

Cultural Imperialism and Manipulation in Gold Coast: At the Crossroad, the Junction Back Home

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Abstract

Thomas Hobbes over three thousand years ago, regretfully observed how daunting it was to arrive at an infallible conclusion about men, for unlike grammar and English composition, the comparison of men and societies invariably involves a clash of truth and interest, as well as passion, particular in a time of crisis. During certain time zones of man's history, the values on which societal members trod on are undermined and the very facets underpinning societies are questioned. Culture which is an indelible entity of any society is taunted as a result of clash among differing societies. Gold Coast (now Ghana) clash with British imperialism sparked cultural blindness in her citizenries. Looming as may it sound, this paper brings to thought very exegesis of Kobina Sekyi's *Blinkards* on the cultural ignominy among Gold Coasters at the Crossroad and offers a junction back to African heritage using Casely Hayford's *Ethiopian Unbound* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* as ambits of thoughts back home.

Keywords: Africanism, Colonialism, Culture, Healing, Wounds.

Introduction

Although various thoughts deduced from astute intelligentsias points to the direction that Africa is the cradle of human civilization, it looks that Africans have lost sight of their thought and path in the quest of living on their own. Many scholars and writers attribute this ills to the fact that Africa have failed to appreciate her own value system and instead incorporated a so called dominant race civilization into its cultures at the detriment of her own. Scholars like Casely Hayford, Kobina Sekyi and Ayi Kwei Amarah who have captivating appearances to this aura have also written extensively on this issue from a social and political lens. Focusing on the works of these writers, this paper aims at demonstrating the aspects of cultural imperialism and manipulation as evidenced in the opinions and views in their published books. Throughout the paper, I refer to one book each from the three writers: Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* (1916), Casely Hayford's *Ethiopian Unbound* (1911) and Ayi Kwei Amarah's *The Healers* (1978). I analyse the ways in which these writers, who were not novelist and playwright by profession, used writing to articulate the very different responses on cultural imperialism and manipulation, scribbling it from the crossroad to the junction back home.

The concept "cultural imperialism" applied in it least sense relates to the creation and conservation of uneven relationship between cultures favouring a more powerful culture which most often is characterized with western ideologies in law, science, social institutions, moral concepts, ideals of beauty which all reinforces cultural hegemony (Johnston, 2000; Lin, 2012; Sarmela, 1977). As such, cultural hegemony is seen in the construct of manipulation which implies an action of managing or influencing skillfully the action and feelings of people in a grotesque manner. i.e. an oblique advantage of people with blare plans to mismatch the thought of people. With this aura in mind, the very tenets of Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* (1916), set the tone of a crossroad in this paper whiles Casely Hayford's *Ethiopian Unbound* (1911) and Ayi Kwei Amarah's *The Healers* (1978) serve as junctions to Ghanaian and African past.

The naivety at the crossroad

Very few native writers took cognizance and documented the very cankers facing the late nineteen and twentieth century Ghanaian after British defeat of Asante (Louw, 2012). William Essuman Kobina Sekyi being among such writers brings to light the various contradictions in the socio-political systems in the Gold Coast and the dangers to the survival African in his book [*The Blinkard: A short story of Anglo-Fanti*] (Yirenkyi, 2014). Disenchanted and frustrated with the British colonial system, contrasts the illogicality of British cultural setting to that of his country side. Realizing the pace of ignominy among his natives exemplifies these inconsistencies of cultural imperialism and manipulation in the *Blinkards*. The *Blinkards* elucidates and typifies the cultural blindness of Gold Coast nation disillusion to its own culture. This in turn connotes immaturity on the part of Africans for naively relegating their culture to the background in favor of another. The strict implication was a cultural stagnation and loss of path on the part of Gold Coasters.

Less dominant super imposed on the torch bearer

According to Sekyi, the people of Gold Coast had seemingly put on an artificial outlook by accepting the Colonizers culture in the quest of her culture meeting that of the colonizer (Langley, 1970). The encounter between colonized and the colonizer at the crossroad has made the colonizer impose her pattern and culture into

the culture of the colonized. Novice as they are, the manipulative schemes of colonizer have made the colonized decry her very own ways of life in terms of social institution, ideals for beauty (dressing), pattern of education and delight for local dishes which Sekyi recounts as relating to the colonized seeing her culture as inferior at the neglect of the fact that she is the cradle of civilization and torch bearer of the human race and for that she is to be herself and live in her natural path. Insidious as this may be, Sekyi tells us in the beginning pages of his book, the extent to which the Gold Coast citizenries have hurriedly and blindly accepted the colonizers' ideals of dressing in contrast to her culture. Blindly, as this may be, Sekyi tell us that Gold Coasters now prefer wearing European dresses at homes and functions even to the extent of frowning on the very few people who wear its native dress (Sekyi, 1997). Vehemently speaking against these ills, Sekyi associates the moral degradation and the downgrading of the traditional values of the Gold Coasters to modernization concept introduced by colonizers who have altered the ideals of the natural nature of Gold Coasters to tread on an artificial path (Langley, 1970).

Although Sekyi stresses the fact that Gold Coasters are not the closest to the Colonizers on the continent, he paradoxically portrayed the idea that Gold Coasters are the most westernized peoples. They are caught between rebellion against the west and the sheepish imitation of Colonizers culture. Sekyi himself in these conundrums instantiates the difficulty in wearing the gown of the law firm to work since it was tradition to Colonizer culture and not categorical of his very own country [Gold Coast] (Sekyi, 1997). The chaos boggling Gold Coasters in the midst of the cultural conflict to Sekyi stems of the leniency of Gold Coasters allowing the tenet of the colonizer or visitor to impose on her his cultural practice.

Misnomer lifestyles among Gold coasters

Sekyi fervidly abhorred and attacked the cultures of the colonizers for altering and educating semi-literate coasters to frown and dislike their native language (fante). To this he recounts the extent the citizenries have tripped away from their immediate language with sort of coyness and delight to associate in the speaking of the English language. Although, the few self-conscious conservative literates who had experienced the colonizers education still gloomed to the speaking of the native language, the masses that were semi-literate absurdly attacked their own systems (Gardiner, 1970). In echoing these absurdities, Sekyi further protests and lampooned Gold Coasters for devaluating their traditional marriage that shaped and brought the real of essence of marriage between families. The implication of these was a majority who according to Sekyi were distressed to behave as British in order to feel accepted in the Gold Coast (Sekyi, 1997). The adverse of this was a Gold Coast that had lost her path (self-identity/ African identity) in the world and cannot find her way home. Which simply to Bonsu: "Ghanaians (Gold Coasters) are now 'aliens' to their own culture" (Bonsu, 2014).

The ideas stemming from Sekyi's Blinkards are timeless to the very heed that Gold Coasters even forgot their very own innate language, food, dress, and ideals for marriage in trade off for ideals from the colonizer. Although these ideas may be seen as malcontent, Sekyis' purview of cultural imperialism is still fruiting in Ghana (Gold Coast). The very facets of Sekyis' ideas in Blinkards brings to thought that Gold Coast is like a little star, which has abandoned the law of gravity of its original constellation and has become a wondering star, which will remain unless she find an autonomous direction (junction) in its trajectory. To truncate his work in this paper, he writes:

*"The people of the old days were wise indeed; if only we could follow
The customs they left us a little more, and adopt the ways of other races
A little less, we should be at least as healthy as they were". (Sekyi, 1997)*

The junction back home

They fought as well as they could, with the arms that they possessed then; and if the echoes of their struggle have not resounded in the international arena, we must realize that the reason for this silence lies less in their lack of heroism than in the fundamentally different international situation of our time. (Fanon, 1966,p.166).

The common views among early and after independence Ghanaian writers have been a somewhat unique trajectory heading towards an African heritage (Asante, 1977). The Ghanaian playwright and legal practitioner, Kobina Sekyl, (1892-1956), has exposed the cultural crisis faced by Gold Coasters. In the rest of this paper, I wish to draw attention to two twentieth century Ghanaians writers, Casely Hayford (1866-1930) and Ayi Kwei Armah (1939) who addressed the puzzles boggling Gold Coasters in wandering in a foreign land in their books *Ethiopian Unbound* (1911) and *the Healers* (1978) respectively.

The idea of a junction back home should never be rejected. It portrays a multisided purview which assumes the position of giving a vivid interpretation of the thoughts and decoding conceptions to the cultural maladies facing Ghanaians (Gold Coasters). I state here that Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* studies in race emancipation (Ugonna, 1969), is probably a challenge with a somewhat wit and serious reflection that provides subtle analysis of the colonial situation, a vision of the future, as well as an appeal to concern citizenries to

remain self-confident and not to commit “national suicide”. Throughout the text analysis, Hayford seems to be recounting his experience through a middle-aged man, Kwamankra who appears to appear to be answering the questions of his young son, providing reflections on the global political situation, racial oppositions and colonialism.

Colonialism and Africanism

It is important to emphasize that Hayford was both a conservative and modernizer. His organizational base was the ARPS and NCBWA. Intellectually and socially, he can be identified with the very intellectuals that spearheaded these movements and even the brain child behind the latter (Prais, 2008). But important as these factors are, they do not fully elucidate the making of his ideologists and intellectual confrontation with the ethical and cultural crisis posed by the colonial transition. Hayford’s call for Africans back to their route or identity was a product of an agonizing middle-aged man in a colonial supremacy, a search in the quest of Africans salvation that could be achieved in a scheme of collective consciousness by galvanizing the cultural corpse of the Gold Coast systems whose values and institutions has been distorted or rendered useless by economic, legal, religious and political forces of the colonial systems. His solution was to rescue the sovereignty of Africa (Gold Coast), based on the superlative ideas galvanized in his literary works.

Although the very facets of his ideology were how to be Westernised without being westernized and how Africans (Gold Coasters) are to own their trajectory without copying, it is imperative to recognize that the thrust of his work was to project to outside world Africa having a rich culture which could be activated by Gold Coasters discovering or knowing themselves, in a wondering similitude of scope and freedom in the struggle of getting to the junction [a point of existence] (Blyden, 1903). Informed by his pertinent ideology, Hayford’s ideology on Africans gaining a national consciousness (African identity) protrude in a case in point of letting go of the whims and caprices associated with colonialism and dovetailing Africans action to their own conduit. Though the very ideologies of Hayford on colonialism (cultural imperialism) seem subtle in the Ethiopian Unbound, a definition from Georges Balandier (1951) provides a useful definition of the colonial situation which in a particular situation helps one understand Hayford’s reaction to the menaces of Africans and the significance of that reaction for the study of nationalist ideology and Pan-Africanism. Colonialism from the lenses of Balandier shatters and conditioned subject people to its own administrative and economic systems to guarantee colonial peace with the drive of making the colonial enterprise more economically profitable. On its axle, colonial situations are characterised often with cultural crisis and ethnic conflict, which serve as shadowy ground in looming ones understanding of conflicts and menaces at a particular time in history. From this cursory elucidation, Hayford’s ideological response to resurrecting and strengthening what most of his contemporaries regarded as a Paradise Lost - the African true identity which would protruded in the forgoing lines.

Although the very gateways provided by Hayford are shrewded with deep political ingenuity, the simplicity of his call is summed in the book title, the Ethiopian Unbound. Unbound in the sense- to let lose or liberated in quest to find a compass for sail on sea. Hayford seems to be apologetic in his ideology in the call of Africans to put attitude that make Colonizers respect their manhood which they could achieve not in imitation but in originality and natural initiation. Thus the call of Hayford to the African is to develop on their own axles with no copying of any form from western countries. To this call, Hayford remarked in his ideologies for Africans to put on distinctive dress that is peculiar and thrive on their cultural pattern. This is to say, that Hayford was more conservative than Sekyi who gave little concern for the adoption of Colonizer culture on a small scale so long as it does not tarnish local customs. That not ending here, Hayford seems to be caught up with the ideologies of Edward Wilmot Blyden on the need for an aboriginal educational enterprise that orbits on the language native to the African (Okafor, 2011). The rationale according to Hayford is to make Africans more self-conscious in their great awakening from cultural domination by whites. The hastening of the call according to Hayford was to be seen in Africans opting to no longer becoming slaves to foreign cultures and stretching and looking forward for a university whose curricular issues are historically inclined with a medium of instructions that are native in nature. The distinctiveness of these is to produce a people with a native culture that encompasses character of African (Gold Coasters). In contrast to this, Hayford posits that:

Our history, our customs, our characters are unintelligible to us until we know it. Character... is the result of an inheritance and environment; and there’s no more subtly influential environment than the language we speak.... if a people inherit a Celtic spirit and grow up in an Anglo-Saxon atmosphere, with the English language on its lips what character will result? It is likely that a people tossed in this cross side way of contradictions will tend to develop inconsistencies of character-amazing force rendered useless by recurring spasms of weakness, brilliant intellectual capacity sterilized by inability to grasp the conditions of material progress, and so forth. (Ethiopian Unbound, p196.)

In contrasts to the semblances of issues stemming from the Hayfordian ideologies on the Ethiopia Unbound, it is of interest to cognizance the very alternate tenets exemplified by Hayford in dealing with the

maladies introduced by colonialism. In the simplicity of his word, Hayford provides antidotes to the fallible nature of the white marriage to that of the traditional marriage. He re-instated the fact that Africa or traditional conducted marriage has much advantage over white man's monogamous system. The point of his call is that the traditional wedding operates on facets of fostering social cohesion among family ties which in its gradual forms the core part of marriage. Compared to the very maladies in Sekyi's Binkard where people are engaged in marriage in the English way, Hayford offer a paternalistic view on reconsidering traditional marriage so as to foster family ties and keep down the pace of ignominy brought by white man's wedding.

Inflicted wounds and ludicrousness, the surgery for relief

Ayi Kwei Armah offers an illuminative understanding and liberation strategy to the maladies facing Gold Coasters. He traces the antecedents of the very cultural incompatibility among Africans to the ills of the scramble and partition of Africa by imperialist inventions (Kakraba, 2011). To this end, his pieces of work have mostly been seen as remedies for liberating Africans from the cankers posed by colonialism (Alexander & Theophilus, 2011). In the words of Amilcar Cabral (2007):

A people who are free from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor's culture and other cultures, they return to the upwards paths of their own culture...If imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture. (p.487)

Informed by the above statement, Armah's ideology for liberation for Africans is synonymous to the re-establishment of African identity that undermines and overthrows the implanted cultures of the colonizers. Germane to this, Armah recognizes Africa values and cultures as elements of resistance to foreign domination and consequently cultural liberation (Kakraba, 2011). Which presupposes that, Armah sees the very facets of African culture to have attempted to chase the enemy (colonizer), which at the end have led terminal and self-inflicted wound, which in the words of Armah must be treated and healed to bring wholeness to human race in the Africa continent (Muzorewa,2007).

From Armah again, the solution to Africans dilapidated culture lies in its abilities to identify the tenets of their ancestry which calls on them to return to their original home. This he conceptualises as Sankofa, which denotes that it is not crime to go back and fetch what you forgot. The profoundness in this recommendation for African malady is recuperated in a healing process that requires first (1) Africans mend their perforated wounds and (2) a surgical procedure that would close the parted parts of the human body (divided society). In light of the forgoing, Armah seemed to be more inclined to be dealing with the disease of disintegration that had been fueled by imperialistic tendencies and the partition of the cores of society, which to Olaniyan pontificates a restorative act against a colonially induced inferiority complex (Armah,1978; Olaniyan,2009). In the words of Lazarus, the very tenets of Armah's ideology is reaching the past (Sankofa) collectively, so as to eschew the form of alien domination, historically and also in conjuncture of the present (Lazarus,1990). As indicated by Armah, the past represents the ideals of the formation of people in their wholeness which can only be achieved through inspiration and not manipulation. The result is ones acceptance to go back to its ancestry willfully, inspirationally and meaningfully without manipulation (i.e. you can take the horse to waterside but you can force it to drink). In all Gold Coaster emancipation from foreign domination are arguably projected in the household of Armah's and Casely Hayford library.

Conclusion

Thomas Hobbes over three thousand years ago, regretfully observed how daunting it was to arrive at an infallible conclusion about men, for unlike grammar and composition in English, the comparison of men and societies invariably involves a clash of truth and interest, as well as passion, particular in a time of crisis (Langley,1970). During certain time zones of man's history, the values on which societal members trod on are undermined and the very facets underpinning societies are questioned. The values are regarded as self-evident and beyond pose questions that are threatened by conflicting economic and other interests. The result of this is cultural loss and mental servitude which is bewildering and astonishing that individuals are called upon to provide an explanation of these events within a wider insider perspective. This was what Kobina Sekyi, Casely Hayford and Ayi Kwei Armah sought to do between the colonial and post-colonial periods. They sought to describe the absurdities introduced by colonialism and the subtle way out of the African problem. The thrust of their ideology was an integrative socio-economic and political culture inherent with traditions and wisdom of the ancestries of African past. To end here, had the first two writers address in the paper been alive today, they would be seemingly distressed the extents to which their very own nation have swept more by the forces of cultural imperialism and manipulation from the West.

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