

The Supremacy and Domination of Ideology in Waliullah's Lalsalu and Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Marxist Interpretation

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Abstract

This paper explores the power and dominance of ideology in Waliullah's Lalsalu and Achebe's Things Fall Apart, using an Althusserian framework to understand how ideology shapes and controls society. The study addresses the research gap by examining how ideology manipulates religious sentiments, serving as a tool for economic and social control. The hypothesis suggests that both Majeed in Lalsalu and the colonizers in Things Fall Apart use religious ideology as a means of domination. In Lalsalu, Majeed creates a false shrine to control the villagers, while in Things Fall Apart, the missionaries introduce a new religion to destabilize traditional Igbo society, establishing a divide-and-rule strategy. The research uses qualitative methods, relying on secondary sources such as books, journals, and articles to provide a comprehensive analysis of both texts. The findings indicate that ideology, when intertwined with religion, becomes a potent force for manipulation, ensuring the intruders' self-interest remains protected. By examining how both Majeed and the missionaries take advantage of the spiritual vulnerabilities of the people, the paper highlights the systematic methods of control and domination that prevent resistance. The study reveals new insights into how ideology functions as an instrument of power, naturalizing oppression and economic inequality. The research concludes that the imposition of ideology, particularly when tied to religion, creates a foundation for exploitation and prevents resistance, reinforcing systems of power and domination.

Keywords: Colonization, Domination, Ideology, Manipulation, Power, Religion

1. Introduction

Ideology is the presentation of the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness," and it includes notions such as "politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc." (Marx and Engels 47). Ideology serves as the superstructure of a society, shaping its conventions and cultural practices in ways that uphold and reinforce the society's dominant ideas. As it seeks to legitimate the powers-that-be, ideology often disguised the violence and exploitation that keeps less powerful groups subordinates. In Lalsalu, Majeed being a perfect manipulator washes away the existing thoughts and culture of the villagers of Mohobbotnagar to established the hegemony through inflicting the ideology of religion. However, all those ideologies are just for the self-improvement of himself in class and power in the village. He uses each and every means to ensure a successful implication of his ideological inflictions. In Things Fall Apart, the analysis highlights social injustices derived from dispossession of land, erosion of traditions and values, and economic disruption created by colonization. And all of these started with the

arrival of brand-new ideology by colonizers which helped them to establish their intention of divide and rule.

2. Problem Statement

The present paper elaborates on the concept of the supremacy and domination of ideology in a Bengali society of Syed Waliullah's *Lalsalu* and Igbo society of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. And both of the authors' depiction is brought under the lenses of Marxist ideological hegemony to get a clear-cut picture.

3. Literature Review

Lalsalu, written by Syed Waliullah, set in an isolated village in northern Bangladesh after Bengal's partition, is recognized as a realistic novel and is a classic in Bangla literature. The plot revolves around Majeed, an adrift man who takes advantage of a lucky to discovered a shrine. Using little knowledge of religion which he possesses, he turns this shrine into a social, cultural, economic, and political center, moving from an unknown stranger in the village, to the established authority of the community (Kabir and Mondol). Waliullah paints a portrait of Majeed being a dogmatist for faith, and exploiting belief for his own advantage. However, there is sometimes a bit of compassion in Waliullah, as he contextualizes Majeed's actions, because for Majeed, religion is closely linked to survival- food, shelter. Majeed cultivates a friendship with Khaleque and draws a link between the shrine and the ownership of land. The connection of these two things rendered everything upstream from the shrine to mimic a feudal system, held up by the combination of belief and land ownership. After all, for Majeed, the mazar is only to elicit fear in the service of controlling his own authority (Jannat and Rayhan).

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is universally accepted as a literary classic that represents both pre-colonial and colonial African life and history. The novel argues that the disintegration of Igbo society in Africa, occurs as a result of the disruptions caused by European colonial forces. In the end, Achebe illustrates not only the violence of colonial rule, but also seeks a fresh means to express African culture because he considers moving away from the "prison house" of colonial subjectivity in order to build a renewed identity (Chua and Pavlos). At this time, Igbo society sits between the past and the present; between the old traditional way of living and the new capitalist reality impregnated with Western Christian culture. While the new elite, which are exposed to Western culture, attempted to dominate the rest of the population by rejecting ofgbani (aligning oneself with the fear of the gods) and the gods, capitalism brought about a money market economy where people are more obsessed with accumulating wealth and power than ever (Ndukaihe).

4. Theoretical Framework

Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. In Marxism, ideology means much more than a collection of beliefs or values. It emphasizes how dominant ideas work as instruments of power that sustain or legitimate structures of economic and social order. In Marxist analysis, If the ruling class controls the material means of production, it also holds power over the intellectual means of production, shaping knowledge, ideas, and beliefs to maintain its dominance; it exercises an ideological hegemony, influencing people's understandings of their reality so that their dominance can be protected and enhanced. The ideological foundations of domination can revolve around people's notions of meritocracy, social hierarchies, which

have explanations rooted in nature, or divine sanction, justifying inequality. While ‘ideology’ in common parlance usually has at least a neutral connotation—a ‘world view’ or ‘a set of beliefs’ -Marxists argue that ideology is seldom neutral, and is more likely not innocent. Rather than innocently reflecting their realities, ideologies serve to obfuscate conditions or structures of exploitation, leaving individuals, even the exploited, with misconceived or incomplete ideas about how society actually functions. This distortion is what Marxists call false consciousness, which inhibits the possibility of recognition and action by groups that experience exploitation, as it prevents them from uniting against it. In addition, in political relationships, ideology often has a more cohesive and institutionalized form. Ideology can be manifested as an official verified doctrine of the state or the overarching worldview of a religion. In the case of authoritarian regimes, ideology is purposefully constructed by the state to create conformity, to repress dissent while performing consensus on the social legitimacy of power, and to ignore or mute significant opposition. Similarly, religious worldviews can take on an ideological position in the form of the highest authority being either in the form of accountability or a sacrifice and therefore may naturalize submission to divine will and discourage societally change. So conceptually, ideology is more than a set of beliefs it also exists as a social force that operates as a way to reproduce and represent relations of power by framing people’s experience(s), values, desires and conceiving a system that maintains the purpose of reproduction for the benefit of the interested ruling class while maintaining subordination of the non-ruling class. Promod K. Nayar writes, “The most significant feature of ideology is that it is invisible” (Nayar 183).

In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971), Louis Althusser shows that ideology operates by determining how people think about their place in the world. “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 127). Importantly, he makes the distinction between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs)- which consists of institutions like the army, police, and courts that depend largely on force and coercion for compliance and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)- which consists of institutions such as the family, schools, churches, and media that depend largely on ideology for compliance. RSAs maintain order by force, but ISAs maintain order by convincing people to accept the ruling order as natural. In the words of Althusser, “Ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material” (128). By presenting manufactured concepts as unquestionable truths, ideology enables people to accept their subordination: “For it is characteristic of ideology to impose self-evident facts as self-evident facts ... ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’” (131). RSAs and ISAs work together to maintain and reproduce the conditions of domination, to make ruling-class power appear legitimate, natural, and invisible.

5. Research Gaps

No prior research has been conducted incorporating these two novels one from Bangladesh and another from Africa, examining them from Marxist angles. And there are several researches on Marxism from the view point of class struggle in Waliullah’s *Lalsalu* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* separately. After analyzing many literatures, no literatures could be found on these two poems separately or incorporate built up on this particular topic which would point towards the ideological hegemony of a Bengali society and Igbo society. So, this would be a very new approach to see these poems rolling around and giving new dimensions.

6. Rationale of the Study

Very few researchers have previously worked on the concept of Marxist ideology on Syed Waliullah's Lalsalu and Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, this paper tends to deal with both of novels and incorporate the ideological hegemony inflicted by Majeed in the minds of the villagers and British missionaries in the ideology of Igbo people.

7. Research Questions

1. How is ideology used as a means of establishing and maintaining domination and control over the masses?
2. What does Marx's assertion that "religion is the opium of the people" imply with regards to both novels?
3. How does false consciousness allow the ruling classes to perpetually reinforce and consolidate their control over the oppressed and marginalized?

8. Research Objectives

This current research aimed to discover the points of different ideologies in the societies of Mohobbotnagar as well as Igbo and how that society's ideological temperament is deep rooted in the storyline of both of the novels, to find out the difficulties and hard times faced by common people.

1. To understand how ideology is used as a means of establishing and maintaining domination and control over the masses.
2. To find out the implication of Marx's assertion that "religion is the opium of the people" imply with regards to both novels.
3. To comprehend the implication of false consciousness allowing the ruling classes to perpetually reinforce their control over the oppressed and marginalized.

9. Research Methodology

The research was done by following a single approach, which is qualitative methodology. Through this research, the researcher intends to examine and find out the ideological conflicts existing in Mohobbotnagar village and Igbo society because of class segmentations and the uprising difficulties of village life due to the arrival of intruders. To get more detailed data for a dependable advancement of the research, the researches of many researchers have been keenly observed. Additionally, relevant books, journals, and other internet resources were utilized as secondary sources.

10. Discussion & Findings

Syed Waliullah perused novel writing as a means of raising socio-political and economic awareness among his readers. He wanted to foster the consciousness of the ideological forces at play within society and demonstrate the ways in which power, tradition, and ideology can invade the lives of so-called everyday people while exposing structural injustices and inequalities around him. In his narratives, Waliullah not only wanted to depict the reality of life around him but also wanted to pose some reflection and, hopefully some conversion of perspective or conditions of those marginalized. Ideology in Waliullah's novels functions as a powerful paradigm of control that shapes perception and obscures the reality of socio-economic degradation, poverty and social marginalization experienced by the common people of Bangladesh. In Lalsalu (also translated as Tree Without Roots), Waliullah provides a

vivid account of the role played by religion as an ideological instrument. In the novel, religious authority is manipulated to create a new social hierarchy, establish compliance, and provide material opportunity and control. Using the character of the pious but deceitful protagonist, Waliullah shows precisely how ideology (in the case religious ideology) can be used to exploit, dominate, and constitute social values for the purposes of maintaining the subordination of the marginalized while empowering the power of the dominant class.

This literary moment corresponds to the idea of hegemony developed by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, “domination exists not only in coercion, threats or forms of legal enforcement but in consent to the governing of the populace by the government” (Gramsci 12). The modern state is not only about coercing people to conform to decisions made by the powerful; equally, modern state's challenge is to create consent among those being governed so that power-wielding individuals become subjugated not merely by force but by ideology: "The challenge of modern states is to win the consent of the governed so that subordination becomes 'natural' and 'normal'" (Gramsci 12). In *Lalsalu*, Waliullah demonstrates a more Gramscian view of religious authority as consent of the governed produced through ideological persuasion, with subtly imposed social hierarchies maintaining power without overt or gusty force. The book shows the hegemony that Majeed has created and that common people are attracted, either willingly or unknowingly, to the grave of Mudassir Pir (a name invented by Majeed to exploit). This manipulation serves to devalue the villagers' beliefs and activities and to reinforce Majeed's own wealth and power. As Jannat and Rayhan recognize: "Majeed is a prototype of the fortune seekers who has made his fortune can create a kind of fear among mankind." (43) The reflection suggests how Majeed uses religious authority and people's reverence to achieve power and highlights the bond between ideology and social domination demonstrated in the novel.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays the alterations that took place in the Igbo society at the end of the 19th century. It outlines transformation in land relations, social and economic structure, cultural practices, and commerce. The novel shows the social injustices arising from land alienation, disruption of traditional values, and economic disruption brought about by European colonialism. The introduction of a new ideology by colonizers brought these modifications. This ideology facilitated a divided and rule strategy. As Okonkwo notes, “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 put a spell on our brothers, and the clan can no longer act like one” (Achebe 176). In *Things Fall Apart*, the European colonizers have established false consciousness among the Igbo by projecting their belief systems into African culture and presenting them as better and “civilized.” Colonizer doctrine makes them to question their own customs, beliefs, and standard authority structures. For example, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, becomes interested in the Christian missionaries because he feels their religious parameters offer the environment for him to adopt a better moral order. Achebe states, “Nwoye had felt a relief within as the missionaries talked to him. He was becoming a man in the new faith” (Achebe 106). This exemplifies how false consciousness works, where certain individuals begin to accept the colonizers belief systems as more plausible than their own communities' influences. By making the oppressed internalize the ideology of the oppressor, the colonizers secure consent without overt force, echoing Marxist and Gramscian ideas of ideological domination.

Karl Marx statement, “religion is the opium of the people,” had an impact in the novel (Blau). In *Lalsalu*, shrewd Majeed uses religious ideology to dominate over the lives of the villagers. As the narrator states, “The unknown grave had become a mazar, the abode of a saint who lived on ever after

death. ‘You have earned God’s gratitude,’ said Majeed, his voice trembling with emotion” (Waliullah 16). Majeed uses the name of God, sanctity of shrines, and authority of religion and mobilizes faith. Majeed recognized fear as his strongest weapon: first, he instilled fear in his wife Rahima, and then he worked to ensure that fear was spread among the villagers to enhance the strength of his enduring power. Even acts of ritual, including circumcision of children and adults, are performed for the purpose of exercising authority and to reaffirm submission while hiding behind acts of religious duty. Majeed's manipulation stretches to Khaleque Bepari, the richest man in the village. Although Khaleque has material power, he ultimately becomes a pawn in Majeed’s ideological game. Majeed knows that fear and belief are better than violence so he creates a fictitious ideology and doesn’t resort to violence. However, Khaleque’s behavior could also create unrest among the villagers, suggesting a tenuous relationship between economic and ideological rule. Majeed’s manipulation of Khaleque is an act of domination, or lust for domination, that is wrapped in the subjugation of a woman he finds attractive, and which he covers by claiming divine authority from the mazar. The main example is Khaleque’s decision, based on Majeed’s assurances of the mazar’s powers of fertility, to send his wife Amena Bibi to Majeed. For Waliullah, this act points to how ideology, especially in the form of religion, can be used as a weapon of tyranny, disguising one’s own avarice and desire as divine purpose.

The ancestors, from *Things Fall Apart*, also known as the living-dead, hold the place of honor among the spiritual and social structure of Igbo society. This practice of integrating the departed into the life of the living is a major difference between Igbo spirituality and Western religious traditions. For example, Christians pray directly to God thanking for blessings and the food which is about to be consumed. Igbo would be praying to their ancestors and acknowledging their ongoing role as protectors of the living community. The collective nature of Igbo culture is made evident through the fact that the welfare of the community is more important than the personal gain of the individual. Achebe highlights this communal ethic through the spiritual implications of wrongdoing. In Igbo belief, individual’s transgression is not an isolated matter but the whole clan is affected because of it. As articulated in the novel: “We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil. [...] 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” (Achebe 30). The passage illustrates how punishment from gods or goddesses is collective. It reinforces the immense mutual dependence that emerged in Igbo culture or society. Achebe’s portrayal of the arrival of Christian missionaries adds to this inherent discord. Achebe's narrative does not simplify the missionaries as a singular, homogeneous force, but rather depicts them as a group of personalities, methods, and temperaments to spread their faith. As noted by Moseley, Achebe’s depiction allows readers to encounter a complex view of African village life, filled with ties of deep loyalty to the community, and religiousness through respect for the ancestors. However, in this cultural interchange, the initial goal of the missionaries was clear; it was to undermine the traditional religious structures of the Igbo and convert them to Christianity, thereby giving colonial powers the moral high ground to impose dominance and governance upon Igbo lands. This transformation of ideology and belief became civic instruments of power and control for colonizers.

Ideology helps the ruling classes retain and consolidate power over marginalized groups by depicting unequal power relations as natural and unquestionable, so the oppressed accept them as a part of the normal order of society. Majeed turns the villagers of Mohobbotnagar “towards God, strengthening their moral fiber by tireless preaching and when necessary, by taking severe action against backsliders”

(Walid and Robiul). Majeed wants to implant his ideology in the minds of villagers at a young age, because it is much easier to manipulate the minds of children with the teachings of his Moktob that Majeed has put in place. Majeed, however, finds himself challenged at the authority level, when he discovers that Moddaber's son Akkas is going to open a school in Mohabbatnagar- a move that directly threatens Majeed's authority and discloses his resistance to any other source of knowledge. "Majeed has looked forward to Akkas.... Out of his anger, he slaps Akkas and asks, "Where is your beard, Mian?" (Waliullah 55). He wants to keep the people away from the light of education so that he can engulf them in the darkness of superstitious and religious ideologies. "Ideology works at an unconscious level.... and is dependent upon language and signs because it has to present reality in particular ways by obscuring other" (Nayar 131). When Taher's father starts to argue with the present influential individuals in the meeting, Majeed starts reciting from Quran to make him feel he is obligated to listen to him and disobedience to his suggestions is not an option. Majeed mentally torments him to the extent that he prefers to leave everything. Ideology relies on language and symbols, because they superficially display reality in a way that hides the real nature of things, and Majeed is good at this kind of trickery. He marries a young girl, Jamila, as his second wife and when she dares to speak up and protest against Majeed's strong convictions and control, she is punished brutally. Ultimately, Jamila's death illustrates the power and frightening potential that ideology can have when it is used to dominate people. However, "the greatest protest comes from her in the end of the novel where she is lying unconscious by the side of the shrine with one leg touching the grave showing her defiance and deviation from all around" (Kabir and Mondol 52). The title, *Things Fall Apart*, itself implies decay, chaos, and disruption stemming from the arrival of the white man and the imposition of foreign values on the formerly stable Igbo society (Alimi 121). This is seen clearly in the cultural clash between the colonial missionaries and the Igbo supreme god when Mr. Brown rejects "Chukwu." Mr. Brown says to Akunna, "there are no other gods but one supreme God who made heaven and earth" (Achebe 169). Besides, the missionaries in Mbanta village instruct that there is only one true God and that the Igbo gods are just pieces of wood and stone (Achebe 137-138). As an ideology, Christianity also simultaneously undermines the authority of Igbo tradition by legitimating itself, such as the village "outcasts" (Achebe 166). The missionary's creation of legitimacy through social recognition and protection of these people, incites division and dismantles traditional leadership. Along with their religious doctrine, the introduction of Western education also supported Christian instruction by developing new value systems and thinking processes that lead young people, like Nwoye, to question the customs of their ancestors. Achebe's observations show that colonialism as an ideology not only transformed religion, but also transformed social relations by leaving significant cracks in terms of political, cultural and moral relations in Igbo society. Thus, eventually "colonialism greatly disrupted the cultural life of conquered people through the banishment of native customs and the introduction of new laws which bred resentment among the natives" (Williams and Chrisman 45-46).

11. Conclusion

In both novels, it is clearly established that all characters exist somewhere within the intruder's ideological prism of power and control and have roles to play within their own world. However, all of Majeed's "power and glory came from the shrouded mystery of the Mazar" (Waliullah 50) which demonstrates that he has constructed an ideological shrine, within the minds of the villagers, used to subjugate them to promote his own self-good. He believes that he has ultimate power over the other

characters and attempts to impose his manufactured religious practices on individuals in accordance with his ideologies, thoughts and beliefs. Similarly, the missionaries operating in Igbo society enact religion as an enterprise that cannot commodified meaning allows them to maintain control of the Igbo through the enactment of ideology. This is a blind, a veil that inhibits the oppressed from clear minted understanding what Marx termed false consciousness and this is what Waliullah and Achebe driven home in their novels to exemplify how newcomers have utilized the ideology of religion to sustain existing class hegemony of domination possibly without it being porous as a transitive medium.

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