

The Source and Different Types of Conflict in “The River Between”

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Abstract

“The River Between” is more concerned with the Africans’ exploitations by the Whites and the adverse colonization impact on Kenya’s culture. However, this cultural clash brought about by the traditional and colonial interests’ interactions is well illustrated in the novel. The novel “The River Between” by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o is based on the theme of conflict. This article, therefore, demonstrates the sources of conflict and it portrays how the conflict between the Makuyu and the Kameno communities. The article begins with the story of river Honia as a source of conflict between the two communities. The river created a rivalry between the Makuyu people who believed in Christianity whereas the Kameno community believed in traditional gods Gikuyu and Mumbi. Moving on, the article gives conflicts in the novel “The River Between”. One of the conflicts is between an individual Waiyaki and the community. Waiyaki failed to consult the community elders before building up schools for them thereby establishing a conflict. Besides that, the article is also showing out the significance of the novel in the benefit of our societies.

Keywords: colonization, Gikuyu and Mumbi, oral traditions, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, “The River Between”, Makuyu, Kameno, Kiama “The River Between”, Makuyu, Kameno, Kiama

1. Introduction

The novel of “The River Between” by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o talks about the story of Kenya’s first settlement by white Europeans. The arrival by the Europeans flashed a revolutionary change period that challenged the traditional ways of life of Kenyan people. The story opens describing the area of two ridges, Makuyu and Kameno and a River Honia running between (Ngũgĩ, 2015). The river even in dry seasons is strong. However, the name Honia meant “cure.” A warrior, a seer and the legends of a magician are ingrained in the tribes’ children that lived there and those who live there are untouched largely by the outside. The novel illustrated the division caused by the Europeans by the fact that the two communities who were affected through their arrival live in opposite ridges and the River Honia separates them. Ngugi (2015) explained that the colonists imposed new ways of thinking which presented a fundamental model shift in the minds of the local communities. It was either they accepted the modern ways, or they reject it in favor to keep their traditional Kenyan culture undiluted. On one side of the river, there was a village which embraced the new religious views of the Europeans while the other village sorted to preserve their tribe’s independence (Ngũgĩ, 2015). The river served as a symbolic divide because it united the two villages on its shores and their opposing perceptions on colonialism of the Europeans. It is on an ominous note when the story comes into conclusion. The main character is later blaming himself for failing to address the lack of time unity for the people.

2. Conflict

Conflict can be referred to as a serious argument or disagreement typically a protracted one about something important (Muir, 2013). If two people or groups are involved in a conflict, they are in a serious argument or disagreement, and they haven’t reached an agreement. Conflict can be categorized into intragroup conflict and interpersonal discord conflict. Intragroup conflict occurs between same group members while interpersonal discord conflict arises between two or more groups and involve violence (Muir, 2013).

3. Discussion

3.1 Sources of Conflicts in “The River Between”

The primary interestingly source of conflict in the novel is that “The River Between” gyrates around the rivalry between the people themselves. Locals who lived in Makuyu do not share the same ideologies as those who live

in Kameno as opposed to that between the Christian missionaries and the locals (Phillips & Overdrive Inc, 2015). The author of the novel, Ngugi, noted that the conflict between the two sides is rooted deeply in Kikuyu people's past and it attracted a lot of attention when the white people's ideologies primary through the teachings of Christianity and are imposed on the people of Kikuyu. Chege led the conservatives in their activities and further emphasized on keeping their traditional values and teachings alive. He severally warned his people to be cautious about the white people's advent.

The novel by Ngugi expresses the story of a girl (Muthoni) who lives in a family which embraces Christianity. Surprisingly, the young girl decided to undergo a traditional circumcision act, a ritual thought by the tribe that marks the transition of a girl into womanhood and signals that she is ready for marriage (Ngũgĩ, 2015). According to the novel, Muthoni ran away from home because her father did not allow circumcision practices, but she wanted to be circumcised because she believed in traditionalism and that it was an important tribe ritual (Hemingway, 2017). Eventually, she died due to surgery complications, and her death is even interpreted in distinctly two different ways. Her death stimulated the conflict of religion whereby it created a more significant division between the people who believed in Christianity and those who believed that the ways of the white man are wrong and choose to follow the tribe's tradition (Hemingway, 2017). Some villagers considered it as a sign that the spirits were angered by the new religion of the girl's family. Others believed that it was an expected result of an antiquated beliefs system and alleged circumcision should be abolished (Ngũgĩ, 2015). After she died, her death symbolized the idea of rejection that there should be a reconciliation between the two conflicting viewpoints.

The story progresses with the two villages, i.e. Makuyu and Kameno heap on, and the young girl Muthoni's proposed circumcision causes a lot of conflict within the people. The death of Muthoni stirs up the school of the missionary where Waiyaki has joined into action going so far as to exorcize the children whose parents uphold still the circumcision traditions. Among them is Waiyaki who is forced out of the school (Kettle, 2017). He then decided to build a school in response to the exorcized children. And while he doesn't understand fully the role of leading his father foretold he could take up, he only realizes that he had a mission of facilitating education for the village children. He is so much worried about his educational goals that he fails to address and recognize the other community's needs such as repossessing the lands held by the European colonists (Kettle, 2017). Some villagers began to conspire behind the closed doors by ultimately forming Kiama a secret committee which had a role of ensuring the tribe's purity.

In "The River Between", there is a focal point of a young man called Waiyaki. He is Chege's only son, and Chege is a respected and a well-known elder in Kameno who grew up in a tense time between the two ridges' tribes Makuyu and Kameno. Waiyaki is considered to have special gifts at an early age. He once met two boys quarrelling and tried to break up the fight. He was able to stop the violence although he was the youngest of the three. Ngugi revealed the three boys, Kinuthia, Kamau, and Waiyaki that they are all meant to learn at a nearby school of local mission and to be professional teachers. At his father behest (Chege), eventually, Waiyaki is enrolled at the school. Chege, his father, explains to his son Waiyaki about the legend savior who will be born into their village and who will be able to undertake great things for the people. Chege believes that his son Waiyaki is that redeemer who has a role of protecting the people. Although he doubts the fantastical prophecy, Waiyaki is able to perform well in school and went on to play a key role in developing his people (Hemingway, 2017). The reason for the eagerness of Chege to send Waiyaki to the mission school is that he wanted him to be in a place to absorb the colonists' wisdom. This knowledge would prepare and assist him in the struggle against the white people. In spite of the liberating knowledge potential, he must make sure he doesn't cuddle the system of the colonial because by doing that way, he would be defeating his training purpose (Hemingway, 2017).

Waiyaki meets a religious leader Joshua in an attempt of reconciling two opposing groups which alienates his own tribe's elders as they fear that he might sell them to the white men. Joshua is a man named in the novel who is set to believe in Christianity than the tribe's traditional lore, and he is known that he has collected a small followers' band who regularly attend to his church in Makuyu (James, Tóibín, & Blackmur, 2011). He is the father to Muthoni and Nyambura. The outcome is, however, the opposite of what he anticipated as both parties were fighting more violently than ever for their creeds (James, Tóibín, & Blackmur, 2011). Waiyaki makes enemies as a result of this turmoil. Kabonyi is among those who began to incite dissidents in the people to destroy and undermine Waiyaki (Kettle, 2017). Kabonyi takes advantage of the relationship between Nyambura (a daughter of Joshua) and Waiyaki and calls a meeting to disenfranchise and humiliate Waiyaki which he (Kabonyi) hopes will end his leadership. Nyambura and Waiyaki pronounce his father tells their love for each other and Nyambura that she is no longer his daughter. According to Kettle (2017), Waiyaki succumbs eventually to the trickery of Kabonyi. While Waiyaki desires nothing not less than to suppress the growing discontent in the

village and to heal the anger amongst the people, he is powerless to undo the colonialism polarizing effects.

Later, Waiyaki is kicked out as a teacher by the Kiama, and he is able to see what is happening in his leadership. He decided to visit the sacred grove to find lucidity and then he realizes action need to be pressed. He started to understand that education was not that the tribe wanted, all they wanted was a unity to push in political power (Kettle, 2017). After leaving the grove and going before the people, he made his case, but Kabonyi deemed him as a traitor and Waiyaki cannot deny when he brings Nyambura forth. This action was the definite proof to the people of Waiyaki's oath-breaking.

3.2 *Different Forms of Conflicts in "The River Between"*

A form of conflict which is shown in the novel ensued as a struggle or a result of the rivalry between the Kikuyu community and an individual. A people who have been living for many years in peace are divided by the colonialist creating an ideological conflict. Some of the people in the society what to retain their cultures and norms while other are embracing the norms of the whites. Waiyaki for instance when he failed to consult with the elders of the community before building more schools in the region. Though he did not have bad intentions, the elders in the community felt undermined and resolved to punish him (Phillips & Overdrive Inc, 2015). This action is also likewise with Muthoni's case where she resisted Christian teachings and decided to get circumcised so as the tribe could accept her.

The cultural conflict between Christianity and the African tradition is portrayed in the novel. There are some Christianity values that are consistent with the African traditional culture while other values aim at replacing the traditional culture. The conflict is conflict aims at preventing the values that replaces the African culture. The values of Christianity is introduced to Makuyu and Kameno by Livingstone the missionary which does believe in traditional African rituals such as the female circumcision practices by the Kikuyu people (Phillips & Overdrive Inc, 2015). On the other hand, the traditionalist valued circumcision as an opportunity which educates young people about the tribe's ways. According to Phillips & Overdrive Inc, (2015), it was also the rite of passage that graduates the initiates into manhood or manhood. This standoff ensued from the antagonism between the two value systems which are mutually exclusive that gave rise to the two camps; the elite Christians on one side and the traditionalists on one side. A two side operating without a meeting point can leave a community that is deeply divided (Hemingway, 2017). According to cook (2011), Kameno is the home which embraces traditional cultural values where Gikuyu and Mumbi the original parents of the tribe reputed their association. It is still in this ridge where you will find Waiyaki's father Chege who is the traditionalists' leader. The ridge of Makuyu is the clansmen seat who have embraced Christianity with Joshua being their leader. Joshua is obsessive in his attachment to the new belief (Ruskin, Doyle, & Cooke, 2013). His faith in Christianity is based on the Bible's Old Testament. He is preaching about total submission to the new faith and at the same time condemning all rituals associated with the traditional way of life which in his sight are an anathema to the will of God. Ruskin, Doyle, & Cooke (2013), explained that Joshua has hatred for circumcision ceremonies and to surprise, Muthoni who is his daughter falls in the line of circumcision against his will which ends her life.

Kabonyi and Waiyaki in the novel also seemed to have a conflict. According to Ngugi, Kabonyi manipulated the division to destroy Waiyaki whom he zealously hates (Cook, 2011). Waiyaki's growing popularity is further fuelling hatred for Kabonyi. Having earlier taken the purity oath and loyalty to the community when he was administered by the Kiama, Kabonyi's schemes are vulnerable to Waiyaki. This is so clear that personal issues like jealousy made Kabonyi get into conflict with Waiyaki, and he had a purpose of ruining Waiyaki (Ruskin, Doyle, & Cooke, 2013).

Despite the conflicts, River Honia "The River Between" the two ridges of Makuyu and Kameno, it is unifying the two ridges since it was for both, the source of life. People from both Makuyu and Kameno brought their animals to drink water at River Honia (Jean, 2018). On top of that, it also represented the paradigm shift which was meant to cure the two ridges' major rift. Waiyaki best manifested this cure as he is deeply rooted in the ways of the tribe and also he was taken to the missionary school to learn the knowledge of the white man (Northup, 2018). Besides that, he underwent through circumcision making him be appreciated for both the old and the new ways. In the same light, he is opposed in the traditions of the community and the meaningless rituals associated with it and therefore he decides to follow a holistic life where people would be living in harmony (Northup, 2018).

4. Conclusion

The novel ends in a somewhat way of pessimism. This is so because Waiyaki in his quest failed to use education as the tool of uniting people the way he had hoped and this led to the remainder of the divisions. According to Hudson River Museum (2013), it seemed that the people were drawn to one extreme or the other while

identifying the emotion expose's extremities rather than taking a more position of moderation.

The novel of "The River Between" can be recognized as a compelling story of love which demonstrates the sacrifices that often have to be made for a person to be wholly committed (Hudson River Museum, 2013). For instance, what made Waiyaki fail in his leadership was his love for Nyambura, and sadly, he was unable to bring together the Christians, and the traditionalists and their fate was less hopeful.

The Novel stands out because of its profound way of showcasing the aspects of conflict during the colonial era. It is in the heart of the Kikuyu community where most of the conflicts were identified making it a focal point by the author. The main conflict in the novel is between the locals who live in Kamenu and Makuyu. The irony in this kind of rivalry is that it distracts the local from their conflict of independence from the colonialists to fighting among themselves.

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