

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GROUP 1 - EXTENDED ESSAY

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Research Question: ‘To what extent is the reflection of colonialism in “Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe and “A Passage to India” by E.M. Forster parallel to the concept of colonialism in George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant”?’

Abstract

This extended essay aims to investigate the colonial community given in George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" and to compare this concept with the two other views from Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and E.M. Forster's "A Passage to India". The investigation in this essay begins with the scrutiny of Orwell's piece and the narrator's place in the community he is telling about. Through the delineations of the happenings and the reactions of the people in "Shooting an Elephant" are examined along with the symbols used by Orwell to describe the whole process of colonialism, which can also be seen by considering the title: The elephant and the gun imageries given with Orwell's perspective. From one aspect the protagonist of the essay, Orwell himself, tells about his dilemma in Burma, and the pressure he feels he is under, exerted by the natives. Although he wants independence for all, he also hates the natives for the harsh situation they put him in. He realizes that colonialism affected both sides: Oppressed and oppressor. From another aspect, the elephant and the gun can be seen as symbols of East and West, as a miniature process of colonialism.

In the other two texts by Achebe and Forster, the issues Orwell mentions in his essay are also examined through both native and British characters. Although these two pieces (Achebe's and Forster's) take place in different countries and are about different processes, both Okonkwo's and Aziz's lives have common problems with Orwell of "Shooting an Elephant".

But what are those common issues? In what ways exactly these three pieces similar and different? To what extent are these two pieces parallel in societal aspect to Orwell's essay?

(280 words)

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Introduction

Throughout the course of history, there have been many battles over the land and resources. Yet, with the discovery of America and the Industrial Revolution, the meaning of the word “battle” and “resources” changed: The countries all around Europe that have tasted the sweet glory of having advanced technology and need for resources, started looking for cheaper laborers, along with mines and land to keep their factories running. So began the battle over the resources in East.

Along with all the battles and occupations, though, only a few people care to talk about the lands that Western countries have fought to get, how the natives are affected, or how the Westerners achieve what they want through oppression and dominance. Only some people care to ask if the oppressor himself is affected by occupying a country, with a virtual wall between the oppressor and the natives.

The basis of this topic is the autobiographical essay, “Shooting an Elephant” by George Orwell, since the essay focuses on the general impact of colonialism on both the oppressor and the oppressed. Orwell lived and worked with the police in Burma between 1924 and 1927, and experienced the effect of a colonial structure, which led him to write about his vivid, realistic observations. He provides the reader with in-depth information depending on his perspective.

In this essay, the viewpoint of Orwell in “Shooting an Elephant” will be compared to the other viewpoints on the same subject of Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart” and Forster’s “A Passage to India.” The reason to choose these two literary pieces is to show the distinct perspectives of the authors; of Achebe, a Nigerian who lived under oppressive structure of the British, and Forster, an outside observer of tension in India.

Colonialism and the Elephant

In his essay, “Shooting an Elephant”, Orwell displays his viewpoint, and in a way, draws a picture of a colony. During his time as a police officer, he sees the unfair governing of British in India and how the Indians are pressed on. He sees the pain India is in and how much they despise the invaders of their country. On the other hand, however, Orwell gives some thought on the relationship between British and Indian people, which appears to be tense.

“In Moulmein, lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people.”¹(Orwell, 191)

Orwell begins the essay with this sentence, and builds the plot on this fact. To further support his point, he exemplifies this statement with his everyday observations, with the anger towards the British, especially using “Buddhist priests”, sneering at Europeans, including himself. However, these observations serve a purpose: He has an anti-colonialist mentality, but with the anger-filled attitude of the Indians, as he mentions earlier, he is left in the middle. He is both on the India’s side, against the British regime, and also sided with British because he disapproved of the Indians in return for their acts against him and other Europeans. With the following quote, Orwell’s personal dilemma, and the dilemma of every Anglo-indian official as narrator mentions, is revealed:

¹ Orwell, George. “Shooting an Elephant”. *Things Fall Apart*. Dallas: McDougal Littell, 2002. 191-200. Print.

“With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official...”²

(Orwell, 192)

As can be concluded from the problems arisen by the broken relation between the British Raj and the Indians, the idealism can disperse into thin air, as is about to happen to Orwell during his time there. Imperialism, eventually, affects the thinking of the people not only the ones that are being oppressed and abused, but also the ones oppressing those people, whom includes Orwell and other Anglo-indian officers.

The pressure on the oppressors is a psychological one: Raj worries of seeming weak to Indians, since they display the power of Britain, so they have to oppress to impress. Every minute they have to act with decorum.

This display causes two main problems: First, the prejudice and anger towards British is inevitable, a communal hatred which both aims people like Ronny Heaslop, a colonialism advocate, and people like Orwell, equalitarian and anti-imperialist. Secondly, there is a psychological result of natives' hatred on the Raj: Officers are eventually driven towards a dilemma between accepting and hating India.

The dilemma leads Orwell to question imperialism's effects on British: He sees that the need to display strength comes with consequences. The anger both sides feel for each other, forces the oppressor to look superior; the oppressor eventually becomes paranoid due to the

² Orwell, George. “Shooting an Elephant”. *Things Fall Apart*. Dallas: McDougal Littell, 2002. 191-200. Print.

possibility that natives could look down on them. Orwell experiences and tells about him being forced to shoot the elephant against his will, by the natives: He realizes that it is the result of British occupying the lands they don't belong to. He sees this is the main problem of British in India, the oppression by Indians.

Orwell reveals his thought on how imperialism really affects both sides at climax: He realizes white men is just a visitor in India, and also the oppressed. With the elephant waiting to be killed out there, the pressure the narrator is under is an example of what kind of an oppression the British are under, as well as the Indians. Orwell expresses the revelation of the truth he has lived trying to decide what to do with the elephant saying:

“And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East... when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the “natives” and so in every crisis he has got to do what the “natives” expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it.”³(Orwell, 196)

Orwell emphasizes the issue in the relation between British and Indians so that reader feels this must be the reason for the phenomenon he states above. According to his view, the oppression works both ways. For example, Britain oppresses India, but due to the strict regulations of British rule, the British in India are also affected. The pressure isn't just caused by these regulations, of course; the need Anglo-indians feel to fulfill has effect as well: To stand superior to Indians. Because the narrator belongs to Anglo-indian community, it is easy

³ Orwell, George. “Shooting an Elephant”. *Things Fall Apart*. Dallas: McDougal Littell, 2002. 191-200. Print.

to see the traces of this effect on the thoughts of the narrator, which are given throughout the essay. His pretentious courage is also caused by the fear of being laughed at: “...with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone.”⁴(Orwell, 198)

Generally speaking, the freedom of the country, Britain, is denied- ironically- for the sake of the betterment of that very country. Everything the Britain has ever done finally comes back and hurts the people of its own, along with the people of India. It is like a chain reaction which eventually turns back to the source of the entire process. This might be the reason why Orwell has mentioned these linked issues both in the beginning, climax and ending: “I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.”⁵(Orwell, 200).

In spite of the thoughts of the narrator, there is another issue that is given to be considered: The elephant. The excessive delineation of elephant’s escape and prolonged death, point that it is there for a purpose: It can be inferred, therefore, that “Elephant” is a symbol. The “Elephant”, as can be seen through an in-depth analysis, symbolizes India, or any other oppressed country, under the effect of colonialism.

This theory can be justified in the way the elephant died, and how the narrator killed the animal. He shot the animal from its head first, and then from its heart, but still, in spite of the fact that its life functions should have stopped then, the animal keeps on suffering and slowly dies. The main hint is the impossibility of such a situation: As the animal was shot in the head, all life functions had to stop, especially after its heart also is shot, too. Also, if the brain and heart are taken to as symbols as well, they can make perfect sense about how Orwell sees the process of eliminating the soul of a country to use the body and source in places required.

⁴ Orwell, George. “Shooting an Elephant”. *Things Fall Apart*. Dallas: McDougal Littell, 2002. 191-200. Print.

⁵ Orwell, George. “Shooting an Elephant”. *Things Fall Apart*. Dallas: McDougal Littell, 2002. 191-200. Print.

Therefore, if we are to say that heart represented the culture (traditions, religion, language, etc.), then brain could have meant the scientific and societal advancement state of the underdeveloped countries, which is not to be compared with the European countries' states at the time. Therefore, the framework Orwell tried to talk about to the reader can be gotten through the analysis of both the metaphorical and direct components among the essay.

From Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant", it is possible to draw a specific frame with the components Orwell provided about the limits of effects of imperialism, the realization of the pressure British is also under and his perspective over the whole process of colonialism. He focuses that colonialism affects both sides: British are oppressed because they needed to act in a certain decorum in front of the Indians so that there will always be a hierarchical structure, in which British is superior and Indian inferior; Indians were oppressed by the British for the resources in their country. Yet, the entire process worked in a cycle, everything initiated another: One hate towards another, makes the other feel hate. Along with the circle-like process Orwell had written about, there was also the process (in a raw form, as it was told through metaphors) of colonialism and how a country turns out to become the slave of another.

Orwell, in his essay "Shooting an Elephant", focuses on two main issues: The process of colonization and the effects of colonialism on both sides. Not one of the novels to be examined cover the both issues, so former issue would be analyzed in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart", and latter would be analyzed in Forster's "A Passage to India". Eventually, their conformity with Orwell's frames will be determined.

Destruction and Reconstruction: Agbala and Church

“Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe attracts the reader with its perspective of a well-respected tribesman, Okonkwo. Since the novel gives a contrast between the past cultural life of tribes to the new and culturally different lifestyle, it is easier to see the effects of colonialism on an underdeveloped tribal community, believing in magical beings and having a polytheist religion, consisted of the Agbala and the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, mainly the spirits they dedicated to forest’s components. Yet the main aim of the writer in the novel is to show how this religion was left by some of the tribesmen in search for a religion that could help them have higher positions in their society and have less violence and gore, compared to what they face in their tribal religion. One example is Nneka who “*had had four childbirths. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away.*”⁶(Achebe, 151)The contrast between the cultures and understanding of these two different nations is the main reason the system of tribes eventually collapsed: There were the strong ones, and there were the weak ones: The weak ones left the place so that they would no longer be weak, as Nwoye did.

The countries in these works, India and Nigeria, differ greatly, majorly because of the political unity and the cultural life. In India, to begin with, there is a unified political situation before the occupation, but in Nigeria, it was the opposite; People still lived in tribes. Therefore, the colonialism took a longer time to be established in India than it took in Nigeria, with less effect. Since there are too many people to take under control India, it wasn’t succeeded; yet in Nigeria, in Umuofia for instance, there were a small amount of people and just one church was enough to convert the unsure Umuofians to Christianity.

⁶ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

Another difference is the cultural and religious life: As it can be seen in Orwell's essay, and also in Forster's "A Passage to India", India has more merciful and understanding religions; In Umuofia, one can observe the cruelty of the local religion, Igbo. It goes by a merciless ancient code full of superstitions, which can even cause the tribe to banish a man as respected as Okonkwo. There are no exceptions, no forgiving. However, Christianity, compared to Igbo, seems rather peaceful and to have less superstitious beliefs, which can be exemplified with the church that was built in the Evil Forest: The missionaries stand against the superstition of the people of Umuofia.

From another aspect, Igbo lacks the structure of Christianity with its polytheist approach: As a result, only the traditional bonds to this religion can prevent the conversion of people to Christianity. Yet, these bonds don't work either, because there are people who were isolated from the tribe, who are looking for a place to be accepted to. They become the first Christians of the tribe, including Nwoye, Okonkwo's son who found Igbo too harsh.

Mainly, especially in the second chapter of the novel, the missionaries were used to take control of a tribe: those missionaries were sent to convert people's religion as Mr. Brown, the first Christian missionary in Umuofia, stated once: "*The head of my church in that sense is in England.*"⁷(Achebe, 180) With this statement, he mentions the queen in England as the head of the church, as the interpreter clarifies. Therefore, England has been using religion to make the tribes give in, with less fight. In time, the tribes are taken over by the white men's governments: "*But apart from the church, the white men had also brought a government.*"⁸(Achebe, 174) Of course, due to the excessive problems and restrictions, such as the prisons, where Nigerians who disobeyed the law of the white men were taken to, make Nigerians convert to Christianity easier because of fear. Churches were the first Western

⁷ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

⁸ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

effect on the tribes. In time, hospitals and governmental buildings are built to take over the management.

It can't be said, though, that religion or language are the only means of occupation. In Abame, another Nigerian tribe a massacre takes place:

*“The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot...”*⁹(Achebe, 139)

There was also the militaristic force used to whom the messengers wouldn't work with, as it is known that Abame had killed a messenger earlier. The Westerner countries (probably Britain) use these two ways to seize the control of the tribes and take people under control through sense and religion, not fight and death.

In “Shooting and Elephant”, the narrator uses a gun to kill the elephant and he aims at his heart and head. From a certain aspect, this metaphorical scene can be interpreted in the means of colonialism: Through militaristic force, religious and cultural change, or through new knowledge, a community and its culture can be assimilated. Every piece of it could be forced to fall apart. Okonkwo witnesses the destruction of his community where he was a strong person, and saw it being rebuilt by a different religion and culture. By shooting the heart and the brain of the tribe, by destroying their Gods and spirits (*egwugwus*) British made the

⁹ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

elephant fall down, and fight the pain until the end of all. Eventually it all had its place in just a book's title: "*The Pacification of The Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.*"¹⁰(Achebe, 209)

Therefore it can be said that the framework Orwell created in his essay actually conforms to the process of colonialism in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart": The tribe breathes heavily and slowly, just like the animal did before he vanished forever.

¹⁰ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

Adjusting to India: Anglo-Indians and Their Struggle to Conform

E.M. Forster's "A Passage to India" begins with the description of the ordinary city Chandrapore and its Marabar Caves. From the beginning of the novel, it can be sensed that British rule is not welcomed and their customs are distinct from the city itself, such as the club and the city station: "As for the City Station ... it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky."¹¹(Forster, 6) That minute on, it is not hard to realize that there will be a conflict in the novel between the British and the Indians, especially after the scenes to come in which British are called *sahib* by Indians, which points English are perceived as superiors. The protagonist, Aziz, for instance, is a doctor. However, he tries to fulfill the appetite of the British for superiority by always accepting whatever they are to say and want him to do. That is how the reader gets to know Aziz: As a person admiring the British, trying to please them. From the beginning of this novel, there is a certain fact to be remembered: "A Passage to India" isn't a novel about the process of colonialism; it is about the consequences of it on each side. Therefore, this novel can best be compared to "Shooting an Elephant" according to their answers to this question: In what ways are the oppressor and the oppressed affected by colonialism?

The answer to this question can be found especially in the first chapter of "A Passage to India", *Mosque*. According to this chapter, the Indians are affected both positively and negatively by colonialism: From an optimistic aspect, the rate of literacy increases as schools are opened (of which Fielding is the head of one) and people are given professions (like Aziz, who is a doctor.) Some systems run more smoothly and easily due to the British rule, which Orwell never mentioned in "Shooting an Elephant." Related to the effect of British, Hamidullah points the real problem with India: "That is why India is in such a plight,

¹¹ Forster, Edward Morgan. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Print.

because we put off things.”¹²(Forster, 12) From their perspective, British are not like Indians especially in social affairs and public life, as also be conjectured from their further talks.

However, these aren't the only effects of colonialism on the Indians: They accept the British as their masters and obey them, no matter how meaningless a request is. They try to live according to their lifestyles, trying to hold onto their traditions. So, in a certain manner, they lose their personal and cultural freedom, although they seem to live their lives in the way they want to live: Aziz, for example, acts like a British, gets along with them well, yet even the smallest accusation without any proof by Miss Quested causes him to be thrown in prison.

They live under the British, according to the British rule (which also not unlike “Things Fall Apart”). The Indians are seen as underlings and aren't even let into same venues with the British, as Aziz states: “*Indians are not allowed in the Chandrapore Club even as guests.*”¹³(Forster, 20)

In “Shooting an Elephant”, the Indians aren't actually the only ones that are oppressed and changed: The British also are. Orwell claims a British has to look like a *sahib*, a master: “*A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things.*”¹⁴(Orwell, 196-197) Also in “A Passage to India”, Aziz and his fellow Indians talk on this issue after Hamidullah mentions in England, Indians and British could actually be friends according to his experience in Cambridge:

¹² Forster, Edward Morgan. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Print.

¹³ Forster, Edward Morgan. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Print.

¹⁴ Forster, Edward Morgan. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Print.

*“They come out intending to be gentlemen, and are told it will not do. Look at Lesley, look at Blakiston, now it is your red-nosed boy, and Fielding will go next ... they all become exactly the same- not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter. And I give any Englishman six months. All are exactly alike.”*¹⁵(Forster, 9)

These being said, the frame of the British people and the effect of India being a colony seems to be unavoidable, yet not without exceptions as Fielding doesn't turn out to be that man they guessed he would become, and stays with Aziz through the riot.

As can be seen the overall picture given by Forster in the novel actually don't fit the framework presented by Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant". The reason is the issue about Orwell neglecting the positive effect of colonialism on the Indians and on the underdeveloped countries of the world: As underdeveloped countries are occupied, new technological and medical advancements along with education also come into that country. Consequently, although mostly Forster's image of India conforms to Orwell's, some extra effects can be observed in Forster's India.

¹⁵ Forster, Edward Morgan. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Print.

Conclusion

Orwell's interpretation of the colonial India gives hints about the nature of colonialism, including its effects on both the oppressor and the oppressed, as can be observed over the thoughts of the protagonist (Orwell). The description of pressure exerted by the crowd and the dilemma narrator faces forms the main claim of Orwell: Colonialism, which is done through the destruction of "heart" and "brain" (religion, culture, knowledge...), is harmful to both sides, as both has to conform to each other.

Mostly, the societies in both novels—as expressed through happenings- in these novels conform to the claim of Orwell about colonialism. However, there are several missing points about the frame presented by Orwell: The communities in both Achebe's and Forster's works are a little different than they are described by Orwell. Whereas Orwell mentions only the negative effects of colonialism on Indians (the oppressed), Forster also mentions indirectly the positive effects of it, including healthcare technology and education. The same issue is observable in "Things Fall Apart": Orwell delineates the colonialism process metaphorically through language, religion, culture, etc. However, Achebe uses mainly language and religion to draw the imagery of the tribes. Yet, Achebe's piece conforms to the frame of Orwell.

To finalize, it can be said that the framework given in Orwell's essay "Shooting an Elephant" fits the images in both novels, "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe and "A Passage to India" by E.M. Forster, with minor deviations, if not completely.

(3996 words)

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