

THE IMPACTS OF MODERNIZATION ON ECONOMICAL LIFE OF THE INDIANS: A STUDY ON JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S *THE PRAIRIE*

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ABSTRACT

This research is primarily aimed at revealing the impacts of modernization on economical life of the Indians in Cooper's *The Prairie*. The study uses interdisciplinary approach, which involves economical, historical, cultural, and ecological approaches, besides mimetic approach.

The analysis shows that modernization does not only cause positive impacts but also negative impacts, which are stronger. The bad impacts include monopoly, human and cultural conflict, poverty, disharmony, social injustice of mixed marriage, greediness, kidnapping, law breaking, materialistic life, adultery, divorce, and less religiosity. The positive impacts include independence, adaptation, rationality, and efficiency. The problems appear in the novel reflect the inner conflict of the author (Cooper himself). He questions the ideas of modernization brought by immigrants on the Indian land. To him, modernization can only be enjoyed by the upper class of the society. It cannot meet the necessity of the traditional people. The Indians lose some benefits because of the settlement of the immigrants in their land.

Key Words: *modernization, traditional, Indians, economy, trader, squatters*

INTRODUCTION

Modernization is one of the developmental goals of a government. It is marked by a strong and conscious break with traditional forms and techniques of expression. It rejects "traditional values and assumptions" (Holman, 1981:274-275). It is the coming of "a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representation toward style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life" (Bradbury, 1976:25). It is generally "expected by most of the countries in the world especially the superior or high class" (Abraham, 1991:1). It can increase income or economic sector. It can also promote economical betterment for society. In addition, it can mean "development, on the other hand, it can also

mean conquest or even destruction" (Wuntu, 1996:18). Modernization also causes "social gap, disharmony, suffering or misery especially for the lower class of the society" (Hidayat, 1994:1-2). Through *The Prairie*, Cooper questions the coming of modernization. The study focuses on the impacts of modernization on economical life of the Indians. One main question of this research is, what are the impacts of modernization on economical life of the Indians in *The Prairie*?

This study uses interdisciplinary approach. Besides, it also uses mimetic approach that views the literary work as "an imitation, or reflection, or counterfeiting, or as representation of the world and human life" (Abrams, 1979: 10-14). Literary work is a reflection of human life

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of a society at a certain time and place. A literary work should be considered as “a social phenomenon” (Burns 1973: 35). Therefore, economical, historical, cultural, ecological, and sociological approach is “indispensable in this study” (Smith, 1980:14-15).

James Fenimore Cooper is one of the American romantic writers, besides Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Romantic period in American literature (1830–1865) was an “age of great westward expansion” (Holman, 1981: 389). He was one of the writers who concerned with the life of Indians and the exaltation of the nature—prairie, beasts or animals, insects, and forest. To him, nature is part of human life which should be saved.

The choice of the material in *The Prairie*, reflected his memory when he was near the prairie, forest, and river. Therefore, he regarded the clearing activities and the westward extension as his enemy because it causes some destruction. He considered that life in the settlements was really immoral and sinful, which leads to the destruction. This might be the reason that he glorified and exalted the beauty of the prairie. Cooper has created his hero represented by the old trapper or the old man to spend his last days in the “blessed prairie” with the good Indians. At the same time the old trapper was disturbed and competed by the bad Indians, the Siouxes.

Modernization is intended by the government to have even distribution of development. It is not only related to something modern and social change, but also “efficiency”. It is also a process which enables “backward people of countries to escape from tradition, to promote and accelerate transition and finally to overcome under-development” (Kreutzmann, 1998:256). Besides, it is “up to date in a specific location at any given time” (Harrison, 1988:xiii). It is usually the result of a process of westernization, involving economical, political, social, and cultural changes which contrast with a previous traditional stability.

According to Levy in Harrison, modernization was defined as “a continuum, according to the degree to which inanimate power and tools

were developed” (1988:40). Levy distinguished between relatively modernized society and relatively non-modernized societies. The former to be high on, specialization, universalism, centralization, rationality and functional specificity, possessing bureaucratic organization, a highly generalized medium of exchange and developed markets”. Relatively, non-modernized societies evidenced “the very opposite of these characteristics” (1988:1).

Modernization can also mean “a total transformation of traditional society to modern society referring to the West” (Long, 1987:13). Jameelah shows that, the professed aim of western modernization is that the government intends “to promote economic development, industrialization and mechanization to eliminate poverty, disease and illiteracy and to facilitate a higher standard of living for the people” (Jameelah, 1966:136). This statement implies that, by having modernization, people can have a better economic development. It will create effectiveness and efficiency. Hidayat stated that a farmer should not only work in the farm traditionally, but he should also use modern technology for example having irrigation, good fertilizer, good seed, and intensification program (1994:5). However, “sometimes, the introduction of technology faces opposition from the people who cannot enjoy it” (Saadah, 1990:47).

Modernization is a global process. It does not relate with one place, one person, or one aspect, but it relates with all people universally. Consequently, it cannot accommodate all interests of all people. There are some people who can enjoy it very much. On the other hand, there are some people who cannot enjoy it. Moreover, there are some people who lost their sources of life.

Jameelah restated that “modernization is identical with Western civilization” (1966:139). The dominant idea of Western civilization is that mankind can achieve perfect happiness, health, prosperity, beauty, justice and lasting place through an intelligent, rational applicant of human reason unaided by any supernatural

power. Nature is still viewed by scientists as an "enemy to be conquered, dominated, exploited and manipulated to serve human ends" (Jameelah, 1966:139).

This statement reflects that Jameelah criticizes the people who have an idea that a better living can be acquired by conquering and exploiting nature. Mansyur stated that the actions of squatters will cause some problems—"conflict between the land owners and the squatters, between the squatters and the previous shelters, and it breaks rule of the balance of ecological life (Mansur, n.d.:125-126).

Modernization then "is characterized by a high degree of literacy, urbanism, media participation and empathy" (Lerner in Harrison, 1988:7). Further, Lerner showed that modernization is indicated by the presence of a distinct set of attitudes which includes:

"(1) a readiness for new experience and an openness to innovation; (2) an interest in things other than those of immediate relevance; (3) a more 'democratic' attitude towards the opinions of others; (4) an orientation to the future rather than the past; (5) a readiness to plan one's own life; (6) a belief that we can dominate our environment and achieve our goals; (7) an acceptance that the world is 'calculable' and therefore controllable; (8) an awareness of the dignity of others, for example, woman and children; (9) a faith in the achievement of science and technology, albeit a somewhat simple faith; (10) a belief in 'distributive' justice." (Harrison, 1988:20-21)

These indications can be used to measure whether or not the people are ready to welcome the coming of modernization.

THE IMPACTS OF MODERNIZATION ON ECONOMICAL LIFE IN *THE PRAIRIE*

Every immigrant tends to bring new culture, new ideology, and new way of life that will be applied in the new settlement. They tend to do this because they want to make the new environment the same as their previous one. Lately, the immigrants can feel at home in the new place and they try hard to influence the

earlier inhabitants to join with them. The coming of the immigrants to the new land brings social changes in every aspect of life of the Indians. Immigrant is "someone who has come to live permanently in a country after leaving his home country" (Higgleton, 1955:478). The immigrants here refer to the squatters or the whites represented by the Ishmael families consisting of Ishmael himself, his wife, his sons, his daughters, and some of his other relatives. In the new land "the squatters settled on the prairie without obtaining legal title to it, and utter the doctrine of frontier agrarianism" (Smith in Cooper, 1955:xiv). This uttering of agrarianism doctrine is proposed to conquer all the Indians land. This agrarianism doctrine leads him to be the wealthiest owner of the new land.

The impacts of modernization can include some aspects such as economy, family relationship, politic, education, culture, ideology, social activities, defense and security, law, religion, and ecological balances. However, the present writer focuses on the impacts of economical changes, because this aspect dominates the way of life of the characters in the story. These changes influence all the ways of life of the Indians. To have a clear picture of the influences, the writer would like to describe the condition of Indian life before and after the coming of the immigrants (squatters) especially on the aspects of economy.

Before the coming of the squatters, the life of the Indians were very natural, independent, peaceful, save, and there is no exploitation from other tribes especially the white. Whatever they want to do depends on their own will. On the other hand, after the coming of the immigrants, the Indians are exploited and usurped to move to the west. This action is pictured in Cooper's *The Prairie*. "All his works deal with exploit of the same scout or hunter at various periods from 1750s when he was young to his death" (Smith in Cooper, 1955:v). To exploit means take unfair advantage of other people in order to achieve personal aims. Being superior, the squatters compel the Indians to work hard for them. The profits of the working will be the

possession of the squatters without considering the misery of the Indians. "Conqueror took possession of the field of battle beginning to crop the day herbage of the fruit at victory" (Cooper, 1955:261). Moreover, they regarded the Indians as backwoodsman, uncivilized, and uneducated people.

Before the coming of the Ishmael group, the Indians lived peacefully, and safely in their own wide land. Cooper describes the condition of the people and nature as follows:

"Here and there a tall tree rose out of the bottoms, stretching naked branches abroad, like some solitary vessel; and, to strengthen the delusion, far in the distance appeared two or three winded thickets, looming in the misty horizon like islands resting the waters." (Cooper, 1955:4)

The quotation shows the refreshment, calmness, and coolness, which possibly influence the comfort and happy feeling of the natives (Indians). Another natural description of the land can be seen through the height of the grass. "Happily for the hidden party, the grass in which they were concealed not only served to screen them from the eyes of the savages, but opposed an obstacle to prevent their horses" (Cooper, 1955:35). According to J.C. Cooper in his book of *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Symbols*, grass in the prairie symbolizes something. "As turf, it is the native land. A handful of grass signifies victory & conquest of land" (Cooper, 1993:76). It is reflected that 'grass in the prairie' signifies Indian land. The squatters' endeavor to settle on the prairie covered by the grass reflects their great ambition to conquer the Indian land. "The naked prairie began to assume the forms of illimitable and dreary wastes, and the rushing of the wind sounded like the whisperings of the dead" (Cooper, 1955:424). These natural conditions of the prairie quickly change after the coming of the squatters. "The prairie is on fire. Trapper's bed of weed gets fairly in flame" (Cooper, 1955:283). The squatters burn the prairies because they want to open the prairie

into farmland. It is called clearing program.

The effect of the fire causes some other miseries on the Indians. Formerly, the prairie was beautiful and fresh, but after being fired by the squatters, it looks dry and barren. Besides, the old trapper together with his Pawnee parties lose some valuable sources of life namely animals and plants.

"Look ye here, returned the old trapper, pointing to the mutilated carcase of a horse, that lay more than half consumed in a little hollow of the ground; here may you see the power of a prairie conflagration. The earth is moist, here away, and the grass has been taller than usual. This miserable beast has been caught in his bed. You see the bones; the crackling and scorched hide, and the grinning teeth. A thousand winters could not wither an animal so thoroughly as the element has done it in a minute." (Cooper, 1955:293)

After the coming of Ishmael, the Indian life will be miserable, poor, and usurped. In the beginning, the squatters lived in the east of Mississippi, but then, they moved to the west of Mississippi. In the East of Mississippi, the prairie "is small, very fertile, always surrounded by forest, fast becoming settled and high cultivation (Cooper, 1955:1). They abound in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois and Indiana. West prairie or west of Mississippi is "great prairie, few hundred miles from the river. It is the final gathering place of red men, most red men inhabited west of Mississippi. Most Indians inhabited the country of west of Mississippi" (Cooper, 1955:1). For the setting of the novel, Cooper chooses "the strange new lands beyond the Missouri that Thomas Jefferson had bought from France in 1803" (MacDougall, 1). Around 1803-1804 (as the setting of time) Jefferson as a president sent Clark and Lewis to explore and clear away the road for westward expansion. The squatters seize their wide land. Consequently, the Indian possesses less land than before. This condition influences the economical condition of their life.

Agricultural areas of Indians decrease dramatically, so that the economy of Indian is

poorer. After being successful in conquering the Indians, the squatters compel the Indian to move west. There is only one choice for the Indians—whether they join together with the squatters or move away from their own land. “Where a pale face come, red skin have no place—cannot stay, the land is too small. They are always hungry. See they are here already” (Cooper, 1955:391). This quotation reflects that the squatters are greedy enough. The squatters think optimistically that the land belongs to everyone freely. This belief provokes them to exploit and usurp the Indians. “The air, the water, and the ground, are free gifts to man, and no one has the power to portion them out in parcels. Man must drink, and breathe, and walk, and therefore each has a right to his share of arth” (Cooper, 1955:84).

In the prairie the squatters bring the idea of modernization in the form of clearing program. The opening of clearing program forces the Indian to choose whether they join together with them or to move away from their own land. The squatters use ‘mobile rule’ or the law of jungle—who is the strongest, he is the conqueror. “I am as rightful an owner of the land I stand on, as any governor of the States” (Smith in Cooper, 1955:xviii). Here, the squatters think that everyone has a right to stay wherever he or she wants. The squatters deny or break the existence of the land law established before. They have great intention to conquer the land of the Indians.

“Can you tell me, stranger, where the law or the reason is to be found, which says that one man shall have a section, or a town, or perhaps a country to his use, and another have to beg for earth to make his grave in? This is not nature, and I deny that it is law. That is your legal law.” (Smith in Cooper, 1955:xviii)

Before the existence of the squatters, the Indians lived traditionally and naturally. In farming for example, they plant vegetables and fruits traditionally, unsystematically and without using fertilizer. After the coming of the immigrants, the land is full of plantations

(vegetables). In the new land, the immigrants are more diligent, more creative, and more challenging in struggling life. Consequently, they get more profits, more crops, and finally they are wealthier than the natives. It is natural that new people tend to be more creative, more diligent, and more independent in their new place. Indirectly, the use of fertilizer, systematical method of farming, efficient technology introduced by the squatters are beneficial and positive for the Indians.

Realizing that their agriculture is successful, the immigrants try to conquer all the nature consisting of prairie or land, beasts, and trees. Here the immigrants look greedier. “As tree after tree came whistling down, he cast his eyes upwards, These two had already liberated the cattle, which were eagerly browsing the grateful and nutritious extremities of the fallen trees” (Cooper, 1955:13). Besides, the squatters also kill all the animals they face. They hunt the animals in very big number. Proudly, the squatters said that “the earth was made for our comfort; and, for that matter, so art its creatures” (Cooper, 1955:17). This is the idea, which provokes the squatters to kill all the animals they face. The immigrants’ greediness gradually causes the Indians shove aside. The Indians gradually possess less land, so that they cannot plant as much as they want, and lately, they have less agricultural profits. Agriculture refers to the science or practice of cultivating the land especially for growing crops or rearing animals. It is the only source of income for their daily life.

Another source of income of the Indian life is hunting beasts. Indians are accustomed to hunting beasts and some other animals moderately. “I make but little use of either” (Cooper, 1955:17). They hunt for food and fashion only. Besides, they hunt in very small number or in moderation. They think that beasts or animals are the other parts of human life that should be preserved and saved. “The animal is human, and as mortal too, as a warrior of these prairies is ever known to be” (Cooper, 1955:210). Moreover, the old trapper suggests

that people cannot hunt all kinds of beasts. He only kills animals that are harmful. According to the old trapper, snake for example is not harmful, so that it cannot be killed. "The snakes of the prairie are harmless, unless it be now and then an angered rattler, and he always gives you notice with his tail afore he works his mischief with his fangs" (Cooper, 1955:209).

The old trapper or Natty Bumppo as the main character in the novel is the representation of Cooper himself. The existence of Natty Bumppo influences much on the color of the five novels called *Leather-Stocking Tales*. According to Davis and his coeditors said that Natty Bumppo became Cooper's greatest character and a real contribution to American mythology" (1955: 416). The novels have great contribution in American life in general and American literature in specific because "wild forest and plains, as Cooper both knew and imagined them, dominate the action and determine the plots of these novels" (Nash, 1982: 76).

Another carefulness of the Indians is shown by the action of the old trapper in saving the beasts. "... reluctance of the trapper to destroy beasts means to save them alive" (Cooper, 1955:278). In the end of his life, trapper leaves a message to a Pawnee not to kill a pup. "Pawnee, you cannot slay the pup on my grave, for where a Christian dog falls there he lies forever; but you can be kind to him after I am gone, for the love you bear his master" (Cooper, 1955:449). The forbiddance of killing pup on his grave represents the damage of killing the creatures living on the world randomly. Killing randomly can destroy the balance of nature.

After getting into the new land, the immigrants show their ambition to hunt or kill beasts in a very big number. They hunt beasts not only for food and fashion, but also for trade. The number of beasts to sent abroad is much more than that is used for food and daily fashion. Thus, the number of beasts as source

of Indian life will be extinct or exterminated. Later, the Indians get difficulties to have food, plants, or crops after the immigrants inhabited together with them.

The emergence of the act of landowner also stimulates the immigrants to be greedier. They have desire to eat more and more even though they are not hungry. Their action refers to a selfish desire to have more and more of something. Consequently, they will be much wealthier than the Indians.

"He as fully aware that a variety of "agrarianism" was current on all frontiers which maintained that nothing save labor applied to the clearing and cultivation of land could established a just title to it, but he saw in this theory a sinister evil." (Smith in Cooper, 1955:xvii).

On the other hand, the act of landowner only causes the Indians poorer because it is the immigrants who make the acts. Before the immigrants arrived into the new land, the Indians had possessed all the land, but after the immigrants arrived there, they made and acted as if the land was free to everyone. Everyone has the right to stand on where he lives. Everyone is free to have the land wherever he stands on. These acts cause the Indians who are inferior will be shoved aside.

Mixed marriage is another effect of the emergence of the immigrants in the Indians society. Marriage is one of the basic and natural needs of human being. It is the state or relationship of being husband and wife legally. Mixed marriage refers to the state or relationship of two people of different races committed together to be husband and wife. Before the coming of immigrants, Indians men married woman from their own tribes or their own races. They do not practice mixed marriage. The Indians think that having a mixed marriage will only cause problems. The following reflects the expression of the Indians:

"Impossible! Exclaimed the starlet naturalist. I am indisposed to matrimony in general, and more especially to all admixtures of the varieties of species, which only tend to tarnish the

beauty and to interrupt the harmony of nature. Moreover, it is a painful innovation on the order of all nomenclatures." (Cooper, 1955:256)

On the contrary, as soon as the immigrants settled at the same place with the Indians, they fell free to marry every woman they meet. The squatters feel free to marry Indian women, either from the Pawnee, or Siouxs. They do it on purpose in order that they can get the land from the Indian woman. This tradition influences the Siouxs. "Mahtore become a chief, as his father has been. He could have chosen wives from the Pawnee, the Omahaws, and the Konzas, but he look at the hunting ground and not at his village" (Cooper, 1955:338). As long as they married women from different tribes, they practice patriarchal system. Patriarchal means male head of a family or tribe. According to Higgleton, patriarchal means "society, organization or system is one that is ruled or controlled by men or patriarch" (Higgleton, 1955:694). In patriarchal system, when the squatters marry the Indian women, they will inherit all the land of the women. Lately, the Indian land will be decreased, and the squatters will be the wealthiest collector of land. "All the description explained above represented the greediness of the squatters lead by Ishmael" (Cooper, 1955:290). Lately, the patriarchal system causes social injustice for the Indians.

CONCLUSION

Modernization brings about great changes in society. The changes can include all aspects of life, but they primarily shape economical aspects. Besides, modernization influences and shapes the behavior of the people in the society. The analysis shows that modernization in the *The Prairie* does not only cause positive impacts to economical aspect, but also negative impacts, which are stronger. The bad impacts include monopoly, human conflict, poverty, disharmony, usurpation or expulsion, social injustice, greediness, mixed marriage, kidnapping, law breaking, and adultery. The

positive impacts include independence, adaptation, rationality, and efficiency.

The problems appear in the novel reflects the feeling of the author Through the novel, Cooper tries to capture the feeling and condition of the traditional people who have been the victim of the modernization. This is the reason why Cooper questions the coming of the modernization. Cooper questions the idea of the coming of the immigrants on the Indian land.

There is contradictory interest on the appearance of modernization—the interest of the authority and the interest of the common people or the lower class people. The *Prairie* reflects that the coming of modernization can only be enjoyed by the upper class of the society. It cannot meet the necessity of the traditional people, because they think that they do not need that modernization yet. They loose some benefits and sacrifice their basic belonging. They reject the coming of the modernization. They think that, they are not directly involved in the system of this modernization. Through the novel, the author realizes that the products of modernization could be a positive item if people use it correctly. In the hands of unscrupulous men, they can be destructive. Man's immorality can lead to the destruction of nature.

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