

Across Disciplinary Boundaries

Across Disciplinary Boundaries is a peer-review journal published by a team of scholars at Cheikh Anta Diop University. It publishes scholarly papers on a wide range of disciplines: literature, linguistics, cultural studies, sociology, history and management of public and private policies. *Across* is designed to promote culture and critical thinking. As a collection of essays, it offers various perspectives by critics from diverse academic trainings. This fifth issue, through scholarships by African scholars in Africa and the Diaspora, bridges Social Sciences and Literature.

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Aesthetics and Social Disparities in Richard N'tiru and Rudyard Kipling's Poems

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and examine critically, through Richard N'tiru's *The Pauper* and Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, the root causes of poverty and marginalization as well as the imperialism plaguing most of African and non-Western societies' experiences. The paper also addresses the negative impacts of poverty and marginalization on the development of the two societies and the necessity to undertake upheavals in order to end up with these plagues. Semiotics and Marxism have been used. From the study, it is established that poverty, marginalization and domination threaten the welfare of many Africans or non-White race societies and also hinder the development of most of their communities. The study reveals that the sullen state of these people is due to the negligence of the rich people who refuse to help. In addition, the paper scratches the conscience of the privileged and the rich people on the necessity to fend for the needs of the destitute from society. In the same vein, the paper shows that the two poets have used some poetic devices as aesthetics in their denunciation of the social inequality among human beings. The use of the two mentioned theories helps us conclude that the poor and the destitute as well as the rich people have each a responsibility in the eradication of the marginalization plaguing African or non-White societies. Finally, the paper shows that the perpetuation of poverty in non-White societies is partly due to the indifference of the political leaders who always seek to enrich themselves leaving the majority at the periphery. They should therefore

undertake some meaningful reforms in order to contribute to the takeoff of their communities' development.

Keywords: Richard N'tiru, Rudyard Kipling, African societies, colonization, poverty, marginalization, political leaders

Introduction

Social disparities exist in every society, no matter how democratic and egalitarian the society may be. These social disparities constitute scourges that prevent African people as well as non-Western people from thriving socially. The harm of this plague did not leave many African and Western critics in aloofness. They have, through their literary productions, discussed this burning issue and have made useful suggestions so as to come to terms with these plagues. Literature as a social science is responsive to socio-political and cultural phenomena. It is therefore used by creative writers to unveil certain inherent abnormalities in various African and English societies.

Critics like Shallon Atuhaire Moreenin have pondered the meaning of this predicament as featured by Richard N'tiru and Rudyard Kipling in their insightful poems. In fact, N'tiru's *The Pauper* and Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, are about poverty, marginalization and colonization inherent in African society and in Western society. Both poets, though they are from two different geographical areas, shed light through their poem on such issues as injustice, inequalities and social imbalances that debase the sense of existence of the poor and the marginalized as well as the colonized in the respective societies.

Richard N'tiru and Rudyard Kipling in their respective poem raise disturbing questions about the poor, marginalized and colonized people in their fictional African and Philippians' societies and question the responsibility of the marginalized as well as that of the rich. Relying on some poetic devices, the poets succeed in depicting the sorrowful and regretful conditions of the poor in African societies and in imperialists' societies as well.

This paper aims at investigating and examining critically the root causes of poverty, marginalization and the imperialism plaguing most African and Philippians' societies and their negative impacts on the development of the two societies. Furthermore, the paper attempts to suggest ways and means to come to terms with these social disparities ubiquitous in African and English societies. Marxism and Semiotics have been used as literary theories. Marxism in this paper refers to "changes in fundamental mode of material production effect, changes in the class structure of a society, establishing in each era dominant and

subordinate classes that engage in a struggle for economic, political, and social advantage” (Abrams 150).

Every literary meaning in semiotics is traced to a sign, and its function in a literary work demands the active contribution of the reader who identifies and decodes it. In semiotics, every narrative element - whether made up of words, gestures or images - thus corresponds to a sign that needs decoding in order to provide its meaning.

This work is structured around two parts: responsibility and social group dominance in Richard N’tiru and Rudyard Kipling’s poems and the use of poetic devices in pricking people’s conscience on the harm of poverty and imperialism.

I. Responsibility and Social Group Dominance in Richard N’tiru and Rudyard Kipling’s Poems

The two poets address in their poems issues on human existence and the responsibility of man in the eradication of the scourges hindering development. In the two societies depicted in the poems under study, one notices recurrent inequalities resulting from the neglect of people in power. It is ironic in the poems to notice that while many people are toiling to find their daily bread, few are living in opulence. This situation puts man in a condition of permanent fight in order to better his living conditions. In spite of the fight of each human being for the betterment of living conditions, the remark is that many people live under extreme poverty and societal discrimination whereas only few people are living a comfortable life. This situation is a worldwide phenomenon regarding communities and nations.

Richard N’tiru and Rudyard Kipling put the emphasis on this alarming situation in order to call for social equilibrium. Richard N’tiru, on the one hand, points out the disturbing worries concerning the pauper and the marginalized people in Africa, in general, and Uganda in particular. On the other hand, Rudyard Kipling figures out how imperialism as the ideology of the period pushes nations to grab other territories and force populations to exile, creating socio-political, cultural and economic disorder among human beings’ social groups in the Philippines.

In African and Philippian societies, the discrepancy between the rich and the poor is blatant. The two societies are societies where very few people are immensely rich whereas the whole majority lives in abject poverty. In the poems, rich people appear to be so egoistic that they neglect the indigents, the destitute. It is arguable that the so-called rich people turn to be poor in neglecting the destitute persons: for both N’tiru and Kipling, the lack of

generosity towards the indigent is synonymous with a kind of poverty. Therefore, poverty in the words of N'tiru and Kipling connotes two meanings: material poverty and mental poverty. For the poets, anyone who lacks financial and material means is considered as a poor person.

Kipling in particular, tackles the issues of marginalization and urges the marginalized to take up the front and defend their right against the grabbers. The poet makes his speaker say:

Take up the White Man's burden
In patience to abide
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride (Lines 9-12).

Through these words, the issue of marginalization is somehow emphasized. Western countries continue with their "duties" pressuring the poorest. They have to 'check the show of pride' to the dominated people. Any betterment of living conditions has to be offered to them.

Lawrence Darmani in his critical analysis on N'tiru's poem maintains that "Being so negligent of the poor, the others have demonstrated their own type of poverty in the sense of failing to help the poor. Where people lack generosity, their lack of it becomes poverty for them" (Darmani 2011: 45). Darmani, from this excerpt, draws the attention of the rich people who very often neglect the poor. Poverty and richness are man-made; therefore, the rich and the poor should not take it for granted that it is eternal. Poverty in the poems under study is caused by diseases, wars, natural disasters as well as human activities.

Mutual love and solidarity can be of great importance in the resolution of this problem. Individuals have roles and responsibilities in the process of helping the poor or the marginalized person (Darmani 46). Poverty and better living conditions have a great impact on human beings since everybody can be found in this situation of extreme poverty. Richard N'tiru and Rudyard Kipling being aware of the importance of literature decided to resort to it to call readers' attention to the necessity of rethinking about the role of literature in the resolution of social disparities issues such as poverty, racism and stigmatization which for a longtime have been the concerns of scholars of hard sciences. Phenyó Butale in his thesis on the role of literature in the resolution of poverty in West Africa points out that: "The thesis explores the unique way in which literature may contribute to the better understanding of poverty, a field that has

hitherto been largely dominated by scholarship that relies on quantitative analysis as opposed to qualitative approaches” (Butale 3).

Literature gives insights into the ‘lived realities’ of the poor and with its vividly imagined specificities, it illuminates the broad generalizations about poverty established in other disciplines. N’tiru and Kipling explore the origin of poverty in human society. In this vein, they use images for the readers. They lament the poor conditions of the pauper and want to know the root cause of this brutal situation that embraces the pauper. Also, they uncover the socio-economic inequities among people. For instance, Richard N’tiru gives a clear image of what is happening in the Ugandan society as far as the place of the poor is concerned. The persona in the following lines scratches the conscience of the reader as follows:

Tourists and I will take you snapshots.
And your MP with a shining head and triple chin
Will mourn your fate in a supplementary
question at question time (Lines 26-30).

From these lines, the persona mentions other members of his fictional Ugandan society who, in his own view, could help in the improvement of the poor conditions of the pauper. By the same way, the persona is drawing the attention of other rich members of the society to the necessity to respond positively to the solicitation of the indigents. Lawrence Darmani lays emphasis on this issue when he has it that “the poet draws the attention to all to respond positively to social actions established to help the poor. As it is said in French: ‘Noblesse oblige’- nobility implies responsibility. The Scriptures render the same idea this way: “to whom much is given, much is required” (45).

N’tiru’s poem is deemed to be the most vivid portrayal of how the indigents are treated among the human society. It sheds light on how poverty dehumanizes people. N’tiru being a pure product of Uganda and witnessing what is taking place in his society realizes that it becomes urgent to draw people’s attention to the damage brought about by poverty in Africa in general, and Uganda in particular.

Rudyard Kipling with his *The White Man’s Burden*, depicts also social issues. He wanted White people to conquer the non-white race of the Philippines and help them . Indeed, Kipling defends the subordinate and the weak social group. His poem uncovers it in the following lines

Send forth the best ye breed-

Go send your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild-
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child (Lines 2-8).

The fight against the marginalization of non-white people after the war between Americans and the Spanish determines Kipling's combat. The captives' need has to be satisfied. The non-white race has to be developed too since it has to be the burden of the wealthy people. A social class cannot be wealthy and the other group poor. These social unbalance and discrimination has to be revisited so as to establish social equilibrium.

Phenyo Butale echoes Kipling's concern when he observes:

The scope of current interest in the status of poverty in Africa is indicated by the three questions: who are the poor? Why are they poor? And what can be done about it? At each of these levels of enquiry –the profile of poverty, its causes and the implications for policy and practice – there is growing recognition of the value of a multidisciplinary approach...and the need to integrate this with more 'qualitative' evidence reflecting poor people's own experience (Butale 8).

Poverty becomes a common denominator in most non-developed countries and this has become a canker gnawing people and societies. This evil did not leave many writers and critics unresponsive. Many studies have been conducted in the view of finding solutions to this disease among human beings for in the view of Bhattacharyya, "billion people are trapped in extreme poverty and reside in developing countries" (S3).

Alex Addae-Korankye, in his analysis of the causes of poverty and its negative impacts on African nations points out that "that poverty in Africa is caused by a number of factors including corruption and poor governance, limited employment opportunities, poor infrastructure, poor resource usage, wars and unending conflicts, poor World Bank and IMF policies, among others". Contrary to Richard N'tiru who links poverty to natural power, Alex Addae thinks that poverty is caused by a series of human factors. For Richard

N'tiru, whoever is responsible for causing poverty in human society should be vehemently criticized.

One can say that N'tiru suggests that the readers should undertake concrete actions in order to eradicate poverty among human societies. It is true that many people do not have the same appreciation on the concept of poverty and its causes but what is important is that everybody be aware of the negative impact of poverty on human beings and on societies. The narrator in N'tiru's poem questions the brutal force that is responsible for the pauper's state.

What brutal force, malignant element
Dared to forge your piteous fate?
Was it worth the effort, the time? (Lines 3-4)

The analysis of these lines shows that the persona is enquiring about the causes of the miserable and piteous conditions of the pauper. Most often, many people think that sorcerers should be held responsible for poverty in human society. Others view God as being responsible for the pauper's poor state. In one word, the brutal force can be held as being responsible for the pauper's piteous conditions. From this, one can say that it is no use being wicked towards other human beings. In order to lay much more emphasis on the alarming condition of the pauper, the poet made use of some figures of speech which have contributed to the understanding of his message.

The reading of the poems gives an image of poverty and class domination as noted by Lawrence Darmani: "several scenarios [are] heavily-laden with imagery. Note the image of poverty, deprivation, and sadness as poets capture the living conditions of the pauper [and the non-white race]. Also, note how imagery contributes to the theme of the poem" (47). The narrator in the following lines has it that:

You limply lean on a leafless tree,
Nursing the jiggers that shrivel your bottom,
Like a baby newly born to an old woman (lines 6-8)

There clearly is assonance in these lines. Richard N'tiru uses assonance as a literary tool to accelerate the musical effect. This develops the internal rhyme that enhances the pleasure of reading and helps the reader grasp the hidden message. In addition, it creates a mood as well as a flow that allows the reader to connect with the subject-matter which in this poem is the depiction of the

pauper's miserable condition. Note the sound [i:] in the following words: [limply, lean, leafless, tree] which gives the image of despair, hopelessness, and extreme poverty.

N'tiru gives the image of somebody who is without support or no resistance; someone who "lean[s] on a leafless tree". The reader is in the presence of a desperate person who is abandoned to the mercy of the nature. He has no support. The tree on which he wanted to lean has no leaves. In fact, the tree here is personified. It symbolizes the rich who should help the pauper. With sentimental diction, that is the words used in conveying the meaning, the poets seek to prick the conscience of those who are rich and refuse to help the pauper.

II. Poetic Devices and the Aesthetics of Denunciation

In Rudyard Kipling's poem, *The White Man's Burden*, the use of the phrasal verb "take up" sheds light on how there is an emergency to rescue the non-White people for their development. Marginalization is well pronounced since Philippians were suffering. The speaker in the poem observes: "Why brought ye us from bondage, Our loved Egyptian night? Take up the White Man's burden" (Lines 23-24). In non-developed societies, it is a commonly shared view that only poor people crouch or bend down begging for food or any other need. Slavery was at its climax and Philippians as well as Egyptians were in a need of help to survive. These non-White races were marginalized and excluded from the economic and financial system. Starvation was visible everywhere.

In Richard N'tiru's poem, the pauper's crouch proves that he lives in abject poverty waiting for rich people's favor in order to survive. The pauper as a marginalized and a needy person is looking for better living conditions. In most non-White societies, the needy and the marginalized people constantly look for a better life. All these situations are revealed in the poems under study to question the rich and the leaders on their responsibility. Nobody has chosen to be poor. Therefore, the poor's state of the pauper should be the concerns of everybody. The narrator in N'tiru stressed it in the following lines:

You sit alone on hairless goatskins,
your ribs and bones reflecting the light
that beautiful cars reflect on you,
squashing lice between your nails (Lines 16-19).

In this passage, it appears clearly that the pauper is abandoned and jilted. Nobody is there to care for him. This bitter situation of the pauper did not leave Richard N'tiru indifferent

A good mindset is required to balance the social inequalities that are well shared nowadays. Shared prosperity has to be implemented in communities. N'tiru and Kipling are aware that there are imbalances in various class-structures in most non-white societies in general and Ugandan and Philippian societies in particular. The poets express their major concern with the pauper and Philippians' miserable living conditions: people are abandoned to their lot. No doubt they rely on themselves since there is no one to grant them help. So, they are obliged to struggle daily and only endurance and determination could grant them a help. N'tiru, in that respect, tackles the importance of poetry as an instrument of literature in the resolution of societal issues. He affirms that: "The business of poetry in particular is to explore the numerous modes of human response to the problems inherent in a world that is naturally hostile and is increasingly becoming complex in all its manifestations" (79).

Furthermore, he continues portraying his Ugandan society whereby the discrepancies resulting from the existing class structure make the artist sincerely align with the pauper who sits alone on the hairless goatskins. Having the pauper sit on the hairless goatskins gives an impression that the pauper has been sitting on them for a longtime leading the goatskins to lose their hairs. This situation connotes that the social conditions of the pauper last longer and have not changed for a long time. This situation experienced by the pauper is similar to that of most non-White races as the result of the unfair management of the nations' resources.

Indeed, the unfair and unfavorable conditions faced by most non-White races should question every artist on the contribution of their literary productions. Amateshe in his "The Social Function of Poetry in Underdeveloped Societies: An East African Experience" spells out the role of poetry as follows:

To be of genuine use, poetry must articulate a people's collective experience – the poet who puts people's idiom and metaphor into poetic verse soon gains central ground, because the artist becomes his/her people's collective articulation (85).

Through these lines, the poet is engaged to inform his readers on the importance of literary works and by the way, s/he criticizes the injustice inherent among

human societies. The poet's use of language contributes to denouncing social injustices in his/her society. S/He convincingly writes to denounce some of the social vices, which hinder happy human existence.

Through the use of contrast and metaphor, the poet succeeds in creating another image of a character. N'tiru tries it and plots a miserable image of the pauper in the mind of the reader:

You limply lean on a leafless tree,
Nursing the jiggers that shrivel your bottom,
Like a baby newly born to an old woman (Lines 6-8).

In these lines, jiggers depict the pauper whose body shakes as a result of the severe hunger that menaces him. The metaphorical use of "baby" in comparing the smoothness of the baby's skin with that of the old woman provides a sharp contrast to what non-White races were facing as social inequalities and disparities resulting from human wickedness.

Rita Felski confirms this use of semiotic devices in literary works attached to their feelings or realities when he says: "people experience works of art, and they say they feel things about works of art...if affect, or emotions, are one of the reasons people turn to works of art" (10). In other words, by seeking the solution of their difficulties people use literature to correct the wrongdoings in their societies.

Lawrence Darmani denounced the irresponsible attitudes that governors are adopting toward their populations:

Treason is a subversive or treacherous crime against kings and heads of state punishable by death. The mention of it, coupled with the allusion of condemnation, casts the image of how the narrator perceives paupers on our streets. By marginalizing them, the state has condemned to imminent death, as if they've committed the high crime of treason (49).

This assertion assumes that the leaders have a great responsibility in the miserable state in which the pauper and the colonized live. The poet is holding the leaders as being negligent and egoistic by leaving the pauper in poor conditions.

The equity in the sharing of prosperity has to be targeted in the governance. In fact, those of us who are privileged to have a good education, to have been born on the right side of the track, to have been fortunate enough, to have come into the world without physical or mental handicaps, are the ones who must share these privileges with all those who (through no fault of their own) have been less fortunate. These doings can contribute to the eradication or the significant collapse of frustrations which plague the development of the continent. It is our joint responsibility to work for the development of our country and the welfare of our fellow men so that poverty and marginalization crippling African societies could be eradicated

In his fight against discrimination and marginalization in African societies, Richard N'tiru mourns the hypocrisy inherent in his society, a society full of political villains who do not care about the pauper (Cook 114). Okonkwo Gabriel Kosiso in his critical work devoted to the Ugandan poet, avers that "this is as a result of extreme poverty which is more picturesque in the poet's description of the pauper" (2). The narrator in the third stanza describes the state of the pauper as follows:

You sit alone on hairless goatskins,
your ribs and bones reflecting the light
that beautiful cars reflect on you,
squashing lice between your nails
and cleaning your nails with dry saliva (Lines 16-20)

In this process of rewriting history, the poet wonders why a counterpart would be suffering in the midst of abundance. It is ironic that such a good-looking member of parliament would see the pauper and all he could do is to mourn the pauper's fate in a supplementary question at question time.

This shows how much Eurocentric mentality has destroyed the Africans' psyche to the extent that they do not recognize their own brothers and sisters who are living in abject poverty as a result of the inherent injustice in the society. N'tiru, being member of Ugandan society, witnesses the ordeals of the poor and knows how the masses turn a blind eye to it. In his role of reforming his society, he made use of some literary devices as tools in the expression of his concerns. Among other things, one can cite irony, contrast, paradox, hyperbole. Note that the poet uses four times the adjective "Beautiful" in order to contrast the pauper's state and that of people surrounding him. The pauper lives in abject poverty but at the same time, he is surrounded by a beautiful environment and beautiful people.

This state of affairs shows the extent to which injustice prevails in non-White race societies and Uganda in particular. Both N'tiru and Kipling paint a picture of non-white races about marginalization. Richard N'tiru portrays the African one based on hopelessness, abject poverty, and absolute dependence on non-dependable factors; while Rudyard Kipling schemes focuses on Philippians who are facing social difficulties.

The non-White people are marginalized and left aside as if they were responsible for their precarious condition. No assistance is offered to them. They find themselves in loneliness. The Society in which they live neglects them and considers them as a woe to the society. For instance, the situation under which they find themselves is in contradiction to what Human Rights seem to advocate in the following: "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 22).

In the light of this statement, one can notice that the marginalized people do not enjoy this inalienable right and their society does not care about this pitiful state they embody. The poet N'tiru notices that the case of the pauper is not presented seriously before law-makers by members of parliament so as to receive attention. The poor is therefore given no hope of betterment of his situation and he yields to his unfortunate destiny. Much of the East African poetry of the sixties gave such a convincing defense of indigenous African culture that the poet of the seventies had to diversify his themes and techniques.

The authors of the poems aim at examining the ills of their societies and at the same time, they propose solutions for the eradication of poverty. Therefore, they do not speak only for themselves but also for their fellowmen. Their cries are the ones of their people. That is what gives it its depth. But if they are to speak for them, they must suffer with them, rejoice with them, work with them, fight with them. Otherwise, what they say will not appeal to them and so will lack significance (E. Ngara 200). Through the use of some literary devices, the poets have succeeded in painting the miserable state of the poorest in the community. Some lines of N'tiru's poem exemplify it well enough.

Human beings' wickedness prompts the social inequalities and injustice noticed in the world today. Kipling is urging Americans to revisit their behaviours and inherit a new mindset by emphasizing the importance of developing poor countries. The non-White race as Philippians and Egyptians have to "come now, to search [their] manhood" in the society they are sharing

with the developed nations (lines 29). And Kipling adds that non-White races have to:

Take up the White Man's burden-
Have done with childish days-
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise
[...] Through all the thankless years (lines 25-30)

It is clear that if the world was not run with injustice and inequality, all human beings should be in good conditions. The marginalized has to stand up for his/her development since the childish days have been ended up. The hardship has passed and there is a need to take up with development of his/her community.

Richard N'tiru and Rudyard Kipling in their poems seek to call leaders as well as the rich people's attention to reviewing their relationship with the poor people in their societies. A good leader should embrace the variety of good qualities and skills of management. A good leader ought to be transparent in his/her actions so that every citizen could enjoy equally the resources of the society. Thus, good leadership is neither a question of ferocity, huge appetite; nor is it about weight or heaviness.

Conclusion

The critical examination of the negative effects of marginalization as well as the social disparities on non-White races in general, and in African communities in particular, has been depicted in the two poems under study. It has been revealed that the abject poverty of the pauper results from the rich who refuse to help the poor and the marginalized. The study scratches the conscience of the leaders and the governors who are negligent towards the powerless people.

Besides, the paper shows that it is the responsibility of the privileged people to care for the welfare of the marginalized and the destitute in the society, because nobility implies responsibility. Furthermore, we have shown that Kipling and N'tiru have resorted to some poetic devices as literary tools in their denunciation of injustice and social disequilibrium inherent in most non-White societies. To eradicate the problems of poverty and marginalization which plague the welfare of many people in non-White societies, the paper invites the few privileged to revisit their traditional ways of governing. It is when the

interests of every citizen are taken into account that the development of society and the welfare of the masses can be possible.

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