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"Revisiting The Centre: Colonial Education, Cultural Continuity, And Neo-Colonial Legacies In The Postcolonial Global Order"

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Abstract: This paper seeks to elucidate the concept of the centre and its broader implications. It critically examines the intricate architecture of the colonial education system and its pervasive impact on the current postcolonial global order. The analysis extends to the roles of culture and language in fostering the continuity and evolution of civilisations. Drawing upon the perspectives of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the paper investigates the mechanisms by which colonial powers exert economic control over third-world nations, often by imposing frameworks that limit the autonomy of colonised societies. Furthermore, it addresses the persistence of neo-colonial administrative structures, highlighting their function even after the formal departure of Western colonisers from these regions.

Keywords: Centrism, The Global South, Cultural identity, Christianity, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ethnicities, Neo-Colonialism.

The concept of "centre" denotes the exercise of dominance whereby one entity imposes its authority over another. This dominance extends to various facets of life, including administrative control, lifestyle choices, religious practices, and economic frameworks, all dictated by established rules and regulations. Importantly, this centrality should not be confined to specific geographical locations, temporal contexts, ethnicities, castes, creeds, or genders.

Historically, Europe has been regarded as the epicentre of cultural and intellectual discourse. However, a genuinely inclusive centre must encompass the positive contributions from diverse global contexts. The languages of the Global South, particularly those of Africa, have faced a devaluation in the face of this centrism. Many African communities communicate in multiple languages yet lack written forms in their native tongues, as most documentation and literature have been produced in European languages.

Consequently, the legacies of linguistic and cultural expressions inherent to Africa are at risk of being overlooked or misrepresented. Notably, academic and literary figures like Ngugi wa Thiong'o have advocated for recognising and elevating African languages and narratives. He posits that African voices must reclaim their cultural representation, as these expressions are fundamental to the continent's identity and historical context. In doing so, they challenge the prevailing narratives that have marginalised their existence and contributions to the broader human experience.

Monopoly means single dominance or control in commerce and trade. The British imposed their cultures, rituals, lifestyles, and dressing sense on the colonised. They modified the medical system and asked third-world countries to do business with only Britain. Africa is famous for producing gold. The British plundered natural resources like gold, silver, copper, and iron from third-world countries.

Sharma states that the British paid salaries to their army by the colonised countries. They gave promotions and increments only to their nation's soldiers. The British saw third-world countries as inferior, so they did not give any promotion and increments to the people of the colonised countries (*History of Modern India* 142).

A monopoly represents a situation in which an entity has exclusive dominance or control over a particular market or sector, particularly in commerce and trade. Throughout the colonial era, the British established a widespread imposition of their cultural practices, social rituals, and lifestyle choices onto the populations of the territories they colonised. This was not merely an exchange of cultural values but a profound transformation of local customs and traditions.

In addition to altering cultural frameworks, the British also modified Indigenous medical systems, often disregarding traditional healing practices in favour of their own. They enforced stringent trade policies that compelled many third-world nations to engage in commerce predominantly with Britain, creating a dependency that stifled local economic development and autonomy.

Africa, recognised for its wealth of natural resources, particularly gold, became a focal point for British exploitation. The colonial regime systematically plundered these valuable resources—gold, silver, copper, and iron—depleting the continent's wealth and disregarding the socioeconomic consequences for local populations. This extraction-driven model of economics resulted in the enrichment of Britain at the expense of the colonised nations, leading to long-lasting impacts that are still felt today.

The British asked third-world countries to grow crops according to their needs. They bought the crops for low prices, making the conditions of farmers critical. For instance, the British asked Indians to grow indigo trees and cotton for their factories (Sharma 193).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o critiques the portrayal of Europeans as noble figures in the context of the Global South, arguing that such narratives undermine the dignity and heritage of their ancestors. He emphasises the significance of identity—comprising individual, national, cultural, and racial dimensions—highlighting that these facets are integral to our existence and societal richness. The British colonial legacy has contributed to pervasive alienation and dislocation among these communities.

Thiong'o advocates for an educational framework centred on African perspectives, positing that this approach would foster a deeper understanding of history and a sense of belonging among African youth. Additionally, he argues for including multicultural education in school curricula; without this, students risk remaining unaware of the diverse strengths and values inherent in their regions.

The imposition of European languages—such as French, English, and Spanish—on African populations led to a significant shift in the continent's linguistic landscape. As Africans were compelled to learn these foreign languages, vast knowledge and information began accumulating in these European organisations, mainly in fields like social sciences, science, and technology. This shift contributed to the decline and marginalisation of indigenous African languages, which suffered as a result.

Ngugi raised a compelling argument regarding the representation of African languages on global platforms, particularly at the United Nations. He criticised the absence of any African language in the organisation's activities and communications, emphasising the need for the UN to embrace and include at least one of the continent's rich linguistic traditions. He suggested languages such as Kiswahili, Wolof, Shona, or Somali as potential candidates, advocating for their recognition and inclusion to honour Africa's diverse cultural heritage.

Ngugi advocates for establishing a universal common language, believing that such a language would significantly enhance communication among people from diverse countries. He emphasises that this universal language should not impede the growth and development of other languages, which are essential to cultural identity and expression. Ngugi specifically proposes Kiswahili as the potential global lingua franca, arguing that it could usher in a transformative era in human relations across the African continent. By promoting Kiswahili, he envisions a world where communication barriers are dismantled, fostering deeper connections and understanding among various communities in Africa and beyond.

Ngugi discusses the concept of three influential powers that are often regarded as the Centre in the global landscape. The first of these powers is the European Centre, a colonisation center of culture, politics, and economic influence. The second power, the United States, colonising and asserting its presence across various nations, showcasing significant impact in areas such as diplomacy, military presence, and cultural dissemination. Finally, there is Japan, a remarkable example of resilience and innovation, renowned for its extraordinary efforts to rebuild and modernise after the devastation it faced during the Second World War. Japan has gained international acclaim for its technological advancements, particularly in transportation, communication, and agriculture, ultimately shaping it into a leading force in the colonisation.

Culture serves as a vital foundation for society; it reflects the values and beliefs that shape the lives of its people. It encompasses a specific group's shared knowledge and practices, including elements such as language, religion, and social customs. A community is nurtured through culture and the values it holds dear play a crucial role in fostering social relationships and connections.

Traditionally, older family members are accorded deep respect by their younger counterparts. However, the impact of colonisation has disrupted this customary reverence. In the past, younger generations would adhere closely to the wisdom and guidance of their elders, but this dynamic has significantly changed. Today, many younger individuals no longer feel compelled to follow the advice of their seniors, which has led to a sense of disconnection and loss of cultural authority.

Colonial influences have mentally shackled many Africans. The arrival of European powers introduced a cultural phenomenon that prioritised foreign customs over indigenous practices. Language, in particular, acts as the primary conduit for transmitting culture. In many developing countries, those who communicate in European languages often receive a higher social status, leading to a concerning neglect of their native tongues. For example, in our society, proficiency in English often translates to greater respect and social mobility, overshadowing the rich heritage of regional languages and dialects.

Religion plays a significant role in shaping culture, and Christianity, in particular, has emerged as the most widely followed religion globally, mainly due to the impacts of colonisation. This influence is especially apparent in Africa, where traditional cultures and practices have been deeply intertwined with Christian beliefs and values. Today, more than fifty per cent of the African population identifies as Christian, a shift that reflects the lasting effects of missionary work and colonial influence.

One striking example of this phenomenon is the naming conventions among African people. Many individuals carry Christian names alongside or in place of their traditional names. A notable case is the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, originally named James Ngugi. His decision to abandon his Christian name in favour of his African heritage is a powerful statement about identity and cultural preservation. Ngugi advocates for his fellow Africans to embrace their indigenous naming traditions and reconsider Christian names, urging a return to names that reflect their cultural lineage and heritage. This call to action emphasises honouring and maintaining African cultural identity despite historical and ongoing external influences.

The development of our mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping our cognitive abilities. When the medium of instruction is rooted in a child's regional or mother tongue, it significantly enhances their learning experience. A perfect illustration of this is Albert Einstein, who attributed much of his success as a groundbreaking scientist to his early engagement with his native language. Children who attend schools where their mother tongue is the primary language of instruction often find themselves answering questions confidently and clearly, free from the constraints of hesitation.

Language is an invaluable gift to humanity, setting us apart from the animal kingdom. Communicating through language empowers us to express our ideas, beliefs, and emotions, forming the foundation of human connection. It is a powerful vehicle that transports the customs and traditions of one generation to the next, allowing us to preserve our cultural heritage. Without language, the transmission of customs and traditions would face tremendous challenges, highlighting its indispensable role in our social fabric.

Culture enriches human existence, infusing life with meaning and fostering a sense of harmony that encourages individuals to flourish creatively. Historically, before the arrival of European colonisers in various developing nations, these regions boasted rich and diverse cultural traditions, with unique practices and beliefs that reflected the complexities of human experience. However, the imposition of European culture led to significant transformations, often overshadowing the local traditions. Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasises that culture should not be monotonous; instead, it should celebrate diversity, celebrating the myriad expressions of the cultures and ethos of the regions.

Language is a vital conduit for passing down cultural knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next. As language evolves, it incorporates new words and concepts, often reflecting shifts in societal norms and cultural paradigms. Today's world is witnessing the rise of online culture, which significantly broadens language horizons, enabling rapid exchange and adaptation of ideas across global communities.

Furthermore, the advancements witnessed in Western societies in areas such as social structure, economic development, and cultural practices cannot be attributed solely to internal dynamics. They are also a result of interconnectedness with regions like Africa, Asia, and South America. For instance, the contributions of a substantial number of individuals from Eastern backgrounds in science, technology, politics, and economics highlight the collaborative nature of progress in our increasingly globalised world.

The capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in 1453 marked a significant turning point for Europe, severing its direct routes to the East and prompting a scramble for alternative passages. This critical event fueled the ambitions of explorers like Christopher Columbus, who sought a maritime route to India, mirroring the pursuits of many European nations eager to access Eastern markets. With various uninhabited lands emerging in the East, Western powers began to assert themselves, expanding their reach to these territories. As a result, Europeans came to dominate approximately eighty per cent of the world's oceans, illustrating the profound interdependence of the two regions, where the Western world increasingly relied on Eastern resources.

The colonisers urgently needed spices and other natural resources, driving them to exploit the riches of colonised nations. Their insatiable greed led to the plundering of precious metals like gold and diamonds, particularly evident in Africa, known for its abundant mineral wealth. Once a prosperous nation before the fifteenth century, India saw its economic conditions decline as European powers infiltrated its borders. This decline is eloquently captured by Dadabhai Naoroji's analysis in "The Drain Theory," which highlights the extensive export of natural resources from India to the West, depleting local wealth.

The stark contrast between wealthy and impoverished societies was observable in many countries, including Britain, the USA, and Russia, but Africa presented a unique situation. Despite its vast array of natural resources, the continent appeared predominantly impoverished. The arrival of Europeans paved the way for a system of enslavement and the establishment of capitalist societies, exacerbating the hardships faced by African populations. The British, in particular, implemented policies such as the zamindari system and permanent settlement, dispossessing local people of their lands and relegating them to labour in gold mines and agricultural sectors.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o illuminates the phenomenon of neocolonialism, arguing that after Europeans left African nations, local administrations often aligned themselves with foreign powers, such as the USA, while simultaneously restricting democratic discourse. In Kenya, for instance, dissent against government policies was met with imprisonment, stifling any potential for meaningful debate or reform.

The legacy of colonialism was further compounded by the actions of postcolonial leaders who were often beholden to European interests. These leaders, lacking an understanding of the intricacies of their nations' problems, frequently adopted foreign strategies that did not align with their people's needs.

Additionally, Christian missionaries played a pivotal role in shaping the religious landscape of Africa. They not only spread Christianity but also provided financial assistance to local populations. While Christianity espouses ideals of love and equality, its introduction to Africa transformed existing societal structures. Before European intervention, African societies were characterised by distinct social classes with limited opportunities for mobility. The missionaries' influence, however, contributed to a reimagining of social dynamics in the region.

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