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Neocolonialism: Exploitation of masses and women's revolt in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*

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Abstract

All the exploitative and oppressive ideologies and strategies originated in Europe including United States are experimented on the societies dwelling in the geographical area of Africa and Asia. The insatiable hunger of accumulation of wealth of Europe gave rise to industrial revolution. With it took birth the need of exploration of new geographical areas consequently giving birth to Imperialism and Colonialism. After centuries of bloodshed and mass destruction of the colonized people with their life taking efforts, they gained freedom. But the diabolic mind set of Europeans still hungry to continue to suck the blood of the masses through multinational corporations and the agents they have planted. This ideology Kwame Nkrumah calls as Neocolonialism. Ngugi in his novel *Devil on the Cross* explores the lived experiences of the masses particularly of women under the impact of Neocolonialism. He shows that it can be encountered by the modern educated youths. He wants women to take modern education, equip themselves with physical fitness for self-protection and at times should be able to remove the European agents with gun.

Keywords: Oppressive ideologies, industrial revolution, imperialism, colonialism, colonized people, multinational corporations, neocolonialism etc.

Introduction

The whole world recognizes the fact that the European Imperialism has left permanent impression on the life of colonized peoples. Freedom for them has been proved to be an illusion. In the present age the United States has continued the economic exploitation of once colonized countries. The objective of the research paper is to find out the neocolonialism as continuation of colonialism and imperialism and its exploitative inherent ideology. The reaction of natives and how Ngugi, the novelist pins hope on modern and well educated women's revolt against it to bring change in social order is also the central concern of this research paper.

Research Problem

Neocolonialism as strategy developed by the European including United States to exploit the once colonized countries economically and culturally through multinational business corporations and women are the worst sufferers of the impact of Neocolonialism.

Hypothesis

The well educated new generation particularly women can bring change by revolting against neocolonialism and removing the natives turned agents of imperialist countries.

Review of Literature

The term *Neocolonialism* has been coined by Francis Kwame Nkrumah, the Ghanaian politician, political theorist, and revolutionary. "He was the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, having led the Gold Coast to independence from Britain in 1957". (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwame_Nkrumah) For the first time the term Neocolonialism, coined by Kwame Nkrumah appeared in the preamble of Charter of African Unity in 1963. It reads as follows: "DETERMINED to safeguard and consolidate the hard-won independence as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our States, and to fight again neo-colonialism.

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(<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20479/volume-479-I-6947-English.pdf>, emphasis added)

Secondly, in his revolutionary book *NEO-COLONIALISM, The Last Stage of Imperialism* published in 1963, Kwame Nkrumah in the very first paragraph of *Introduction* of the book explains the continuation of colonialism in the form of colonialism as:

“THE neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps it’s most dangerous stage. In the past it was possible to convert a country upon which a neo-colonial regime had been imposed - Egypt in the nineteenth century is an example - into a colonial territory. Today this process is no longer feasible.

Old-fashioned colonialism is by no means entirely abolished. It still constitutes an African problem, but it is everywhere on the retreat. Once a territory has become nominally independent it is no longer possible, as it was in the last century, to reverse the process. Existing colonies may linger on, but no new colonies will be created. In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism” (https://www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/books/Economics/Neo-Colonialism_KwameNkrumah.pdf)

The study of the literature originated from once colonial countries centres around the critical study of the ideology hidden in the isms viz. Imperialism, Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism and Postcolonialism. Many times the demarcation between these terms is ignored but it is crucially important to understand interlink and demarcation to analyse the political and social upheavals in these countries today. In the book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (2004) by Ashcroft Bill *et al.* we are informed as, “In the most general sense imperialism refers to the formation of an empire, and, as such, has been an aspect of all periods of history in which one nation has extended its domination over one or several neighbouring nations.” (p. 122) However the concept has gone through mutations and around 1880, imperialism emerged as “a conscious and openly advocated policy of acquiring colonies for economic, strategic and political advantage.” (ibid)

Ania Loomba in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* brings into discussion the description of the term colonialism provided by Oxford English Dictionary and goes on to discuss the limitations of the description and comes to conclusion initially as she states, “So colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods.” (p. 8) Further bringing capitalism and industry in focus, she says, “The essential point is that although European colonialisms involved a variety of techniques and patterns of domination, penetrating deep into some societies and involving a comparatively superficial contact with others, all of them produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry.” (ibid p. 11-12)

John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2011) differentiates between the hyphenated term post-colonial which denotes “a particular historical period or epoch,” whereas postcolonial, the term without hyphen as John McLeod points out, refers to “desperate forms of representations, reading practices and values”. (p. 5)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o: The Making of a Rebel (1990) by Carol Sicherman, is a source book in Kenyan Literature and Resistance. It gives detailed information about Ngugi’s biography, colonial history of Kenya, resistance movements

rose up in Kenya, detention of Ngugi. The book prepares required background for a foreign reader and researcher to understand Kenyan literature in general and Ngugi wa Thiong'o as a Kenyan writer in particular.

Discussion

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of Africa's most prolific intellectual activists. A versatile novelist, playwright, essayist, journalist, film maker and academic, Ngugi has inspired an entire generation of postcolonial writers and scholars by his commitment to the process of decolonization. He has persistently reinterpreted Kenyan national history through his writings. He has penned seven novels till date viz. *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Devil on the Cross* (1982), *Matigari* (1986) and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). Ngugi's books have been translated into more than thirty languages.

The novel *Devil on the Cross* was written in Gikuyu language, Ngugi's mother tongue. Later on it has been translated into English. The novel is written in the form of a detective story. Ngugi has experimented with the form of an oral narrative popular among his people. The story is narrated by a Giccandi player. The principle character in this novel is a female- Jacinta Wariinga and the male characters have been assigned minor roles.

The Giccandi player narrates the story of the novel. The novel opens with the exploitation of women by the new elites brought to power by independence and often educated and trained by the colonialist powers. Jacinta Wariinga - the heroine of the novel- has lost her job, because she refused to submit to the advances of the Boss Kihara. The author states in most forthright manner, seems to be the fact of most urban Kenyan women:

"She enters another office. She finds there another Mr. Boss. The smiles are the same, the questions are the same, the rendezvous is the same - and the target is still Kareendi's thighs. The modern Love Bar and Lodgings has become the main employment bureau for girls and women's thighs are the table on which contracts are signed." (DC: 19)

She has no other way but to return to her native. On the road she felt dizzy but a young man named Gatuiria saved her from falling on the ground. She, under the assumed name Kareendi, told him her whole life story. The young man, before leaving, gives her an invitation card, saying

"If you would like to know more about The conditions that breed modern Kareendis and Waigokos, go to the feast advertised on the card.

When you get to Ilmorog The Devils feast!
Come and see for your self- A Devil-sponsored competition

To choose seven experts in Theft Robbery Plenty of prizes! Try your luck.

Competition to choose Seven Cleverest Thieves and Robbers in Ilmorog

Prizes Galore!

Hell's Angels Band in Attendance!

Signed: Satan The King of Hell

c/o Thieves' and Robbers' Den Ilmorog Golden Heights". (DC: 28)

She reaches Ilmorog with four others - one woman three men. The devils feast was a competition among Kenyan

thieves and robbers to elect the greatest them all. The competition was held in a cave near Ilmorog. Wariinga, Mwaura and other three have come to witness it. Each participant had to mount the platform to tell "how he first came to steal and rob, dwell on the technique to perfect our skills in theft and robbery and finally to show us how we can develop the partnership between us and foreigners so that we can hasten our ascent into the heaven of foreign commodities and other delights." (DC: 87) Participants after participants regale the audience with details of his affluence—number of houses, cars, wives and mistresses and then about his expertise at theft and robbery and finally his suggestions about some extraordinary way of robbing people. But before the local participants narrate their tales of exploitation, the leader of fraternal delegates from IOTR - International Organization of Theft & Robbery is invited to address the audience, who gives them the following advice:

"I think there is no one who does not know that theft and robbery are the cornerstones of America and Western Civilization. Money is the heart that beats to keep the Western world on the move. If you people want to build a great civilization like ours, then kneel down before the god of money. Ignore the beautiful faces of your children, of your parents, of your brothers and sisters. Look only on the splendid face of money and you will never, never go wrong. It's far better to drink the blood of your people and to eat their flesh than to retreat their step." (DC: 89)

The participants gave several suggestions to intensify robbery, such as: bottling air and selling it to masses for breathing, while another suggests the building and marketing of folding nests for the poor to lay their heads into at night. Obviously Ngugi's satire is as incisive as that of Swift. The feast, however, is disrupted midway with Wangari arriving there with Police who refuse to arrest the competitors but arrest Wangari instead for levelling false accusations against respectable businessmen. In the meantime, Wariinga and Gaturia have come closer to one another after each has narrated his/her story to the other. Gaturia tells Wariinga that, "My father is a business tycoon. He owns several shops in Nakuru and lots of farms in the Rift Valley and countless other businesses to do with import and export...I am his only son." (DC: 133)

It is now Wariinga's turn to tell him about her life. "Jacinta Wariinga was born at Kaamburu, Githuguri Kia Wariera in 1953. In those days Kenya was ruled by British imperialists under much oppressed laws. In 1954, Wariinga's father was arrested and detained at Manyani. A year later, her mother was also arrested and detained at Langata and Kamiti prison." (DC: 138) She was a very bright student. Her ambition was to study Electrical, Mechanical or Civil Engineering. It was her aunt's husband who caused Wariinga "to stray from the path of trodden by peasants into the path of the petty bourgeois, the clan of tie wearers". (DC: 142) He introduced her to a rich old man from Ngorika who pursued her relentlessly, giving her pocket money, and other gifts. Soon she neglected her study and started going out with him. He taught her to play the hunter and the hunted. Soon she had got pregnant from him but he denied and dumped her. After many aborted attempts to commit suicide including, throwing herself into a pool and before a running train, she gave birth to a daughter. Leaving her with her parents, Wariinga had picked up threads of her life by coming to Nairobi where she had recently been fired from her job for refusing Boss Kihhara's sexual propositions.

After two years, Wariinga became an automobile engineer and she now lives in Nairobi in a single room. Brimming with self-confidence she is a different Wariinga. Through her Ngugi is envisioning a new Kenyan woman who is a foil to the stereotyped women whose only job was "to cook, to make beds and to spread their legs in the market of love." (DC 218) She also trained herself in the martial arts like judo and karate. Gaturia and Wariinga decided to get married. But Wariinga got shocked to discover that the rich old man who had destroyed her youth and shattered her dreams was no one but Gaturia's father and her daughter Wambui's father. The old man requested her to leave his son alone:

"My home will fall apart. My property would be left without a manager. My life would break into seven pieces. Jacinta, save me!. I would like you to leave Gaturia. Be mine. Remember you once belonged to me. I believe I am the man who changed you from a girl to a woman. And you are the mother of my child, although I have never set my eyes on it." (DC: 251)

Wariinga refuses to become his flower, his little fruit, his little orange to sweeten his old age. She takes out the gun from her purse, the one which Gaturia had given her two years ago to keep safe with her, and shoots him dead.

Conclusion

Through the novel, *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi exposed the concept of *Neocolonialism* as strategy developed by the European including United States to exploit the once colonized countries economically and culturally through multinational business corporations. In this oppressive strategy women are the worst sufferers. He also exposes that certain selfish natives joined hands with the Europeans as agents. Ngugi has shown that women have to change their predicament with modern education and physical fitness for self-protection.

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