

Argumentative essay on the river between and effects of colonialism on african SO...

[Government](#), [Colonialism](#)



The River Between is a book authored by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer highlighting the plight of Kenya and its citizens during the early white settlement era. The book shows how colonialists spelled radical changes for the two communities residing in opposing edges of a river. Colonialism pioneered a new understanding of the world for the Kenyan tribes. An example of one such tribe is the Kikuyu community, whose perception about the world changed with colonialism; the members of this community experienced new revelations about the world in which they lived. These communities had a choice to make; they were confronted with a choice to either accept the changes brought by the white men, or reject them and remain loyal to the purity of their tribes. One community embraced the ways taught by the white men and rejected the old while the other pursued the conservation of their tribe's independence; therefore, the river which once united these tribes, become the river which divided them. It, thus, is necessary to explore the effects of colonialism on African cultures and societies, as depicted in The River Between.

The fictional tale created by the author is based upon a real episode that happened during early colonialism. Female circumcision, according to the Kikuyu community, was a rite of passage that a woman was required to undergo before she was married. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's story revolves around an episode where one girl's family that had converted into Christianity, subjected her to circumcision (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1965, 25). Complications arose during the surgery, which caused her death; some people interpreted it as a sign of a new religion that upset the spirits while others viewed it as a call to abolish customs. The colonialists, especially Christian missionaries,

sought to ban this practice. Female circumcision, however, was a foundational rite of passage in the Kikuyu community; therefore, the missionaries' intentions spurred the contempt of the Kikuyu as they viewed the new religion as irreconcilable with theirs. This controversy resulted into a split between the Kikuyu tribalists and loyalists. This shows that colonialism affected the Kikuyu culture in a significant way.

The cultures of the Kenyan communities during colonization as depicted in this book include communal land ownership and a traditional system of governance. The community owns all land and the elders are responsible for settling people; they settle people in ridges. The community views Waiyaki, the novel's leading character, as the Messiah they have been awaiting (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1965, 12). This means that they look upon him for guidance and governance. Colonialism, however, altered these cultural beliefs as the white men attempted to acquire the people's land and introduce a new system of governance. The traditional African Societies viewed the new system of governance as exploitative and oppressive as opposed their own. The colonialists also introduced a new monetary system, in which people were required to pay taxes to the authorities. This elicited controversies because it contrasted with the cultural leadership practices where a council of elders governed the communities. The River Between, therefore, further shows the readers the extensive colonialism had on the traditional communities by revealing the controversies elicited by Whiteman's changes.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, in this publication, tells a tale concerning the use of traditional medicine. Muthoni, a character in this tale, receives traditional

medicine, which is ineffective. She is taken to the hospital and dies soon after touching a dead body. The traditionalists argued that her death was bound to occur when in reality it was caused by delays in getting her to the hospital. The colonialists introduced their own medication to the societies, in an attempt to eliminate traditional herbs and medicine that were in most a time ineffective. This became another source of a cultural clash as these loyalists strived to maintain their traditional practices. Ngugi's tale, therefore, shows the reader the effect the White men had on beliefs about traditional medicine as people started substituting traditional medicine with modern day medication.

The two communities living on different sides of a river in this novel believe in their leaders, medicine men, and women as opposed to forms of religion. The colonialists sought to change the beliefs as they introduced a new religion with strict doctrines and one that promoted the recognition of God as the Supreme Being. This left the people bewildered because they believed that Muthoni could heal if sacrifices were offered to the gods (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1965, 37). According to Christianity beliefs as introduced by the White men, a sacrifice to gods was a practice only done by heathens. The peak of culture clash protesting the changes brought by colonialists was when the Kikuyu community leaders formed a Kiama to fight for land and keep the tribe pure. A kiama refers to a group of individuals brought together by a purpose. These protests signify the extent to which colonialism affected religion and cultural practices in these communities.

The River Between integrates traditional beliefs of the communities that existed during the colonial era with colonialism practices. The author reveals

to the reader the effects of colonialism on the traditional African societies. The Christian missionaries, for example, sought to eliminate cultural practices such as female circumcision, which they viewed as barbaric. The White men introduced a new religion, medicine, economic, and governance systems among others. These systems contrasted with the traditionalists' practices and beliefs, and this resulted into disunity between the tribe loyalists and tribalists. Ngugi, through this story, highlights a dilemma caused by the collision of two tribes and the struggle to reunite them. This struggle is characterized by the introduction of new systems by colonialists and missionaries.

Bibliography

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1965. The river between. London: Heinemann.