NEW FACE OF AFRICA IN THE GLOBALIZATION AGE, ITS ABSURDIST CONSEQUENCES IN BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT* AND RUSHDIE'S *THE SATANIC VERSES*

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Abstract

The world is changing fast. As modern science and technology have turned the world into a global village, Africa is under a serious challenge over exploitation and slavery from the civilized nations. There is the danger of the continent's loosing its bearing as the more civilized nations keep changing ideas constantly at the detriment of the black man. Not long ago, African institutions witnessed the phasing out of typewriters and the introduction of computer machines and accessories into their academic and government institutions and establishments. These events which took place in the middle of the first tens of the years of 2000 millennium alongside other earlier problems of post colonialism looked very good and promising to Africans, but ironically today, typists, messengers and other low carder of civil servants have been phased out with the arrival of the computer. Unemployment is on the increase, economic recession is facing the black world, to the level that suicide cases are becoming the order of the day. Where are those things for which Africa was known? So to speak, where are the African values? Where are the African intellectuals, seers, prophets and priests? This paper is of the view that the effect of globalization on Africa is to say the least absurd and need more serious reappraisal.

Keywords: Africa, Globalization, Beckett, Rushdie, Satanic Verses.

Introduction

Recent global developments reveal that Africa has always been at the receiving end as well as also sometimes suffering from the hands of the international expatriates, especially marketers, religious leaders and politicians. As a developing continent, Africa lacks both the major scientific and technological competence to compare with the world especially the more developed nations. African nations are still largely very far from the age of space travel, internet uses, and satellite launching, computer designs, geo-information, manufacture of aircrafts and electronic devices like the mobile telephones, mobile/wireless computers, cable networks, airplanes and other scientific devices. The humanities, as a discipline of knowledge, therefore seems to be the only most competent ground to air the black man's views over the modern world and its phases of development.

The framework of this paper is seen from a perspective of how those under the arts and humanities see the contemporary happenings or developments in the world socio-political scene. This perspective could extend to literature, religion, philosophy, history, language, theatre, music, sociology, anthropology, politics, mass media, architecture, sciences, etc.

Millennium is approached from its context of one thousand years (per millennium). Much as it is too early in history to appraise the third millennium, a lot of things have developed in the world socio-political scene that there is a serious need to examine these issues. The premise on which this paper is articulated is that the internet, with its other machineries, like the mobile telephones, computers, television and radio, have seriously contributed to fast spread of ideas in literature. Absurdist literature has developed and taken much root in literary studies due to these scientific and technological interferences.

Colonialism as Pseudo-Globalization

To an average African, the word internet means international communities or a machine that can transmit messages from place to place. This idea is true, but very fragmentary. Looking back at history, one quickly recalls that the primary concern of man in farming and trading was for economic reasons. No matter how this was coated by the western missionaries who were very instrumental to colonizing Africa, the primary aim of colonialism was for religious, political and economic exploitation. The Renaissance period in English literature was replete with the story of industrialization. This created a state of political and religious interests resulting to export and trade and Africa served as a dumping ground for the industrialized nations, especially England and France, during the colonial period.

The eventual contact of Africa with Europe was not an encouraging development as Christianity made Africans to believe. The long term effects of colonialism and pseudo-globalization was the etiolating of and asphyxiation of African Traditional Religion, social institutions, moral values, philosophies, as well as the obliteration of African literature. Africa was Europeanized not by any act of persuasion, but by force and compulsion. David Diop calls this "extorted kisses" in his poem "The vultures" (See Nwoga: 110), while Gabriel Okara summarized this act as "a phrase at a dagger point "in his poem "Piano and Drums". (See Nwoga: 37).

It is obvious that the restlessness of the white man and his ever increasing quest to discover the unknown and the impossible motivated the rise of explorations, battles and conquests of the developing countries. The mission of the white man was not only in the scientific and technological discoveries,

but in economic, religious and political conquests and exploitations. These largely could be referred to as the pseudo-globalization phase of the world history.

The Internet and Globalization

The discovery of internet in the 1970s has seriously revolutionized the medium of communication in the history of man. With this new discovery, the world was turned into a "global village". It is this discovery that eventually developed into the concept of globalization.

Contrary to the notion of the internet expressed earlier, Mbanefo-Ogene defined internet as

> a computer-base global information system, which is composed of many interconnected computer net-works. Each network mean-while links tens, hundreds, or even thousands of computers enabling them to share information with one another and to share computational resources such as powerful super computers and database of information. (1)

Looking at the definition above, the operations of the internet is still a puzzle and an enigma to an average black man. One still finds it difficult to understand where, how and who develops the database or powerful super computer for the internet uses. Do the blacks have equal opportunity like their white counterparts to store data and other information on the internet? The net-working of the internet is equally an enigma, just as the combustible engine is to the black man.

With the inception of the internet and its application in the world socio-political system, people all over the world started finding it easy to communicate with one another effectively at cheaper rate. All that one needed to communicate to others was just an access. These accesses were provided through the uses of electronic mail (e-mail); text messages, website, satellite news and cable networks, as in CNN. Marketing and commerce changed from the traditional *trade by barter* to *face to face buying and selling*, and now to the contemporary style of E-commerce which include E-banking, E-marketing and other related matters. The computers, television and GSM (mobile phones) provided the working engines or media through which transactions take place.

At the stage the world is at present, books, machines, artworks and other industrial products are no longer needed to be displayed in a given market stand. One can be inside an air conditioned room in Awka and purchase

books in the internet market, while controlling many other businesses worth billions of naira at both local and international markets. Outside those books whose covers are advertised on the internet websites, others can be purchased through payment and subscription for the soft copies. The world is indeed quite globalized.

The question is if the black man has equal access to the internet advertisement and sell of his goods and products through this new wonderful discovery of the twenty-first century. The truth is that most blacks are seriously marginalized and handicapped in the aspect of the internet uses and are therefore facing further problems and challenges like poverty, slavery and annihilation occasioned by this new world order.

Globalization of Absurdism

African philosophers, artists, intellectuals and thinkers have largely upheld the notion that part of the black man's woes is the calculated attempt of the European nations to shift those aspects of knowledge that will be of disadvantages and sometimes harmful to their future generations to the developing countries of Africa and Asia, while their more cherished ideas and discoveries are hoarded or preserved exclusively to the knowledge of their children and citizens only. This idea may not be far from the truth. Looking back at the colonial period, many white aristocrats were kind enough to sponsor many youths on evangelical missions to Africa. European sailors and missionaries were able to establish schools with the primary aim of teaching morals of European and Arabic religions to Africa, while their real sciences were jealously guarded and preserved back home. As the children of these whites were growing fast in researches and advancements of already discovered and established scientific and technological wisdom, Africans were busy quarreling and fighting against different interest groups, destroying their religions and culture and lamenting over their woes of ever being born blacks. Unlike the Miltonic Satan who preferred to "reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven" (38), the African elites chose to travel to America, Britain, France, etc. and wash plates, corpses, sweep the streets of Europe, die as slaves and be buried there.

The African sense of value was seriously battered and eroded by the new scientific discovery, the internet, satellite and other agents of globalization. The new world networking has equally exposed Africans to different western philosophies, including the philosophy of absurdism. This philosophy has extended to arts and literary arts in particular. It can be said to be one of the instrumentality which the whites were trying to use in obliterating the African nation and other developing continents of Asia.

Absurdism and Literature

The term absurdism started as a philosophical speculation, which sees the human efforts in creating meaning out of the universe as futile, so absurd, since such meanings did not exist, especially with regards to the individual. To the absurdist, a clash exists between the human search for meaning and his inability to find any such meaning. Expounding on this, the Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia states that "absurd" does not mean "logically impossible," but rather humanly impossible."

A symbiotic relationship exists between absurdism and existentialism. This relationship is further extended to nihilism. Soren Kierkegard, a 19th Century Danish philosopher is claimed to be the originator of this philosophy. Kierkegard developed the existential philosophy to address the problem faced by men with the Absurd. French Algerian philosopher, Albert Camus championed the European existentialist movement when he rejected some philosophical basis of absurdism and published his text *The Myth of Sisyphus.* The consequences of Second World War so much influenced the sociological milieu that encouraged absurdist views and also gave way to their popular development. The Second World War which took place between September 1939 and August 1945, devastated a lot of things, including human lives and property, so much so that many modern and post modern writers started adhering to the use of philosophy of absurdism to discourage further wars and also asking questions of what man is doing here on earth, whether God really exists, who is God?, why should God make man to die? Etc.

In literature, absurdism is seen as a condition of existence in which man observes himself in a universe, which paradoxically is both his home and also his exile. The theatre of the "absurd" developed out of the philosophical movement of existentialism. This movement came into existence from the thinking of a French writer, Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre based his argument on the premises that God does not exist, so man is a free moral agent (without any restraint). For him also, there is no meaning in the universe.

Samuel Beckett, (1906-1989) an Irish born novelist - dramatist was equally influenced by the works of French philosopher Rene Descartes. Beckett's works attacked systems of communication, including language itself.

Effects of Globalization on Absurdism and Literature

Globalization has many aspects which make different impacts on human beings all over the world in various ways. These include philosophical, technical, industrial, financial, linguistic and literary, cum religions dimensions.

As there is the growth of cross-cultural contacts in the modern globalization age, there is an increase in the growth of consciousness in other cultural identities and activities. This leads to cultural diffusion and devolution, and has adversely affected weaker cultures where losses occur in religion, literature and language uses. The Wikipedia states that "the internet breaks down cultural boundaries across the world by enabling easy, near-instantaneous communication between people anywhere in a variety of digital forms and media." (web)

Beckett's study of the works of Descartes affected his outlook to life. His literary works are devoid of traditional plot and recognizable characters, and equally attacked systems of communication, including language itself. Instead of representing the observable surface of life, Beckett seemed determined to demonstrate its inconsistencies and absurdities. Consequently, some early critics saw Beckett's works as part of "literature of the Absurd", a representation of life's irrationality. Like the other Absurdist writer, Beckett reacted against traditional Western theatrical conventions, rejecting assumptions about logic, characterization, language and plot. This style of writing goes on to support the post modern writers' style of writing. In the words of Klages, "the motto for post modern politics might well be "think globally, act locally… and don't worry about any grand scheme or master plan." (Amazon.com).

Waiting for godot which was first published in 1956 clearly depicts Beckett's commitment to the course of Absurdism. The title of the book was remarkably printed in small letters. With its two acts, the book started in page 9 with two tramps: Estragon and Vladimir sitting on a low mound, and playing endless and aimless games. This they do to pass the time, while waiting for a saviour (Godot) who never comes. A big philosophical puzzle was given by Estragon at the first line of the play: "Nothing to be done." (Beckett: 9). These two tramps spent the time near a tree on an isolated country road waiting for a person with the name, Godot. A hopeless situation confronted these men as they have lost all sense of bearing and engagement and engaged in making unnecessary noises and behavioural activities to show that they are, at least, still in existence.

The situation of things changed when Pozzo and Lucky appeared on the stage at page 21 of *Waiting for Godot*. Pozzo did not accept that he is Godot; neither did Estragon accept knowing Godot. Pozzo was the outspoken of the duo, while Lucky serves as a beast of burden. Lucky is used in this play to

represent the archetype of Africans as beasts, bearing the burdens of the world. The following dialogues are necessary to understand this:

Estragon: Why doesn't he put down his bags?

Vladimir: Rubbish!

Pozzo: Are you sure?

Vladimir: Damn it. Haven't you already told us!

Estragon: Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!

Vladimir: (to Pozzo). Tell him to think.

Pozzo: Give him his hat.

Vladimir: His hat?

Pozzo: He can't think without his hat.

Vladimir: (to Estragon). Give him his hat.

Estragon: Me! After what he did to me! Never!

Vladimir: I'll give it to him.

He does not move. (41)

In fact, Lucky does not talk, except when Pozzo tells him to talk. He only says what he was taught to say. This reminds us of the Prospero Africa, or the case of Robinson Crusoe, where Crusoe saw himself as the first Adam. Being trapped in a "primitive" continent of Africa, Crusoe had to conquer, subdue and civilized the whole environment. *Waiting for Godot* continued this attitude of Europeans and their views that Africa is their beast of burden and dumping ground.

In Act 11 of *Waiting for Godot*, the reader is informed that the play continues the next day, same time, and same place. The tree that Vladimir and Estragon stand nearby to has four or five leaves. Vladimir who moves feverishly about the stage, halts before the tree and gazes into distance … All these actions are to keep the time and play going, according to the tradition of absurdism. Kenner states that, "the scanty tale of objects that concern the bums in *Waiting for Godot* contains no items owning a past, a future, or a duration with which our vital sentiments may feel empathy." (151).

The actions in *Waiting for Godot* are clear manifestations of the metaphysical anguish common to the absurd characters. For M. H. Abrams, the idea of

absurdism is to view each man as an isolated being who is cast into an alien universe … and to represent man's life as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end, as an existence, which is both anguished and absurd.

The state of uncertainty about the existence of God manifests in the characters of the play *Waiting for Godot.* This state of uncertainty of God is closely related to what the postmodernist writers refer to as the deconstruction of grand narratives.

Salmon Rushdie used this method of deconstruction of "Grand Narratives", in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. The rise of religious fundamentalism as a form of resistance to the questioning of the "grand narratives" of religious truth came into limelight because of the new awareness created by globalization from the concept of post modernism. Rushdie's novel was banned in the Middle East due to the book's deconstruction of grand narratives.

Rushdie's Challenge of the "Grand Narrative" of the Muslim Religion

Salmon Rushdie was born in 1947, a British novelist of Indian descent. His fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988) combined fantasy, philosophical ruminations, and comic aspects and was well received in the United Kingdom. The book however aroused the anger of many Muslims who considered the contents as an attack on Qur'an (Koran), Muhammad, and the Islamic faith. With its five hundred and six pages, the book is best placed under the category of novel genre known as *magic realism*.

The novel made use of current affairs and personalities in history, especially that depending on the life of the founder of Muslim religion, Muhammad, to create the characters and themes in the book. The novel stipulates that Muhammad (who founded the Muslim religion) got "tricked into revealing these verses as part of the Qur'an by Satan and he later retracted them, saying the angel Jibreel had told him to do so" (Wikipedia). The title of the book represents the signified issue known as the Satanic Verses and these verses give room for prayers of intercession to be made to three pagan goddesses: Allat, al-Uzza, and Manat. Each of these three goddesses had a shrine in separate places close to Muhammad's birth place and starting point of his mission in Mecca, Arabia. Rushdie depended on the historical accounts of al-Waqidi and al-Tabari about the life of Muhammad to write his novel, *The Satanic Verses*.

Though the book reached the final stage of the Broker price award in 1988, the Muslims generally rejected the book and held its contents as blasphemous. The general controversy surrounding the book led to its being banned in the

United Kingdom. Pakistan, South Africa, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia also later banned the work. In 1989, Iran's religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (edict) declaring that Rushdie be put to death. Rushdie however went into exile and the novel became more popular, as it represented the European interest.

Conclusion

Culture is the sum total of how people live their lives or do their things**.** ***Wilkipedia, the free encyclopedia*** defines culture as "patterns of human activity and the symbols that give these activities significance." Culture embraces the idea of what people eat, how they dress, what beliefs they hold, and what activities they practice.

Globalization has linked many cultures that were originally different together and changed their former contents. It is quite obvious that when a culture receives outside influences, it ignores some of the influences and adopts others, and then almost immediately starts to transform them. At first, globalization was seen as process of homogenization. It is not surprising that the developing nations soon started realizing that the global domination of American culture adversely affected the local and indigenous cultures. This led to the uprising of movements protesting against globalization, although with little or no success.

The attempts to obliterate both Christian and Muslim religions, through the use of deconstruction of grand narratives, against religious fundamentalism are good examples of the adverse effects of globalization. Absurdism was globalized as post modern means of deconstruction of grand narratives in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Rushdie's *The satanic Verses.* The extents to which successes have been achieved in these contexts are yet to be proven.

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