Post in the Rift Valley and captures it. He is then described as "*The terror of the whiteman*"⁴¹. Thus, the isolated life that Mugo has been carrying will see a complete change especially after the death of the true hero. Mugo's fear to be killed by the British government leads him to betray the true national hero Kihika, and this will not be revealed until the end of the novel. Yet, it is until the last chapters that we come to discover the real image of Mugo as a traitor and a trickster. Correspondingly, Simon Gikandi mentions: "*Now, the central movement of the novel concerns the nationalists' slow discovery that Mugo, the ostensible hero of independence, was a traitor.*"⁴².

By ignoring the misleading heroism of Mugo, people in Thabai has chosen him to lead the Uhuru celebration day of Independence. At first his guilt prevents him to accept such an honor to speak in the Uhuru celebration day knowing that he does not deserve it. But at the end Ngugi depicts that though his misleading heroism, Mugo succeeds to join back his community by confessing his guilt. Thus, he will not be absolutely judged on his betrayal of the true heroic leader Kihika since he accomplishes other positive roles in the struggle for liberation.

The Function of Myth in Both Novels.

The insertion of myths in any given African literary work is an important step towards the refinement of one's culture. Being severely aggressed by the colonizer, the colonized people feel the urge to rescue their respective cultures from depreciation and devaluation. Thus, literary works are among many other important means or manners to reach such a purpose. Many writers inspire their creativity especially from the old stories told by the elders of society to produce revolting and revalorizing works. Thus, the presence of myths in Kateb's and Ngugi's works plays a great role and holds a certain power in the process of cultural refinement. The myths also are used to fit a certain ideology.

Knowing that myth as a general aspect in the universe serves so many different functions. Each community has its specific myths that explain and relate them to their own life. Hence, when we come to analyze the mythic features in Kateb's and Ngugi's novels, we come to the idea that they are used to carry out a specific task. To start with, Kateb in his novel *Nedjma* introduces the readers to particular myths which function as ideological narratives. Firstly, the myth of ancestors that is the myth of Keblout, is used ideologically to defend the Algerian identity and affirm a set of its national values. It mainly acts against the imposing power of the French colonization which incessantly and absolutely offends the Algerian nation. So Kateb, describes the myth of his origins as not only significant but imperative in the formation and preservation of his own nation. The author, thus, replaces the rational and logical thought and takes rather the alternative route of mystification. Following this idea of mystification, Joseph Campbell in his book *The Power of Myth* 1991 asserts:

[...] Myth basically serves four functions. The first is the mystical function that is the one I've been speaking about, realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before this mystery. Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlines all forms. If you lose that, you don't have a mythology. If mystery is manifest through all things, the universe becomes, as it were, a holy

picture. You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions of your actual world.⁴³

Following this quote, we may understand that Kateb tends to mystify his world in order to raise the national awareness of his people. He mystifies and steers the myth of Keblout in the direction of political mobilization. The myth of Keblout guides the Algerian society to their original and true identity transgressed by the French colonizers. It is one of the founding myths that contribute to the cultural revival of Algeria as a colonized community. The passages on keblout as a tribe and ancestors erect allegorically and symbolically such resistant figures. Next, Kateb also gives a mythical dimension to his characters. Nedjma as a character, illustrates one of the most significant figures in the novel. Given that she carries the title of the novel, Nedjma conveys many virtues and realizes endless purposes related to the Algerian liberation. She symbolizes the whole country regarding the way Kateb portrays her. She is dear to all the characters in the novel in the same manner as Algeria should be to its people. If Kateb puts her in the center of attention, it is because he aims in a way or in another to capture the consciousness of his people towards their country. As a dangerous woman, Nedjma captures the hearts of all her lovers and pushes them to follow her path and this means that Algerians are so excited to liberate and own back their land. Nedjma is the woman who looks for her true identity and this shows that she symbolizes Algeria in its search for its true identity too. Nedjma's inaccessibility and resistance reveal the status of Algeria in a turbulent time period. Likewise, Nedjma can be associated to the old tales about ogresses or "Tharyel" in the kabyle language. This old myth has also a particular function in Kateb's novel since it proves that the author revives tales from his cultural heritage. Undoubtedly, each myth holds certain powers in explaining what is going on in the modern times. The Ogress myth (Tharyel) is a story about a female monster that scares everybody in her way be him a man or a woman. The Ogress or Tharyel then usually appears at night and goes in search for food and in nowadays society people use such a myth in order to scare young children to never go out

at night. In the case of Nedjma as an ogress, she stipulates that she is a dangerous woman and she can be awful to the ones who follow her. Another time, Kateb figures a primordial myth through his feminine character because as a symbol of Algeria she is seen as an ogress even to the colonizers. This myth hence can be an indication of Algeria's resistance and that the myth of Nedjma holds many connotations and can be seen from various corners. Roland Barthe in his eminent book entitled *Mythologies* enlightens new ideas about what a myth can be. He claims:

Of course, it is not *any* type: language needs special conditions in order to become myth: we shall see them in a minute. But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form. Later, we shall have to assign to this form historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society into it: we must nevertheless first describe it as a form.⁴⁴

Subsequently to the quotation, myth is effectively a means of communication but at the same time has to convey a particular message. Writers make use of myths in their literary works for different purposes. For Kateb, myths provide an ideological way to answer back and harass the invaders of his country. If we come to the mythic figure of Rachid, we may say that Kateb reflects also the myths of heroes and supernatural beings. His position in the novel affirms that he plays an important role in the search for identity. Rachid feels the necessity to get back in touch with his ancestors and fill his lust to reach the history of his ancestors. Many details in Kateb's work refer to the mythic elaboration of ancient heroes. Historical figures such as the leader L'Emir Abdelkader and Jughurta are presented as mythic figures who illustrate the history of Algeria. The study of the landscape in *Nedjma* also sends back to the mythic Cirta and Bone which are mythic towns of Numidia.

Equally to Kateb Yacine, Ngugi transmits his message by using myths proper to his own country. Through *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi reaffirms the place and power of myths in African literary works. Ngugi's resort to ancient myths in his novel invokes an assembled set

of meanings which the reader will recognize. In addition, one may say that myths play important roles as a form of alternative history. Ngugi, thus, offers a new direction to comprehend his country's history and gives an ideological form of narrative to the myths he uses. Consequently, using myths to report history mainly by using figures or events of the remote past is a form of contemporary ideology that defines the country's national identity. In the society in which it is told, a myth is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past. For example, Ngugi constructs a myth of origins that is the Gikuyu myth of ancestors in order to explain the creation of his nation and motivate the revolutionary consciousness of his people. He uses such a primordial myth in a way to kindle a national reconstruction of Kenya. Such mythic narratives about the creation of a given society are used as metaphors for social and cultural unity along with national awareness. Ngugi uses history and oral tradition to interweave the past time of Mumbi and Gikuyu along with the present day of Kenya. By using the oral tradition, Ngugi finds a certain freedom in expressing his message of the preservation of the culture on the one hand and the revolution against its invaders on the other hand. In an inaugural lecture at the university of Nairobi, Professor Christopher Lukorito Wanjala asserts:

The literary scholar will be primarily interested in the creative process at work in the myth. He will examine the accuracy with which the mythmaker has observed the reality around him. In this regard, he will be interested in the communicative ability and the intersubjective truth of the myth. He will be interested in the keenness with which the composer's imagination has worked on the observation to turn it into a particular experience giving it significance, a point of view, a sense of humour, and finally the effectiveness with which both observation and imagination find expression through the medium of language.⁴⁵

In connection to the quotation above, one may say that novelists like Ngugi have their own way in interpreting things in the world around them. They use their mythic imagination in order to give meaning to the living experiences they study. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi borrows elements of oral tradition specifically myths and communicates them in his own

method in order to reach a precise meaning. Apart from the Gikuyu creation myth, Ngugi's feminine figure Mumbi owes a significant position as a symbol of a mother creator. Mumbi's mystification as a mother creator explains once again Ngugi's attachment to his oral tradition and through this myth he reshapes the creation of the Gikuyu society. She is, then, a brave woman who confronts alone many troubles during the British colonization. The story of Gikonyo and Mumbi reconstructs an archetypal image of Kenya's history and can be read as the contemporary founders of Kenya. They stand for the divine creators of the Gikuyu society and culture. Hence, Ngugi gives one of the most elaborate and absorbing traditional explanation of the origins of the Kenyan world and its culture. The creation myth is among the most essential sorts of myths because it gives explanations on how a given community or the universe as whole came into being. It testifies many things that are ambiguous to the scientific world. One more character in *A Grain of Wheat* has been given a mythical image. Mugo, the supposed hero of the novel represents the myth of heroes though his false achievements and misleading heroism. He betrays the true hero known as Kihika, but at the same time he becomes the legendary figure. What is interesting in Ngugi's fiction is that he incorporates tribal myths to his work in order to show the struggle of Kenyans against the British colonial presence. He ironically idealized his characters so as to raise the national awareness and push his people to unite themselves against colonialism.

Once more the mythic richness of the novel is shown through his explicit and implicit references of biblical myths. Ngugi seems very much influenced by the Christian religion. It is primordial to take into account Ngugi's use of some references from the Bible because it constitutes one of the crucial supports of the story. The title "*A Grain of Wheat*" itself reflects the idea of self-sacrifice which is a mythic feature of the bible. Following this idea, Joseph Campbell in his book *Power of Myth* (1991) mentions:

"Jesus had the eye," he said. What a magnificent reality he saw in the mustard seed." He would quote the words of Jesus from the gospel of John -- "Truly,

truly, I say unto you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.⁴⁶

The idea of self-sacrifice is current in the sacred texts of the Gospel. It stipulates that one has to sacrifice his own life in order to reach a certain objective. In *A Grain of Wheat* thus, Ngugi demonstrates through Kihika, the heroic freedom fighter who sacrificed his life for the freedom of his country. In one of the passages in *A Grain of Wheat*, Kihika preaches the Christ-like self-sacrifice and says:

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 a Christ. Everybody who takes the oath of unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ.⁴⁷

Kihika often quotes passages from the Bible he carries with him. Ngugi therefore, uses ideologically the colonizers religion in order to dismiss the false and tricky use of the bible from the British missionaries. These British tyrants, in fact, employ the Christian religion for the deep purpose of colonization. They mislead the Kenyan people in order to take possession of properties. Hence, it is imperative to interpret Ngugi's novel by taking into account the Christian myth since it is a basic component of the story.

The two authors' use of myths in their works provides a sense not only for the honored past but also a direction for the future. Traditional myths then operate as instruments that depict one's environment and at the same time as driving and motivating forces for action. They must therefore create and unify a national body.

Endnotes

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Conclusion

The present work explores the mythical connections and their significance in the two prominent African works which are respectively Kateb's *Nedjma* (1956) and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). Throughout the study of both novels, it is apparent that they share many common points in relation to the themes they explore. As African writers, they successfully use the myths of their countries for their literary creations. They choose to convey their revolting messages through the influence of the oral tradition and hence to give an African quality to their works. Both works then engage a considerable contribution in the history of the African literature. They use their indigenous sources for subjects and inspiration to protect their African identity and assure its dignity and continuation. They weave their works with the ancient myths of their respective countries. As a result of similar historical experiences, the two authors converge to the same manner of constructing their works. The colonial environment pushes them to create a labor that will contribute in a way or in another in the liberation and decolonization of their nations. They convey the same African goal which consists mainly in counter attacking the Eurocentric criticism on behalf the African culture and reject the imperialist presence in the African soil.

Throughout our analysis of the two novels, we have discovered that Ngugi and Kateb refine their cultures through the myths; the presence of orality shows the writers' interest in the preservation and continuation of their culture which constructs the basis of their identities. Being very rich and multifaceted, both novels are open to various interpretations and investigations. Many significant issues are discussed in the two works. It is noteworthy to mention also that the subject of myth is a universal issue because myths are present in every culture of the world and have a significant position and function like in the African culture. So, I invite other students to deal with the two prominent writers from different perspectives.

They share many affinities not only in the themes they confer but also their style of writing and techniques. For example the use of symbols in the two novels can be an interesting theme of investigation. Moreover, revolutionary ideas can also be a motivating subject.

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