ABSTRACT

THE IMAGE OF IMPERIALISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS* AND
ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

**Introduction**

During the past five decades, literary critics have increasingly studied the manipulative power of language in literary texts. In recent years, however, fields of critical inquiry continue to unfold ways in which literary works not customarily noted for political significance, such as Dickens's *Great Expectations* or Austen's *Mansfield Park*, also contribute to the discourse of cultural control and dominance. This type of critical practice, postcolonialism by name, seeks to explain how discourse, literary or otherwise, becomes imbued with social and political resonance.

The purpose of this work is to study how do whites approach the colonized countries and their people, again, how do they (whites) see and represent the colonized and themselves in relation to them (colonized)? On the other hand, how do the colonized or their descendants represent themselves, and whether they challenge, or accept passively the tradition founded in colonial canonical master-texts? Reading the selected literary works – using postcolonial criticism – offers an alternative perspective in understanding the colonizer's ideological construction of himself and the Other, and whether he (Other) sets against, or contributes to the colonial hegemony.

Of the entire spectrum of imperialistic (old and modern) interests present in literature, the researcher has selected Africa as a focal point because Africa
achieved a particularly mythologized status in English literature and so offers a unique means for studying colonial representations and misrepresentations. Although the researcher draws examples from a number of discourse types including fictional and non-fictional, ultimately, in the second half of the dissertation, the focus is on the novel as an ideological agent. In particular, the researcher studies Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the context of European imperialist and racist discourses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the light of colonial and postcolonial discourse analysis on race and empire. It is just this sort of manipulation, and within the time frame stated above, that the ensuing study addresses.

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

This research project concentrates on the image of imperialism as reflected in English literature; therefore, it is profitable to understand the relationship between literature and colonialism. The project has been designed as a study of the colonial and postcolonial novel by Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe to investigate colonial misrepresentation of the colonized, and the postcolonial contestation of it. For the purpose of this study, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* have been chosen as a case study. This choice is based on the fact that each is set in nineteenth-century Africa, and, more importantly, both are based on a major historical event that occurred in the continent toward the end of the nineteenth-century — both explore the meaning of the European colonization of Africa. Thus, the connection between these two texts is the history of European colonization of Africa. While Conrad was implicated in it, Achebe – textually – revised a history that he read in Conrad's literary work.

Ultimately, the issues addressed in this study retain significance to the extent that they illustrate concerns of cultural hegemony that remain current in contemporary society. By exploring and understanding methods of cultural
control that arose as an organic component of nineteenth and early twentieth century imperialism, we can better assess misrepresentations of the Other and cultural dominance currently exercised in society.

**Aims and Objectives**

- To examine various ways in which literary works (both colonial and postcolonial) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to or challenged the imperial ideology.
- Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), to be analyzed in the light of colonial and postcolonial discourse analysis on race and empire.
- To understand how two different points of view – Conrad's and Achebe's – tackle the image of imperialism, and how they represent the colonizer and the colonized in these two novels.

**Assumptions/Hypotheses**

- Literary productions, including narratives, are aesthetic as well as socially and politically oriented, and are central to the process of colonization, and then again to the process of postcolonial resistance and reaction.
- Western literature presents a Western point of view with monolithic national cultures and stereotyped images of the other. It is an agent of colonialism.
- Colonial literature presents Africa as a land devoid of civilization, and the Africans as sub humans.
- Postcolonial literature aims at debunking this Western representation and presenting a true picture of the colonized.
- Colonialism in all its forms is exploitative and, as a matter of fact, is not meant to bring the colonized to the level of the colonizer.
Scope and Limitation of the study

- This study is confined to survey the image of imperialism in some fictional texts, within the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- It is also limited to analyze and examine this image with reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Methodology

This study is based mainly on a library research due to its textual nature. One level of this study involves access and use of relevant material from various libraries in India and Yemen. Internet research, especially for reviews, is conducted. This preliminary level was fundamental to the collection, review, and assessment of secondary material. The other level of the study involved reading, analysis, and interpretation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as primary sources. The two novels have been subjected to a postcolonial reading of literary texts. This strategy offers the relevant perspective, fundamental to applying colonial and postcolonial discourse analysis on race and empire.

Structurally speaking, this work is divided into two general parts: theoretical and practical. The first part is made up of conceptual chapters – One and Two. Together, these two chapters of the study are considered an introduction to some basic concepts: imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, representation, culture, literature...etc. They contain definitions and a brief survey of a historical background of these concepts and, most importantly, of both colonial and postcolonial discourses that the researcher draws upon both his own reading and those of various commentators, and thus considered to be the framework of this study. Above all, these two chapters indicate to the assumptions, aims, limitations, significance and methodology of this work.
Once the theoretical and methodological framework has been analyzed, the researcher continues by examining its application in the second part of this study. This part comprises of chapters Three and Four, each deals with the research objectives, assumptions and questions above stated. They are intensive readings or re-readings of the novels Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, chapter III, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, chapter IV. Each chapter is divided into three main sections; taken together they provide a well-rounded picture of both Conrad's and Achebe's visions of European colonialism and the indigenous people of Africa. The study approaches the selected works as modes of representation crafted by Conrad and Achebe as representative writers within the colonial and postcolonial literary traditions. Chapter Five is the concluding observations.

**Chapter Organization**

**Chapter One** – Introduction – consists of two main sections. The first section traces briefly Western Imperialism/Colonialism – causes, allegations, objectives, discourses, effects, and development – from Christendom to the Crusades and in the discovery and conquest of the Americas, which was a combination of Christian mission and mercantilism. Since then, the myths of empire took the place of the myths of Crusade. The difference came when the old 'legal right' to rule in territory once Christian was replaced by a 'moral right' to civilize the alien people that, later to be transformed into a primitive form of colonial concept – a policy that finally – by way of two global wars of the twentieth century – resulted in the modern and capitalist globalization that the world experiences today in the first decade of the twentieth-first century. It is a globalization in which the only superpower of the world has epitomized the Other as the "axis of evil" and "terrorist". Therefore, for the colonizer, to dominate and profit there is a necessity of 'a necessary-evil'.

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The second section – Postcolonialism – traces the development of postcolonial studies in general and its application to literary studies in particular. Several postcolonial categories – such as hybridity, mimicry, identity, issues of colonialism and race, and representation of the Other have been reviewed. There have been several attempts to define postcolonialism. Based on the assumption that postcolonialism or resistance begins at the first arrival of colonials in a country, the term 'postcolonial', in this study, is used to refer to the study of the interactions between the Western nations (as colonizers) and the nations they colonized. It also refers to the culture and literature that confined to the period of European colonization through the era of anti- or postcolonial activity to date.

The Second chapter, The Relationship Between Imperialism and Culture is divided into three main sections. The first deals with Culture/literature and Imperialism. In this, the researcher examines the imperial rhetoric by investigating the connection between imperialism and culture in general and its application to literature in particular. The second section investigates the Link Between Colonization and the Novel as a Literary Genre. Narrative fiction had an important position in the history and world of empire. What is interesting is the extent to which the genre of the novel has remained such an integral part of the imperial experience, recording, for example, the anxieties associated with expansion throughout the entire European imperial eras. Hence, it is assumed that the ways in which different values permeate narratives reflect ideological considerations, and that colonial novels helped to reinforce the dominant ideologies of their time by teaching their readers to see, for example, Africa as a primitive, mysterious, dark continent peopled by inferior savages, centuries behind Europeans in social and moral evolution.

What is likewise interesting is that the novel form has been appropriated by non-Western writers and has become the artistic medium through which an oppositional voice to Western domination has been raised. Chinua Achebe, for example, sees his role as novelist as that of teacher, dispelling – in Things Fall
Apart, (ch.IV) – the myths of supposedly 'savage' peoples generated by imperialist cultures and portrayed in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, (ch.III). Instances of such images and re-worked images abound in the two novels once we introduce a 'postcolonial reading' of the texts. This is the title and subject matter of the third section.

In this section, the notion of "Postcolonial Reading" of the Novel is introduced as a process by which a text is read with an understanding of what is involved, whether it is included in or excluded from the text. Said's concept of contrapuntal reading strategy is a type of postcolonial reading. This process comprises of a subversive reading and re-reading, mostly applied to works emanating from European colonizing forces (but may be applied to works by the colonized). The colonized writer's work is itself a postcolonial re-reading of canonical colonial text. However, the goal of this new reading is not merely one of analysis and description, but rather it challenges the dominant narratives and provides a voice to the untold stories of the colonized in the text. It also encourages writing back from the margin or periphery to the centre.

When postcolonial texts recreate these silences, they clearly attempt to draw attention to what was not said in the first place, and in the reiteration of such moments. Such a project guides us toward reading literature both intertextually and contextually – reading literature “contrapuntally” as Edward Said suggests. In the next part, we trace these patterns of textual reiteration and opposition in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* that recreates incidents and images from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to tell stories from the 'Other' point of view.

**Chapter Three** looks at Conrad’s life and work, and his use of colonialism in *HoD*, where emphasis is made on instances of the use of colonial terms and binary opposites to which postcolonial literature seeks to respond.

(For the sake of brevity, from now on, I use *HoD* and *TFA* when referring to *Heart of darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, respectively).
HoD measures civilization through binaries, taking Western culture as the ideal or role model and presenting Africa as the racial ‘other’. The colonized Africans are depicted as the antithesis of the Europeans; if the former has to be looked at as childlike, savage/barbaric, lazy, static and inferiors, the latter can be seen as adult-like, civilized, effective, developing ahead and superiors. Conrad projects an evil image of Africa, void of all human attributes; he reduces the African to an object of ridicule that can never match European standards. He therefore presents Marlow as the holder of advanced and humane views, and the African natives and their customs and traditions are likened to the behavior of animals. In effect, Conrad questions the very humanity of the Africans.

Again, Conrad’s racist motives are evident wherein he views everything black or African to be evil and anything white or European is pure. As such, there was a need for the whites to come in and redeem Africa. This portrayal of the white man as an emissary of light and civilization, and the negative and racist portrayal of the African was a strategy in giving a justification for the colonization missions.

Conrad’s representation of Africa is based on the theory of social Darwinism in which, the white man by virtue of being born white was destined to lead Africa from darkness to light, from childhood to adulthood and from its prehistoric era to history. Conrad therefore did not originate the image of Africa that we find in his book, but it was (and still is) the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination. The next chapter therefore is an analysis of TFA, a text that aims at responding to and resisting this imperialist and racist perspective in its scrutiny of the colonial relationship.

Achebe's life and work are the objects of Chapter Four. His TFA is discussed in detail, where the theme of colonialism is subjected to a new perspective. It highlights those specific elements of Achebe’s work that characterize a response to the colonial connotations made by colonial writings.
*TFA* is regarded as a post-colonial text since it is a detailed, insider’s account that refutes colonial myths, and challenges colonial literature, which viewed and depicted Africa as a space only, void of any form of social system. Therefore, unlike the African society in *HoD*, which is portrayed as having developed no culture, the African society in TFA has an admirable history, and is rich in culture and civilization.

However, Achebe appears to have a dual purpose: to restore the faith of his African reader in the strength of his culture, pride and worth that were lost through Africa's encounter with the white man. On the other hand, to enlighten the foreign reader and help him demystify the demonic face that colonial texts deliberately paint(ed) for Africa. Achebe seeks to show the world a thriving African society in which there are communal ethics and clearly defined parameters of right conduct on both personal and communal levels. This is exemplified by the event of banishing Okonkwo – regardless of his titles and social status – for accidentally killing a kinsman. Similarly, though it is a warlike society, the community debates on issues before passing judgment. This is seen when a man from village of Mbaino murders a daughter of Umuofia, the dispute is resolved amicably and not violently. The ethics of the African society also encourages people to work hard and that “a man was judged according to his worth and not to the worth of his father”. Achebe thus dismisses the colonial myth that Africans are a naturally lazy race who works only under the whip and harsh working conditions. He goes on to counter the racist notions of colonialist literature that sought to justify and validate colonialism. In his use of tales and fables, Achebe subverts Conrad’s presentation of Africa as a void space; as for "proverb" to emerge, there must be a yesterday.

Contrary to the colonial literature, which presented Africa as engaged in paganism and savage rituals, Achebe asserts that culture, philosophy and religion were not new to the Africans. *TFA*, thus, presents a society with
various societal organizations and rules, with culture, values and beliefs that
held people together before the advent of the whites. Nevertheless, Achebe
does remain conscious of the dangers of idealization. He suggests that the
African culture like all other cultures has its merits and demerits. Yet, Achebe
emphasizes that however patriarchal and far from perfect, African societies
were/are not utter darkness as were presented by Conrad and other colonial
writers.

Having analyzed both HoD and TFA, Chapter Five summarizes and concludes
the arguments and findings in the preceding chapters. This is done by way of
general conclusions and observations, in which the interconnections and shared
themes are elucidated. What the researcher hopes to have illustrated is that:

- In the nineteenth and early twentieth-century's Western writings on the
  subject of colonialism, the romantic image of the Western world is often
  emphasized. Whites have been represented as civilized, reformers, a
  virtuous nation of typical values – an image in contrast to that which has
  stereotyped the non-whites: savages, brutes, cursed territories with no
  ethics.

- Cultural or literary representation has a political dimension, however
  highly one may value artistic qualities.

- From the perspective of the relationship between culture and
  imperialism; cultural representations, including literature, are central
  first to the process of colonizing lands, and then again to the process of
  decolonization.

- Novels, in particular, are the most significant originators and
  disseminators of colonial power and its double, postcolonial resistance
  and reaction.

- What the researcher has tried to relate is that a novel like HoD, beside its
  aesthetic merits, is somehow expected also to convey social facts and
  meanings with regard to Africa's reality and Europe's contribution to its
social reform or destruction. Nevertheless, when applying a postcolonial reading of the text, colonial implications emerge, which might otherwise remain hidden; moreover, the social realities and experiences and facts of Africa's resistance have been avoided.

- There is no doubt that Conrad has exposed and accused the imperialists of inhuman treatment of the natives; nevertheless, he remains unrealistic in his portrayal of the African character. He uses clichés, stereotypes and generalizations about Africans – *evil, backward, savage* – for example.
- Today we hear many such general statements – *unpunctuality, lack of administration, 'axis of evil', terrorist*…etc. – about the Orientals in general.
- However, since *HoD* is immensely affiliated to the world of politics it should be affected by the political atmosphere and the dominant ideologies governing the setting.
- Perhaps there is some truth to the statement that the 'African' we know in fiction was originally created by European 'master-texts'. Therefore, Achebe's *TFA* provides an alternative reading of such colonial texts.
- Achebe's text debunks and challenges this Western representation of the Other, and as such, presents a coherent picture of an organic society – a picture in contrast to that which had been depicted in Conrad's *HoD*.
- In *TFA*, the author has drawn the reader's attention to the fact that Africans are people, and "often highly gifted people with life and society", and that Africa had cultural values as valid as those of Europe, and even existed before the white man and his civilization took control of the continent.
- Such Western negative stereotypes and distorting images of the Other were reason why Africa and several other nations came under the yoke of Western subjugation. With the pretence of shouldering the burden of spreading civilization, Christianity, and progress, Westerners have plunged Africa, and the Third World in general, into an irretrievable situation; and as a result, everything had fallen (and still falling) apart.
• Achebe focuses on issues of race and power, and his text questions the "silencing" act of colonial imposition, challenging colonial constructs that had been imposed upon the subjugated nations.

• Thus, in this contrapuntal reading, TFA announces that the 'days of ignorance are over'.

What the researcher wants to convey is the point that English language and literature play a vital role in the development and dissemination of colonial representation and power, and then again in challenging and resisting such dominant devices, as well. The two works discussed in this study thus present themselves as texts of intervention, exemplifying the political nature of literary texts (colonial and postcolonial). In so doing, they illustrate how literary texts cannot be divorced from the political and social realities surrounding the author.

This study, then, has completed only a very short story in the long novel that is still being written, namely, the story of imperialism in literature. Further in-depth studies on many more writers of different cultures with different perspectives – many more "short stories" – should be undertaken.