The Impact Of Westernisation On Traditional Cultures

Culture consists of the customs and beliefs of a community, passed down from generation to generation in the form of religion, folklore, language and music. It is these cultural practices that have led traditional communities to prosper, for people in these communities follow the expected due to consistency, without being thinkers or seekers. However, modern communities have adapted to western culture through a process called westernization. Modern westernization is also composed of religion, politics, costumes and beliefs, acquired from the European civilization. People already adapted to westernization are the thinkers and seekers of the society for with higher education and knowledge they begin to question their daily norms. This leads to westernization becoming a popular process that has set a stronghold in some traditional communities. The adaption to westernization may be a voluntary process; however, to others it may be a forced upon process. Placing traditional culture and westernization on a balance, but the weight varies depending on one's prospective.

Westernization creates a wall between traditional and European practices, as is forbidden while the other is empowered. According to Paul Harrison, "The third obsession with the western way of life has perverted development and is rapidly destroying good and bad in traditional cultures, flinging the baby out of the bathwater" (n.d.). Traditional cultures are vanishing destroyed due to westernization, because people are eliminating the essential characteristics that make the traditional cultures unique and adapting others. Europeans became superior due to their technology and industrialization, but were graving for more power. Power that is obtained by ruling the traditional communities, which are weak and making them inferior.

In the end, the traditional communities' mimic European customs, for acceptance in a society governed by those customs is the norm. Even today in the society, people pretend to be rich, by wearing fancy clothing and shoes, which allows them to socialize with rich people. A traditional person cannot wear its Mayan outfit as will be judged by the society. The traditional people had to dress, behave and act as something they were not, leading to Paul Harrison documents that "the local elite were made to feel ashamed of their colour and of their culture". This caused Fanon to write, "Then I would quite simply try to make myself white" (n.d.). Acting as a "white" was the style, that made the traditional people be accepted and treated equally in the society regardless colour. Adapting to westernization was not entirely an option, but rather a choice of acceptance or rejection. Nobody likes to be on the rejected zone; therefore, this encouraged people to pretend to be white, by dressing, speaking and behaving like them.

In the end, the use of physically and psychologically practices was employed to force new customs to traditional communities. The social institutions started to play a vital role in contributing to the success of westernization by encouraging the European culture but starting with European language. For as stated by Wa Thiong'o in an article titled Decolonizing the Mind states,

"Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vinicity of the school. Those found guilty of such crime were corporaly punishment - three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks - or were made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM DONKEY" (1992).

In the end educational institutions started to adapt many of this practices, and punishment of traditional people was enforced when they tried to practice their customs. With the prescription that traditional cultures need to be ended, as they were a persistent threat to the Europeans and their culture. In the end, the onset of punishment may have been a big negative aspect on the part of Europeans with possible repercussions of westernization not thriving. However, this was not the story for with punishment westernization just seemed to grow in popularity, while traditional cultures simply stagnated or declined.

New opportunities were offered in the traditional communities, as a result from westernization. Westernization might not be entirely all that bad, because as it closes a door, another gets open for the best. Recognition of westernization was mostly because of industrialization. Globally, all other countries want to be up to date with technology, but only some countries have the brain and equipment to make it function. The rest of them had to imitate in order to feel equal and recognized by the others. In order to be recognized, traditional communities needed to learn to speak and communicate as the modern people. The language globally known is English, this was the main thing that traditional communities needed to learn. Without knowing English, there was no acceptance and no opportunities. According to Colonising the Mind, “The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the main determinant of a child’s progress up the ladder of formal education” (Wa Thiong’o, 1992). Speaking the westernization language was an accomplishment and this was rewarded. The rewards not only included the prizes, applauses and prestige, but mostly the knowledge provided and its applications to specific areas that led to increased development. This was the first step for the traditional people to escape from their culture and ascent into new endeavours.

Westernization and traditional culture may be coexistence, but unequally. According to post-colonialism, “In a positive way, it becomes a necessity to rule over the local population in order to civilize them; colonialism showed that the colonialists are taking the burden of civilizing the brutes” (n.d.). Westernization can be a beneficial factor by providing the traditional people with education, as to how they should behave and speak. However, this does not mean they should forget about their folklore, music and food, as this does not affect the society, but provides an identity. Traditional culture provides unique identity to the communities, which does not need to be broken or disappear. According to Remarking Civic-coexistence “Globalization and the ongoing diversification of multicultural and multi-religious societies have given the rise to a new objective: that of inter-culturalism” (Terren, 2008). Societies can become more important due to their diversity in culture. Westernization can only be the physical appearance to impress people, but traditions are the daily practices that motivates the country to be as one, regardless race and religion. Not all the countries are lucky enough to have a diverse culture; therefore, this opens the door for economy, as a country with different cultures can be more fascinating that a new pair of shoes or a fancy blouse.

Westernization may be a positive, negative or neutral decision, but everything depends to what extent we decide to judge it. Practising westernization and forgetting the cultural roots, maybe a drastic problem as culture may decline within a few years. Multiculturalism is the key for societies that practise westernization but at the same time encourage traditional practices Westernization may be a drastic experience for those who were forced to adapt to the modern society, but a wonderful experience to those that freely accepted to be in style as the rest of the society. Traditional country can survive along with westernization, maybe a little or maybe a lot depending on the cultural people mentality. Traditional people has to fight for what they want

and most of all if their roots want to be cut and thrown. Traditional people are the ones that need to make westernization and traditional culture coexist, by accepting the advantages of technology and industrialization, and exhibiting their cultural folklore.

References:

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