
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Things Fall Apart: Tracing the Tools and Means of Constructing Colonial Historiography

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ABSTRACT

History is a political tool. It is a tool of power either to the exploited or to the exploiters based on the narration of it. Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* witnesses the pre-colonial, under-colonial and post-colonial phases of Igbo society, a territory that represents colonized Africa or to some extent, all the colonized societies. This paper aims at illustrating the tools and the means incorporated to strengthen the base of imperialist interests marginalizing the historical narratives of the local "other" people. Therefore, this study explores the tools, like religion, education and administration, and the means, like the church, missionary and administrative system which are used by the colonial rulers to prevail hegemony in the novel. To this end, Edward Said's *Orientalist Discourse* and French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in which he has discussed discourse of State Apparatuses like Ideological State Apparatus and Repressive State Apparatus which will constitute the cornerstone of this study. Thus, this paper will contribute and enrich the existing African, Caribbean and postcolonial literatures and come up with a new approach – *Things Fall Apart: Tracing the Tools and Means of Constructing Colonial Historiography*.

KEYWORDS

Hegemony, orientalist, ideology, Ideological State Apparatus, Repressive State Apparatus

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1. Introduction

Albert Chinualumogu who is later known as Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was born in Eastern Nigeria. It is believed that he "invented African literature" (Gikandi ix). During his childhood, his father was a converted Christian whereas his other family members believed in the traditional African Igbo religion. According to him, as a writer as he was moved by the poetry of Christianity as well as the thing that Christianity was attempting to suppress: the traditional religion (Rowell 101). So, we can say that he saw the mix-up or blending of two opposite cultures at his own home. As a child he used to read English books where he liked the "smart and courageous" (Garner 1) white explorers. However, while studying at Ibadan University he traced the negative portrayal of the Africans. In texts like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* he realized the colonial ideology whereby Africans are considered as brainless savages.

His *Things Fall Apart* which depicts the life of a brave, courageous, Igbo soldier called Okonkwo in pre-colonial Nigeria of 1850s who commits suicide as the white colonizers began to dominate over the Africans at the end of the novel is a widely studied as a documentation of precolonial and postcolonial state, as a picture of past culture and imposed culture, as a counter statement against colonialist discourse and so on. So, it can be seen that this novel is an ample textbook for the postcolonial critics as it presents the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial stages of an African society. Since the novel witnesses the precolonial Igbo society and its culture, language, economy, and social belief and relations, it can be observed how the colonizers are penetrating a society physically, capturing territory, and ideologically, earning subjugations, and producing grand narratives from their own

end. The present study focuses on the third part of the novel mostly, where this infiltration and the weapons of these invasion can be traced which, consequently, drive the historical narratives.

Therefore, this paper aims at drawing lights on the tools, like religion, education, health and administration, and the means, like the church, school, hospital and administrative system which are used by the colonial rulers to prevail hegemony in the novel. To serve the aims and purpose of the study, some objectives are set to draw lights on some aspects like identifying imperialist narratives of history exposed in the novel, tracing the conflicts between the colonial and local interest in terms of culture, economy, and social system and exploring the used social, religious and state institutions along with their dealt functions and purposes by the colonial power to establish hegemonical narratives.

As a part of this research, I will locate the following articulations of the study like what are the historical narratives colonizers tended to establish in the novel along with what are the penetrating moments for the colonizer to infiltrate their ideology as well as how do social, religious and state institutions function for basing colonial rule.

2. Literature Review

Chinua Achebe's writings are described and illustrated in academia from multi-dimensional perspectives, although being an African writer, his works are mostly portrayed from postcolonial aspects.

Richard Begam in "Achebe's Sense of Ending: History and Tragedy in *Things Fall Apart*" explores "the interaction between the narrative construction and colonial representation... focusing on the question of closure or ending" (396). In this study, the researcher depicts three different conceptions of history saying that Achebe has spoken three perspectives of historical narratives in three endings of the novel. On the same note, the writer argues that at the first stage, Achebe "writes a form of nationalist history" which utters about past of Igbo society. Secondly, he writes a form of "adversarial history" where the colonizers are penetrating and controlling the society. Lastly, the author proposes that Achebe writes a form of "meta-history". All these endings, Begam recapitulates, works as a counter statement to the colonial statements in the novel.

Unlike several research works on *Things Fall Apart* from postcolonial perspectives, Md. Mahbubul Alam in his study "Reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from the Postcolonial Perspective" argues Achebe's work as "counter discourse" to the colonial prevalent discourses. Taking thoughts from Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, Alam shows the impact of colonialism on culture and traditions, relationships, and identity of the native Africans. He also posed the text as "an anti-orientalist discourse" (105). The counters are prorated into use of language and narration of the history based on oral traditions. The researcher concludes saying that "his strategy of differentiation between the pre-colonial and the colonial well suits his purpose of writing back by rewriting the history of the lost traditions and culture of the Igbo" (105).

Ali Salami and Bamshad Hekmatshoar Tabari, two scholars from University of Tehran, Iran research article titled "*Things Fall Apart* and Chinua Achebe's Postcolonial Discourse" demonstrates the text as a pathological writing; The authors write that "a pathological reading meant to draw on the pre-colonial and colonial history without any presumptions so as to present the readers with possible alternative African discourses in future" (19). This study illustrates the features of pathological literature and posed the text as "an alternative to colonial discourse" also. For this, considering the thoughts of Homi K. Bhaba and Mikhail Bakhtin, the researchers analyzed the role of language in the texts and use of folklore as a resistant discourse.

Though the existing literatures expose and confine themselves to depicting colonial influence on language, culture and society, the means and tools used for physical and ideological submission remain somehow undealt as it should be. From this view, the current study focuses on how historical narratives in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial era are established and by which means.

3. Methodology

The researchers used qualitative descriptive data to collect information from secondary sources like books, research articles, interviews, magazines with the novel remains the primary source. The basic aim is to analyze the themes of colonizer-colonized equation where colonial ideological devices like ISA and RSA are used. It integrates the thematic explanatory approach through the entire paper.

4. Theoretical Framework

Ideology of the colonizers who used religion, education and other devices like army as well as government to dominate over the subjugated African colonized is the pivotal aspect of this novel. Aside from this, the Whites have Eurocentric gaze where Orientals are defamed as secondary, marginalized, periphery, the inferior other. Thus, the theories of Louis Althusser and Edward W. Said remain conspicuous aspects of this research.

4.1 Louis Althusser

As this paper focuses on the social and state institutions' functions and purposes, Neo-Marxist French thinker Louis Althusser's thoughts of reproductions of the conditions of production and state apparatuses provide base for the arguments to serve the aim of the study. Althusser penned his widely discussed article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" where he discusses Karl Marx's Marxist thoughts on state and suggested his new thought on ideological functions of state and social institutions.

Under the sub-heading "On Reproductions of the Conditions of production" he writes about functions of reproductions and how the function work. He says, "Every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce: 1. the productive forces, 2. the existing relations of production" (Althusser 2). This view resembles the colonizers' functions in setting up institutions for reproducing their ideology on the subject group of people. On the same note, Althusser shows the function of school or educational institution under the sub-heading "Reproduction of Labor Power". He writes, "the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice (Althusser 6). The novel witnesses this sort of activities in then Igbo society by the colonizers.

Then, Althusser analyzed Karl Marx's thought on "The State" and state apparatuses where he proposed that state has two types of apparatuses. Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which Marx has discussed already, includes the government, the administrations, the police, the court, the prison. On the other hand, he proposed Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) which includes the religious (church, shrines), the educational (school, university), the political (party), the communications (newspaper, media), the cultural (art, literature etc.) ISA. These institutions serve to produce and reproduce consent from the subjugated for the policy maker, the powerful class. It can be seen that Chinua Achebe in depicting the colonial reality has detailed the presence and effects of these ideological apparatus in *Things Fall Apart*.

4.2 Edward W. Said

In his book *Orientalism* has illustrated the view of the west about the east, the orient. His thought's relevance in this study can be argued by his words from the "Preface" of his book,

without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand tenuously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce-the Orient politically, socio-logically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively (Said 3).

From these words, it becomes clear that, to know the purpose and aim of the rule of the west, colonizers their view on the colonized is needed to be informed. Said writes that the colonizers make the natives "other" by inflicting hegemony about the binary oppositions superior/inferior, civilized/savage in terms of religion, education, behavior, values, culture, and language. These propaganda helps the colonizers to have the certificates of ruling and exploiting the natives. In *Things Fall Apart* the church, the pope, the administrators, schools play the role of spreading these kinds of hegemony.

5. Results and Discussion

The Oxford Dictionary defines historiography stating, "the study of writing of about history". Historiography includes the narration, construction and their contexts of any historical moments or events or individual. It can be oral or written. The folk songs, legends and myths also carry the historical narratives as the books, art, literature, archives, museum and newspaper or press do. As a political tool, historiography serves for the powerful to manufacture power and subjugation from their subjects. In the age of colonialism, it is a weapon for legitimizing their atrocities.

In recent years several studies of historical synthesis have revealed that the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events. They have pointed to a variety of ways in which historians have given their chronological accounts of the past, their basic narratives, a meaning as a whole. A narrative may illustrate a familiar kind of plot -a romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire, for instance. It may illustrate a moral truth, as parables do. A narrative may manifest a trend of some kind of be colligated under a set of determinative values or goals. A narrative may account for an important outcome, which gives a certain value to what went before. Finally, a narrative may illustrate a theory of historical change, a theory, say, of economic or political processes. In all these ways an historical narrative may have a meaning as a whole over and above the meaning of its parts, its constitutive sentences. Narratives of fiction can be given meaning in these ways too.

In *Things Fall Apart* the notion of making historical narratives by the rulers can be traced if the functions and purposes of their established institutions are examined closely. In this regard, Religion and Language are the primary tools for the colonizers to penetrate the mind of their subjects. For this purpose, Church and Schools play crucial role. In any territory, the colonizers firstly attack on the beliefs and language. Chinua Achebe in his novel also has demonstrated these notions. Before establishing church,

missionaries appear. They preach about their religion and makes the native religion as false. Achebe writes, "he told them about this new God...he told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone" (Achebe 102). In this way the agent of the colonizers along with other for black converted Christian, for making the native convinced, try to inflict new hegemony. They try to rewrite the beliefs and traditions of the territory manufacturing their own narratives. Edward W. Said comments:

The idea of Europe a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison.) with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness (7).

This kind of attitude can be observed in the missionaries. They become introduced with the local with respected appearance and good words from the Bible with propaganda against the native beliefs and norms. They even try to change the narrative of God before the natives saying, "Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm" (Achebe 103). These words illustrate the power of making statement by the west to inflict their ideology. After "they asked for a plot of land to build their church" (Said 105), the missionaries start their mission permanently establishing church at Mbanta.

Along with the church, school and hospital have added strength to the colonizers purpose. In Chapter Twenty-One it can be seen that Mr. Brown, the white missionary, plans to be introduced with the natives softly and become close to Akuna, one of the great men in the village. Then, he learns about the clans and their religions and "came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so, he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia (a village)" (Achebe 128). The reason behind this can be argued that it is the process of injecting belief, behavior, knowledge and language in this future of the society and reproduce these constantly, taking the thoughts of Louis Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) in consideration.

The concept of hospital by the west eliminates the existing medication system of the natives. Like other concepts, the colonizers pose health issue as a weapon depicting their health system as fast and safe and "people began to say that the white man's medicine was quick in working" (Achebe 128). On another note, it is also argued that public health system is also used for the safety of ruling. Between 1832 and 1834 expeditions up the Niger River risked devastation by tropical diseases. The West African interior came to be described as the "white man's grave. In 1854 medical workers confirmed that the use of quinine minimized death from malaria and other advances in medicine and technology facilitated further European penetration. However, in this way the colonizers find conformity in injecting their supremacy among the natives and drive the narratives of history according to their own interest.

When the European came to the land, they had Eurocentric mindset that the Igbo has no centralized system. The Igbo lived in autonomous villages and town, ruled by their elders. So, the white, for the advantages of ruling, establishes a central administration under which there are several district commissioners for each. This phenomenon can be observed in the history of Indian Subcontinent also. Before the power of ruling going to the hand of East India Company, the whole Indian Subcontinent was detached for its geographical location as thousands of rivers and waterways crisscrossed the land. However, when the company took over the power, this land emerged as "Indian Subcontinent."

The advantage of setting up an administration is to rule the natives easily according to the laws made by the white from their own view. In addition, by introducing law, they find legitimacy to rule and exercise power. Furthermore, they also conduct court and police and messenger by themselves to punish the natives. All these are tools and means of manufacturing consent which Louis Althusser states as Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA). These institutions shape historical narratives of colonial era depicting the rulers as the messiah of justice and law because they enlightened the "savage" multitudes with these institutions.

Strikingly, in Igbo society, the White came to make money for their own sake. The availability of iron, yams, bananas, palm oil and other resources attracted them to colonize. So, they made appearances with their own religion, Christianity. Their church worked in land to make people convinced in the west's religion, and they become successful. Then they tended to centralize the decentralized Igbo society which used to dwell under various groups and clans for ruling easily. As a result, they introduced the administrative system and army in the name of security. Gradually, their school and hospital functions well to marginalize the existing education and medication system with their beliefs of the society. Finally, the colonization process reaches at its climax with the suicide of Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel who represents the culture and tradition of the Igbo society. At the end of the day, all the atrocities and exploitations by the West in that timeline are wiped and get legitimations. The last part of novel is mostly significant for in this ending Achebe exhibits the inner thought of the district commissioner when he goes to see Okonkwo after his suicide. By depicting this scene Achebe actually tries to unfold the scenario of the marginalized people and their history in academia or in the page of history. While thinking on writing about Okonkwo in his own book titled *The Pacification of the*

Primitive Tribes of the lower Niger (Achebe 148), the district commissioner thinks that "one could write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate," (Achebe 148). This thought, in fact, talks about the power, the power of writing history which belongs to the powerful colonizers. They decide who is to be celebrated, who to be minimized or what to be written or how much. This power of decision in the field of art, literature, history and academia is saved by the colonizers. Ultimately, they become the demigod who write the past and drive the present and future of the subjects. Therefore, the abovementioned institutions serve the dominant ruling class in *Things Fall Apart* in projecting historical narratives of the Igbo society.

6. Conclusion

The colonizers had a vision. The vision of earning subjugation. For this, they incorporated the ideological and repressive apparatuses such as the church, the school, the hospital, the law, the army and the administrative system. All their religious, social and state institutions served their own purposes rather than as they projected the welfare of the natives who were maltreated physically, verbally, culturally as well as psychologically. These institutions function simultaneously in manufacturing consent consciously or unconsciously as well as in basing permanent rule over the territory with no objections. If objections arise, there are also institutions to mute or marginalize like Okonkwo. All in all, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* becomes a recognized text for the postcolonial researcher for this detailed pasteurization of the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial moments in the Igbo land.

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