

Messy Muddles: Capitalist and Non-Capitalist Encounters in Sherman Alexie's "What You Pawn I will Redeem"

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Abstract

The present study explores the potential relevance and/or irrelevance of capitalist conceptual frames to the subaltern, pre-industrial cultures as marked out by the prominent US writer Sherman Alexie in his famous story "What You Pawn I will Redeem". More specifically, the study highlights one particular deconstructive scheme used by writers from the periphery to protest the imposition of capitalist culture principles on native populations. To situate the discussion more broadly in post-colonial theory, the study traces uses of the same self-whipping strategy elsewhere in the post-colonial tradition where the capitalist and non-capitalist cultures do occupy the same temporal and physical space. The article consistently demonstrates that these post-colonial voices were not in fact cursing themselves or their own populations, but they were rather protesting malignant interventions in the natural growth of the native cultures.

Keywords: Capitalist cultures; pre-industrial cultures; self-whipping; marking difference; cultural encounters.

Any careful examination of Alexie's story would reveal that it abides in critical moments of the Capitalist Cultural System (CCS); e.g. silent Indians, homeless Indians, pre- and post-Columbus Indians; similarly, it is rich in criticism for the Native Indian Cultural System (NACS); e.g. the waiting Aleuts, cyclical time, tribal connections, the valorization of the past. Additionally, Alexie's narrator, Jackson Jackson, comes harsh on himself both at the beginning and at the end of the story. He presents himself on the first page as being best at homelessness, a flunky student, a bad father, a failed lover, a heartbreaker, a bad husband, etc. On the last page, he comes out as harsh on himself again; he ends with the same five dollars he started with; dances in the middle of an intersection in what seems to be a busy capitalist city; dances like a hero when he has already told us he is not one by any means.

Such negative representations have often led some Native American intellectuals to accuse Sherman Alexie of perpetuating the stereotypes about Indian culture; they reproach him for mocking tradition and for being unduly sympathetic towards his own people Westron (2014). In light of this practice of self-criticism, which often amounts to self-whipping, the author will address these significant questions in post-colonial studies: Can this self-criticism be read as an honest confession on the status of the postcolonial cultural condition, and, therefore can it serve as a deconstruction of the collective group identity? Alternatively, does it serve as criticism of the capitalist culture system (CCS) imposition on native non-capitalist, pre-industrial cultures? Or can it possibly have a dual function? What consequences do these peripheral cultures suffer when forced to adopt capitalist cultural systems wholesale? What strategies and alternatives are proposed to deal with the highly mobile postmodern life styles?

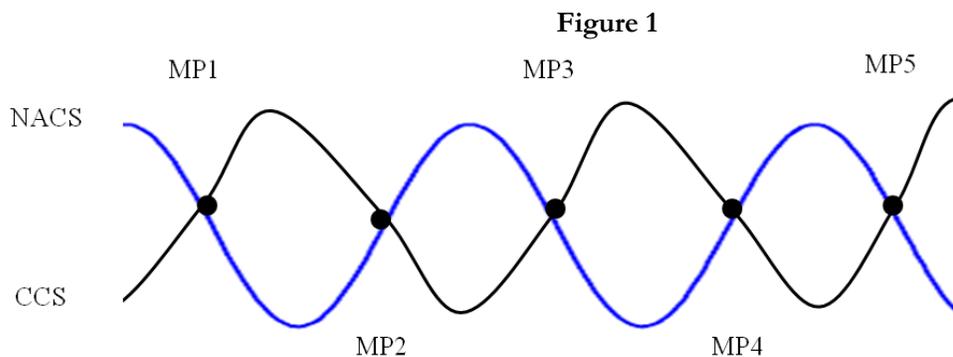
The misfortunate encounter

"What You Pawn I will Redeem" raises many historically and cross-culturally significant issues: tradition, history, progress, identity, mobility and memory. The story puts two cultural systems in deliberate encounters by creating situations where NACS and CCS run parallel to each other all along the story. Ladino (2009) aptly describes this dual structure in the story when she notes that it "illuminates the problems with multiculturalism while simultaneously imagining a polycultural world."

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According to Ladino, the postmodern city space of Alexie's Seattle can be alienating to the city's inhabitants who will suffer from the common problems of multicultural, post-modern space such as the fast rhythm of city life, unemotional attachments of city dwellers, and merciless stereotyping. Ladino goes on to draw a more positive picture of the city as a polycultural space where "empathetic boundary crossing and community building" more often takes place. This rather optimistic argument seems to miss an important, and, I would argue, deliberate polarization of NACS and CCS.

The homeless Native Indian named, Jackson square, incessantly floats in a capitalist city using the ideas and belief system of his pre-industrial culture. Or so it seems at least on the surface. Jackson's story starts in front of the pawn shop when he recognizes his grandmother's regalia. He had to make a thousand dollars in twenty four hours to get the regalia back. The story then proceeds to present situations where the industrial cultural logic is forced on non-capitalist, pre-industrial groups. All along the way, every time the two cultures meet, they sound very contradistinct; every time they come into direct contact, they fail to yield any good results. These are the six encounters in the story: the pawnshop owner, the policeman, the mission boss, the bartender, the pawnshop owner again towards the end, and the Seattle city crowd at the very end. These misfortunate meeting points (MP) can be represented on a spiral, fractional structure as in figure 1:



Alexie smartly and elegantly constructs the structures for each system only to tear them down by the time we get to the end when the encounters fail miserably to yield happy hybrids. He puts in confrontation two divergent cultural systems, which had to co-exist in one post-modern, capitalist space. The essential differences between industrial and pre-industrial cultures will only create confusion and loss on the Native American side.

Capitalist versus non-capitalist systems

The structures for each cultural system as they appear in the story can be summarized for easy reference in this table:

Table 1

Capitalist Cultural System (CCS)	Native American Cultural System(NACS)
Money matters- in fact it equals morality (Pawnbroker "the right thing to do is to lose one dollar")	Memory matters (grandmother died in 1971 and Jackson is killing himself now)
A culture of deadlines (twenty four hours)	A culture of waiting (The Aleuts)
Legal contracts (policeman filing a law suit)	Orality and missions (I want to win it like a hero)
Linear progressive time (the ticking clock; closing time at the bar)	Circular time (begins and ends with the same five dollars)
Evidence-base (calculation, records, mission boss)	Non-perfectionist, mythical thinking (The yellow bead)
Preoccupation with the present	Dwelling in the past (Story beginning and end)
The neutrality and objectivity of rationalism	The sharing and bonding of tribal loyalties

Clearly, Alexie presents these two systems in binary fashion, and he piercingly makes fun of both systems. For example, at the first encounter between Jackson and the pawnshop owner, when Jackson demanded his grandmother's regalia, the pawn broker asked for proof, "can you prove it's your grandmother's regalia?"

In this response we can notice the fact-oriented mentality of the shop owner in comparison to Jackson, who said that "I'd only seen photographs of my grandmother dancing in it." Jackson believed that he has the right to claim the regalia based on his memories while the shop owner cannot understand this logic and is only convinced when Jackson showed him the yellow bead under the armpit. This yellow bead strikes yet another difference between Jackson's Romance logic and the precision, evidence-based logic of capitalism (e.g. proud of German engineering versus only God is perfect therefore any human product cannot be perfect). Ironically, Seattle, the story's locale, hosts the Boeing 747 manufacture facility and no one would want to imagine an imperfect airplane.

In addition to that, the definition and the understanding of morality are hugely dissimilar in the two cultural systems. For example, the shop owner told Jackson that he would "sell it to him for nine hundred and ninety nine dollars; I'd lose a dollar that would be the moral thing to do." Often, morality may equal money in the capitalist system. This is how we can understand the "white man's burden" in the colonial logic - building schools, roads, hospitals, and railroads - and the AID programs to the third world countries more recently. Certainly, morality does not equal loyalty to one's own history or tribe. For a capitalist person, it would not make any sense to borrow money to invite your kinsmen when one member in the tribe passes away- a common practice in tribal societies.

Another difference appeared between the two cultures when Jackson met the Real Change mission boss. When Jackson asked for "one thousand four hundred and thirty papers" to sell them to get the money he needed to buy back the regalia, the boss answered that this is a strange number, because "the record for the most papers sold in one day by one vender is only three hundred and two". The boss relies on numbers to plan and precisely predict future action. His organization records tell him Jackson cannot sell this amount in one day - the data-based contractual capitalist culture which works by records vis-à-vis the oral, non-contractual culture revealed by Jackson's request. In an oral culture, even when borrowing money, honoring the word counts more than honoring documents. It is considered a social taboo when you borrow money from a friend that s/he asks you to sign a warrant. Such phono-centric orientation is aptly described by Ogede (2011): "Today primary culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees, many cultures and sub-cultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality." In his encounter with the mission boss Jackson shows signs of an orality mindset.

The bar scene illustrates how each culture has its own way of perceiving time. At 2:00 am the bartender announced that it was, "closing time," but Jackson chose to ignore this and insisted on the fact that the bartender should be nicer to him, "you are an ungrateful bastard." In this incident we can see the huge emphasis on time in the capitalist culture in comparison to the Native culture which does not value time much. To the bartender closing time is closing time; your being my customer, or my friend, or my relative does not entitle you to stay any longer after closing time. It equally did not matter for Jackson when the clock was ticking as he was supposed to be collecting the money to gain back the regalia. The linear time of capitalism is something he cannot fathom. On the contrary, he wastes his time nomadically roaming the streets of Seattle, spending whatever money he has on cousins-- the bar scene-- and non-cousins-- Mary in the lottery ticket scene. At the end of the story he comes back full circle with the same five dollars with which he started his quest.

Industrialization has made it inevitable for the western/modern man to have a well-defined temporal frame since it plays a central role in measuring the productivity of the worker; "time is money" since the workers are paid according to the number of hours they work. Therefore, the more divided the time, the better organized and more productive both corporate and individual life will be. In the post-industrial knowledge societies, corporate competition for patents made the combat for time even fiercer than it was in the industrial times. Let's suppose for example that companies in Japan, Germany, and the United States are simultaneously working on developing a cure for the Corona virus, the company that could make the break through first will be the one that makes the most capital. In comparison, the native preindustrial cultures are, for the most part, oblivious to these values, relationships, and ways of life. For example, the Aleuts were totally unmindful of the city progress and could wait for eleven years for their boat to come back. If Jackson were to pass the same spot eleven years later, he would find them still sitting on the same bench, waiting. This culture of waiting for heroes from the past to come save the nation from its miserable present condition was noted by Fanon in his much quoted chapter on "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness." The encounter with the police officer is quite revealing, too. When the police officer tries to help Jackson by suggesting filing a report about the theft of the regalia, "if it was stolen, you need to file a report," Jackson refuses to do so; instead, he prefers to see himself as a man 'on a mission' to which the officer responds that this is "romantic crap."

This scene reveals that each cultural system has its own rules and conventions in establishing social order. Law is considered important for the stability of an industrial nation, where regulation covers the most basic details like parking a car in reverse or a ditch in a city street. In pre-industrial societies, however, the law is centralized in the tribal chief or the tribal council. They are responsible for conflict resolution, and they follow tribal customs in doing so.

These critical encounters show the main structures of the NACS which can be summarized as: 1. Tribal; 2. Oral; 3. Sharing resources; 4. Circular time; 5. History and memory; while the reactions to them reveal the main structures for the CCS which can be summarized as: 1. capitalist; 2. Linear; 3. Contractual; 4. Legal; 5. Deadline and data orientated. If we want to speculate about the center in each system - the most important structure without which the system would not hold - money would turn out to be the center for the CCS while memory would be the center for NACS. The two systems run parallel, and every time they come in contact, cross-communication seems to be missing.

This binary presentation of the two systems and the centrifugal forces that pushes them apart every time they come close would make the story's ending a real case of total miscommunication between the dancer and the people watching him.

The Ending

Indeed, the ending does not mitigate but rather intensifies the binary oppositional structuring in the story. The obvious contrast between the values and the characteristics of the two cultures is prevalent throughout the whole story, but, at the end, everything reaches its optimal point. The misfit between the two cultures pokes out. Both NACS and CCS stand apart, even though they occupy the same temporal and physical space. If we take Alexie's story as an attempt to deconstruct culture imposition by maintaining the opposition between the capitalist and pre-industrial systems, and that's how I am reading it in this article, then how would the ending fit into this deconstruction scheme?

The ending starts when Jackson got back his regalia though he did not win it. He is given the regalia as a gift from the shop owner or rather as a take-it-and-leave-me- alone kind of deal; I'm tired of you and your memory:

"Take it," he said, and held it out to me.
 "I don't have the money"
 "I don't want your money"
 "But I wanted to win it"
 "You did win it. Now take it before I change my mind."

There are four possible explanations as to why the pawnbroker gave back the regalia for free, and they are all consistent with the author's inclination to maintain the parallelism between CCS and NACS; these are:

- (1) The pawnbroker does not want to waste more time on this issue.
- (2) To him the regalia is just a commodity and no more. The history behind the object is irrelevant to him.
- (3) He wanted to get rid of Jackson and his repeated visits; initially, he gave him twenty dollars and thought that perhaps he will not come back again.
- (4) To the pawnbroker history equals zero; he lives in a state of total amnesia.

Regardless of the reason why the broker gave out the regalia, the act itself does not constitute a resolution. Wilson (2013, 71) cites Alexie's story as an example on hallucinatory endings where the story builds towards "lyrical and ambiguous floatiness where meaning feels out-of-reach or even concealed". The ending "merges the past and the present via image and action: his stopping Seattle traffic in order to dance in his grandmother's long-lost regalia. It's a near-literal resurrection of his past, and, simultaneously, the reclamation of dignity in the present."

When he had it, Jackson felt like a redeemer. He wraps himself in the regalia and "breathes in his grandmother;" he is intoxicated at his unity with his past. In the midst of post-modern Seattle, home for Boeing Company, famous biotechnology companies, software industry, and international trade, Jackson performed his own ritual, not bothering himself about all the progress around him, as if he is living in his own imagined world:

Outside, I wrapped myself in my grandmother's regalia and breathed her in. I stepped off the sidewalk and into the intersection. Pedestrians stopped. Cars stopped. The city stopped. They all watched me dance with my grandmother. I was my grandmother, dancing.

Jackson's celebration in the middle of the street is equally ironic. His sense of victory shows how emotional the situation is as far as he is concerned. But this sense of victory is only fake because he has not achieved anything through his aimless wandering from one bar to the next. In other words, he has not collected the required money, has not done any work, planning, or mobility, but the regalia was given to him by the shop owner for free. Expectedly and not so surprisingly, Jackson does not focus on the process of gaining the regalia but rather on the fact that he has it.

The dance is also misplaced. When Jackson decided to start dancing in the middle of an intersection, and though it is not said in the story, he is dancing at the heart of a post-modern American city. Dancing in the middle of the street, wrapped up in his grandmother's regalia, Jackson becomes a sign which signifies many meanings depending on who is watching the scene. We can decode the sign from two points of view- Jackson's and the pedestrians'. The two angles of vision are given in table 2:

Table 3

To Jackson	To the pedestrians
a winning hero	A strange, odd figure
a mission accomplisher	A funny show
unity with the past	An entertaining show pleasant moment-
moment of celebration	A wild Native American
nostalgia to the past	A five minute break from a long business day
A redeemer of his past	A man losing touch with reality

When the whole city stopped, it looks like Jackson's dance was the cause for stopping the normal flow of the CSS system; that he is forcing his history on the city; that he has redeemed his past; and that his act is an act of victory. However, what Jackson considers a victory and a heroic act; the white spectators consider it either a pointless or a strange act. The schematic binary structuring may force yet a third and, in my opinion, more significant reading if we consider this ending against the story's beginning as I will do in the next section.

To the city, the range of possible reactions to Jackson's dance is given in the table above; indeed, when I was presenting this paper at a conference on American studies, I meant to elicit audience response to the last scene in the story. I stopped the presentation at this point and turned to my audience with a question on how they would react to the scene if they happened to be passing by the intersection at that exact moment. One professor, who happened to be a white American male, said that he would take it for a strange, exotic, and, therefore, entertaining scene. Indeed, Jackson's dance in the middle of the street would seem illogical to many of us who tend not to take history too seriously.

Jackson himself believed that he became united with his past or his grandmother because of the regalia. At this point, and for his own reasons, Jackson imagined himself a winner. He is dancing in circles right at the heart of an intersection in a very busy city. From his point of view, that imperfect yellow bead is a part of him or a part of his existence - as if history moulds his life. When he wrapped himself in the regalia, he is united with his grandmother, with his memory and history. He breathed his grandmother as if his history became a part of his present; his whole quest was to get back his glorious history. Well, he finally got it!

From the readers' point of view, when I ask my students' responses to Jackson's dance, I do actually get predominantly similar responses to those of the pedestrians. Jackson wanted to complete his mission by himself like a hero; however, if we objectively read this ending, so my students argued, "we are going to find out that Jackson did not accomplish anything. Actually, we hate his guts! We thought he could do much better than eat, drink, vomit, and pass out on the train tracks." Apparently, they are less appreciative of the fact that Jackson much admires the past and is unable to make any difference in the present. They got irritated by his incapacity to achieve anything, his passivity, his replication of stereotypical images, and his illogical tribal bonds. It appears that the four years they spent in the university apparatus have had their toll on their minds; working against deadlines, planning, prediction, evidence-based work, etc. had transformed them into capitalists in the making.

There was one exceptional reading which, I think, is both the most significant and the truest to the flow of the story line. One student argued that when Jackson stepped into the heart of the intersection, and though he looks odd or bizarre by industrial cultural standards, he manages to force his own cultural system in the heart of a capitalist city or at the CCS.

By demonstrating the stark contrast between Jackson wrapped up in his regalia and the massive flow of the capitalist city, Jackson became the center of attention because he acts in away different from the main stream.

In the light of this reading, we can understand the mesmerizing effect Jackson's dance had on the whole city. Yet there is still more to say about the ending. At one level, Jackson's conflict has been resolved because he got back the regalia; but at another perhaps higher and more significant level, the story's main conflict remained unresolved because it was not only about getting the regalia back. In fact, it is not about the regalia at all, but rather about two conflicting, mismatching and variant cultural systems who occupy the same space. At any moment, these two cultures are put together face to face something goes wrong similar to what happened in every encounter between Jackson and the officer, Jackson and the mission boss, and Jackson and the bartender. Jackson is Spokane Indian and his people have lived in Washington for thousands of years; they have danced the powwow dance for all these years. "White Americans have consistently failed to appreciate the culture and specific identities of Native American"(Brookeman 1990).

The end of the story highlights the naked truth that Jackson embraces history in a city that does not bother much with history, which makes him odd. The city did not actually stop; in fact, it does not have the leisure time to stop; but that is Jackson's own feeling. The spectators perceive him as strange, mad, freak, a person who is out of time and place. Therefore, when we speak interpretation, the story has a double end, Jackson's own perspective and that of the city. Such finale would make more sense if we put it against the beginning. Now, it is about time to turn to the question I asked at the outset: why did Jackson beat himself up so badly at the introduction?

The ending against the beginning

Right on the first page, the narrator introduces himself as a homeless, alcoholic, and passive protagonist. This is what Jackson has to say about himself by way of introduction, "I grew up in Spokane, move to Seattle twenty-three years ago for college, flunked out after two semesters, worked various blue – collar jobs, married two or three times, fathered two or three kids, and then went crazy." Nobody would, of course, introduce him/herself in such negative terms unless he is totally wasted, which Jackson might likely be. Similarly, Jackson farcically characterizes his own kinsmen. The seven Aleuts are an Indian group who have spent eleven years waiting for their boat and have literally done nothing to bring forth their own salvation. They smelled like salmon because they spent so much time sitting on a bench on the seaside. Jackson sang with them their nostalgic songs, and when they started crying, he cried with them for awhile; then he asked if they had any money, which he knew, of course, they would not have. Jackson also mocks the fact that his ancestors did not believe in perfection, "Because they don't want to be perfect, because only god is perfect, Indian people saw flaws into their powwow regalia." In the end, he mocks his own victory, for the ending is as hilarious as the beginning. Commenting on Jackson's reward at the end of his quest, Alexie in an interview with *The New Yorker* says:

He's still homeless. I mean, he's got the regalia, but what the hell is he going to do with it? It was interesting to me when I read the story again this morning—I'm always puzzled by myself. Like, what the hell does that mean? But the end, in my head, I saw it being filmed. And I thought, That's a huge triumph, him dancing in the streets with the outfit. But, as with any triumph in any movie, when it says "The End" you have to think, well, what happened to them after that?

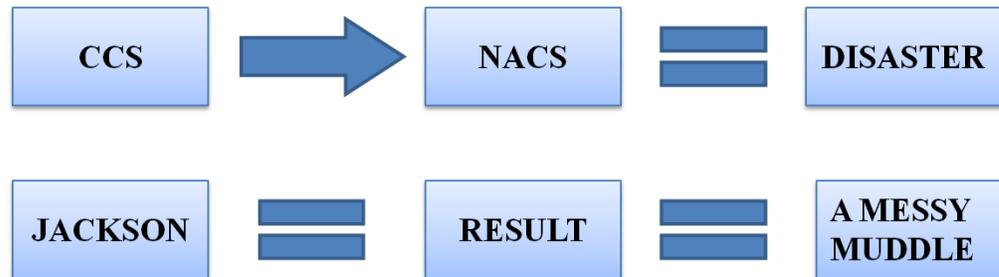
When asked to speculate on what will happen after the ending, Alexie did not hesitate to say that Jackson may well go and pawn it again. To explain such great appetite for farcical introduction, middle, and ending, one could argue that Alexie has exchanged the usual heroic main character in literature with a more realistic representation, which more aptly reflects the awful situation of the Native Indians in the reservations. Jackson is not just a fictional antihero; he represents the real dwellers of the reservations.

A second way to interpret this self-whipping is that Alexie is playing the blame game. Because Jackson blames white America for the Native American appalling end, he unequivocally rejects the capitalist apparatus (universities, laws, money, and linearity) as a system of oppression. These farcical situations can therefore be read as an act of resistance to assimilate into mainstream America. One third possibility is that Jackson is countering the stereotypes about Native Indians by literally acting them out, which is yet another act of defiance.

However, the irony with which he represents himself and his own culture would tempt me to take these representations into a different direction.

They are more than counter-stereotype images or anti-assimilationist messages on the part of the narrator; I am more inclined to read them as markers of cultural difference between capitalist and non-capitalist societies. The flip side for these farcical situations will look a bit more serious. The net result for these encounters marked by culture imposition, whether the object of imposition is an ordinary reservation man or an anti-assimilationist hero, his end is as catastrophic as his beginning. Figure 2 helps explain Jackson's catastrophe:

Figure 2: Cultural Imposition



NACS is not a capitalist culture; therefore, any imposition of capitalist principles on it will result in a total mess. Using irony as his tool, Jackson has in fact succeeded in protesting imposed deculturation. The reference to Columbus later in the exposition provides enough anchorage for this reading. After Columbus; Jackson became what he is now-- a homeless, alcoholic, random person. Before Columbus; he was the noble savage-- an uncivilized man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of a man not exposed to the influences of civilization.

Elsewhere in the post-colonial scene

Alexie's self-whipping practice is not alien to the post-colonial scene. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe approaches native deculturation in similar terms in his much anthologized story "The Sacrificial Egg." The story features a main character who has been transformed through the influence of missionary schooling and the multi-national companies. Achebe's narrator does frequently intrude to comment on these cultural interventions. The more significant narrator responses are evident when he, like Alexie, very loudly defines his own culture as primitive; and when he describes the negative impact of capitalist intervention on the Igbo boy, Julius Obi.

The narrator intrudes on the story line to describe his native people as the people of the jungle who travel on canoes and exchange products on the market day: "And they came, these men and women, bringing the produce of their lands: palm oil and kernels, kola nuts, cassava, mats, baskets, and earthenware pots. And they took home many-colored cloths, smoked fish, iron pots and plates." These native communities are structured around tribal loyalties: "Umuru then was the meeting place of the forest people who were called Igbo and the alien riverain folk whom the Igbo called Olu and beyond whom the world stretched in indefiniteness." The narrator confirms western stereotypes about African culture by pointing to the economic and cultural structures and life styles of the pre-industrial Nigerian communities. People in these communities manifest non-capitalist economic practices of trading goods for goods, but they do not know or use any currency.

The impact of the capitalist intervention appears on the story's protagonist, Julius Obi. When the story opens, he is standing by the window of his office looking out on the empty market named Nkwo, recalling memories from a week ago, when it was full of activity before the arrival of smallpox. Julius's education tells him that smallpox is a kind of disease. But his native people think it is the revenge of Kitikpa, the evil deity. Julius takes the native belief to be purely superstition. Right at the opening paragraphs, the clash between the two cultures is clearly evident and Julius seems to be torn between two worlds that are so divergent and perhaps irreconcilable. The very true conflict inside Julius between the African Igbo side and the western side can be aptly described as a conflict of identities within the same man.

Julius shows signs of a scientific-oriented mind but when worse comes to worst, he shows signs of a superstitious mind which believes in the powerful revenge from Kitikpa, the native god. On the fated day, Julius suddenly steps on the sacrificial egg: "In his hurry he stepped on something that broke with a slight liquid." Soon enough Julius finds himself onto the ground hiding from the night-masks fearing for the worst. Julius presents a case of the half transformed native. He is neither totally Igbo nor totally Western; neither totally Christian nor totally pagan.

Similar to the conflict in Alexie's story, the conflict here is one between what is Igbo-- an primitive, pagan, farming, African culture-- and the culture imported through multi-national companies and the missionary-- scientific, Christian, capitalist, European one.

For readers who are unfamiliar with Achebe's writing and his loyalty to native African culture, Achebe would doubtlessly sound like someone who is whipping himself and his own people. Unless we could read his words within the context of post-colonial responses to imposed culture transformation, we will not be able to reconcile Achebe's criticism for his own culture on one hand with his loyalty to it on the other. Indeed, and to state it bluntly, Achebe is not critical of his own people, but he is rather calling a spade a spade, not a motor driven saw.

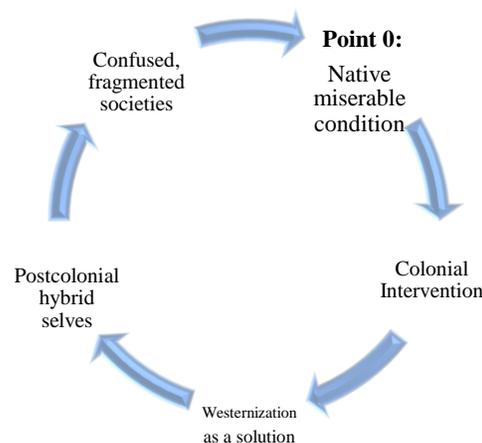
Like Alexie, Achebe is stating the truth about his nation and people. However, unlike Jackson, his narrator sounds dead serious in his criticism of deculturation when he describes the native village growth as malignant growth: "For indeed they had prayed--who will blame them--for their town to grow and prosper. And it had grown. But there is good growth and there is bad growth. The belly does not bulge out only with food and drink."

When capitalism is imposed on the farming tribal Nigerian society, this will only lead to divisional attitudes; such sudden cultural intervention in the flow of life through globalization, westernization, democratization will only tear the community apart and divide it along religious and regional lines.

Like many third world societies, the Igbo society is structured around tribal loyalties; each tribe has its rules, laws and alliances. The tribal system features simple and pre-industrial social and economic structures. In such case, the individual shows more loyalty to the tribe than to the nation state. Tribal laws have more force than the civil law, and national leaders often find themselves having to respect these tribal, patriarchal community structures to guarantee tribal loyalties and the nation's stability. Any imposition of industrial and post-industrial cultural, legal and economic principles will only contribute to destabilizing these rather stable structures.

Conclusion

In response to the miserable consequences of unfortunate encounters between capitalist interventions in non-capitalist native cultures, post-colonial writers seem to want to highlight the irreconcilable differences between pre-industrial and industrial systems. That is why, the author argues, both Alexie and Achebe have declared honestly and directly that culture impositions are more malignant than benign. Can capitalism be imposed on people who do not know currency? Can democracy, a byproduct of middle class industrial societies, which works according to the principle of consensus building, be imposed on tribal societies? Will the progressive, linear time of science fit the Aleuts? The narrators were not cursing themselves but they were rather protesting malignant interventions in the natural growth of their native culture. When capitalist culture or economy is imposed on non-capitalist societies the result would be a total mess like Jackson or Julius. The figure below shows the correlation between culture imposition and bad growth. The culture cycle looks like in figure 3:



As a final note, and to tie the discussion to the contemporary Arab messy situation, many Arab intellectuals have joined forces with these post-colonial voices to protest imposing democracy on non-democratic Arab societies.

As a matter of principle, democracy means expressing one's opinion freely without fearing any retribution. Diversity, plurality, decentralized governance, transparency, and the rule of law are the cornerstones for any democratic culture.

Following Alexie and Achebe in calling the spade a spade, the Arab post-colonial cultural scene provides ample evidence that these principles are far from being realized. The traditional authorities- mosque, school, father, police- are pretty much in hold. These authorities still impose many restrictions on the freedom of speech. The Arab citizens continue to be divided along sectarian or tribal lines. Such alliances often replace the civil law in resolving disputes. That being the case, democracy has become the bad growth and the Arab Spring has quickly given way to the autumnal scorching winds in Yemen, Libya, and Syria. For it to yield the desired good growth, the democratic transition in the Arab world should take its due evolutionary course like it did in many European countries. In the British case, for example, it took eighty six years (1832-1918) before all British citizens--men, women, rich and poor-- could freely practice their democratic rights. In the less optimistic scenario, it might take an equal or more number of years for a democratic culture change to occur in the postcolonial Arab countries.

Acknowledgement

Dr. Abdel Karim Daragmeh currently works as associate professor of modern and contemporary literature. He has published articles on post-colonial and minority literature, African literature, African American literature, Arab literature, blended language teaching environments, and translation between Arabic and English. Dr. Daragmeh's research expertise are in African, Arab and American contemporary literatures and translation studies. He is a co-founder of the American Studies minor program at Najah University. He has received his PhD in contemporary literature and literary theory from Southern Illinois University, Illinois, USA.

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