

Sense of Displacement and Alienation in Things Fall Apart

Anoj Kumar

Research Scholar, University Of Jammu, India

EMAIL: anuj151089@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the sense of displacement and alienation in the Things Fall Apart, which is the seminal text of the Postcolonial literature. Postcolonial literature critically audit the colonial relationship, it is the writing which sets out in one way or the other to resist colonialist perspective. Its true thrust is in reshaping the dominant meanings. In Things Fall Apart the white colonialist and their religion weakens the Igbo culture. The paper also shows that how the arrival of colonial power give rise to displacement and alienation in both individual and social level, which is illustrated through the main character Okonkwo who single handedly fought the meddling of white rule in the native life.

Key Words:

Displacement; Alienation; Colonialpower; White rul

Paper

The word ‘Displacement’ means replacement of one by another and ‘Alienation’ simply means estrangement.

Place and displacement are always considered as the most important traits in post colonial writings, whether its Derek Walcott poem “A far cry from Africa” Or powerful novels for example *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad or *Things fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, when a novel carries elements of place and displacement the theme of alienation is always reflected,

this originates from a sense of displacement. The sense of displacement comes out of the migration and enslavement.

The paper attempts to explore the sense of displacement and alienation in the *Things Fall Apart*, which is the seminal text of the post colonial literature. Post colonial literature audits the colonial relationship and it is the writing, which sets out in one way or the other to resist colonialist perspective. Its true thrust is in reshaping the dominant meanings. It is said that the post colonial theory may have originated in the middle of the twentieth century texts of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, but the studies of the imperialism have been undertaken much earlier in the works of V. I Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). It is with the Fanon that studies in the psychological effects of colonialism really develop. Mannons on the *Psychology of Colonialism* (1956) was a central text in this area.

However it is with the Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcraft et al’s *The Empire Writes Black* (1989) that post colonial studies becomes an institutional enterprise. Today the field is vast and ever expanding, including in its ambit and theoretical concerns film and culture studies, language/religion art and architecture, education system and its curricula, displacement, Diaspora and multiculturalism, feminism historiography, nativism and fundamentalism, environmentalism the project of modernity



and development and more recently globalization.

In *Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe sought to convey a fuller understanding of one African culture and in so doing give voice to an underrepresented and exploited colonial subject. In his article, “The Novelist as Teacher (1965), Achebe dwells upon, “the disaster brought upon the African psyche in the period of subjection to alien races” (Roscoe, 122). *Things Fall Apart* set in 1890’s and portrays the clash between Nigeria’s white colonial govt. and the traditional culture of the Igbo. Simply it is about the disintegration of an African culture as a result of European intervention.

Disintegration of the Igbo society is so central to things fall apart, the idea of collapse on both individual and social level is one of the novel’s central image. The image also gives the book its title, which is taken from the W.B Yeats poem “The Second Coming,” where he says,

Turning and turning widening gyre

The falconer cannot hear the falconer

Things fall apart the centre cannot hold

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world (1)

This poem also speaks about the breakdown of the old order and its displacement by a new order that kicks up mixed feelings of revulsion and fascination. The arrival of the white colonists and their religion weakens the kinship bonds so central to the Igbo culture. Ancestral worship plays an important role in Igbo religion and conversion to Christianity involves a partial rejection of the Igbo structure of kinship.

The behavior of the natives has been shown as somewhat irrational and the people

are depicted as superstitious in religious matters. For instance, at the very outset, parents are seen advising their children not to whistle at night: “Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits” (TFA 9). Likewise, “a snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear” (TFA 9).

Moreover, if a person had a swelling in his stomach, it was considered “an abomination to the earth goddess. When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die” (TFA 18). It was considered an abomination of earth. So, he was not given the first and the second burial. The people of Umuofia also observed a “week of peace” before sowing seeds in the fields. They believed that if no violence was committed during this sacred week, goddess Ani would get pleased and this will lead the village to prosperity. The story went round the village that a man had once broken the peace and as a punishment, he was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. Unfortunately, during one such week, Okonkwo happened to lose his temper. He failed to control his rage and he beat his wife, as she could not prepare the food in time. For his misdeed, Ezeani rebuked him and said, “The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish” (TFA 30). He commanded Okonkwo to bring a she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries to the Shrine of Ani, to repent for the sin he had committed.

The Christian tell the Igbo that they are all the brothers and sons of god, replacing the literal ties of the kinship with a metaphorical kinship structure through god. The over enjoyed response of the missionary



to Nwoye's interest in attending the school in another village- "Blessed is he who forsakes his father and mother for my sake" illustrates that the Christian church clearly recognizes Igbo kinship bonds as central obstacle to the successes of its missionaries. Towards the second half of the novel, a clash of civilizations comes into light, and Okonkwo's speech reveals that even Christian beliefs had some irrationalities in them. Okonkwo makes fun of the white man's religion and their God "Jesu Kristi:" "You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife, then"(TFA 147). The interpreter was dumbfounded at Okonkwo's remark and he somewhat awkwardly replied, "I did not say He had a wife"(TFA 147). Through this episode, Achebe seems to suggest that no religion is perfect and no beliefs can be perfectly rational and logical. Okonkwo was not at all impressed with these white missionaries, who came during his exile from the village, and who called African gods- only the pieces of wood.

However, the emergence of new religion did become successful in creating some doubts in the minds of the village folk. The young generation in particular, felt attracted towards Christianity. The Churches started converting the village folk to Christianity. When Okonkwo asked Obierika whether the white man understands their customs, he replied, "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no

longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (TFA 176).

For the colonizers the most important area domination was the mental domain of the colonized. This involved argues Ngugi two things,

- (a) Destruction of the old and revaluing of people's culture art etc.
- (b) The conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer

Together these two resulted in the dissociation of the sensibility of the native from his social and social environment. This is what Ngugi terms 'Colonial alienation' Okonkwo was a true patriot. He felt deeply hurt to see his village and his people changing and breaking away from their values and beliefs. In a fit of rage and anger, he killed one of the messengers of the District Commissioner Court, who came to stop the meeting of the villagers. However, he realized that nobody would protest against the white man. In his loneliness and despair, he committed suicide. He preferred to die, than to accept defeat in the battle of religion. He could not even get proper burial. He lost his status and reputation among his own people, as it was a sin to commit suicide in Igbo community. A man informed the District Commissioner, "it is against our custom... It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen, His, body is evil, and only strangers may touch it" (TFA 207).

By providing the economic benefits of cross- cultural contact and reveals the villagers delight in the hospitals treatment of illness. Mr. Brown, who is white missionary, captured the ideology of the Igbo people by providing them special aids as to send their



children to school so whites have implied the strategy of neo- imperialism to control the Igbo culture. And that is what Fanon in *The Coloniser and The Colonised* (1965) says, “colonizer never arrives in the colonies with the moral or cultural mission. There is always economic basis for colonialism.” (175) The European thought that their way of thinking and doing the things is much better and superior to the others so it should be imposed upon the rest of the world.

Conclusion. This paper clearly depicts the clashes between the Europeans and the natives i.e. Igbo society and the shortcomings and irrationalities in the beliefs of the African people and their society. Achebe implores them to live with self-respect and dignity, without feeling any shame for their past.

References:

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