AN ARTICULATION OF CULTURAL DISHARMONY IN OKARA'S "PIANO AND DRUMS", AWOONOR'S "THE ANVIL AND THE HAMMER" AND DIOP'S "VANITY"

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes an attempt to expose the cultural confrontations of traditional and western culture in the African soil and how the three writers Gabriel Okara, Kofi N. Awoonor and Birago Diop differ in their attitudes towards the preservation of their indigenous culture. Having been born in various places in Africa, their love towards their native culture is identical despite their differences in attitude. In this effort, the paper also pays special attention to the intrusion of the western culture in Africa and its negative impact on the African natives with reference to Okara's "Piano and Drums", Awoonor's "The Anvil and the Hammer" and Diop's "Vanity."

KEYWORDS: African Culture, Western Culture, Differences, Dilemma & Tradition

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INTRODUCTION

Differences in cultural values create havoc in people who try to assimilate the western culture with traditional culture. Forgetting one's indigenous culture and adopting an alien culture is an uneasy experience for anyone throughout life. It produces mental trauma in them explicitly. The Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara, the Ghanaian poet Kofi N. Awoonor and the Senegalese poet Birago Diop express the same experience of having been caught between their traditional culture and western culture through their poems "Piano and Drums", "The Anvil and the Hammer" and "Vanity" respectively.

CULTURAL INCONGRUITY IN OKARA'S "PIANO AND DRUMS"

Okara, born in Nigeria, elicits his chaos through various symbols in his poem "Piano and Drums." In the title, the word 'Piano' symbolizes western culture whereas 'Drums' characterizes traditional African culture. He employs two different musical instruments to depict the differences in the two cultures. In the first stanza, while he speaks about the indigenous culture, his influence on the western culture is overtly expressed through the word 'telegraphing'. The first two stanzas that describe his traditional culture contain uncivilized and rough phrases such as 'raw/ like bleeding flesh', 'panther ready to pounce/ the leopard' and 'the hunters crouch with spears poised'. He has been one with nature in his indigenous culture. It lauds its own values and makes its people inherit them since their birth as a suckling in their mothers' laps. In the second stanza, he utters that he walks through the rugged path of traditional culture with no intention of bringing innovation in it. It discloses the truth that traditional culture is rich in itself, despite its rugged facade and its rhythm is 'urgent' and 'raw'. The plural word 'Drums'

which stands for traditional culture exposes people's unity and their custom of living in groups for one another. The scene of a panther pouncing on a leopard and the hunters crouching with spears expresses their valor of confronting gruesome realities.

In the third stanza, Okara describes the western culture through the imagery 'piano'. 'Piano', the singular noun depicts loneliness of people who are tagged with western culture. He further adds that it is wailing alone and speaking of complex ways and unknown, distant lands. It accentuates that no one can cling on to western culture as it is transient and bizarre. It lures them with novelties unlike the traditional culture. If anyone makes an effort to imbibe it, he/she will get lost in 'the labyrinth of its complexities' or will stop in the middle of a 'daggerpoint'. In the last stanza, he lets out that he is caught between African and western cultures and is unable to assimilate himself into any of the two cultures. He firmly believes that there is much to relish in the traditional culture. Yet he has been coaxed by remote lands and 'new horizons.' It is conspicuous in the last stanza that he can neither assimilate himself into the African world nor into the western world.

CULTURAL INCOMPATIBILITY IN "THE ANVIL AND THE HAMMER"

Awoonor, in "The Anvil and the Hammer" expresses that fusion of the indigenous culture and the western culture is inevitable. The words 'anvil' and 'hammer' indicates the African culture and the western culture respectively. The first line of his poem overtly states that he has been caught between the native culture and the western culture. The integration of both cultures provides him a novel life transforming his pains into joy. Though he desires to imbibe the western culture, he is trapped by his African culture. Through the use of the word 'trapping of the past', it is understood that he has lost his interest in it and has started admiring the new one. The native culture is described as 'tender' and 'tenuous' because it has failed to embed its African root on its own soil because of the western influence. He is woven with the fiber of his indigenous culture to adhere to it. He is also washed in the blood of his native culture in the 'fetish hut.' However, being enticed by the emergence of the new culture in his land, he sides with it as well. Hence, he is not only washed in the blood of the African culture, but also is embellished with the 'flimsy glories' of the western culture. He makes a departure from his dialect in eternal search of the new charismatic dialect of the western world.

In the second stanza, Awoonor expresses his wish to his ancestors to seem their indigenous culture 'under our new garment' of the western culture. Though he is unable to give up his own culture, he is still captivated by the western ways of life. He admits that it is impossible to ignore the influence of the western culture in the African land. As they are greatly influenced by the foreign culture, they wash themselves in the vortex of the rivers' estuary called western culture. The poet's portrayal of washing oneself in the African culture in the first stanza and in the western culture in the second stanza signifies the importance of both the cultures – the native culture that they can be proud of and the western culture that has brought personal and societal development through education, religion, and trade. Hearing the 'songs and rumors' of the western world conspicuously expresses that they just hear and not listen to them and so they do not adopt the foreign cultural values wholly. It also clarifies that they have not completely ignored their native culture and embraced the new one. But they use only 'snatches' from the western values to make themselves 'new flags and anthems.' That is, they wish to undergo a new transformation that can enrich their cultural values. They merge both the cultures in order to build a new African nation with abundant changes in it. When they witness personal, social and cultural growth in their country, they can lift the banner of the land proudly. Also, they can take pleasure in the fruit of development in the 'splash and moan' of the sea. Although the process endures pain and anguish, the poet hopes that the hammer and the anvil will shape the nation perfectly to transform it into a utopian land.

CULTURAL INCONSISTENCY IN DIOP'S "VANITY"

Birago Diop, the Senegalese poet articulates his agony about the over dependence of native people on the western culture in the poem "Vanity." Even though the poem is titled "Vanity", it actually represents a loss of vanity. Throughout the poem, he conveys his anguish and anger on his native people for being gullible to westerners. The natives and their culture are looked down upon by the westerners that there is no one to hear their voices 'without laughter.' The poet, even goes to the extent of calling his natives as 'beggars' that they complain about sad voices. With the advent of an alien culture in their soil, the natives have become beggars. Their rough cry is unheard and unwatched by anyone for their culture is unrecognized in the world because of the dominant western culture. He uses a variety of words like 'tell gently', 'cry roughly' and 'clamoring' in an attempt to emphasize how much the natives have been undergoing sufferings as voiceless people and their cultural values are totally devastated because of the intrusion of the western culture.

In the third stanza, Diop admonishes the westerners saying that their 'pitiful anger' on the westerner people grows like a tumor in their deep throats. He stresses that if the western culture tries to eradicate their indigenous culture, the natives will vent up their anger on them. Their indigenous culture is in decline because the subsequent generation ignored their forefathers' premonition of the demolition of their culture. They were deaf to their warnings and requests. Their cries exist everywhere in the soil. Yet, they are blind, deaf and unworthy sons to their forefathers leaving the way for the western culture to sprout out in the African land. They have failed to protect their culture from the western culture. As they did not understand their forefathers and listen to their cries, no one is going to listen to the cries of the natives. Throughout the poem, Diop warns the future generation that if this continues, their indigenous culture will be wholly devastated and so their cultural identity will be lost.

By comparing the three poems analyzed, Okara is hazy in his narrative to some extent, whereas Diop's poem is very simple and lucid. Awoonor uses lucid imagery to explicate his cultural dissimilation. Okara uses musical instruments in order to explain his concept of cultural disharmony, but Awoonor brings out his cultural dilemma through the heavy tools, anvil, and hammer. Diop passes his message through cries and admonition while Okara and Awoonor pass their messages through comparisons. All the three Okara, Awoonor and Diop are subjective in their narratives where Okara prefers 'I' and Awoonor and Diop choose 'we.' All the three express their emotions differently. Okara is uncertain and perplexed whether he can choose either his rough and uncivilized traditional culture or the complex and queer western culture. Awoonor is quite delighted about the merger of his culture and the western culture hoping that their nation will transform into a developed nation through western values and culture. However, he is unable to give up his traditional culture. Diop is very different from these two poets that he brings out only his agony for the intrusion of the western culture in the African culture. He also warns his people if it continues without any resistance against the western influence, they will have to face more adverse consequences in future. It will bring only a disgrace to them.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, the three poets articulate the cultural differences and its negative impact on the indigenous people and their realization of the values their culture possesses. The three poets struggle to embrace the new culture as the love of their culture is so profound that nothing can easily take them away from it. "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart"

(Achebe 2001 p129). When there is a direct clash between two cultures, it will make its people fall apart and bring disharmony in cultures.

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