

THE ENCROACHMENT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION/EDUCATION ON THE AFRICAN COMMUNAL LIFE STYLE AND ITS AFTER EFFECTS IN *THE BLACK HERMIT* BY JAMES NGUGI

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Abstract

This paper examines the Encroachment of Western Civilization/Education on the African Communal Life Style and its After Effect in “The Black Hermit” by James Ngugi. There has been a claim that Western Civilization/Education usually has negative effect on the African Communal System and life style. That is by way of living, thinking, reasoning or doing things generally. This work enables us to either agree or disagree with the claim. The theoretical frame work used in this work is based on Fairclough’s 1989 work on CDA. Findings reveal that Ngugi brings out the domination of Western culture on the African culture in his book, which forms the tragedy in the play. The after effects were pseudo- civilization; which is the false civilization that crept into the land, physical alienation and psychological/mental alienation. The book upheld the claim that Western civilization has effect on the African Communal life style as represented by a character in the play, which is the person of Remi. He ought to be a means of enhancing community development since he has acquired western Education but he became a recluse thereby depriving the people of some benefits.

Introduction

Western culture, sometimes equated with Western civilization, is a term used very broadly to refer to a heritage of social norms, beliefs systems, political systems, and specific artifacts and technologies that have some origin or association with Europe. Some of the characteristics of Western culture include democracy, rational thinking, individualism, Christianity, capitalism, modern technology, human rights, scientific thinking and so on. In earnest, Western civilization stands for a set of Western nations that took root in the 18th century which entails new periodization of history, language, medieval, modern which denotes the period of civilization when reason and science triumphed over scripture, tradition and custom. This civilization decries the fact that Africans have gods or culture or any significant past.

The 19th century constituted a turning point in the history of Africa. It heralded the introduction of Western Education and equally witnessed the end of slave trade, inauguration of legitimate commerce, the high tide of European imperial invasion, conquest and pacification. The concept of education in Nigeria was not a colonial invention. Prior to European colonization and subsequent introduction of Western Education, traditional Education system existed in Africa. The educational structure was fundamentally informal; the family kingship, village group and the larger community participated in the educational and socialization process. Hence, Abdou Moumouni affirmed that the educational process essentially was based on a “gradual and progressive achievement, in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child” (Moumouni 1968, 15). The medium of instruction was the native language or “mother tongue”. Instructions were delivered by way of songs, stories, legends and dances to stimulate children emotions and quicken their perception as they explore and conquer their natural environment. The African child was taught the various tribal laws and customs and made wide range of skills required for success in traditional society.

However, the advent of the European missionaries and the introduction of Western Education through the mission schools changed in many fundamental ways, the dynamics of African Education. Western Education soon took the center stage in Africa, debasing, challenging and supplanting the traditional, informal education along with its cultural foundations. One very good example is “*Thing Fall Apart*” by Chinua Achebe (1959) where things actually fell apart in Umuofia village and the centre could no longer hold anymore after the people (osu i.e outcast) assimilated the white man’s

ideas. They abandoned their customs and traditions, converted to Christianity and received Western Education.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo in his work “*Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*” (1981) noted the isolationist and alienating influences of colonial education in Africa, including contempt for their African names, language, environment, heritage of struggle, unity and mental abilities. Educated Africans not only became deluded hybrids alienated from their cultures and tradition, but individuals who longed for alien and “more civilized” cultures of the West. It was on this note that Walter Rodney argued that colonial education in Africa “was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment” (1972, 264).

In this study, Ngugi presents an African setting that was unadulterated until Western Civilization/Education encroaches and its detrimental effects.

Community and Individual Life

A community is the total organized social life of a locality. According to Rao Shankar, ‘The mark of a community is that one’s life may be wholly within it’ (2008, 172). That is, one can wholly live within a tribe or a city. The basic criterion of community then is that all of one’s social relationships may be found within it. Rao Shankar says, for an individual the community is “home of his home and flesh of his flesh” (2008, 172). Every individual is conscious of the fact that he has to play his role, his own function to be fulfilled in his community. He feels that he is dependent upon the community. This could be physical and psychological dependence. An individual is said to be physically dependent because many of his needs are satisfied within the community. He is psychologically dependent because it saves him from the fear of solitude and the boredom of isolation.

R.S. Lynd and H. M. Lynd in Rao Shankar, point out that we can find some common activities being performed by the people of a community despite infinite variations in detail. Some of these major activities are getting a living, making a home, training the young, engaging in religious practices, engaging in community activities, using the leisure in various forms of play, art and so on (2008, 173). These activities may go on changing in keeping with the changes that takes place in the material and non material culture of the community.

Benefits of Communal Life

1. It gives room for selflessness, self sacrifice, kindness, compassion, patience, perseverance, sublimity, benevolence towards each other and so on.
2. It gives room for the manifestation of talents and abilities.
3. It depends on some kind of communication among the members. Community life depends on language for communication. Language has made communication easier and it has contributed to its development.
4. It provides for cooperation of the members. The individual in cooperation with others can work in the more efficient manner in the social, economic cultural and other fields.
5. It provides the people the needed protection and security. There is strength in unity. The individual is better equipped to face dangers and overcome problem with the due assistance of the other members of the community than alone.

However, the communal life has its own conflicts and contradictions amongst the people. It is not always smooth and free from tensions and clashes. This could be due to the greediness, selfishness, unsocial and antisocial habits and tendencies of man: conflicts, clashes and tensions do take place. Nevertheless, they always have a way out of these conflicts. There is usually a system of control used in resolving issues that exist long ago and are passed on from generation to generation. However, this system may not be efficient but obeyed and respected by all and sundry.

Western Education/Culture

It is paramount we look at the definition of Westernization because it is a key factor in this work. M. N. Srinivas in Rao Shankar defined Westernization as “the changes that non-western country undergo as a result of prolonged contact with a western one” (2008, 314). It is used here to refer to the socio- cultural changes brought about as a result of contact with the western world. Srinivas in Rao Shankar, outlined some features of Westernization:

- Westernization implies certain value preferences.
- Westernization not only includes the introduction of new institutions (for example, news papers, electronics, Christian missionaries and so on) but also, fundamental changes in old institutions.
- The forms and pace of Westernization varied from region to region and from one section of population to another. For example one group of people became westernized in their dress, diet, manners, speech, sports and in the gadgets they used. While another absorbed Western science, knowledge and literature.
- Westernization pervades political and cultural fields. Westernization has given birth also to revivalism communalism, casteism, heightened linguistic consciousness, and regionalism. To make matters more bewildering, revivalist movements have used western type schools and colleges and books pamphlets and journals to propagate their ideas. (2008, 315).

Western Education/Civilization brings about a big change in the outlook of those educated. It usually has impact on the style of living of a people. Their manners, habits, choices and preferences changes. It brings about the adoption of Western style of dressing. It may also include learning to appreciate Western music and dancing

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Fairclough’s 1989 work on CDA. Fairclough provides a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of text and discourse in CDA:

- Description is the stage which is concerned with the formal properties of the text.
- Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction – with seeing the text as the product of a process of production-and as a resource in the process of interpretation...
- Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects (1989, 6).

Therefore Fairclough looks at a work in three main dimensions: description, Interpretation and explanation of a given text.

Fairclough’s analysis has gone beyond the “what” of text description towards the “how” and “why” of the text interpretation and explanation. There are certain underlying assumptions behind certain selections of discourse. These assumptions are never value-free and innocent; rather they are ideologically driven and motivated. By studying the forms of the language, we can discover the social processes and also the specific ideology embedded in them. This leads to the exploration of power relations that exist in the society or community. He believes in a “hidden agenda”, that behind every text there is a hidden agenda which motivates what is written and how it is written. Hidden agenda also affects the choice of words in every write up.

To drive what Fairclough was saying home, his approach was basically through *critical language study* or CLS for short. As stated by him:

Critical is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people such as the connections between language, power and ideology referred to above – CLS analyses social interactions in a way which focuses upon their linguistic elements, and which sets out to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system (1989, 5).

This approach will be used in analyzing reference sections from the book: ”The Black Hermit” by James Ngugi on the Encroachment of Western Civilization/Education on the African

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Communal Life Style and its After Effect. In doing this, the work will be broken down into subtitles which are Physical Alienation, Psychological/Mental alienation and Pseudo Civilization.

Physical Alienation

In this play, Ngugi concerns himself with an estranged relationship between an individual and his community. This he sees as alienation.

Alienation simply put, is a state in which a person sees himself as an alien. He has become estranged from the world around him. Erich Fromm says:

He doesn't experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts and consequences have become his masters when he obeys or whom he may even worship (1963, 120).

From agrees that alienation is a form of mental illness. The neurotic personality is an alienated personality in the sense that the person is a stranger to his own actions.

Alienation is the anchor upon which the play, "*The Black Hermit*", is built. Remi, the main character, is said to be physically alienated from his people. He is physically alienated because he hides himself deliberately from his people. Remi does not go home and does not participate in their traditions.

He has the misfortune of being the first in his tribe to get University Education. It is his tribe that reared him. In other words, he has acquired the knowledge of the Western man and as a result, he now sees his own tradition as primitive. His custom demands he marries his late brother's wife and since he cannot change this, he goes to the city. It therefore means that his initial exposure to modern life has given him the impetus to run away from his tribe: to abandon the custom. He says: "My tribe was, around me" (1968, 46). Thus, he sees his tribe as a problem.

Remi tells his friend Omangbe that he has a wound which he feels can never be healed. This wound he says is a woman and the only consolation to him is in alienation. He decides in his heart to remain a hermit forever. Remi says:

When I came to the city running away from the tribe, I never knew I would ever go back. I wanted to be a hermit forever... (1968, 48).

Remi's decision to be a hermit affects all the parties in the play. They all are alienated in one way or the other from Remi. But theirs is a painful one which they could have avoided if they had the power and will to do so.

Nyobi tells Thoni about the joy in scolding ones child. She sees no reason why Remi has been silent for many years. Remi is the only son she has presently after the death of her first son. This action of him isolating himself from her is as good as being dead. Nyobi says:

And now, Remi, the only man left in the house, went and died to us in the city. (1968, 7).

Thoni the wife is not left out in the business of alienation. She is even the worst sufferer. She does not understand why men do not rest in her hands. Fate seems to be playing on her. Death has taken her first husband and now Remi who should have comforted her, runs away. She says:

...Why do men not rest in my hands? Death took away my first husband. Now the next his brother, has left me... (1968, 4).

Thoni tells Nyobi that she cannot wait to see her husband come back to her, definitely, there will be changes. That joy she has lost will come back in full blast.

The tribe misses Remi who would have been a great help to the improvement of the community a great deal. This involves social and political commitments. One of the elder's speech portrays the state of isolation and the anxiety to see him. He says:

...We the ridge, the tribe, have waited. We fear (1968, 8).

The idea of physically alienating oneself painfully from his society is also portrayed by Armah in "*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". The teacher's choice of alienation is a painful one. He could also have avoided it if he could. He goes away from his loved ones and so, his inability to be with them makes him unhappy.

Psychological/Mental Alienation

In “*The Black Hermit*”, Remi is mentally alienated from his society. He is mentally alienated because he has abandoned his original communal ethics and he is now being controlled by Western individual philosophy. This implies that an individual may be found among people, but may not mentally belong to his physical environment because he rejects the values of the society. Even though he is physically present, he is mentally absent as in the case of Remi. He is mentally alienated from his people because he does not think like them anymore.

Remi goes to the city and he is swallowed up by the pleasures of the city. This changes his thinking. He now sees Thoni as another man’s wife. He does not see how he could reconcile himself to marry her. He says:

Can’t you see? I had already reconciled myself to the fact that she was my brother’s wife. And she was. How then could I take another man’s wife? I wanted a woman of my own... (1968, 34). Therefore, he sees his culture as primitive. Remi is passionately attached to the idea of Education. Westernization has really influenced him a great deal. Thus, he believes strongly in education. He says:

All my life I believe in the education of a nation (1968, 41).

He sees himself destined to play a very important role in the process of liberating his people. He sees the need for him to rise and go to his country to save them from traditions and bad customs and free them from tribal manacles. It is therefore not mistaken to say that the Educational process aims at alienating the African from his people. Ngugi clarifies this by pointing out that while Remi was in college, he hated many small political and social organizations.

When Remi goes home with a man from Njobe tribe, he tells the people that the man is their brother because he now sees himself different from his people. He blames the elders and the leaders for preaching tribalism thereby misleading members of the community. The elders leave in guilt and shame. They all feel disappointed because the contrary is what they were expecting. Remi says:

Go now dear elders. And remember what I told you. We must all turn to the soil. We must help ourselves; build more schools; turn our hearts and minds to create a nation, then will tribe and race disappear and man shall be free... (1968, 64).

Armah, in *Fragments* also portrays mental instability through the person of Baako. Baako, after undergoing emotional disturbances or mental instability, returns not to his home, but to Juana, his mistress. This he does because he can no longer reconcile the expectations of him with what is sane in his mind.

Pseudo-civilization

Pseudo-civilization is the false civilization that is brought into the tribe by Western education to the detriment of the African culture.

At Remi’s return, because of his newly acquired ideas, he forgets the loyalty that is accorded to ones mother. He accuses her of harping on his weakness and wanting him to marry a woman “whose love and loyalty will ever lie with those in the grave”. His rudeness is so glaring that the pastor has to come in. He says:

... don’t be hard on the woman. She has waited for you, bearing all the ills of the land. (1968,65).

Little did Remi know that he is being ironical because Thoni truly loves him. Omenge wonders why Thoni did not tell Remi about her love for him all these years. She forgets this can never be achieved because tradition demands the man should say such. This idea, however, emphasizes the falsity of this civilization. Remi’s realization of her love for him is late. Thoni could not bear the pain and she commits suicide. Remi could not regret but his actions. He says:

... I wish you had seen the letter earlier. But I never gave you a chance, Nor even tried to understand you. I came back to break Tribe and custom. Instead, I’ve broken you and me (1968, 76).

Nyobi could not bear the consequences of this false civilization. Thoni’s death pains her heart. She rescinds her regard for education; it is fruitless and brings nothing. Nyobi prefers herself that is uneducated to Remi. She says:

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Education and big learning has taught him nothing. I am an old woman, without learning or much wisdom. Yet, I know that what Remi has done is wrong. So unfeeling to her who has been true to him (1968, 73).

On a final note, it must be noted that education which ought to be a means of enhancing community development becomes in *The Black Hermit*, as demonstrated by the character of Remi, a means of deprivation. He becomes a recluse in the city thereby depriving the people of some benefits. Also, the tragedy of Thoni, which is also a tragedy to the entire community, demonstrates that education (Westernization) is a means to an end.

Conclusion

The title of the book "*The Black Hermit*" is symbolic. It is used to describe those Africans who abandon their own culture for Western values. This symbolism is used to describe Remi the major character in the play He represent those Africans that abandon their culture after westernization. Ngugi is able to bring out the consequences of western civilization which is pseudo-civilization and alienation (both physical and psychological). He tries to project his message that the feelings of disillusionment and disappointment which subsequently lead to alienation on the part of the individual is caused by the fact that Africans have abandoned their communal ethics and are now being counseled by western individualistic philosophy. He rejects the individual's idea of going into alienation because he sees the individual predicament worsened by trying to alienate himself. Thus, if Africa is to be rescued from alienation, foreign domination and civilization, then there is urgent need for Africans to retain their authentic African traditional values.

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