

Teaching Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Critical Literacy in the English Classroom

For a Democratic Swedish Society



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Abstract

In the 2014 Swedish national election the Sweden Democrats, a radical right-wing and anti-immigrant party, established itself as the third biggest party and as an outcome, racism has become an everyday issue of the society. This can be seen everywhere, not least in educational settings where, for instance, insulting language use, violation of integrity, sexual harassment and hate crimes are common problems. In the Swedish school system, there are laws that protect students from such discrimination and thus, educators are responsible to counteract racism. Because of that, the aim of this paper is to show how Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) can be used in connection to critical literacy in the English class in order to facilitate an increased understanding for other cultures in Sweden. This is presented through a postcolonial analysis of the novel where the research questions focus on the similarities and differences between the natives and the colonialists in the areas of political, social and cultural (postcolonial) operations. More precisely, the themes that are addressed are "Religion", "Politics", "Economics", "Social hierarchy", "Material things", "Society" and "Encounters". For the analysis, the novel used is, as mentioned, *Things Fall Apart* and further, scholar articles treating the novel, critical literacy and postcolonial criticism are used as a background to the study. Also, the Swedish national syllabi for English at upper secondary school is used in order to justify the work. The findings show that there are not only differences, but also a lot of similarities, when it comes to the postcolonial operations of the groups in the novel. These results can, in turn, be used in the Swedish multicultural classroom with the help of critical literacy in order to work for social stability.

Keywords: *Things Fall Apart*, critical literacy, racism, education, postcolonialism, literature

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1. Introduction

In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats, a radical right-wing and anti-immigrant party, has grown rapidly over the last decade. In the 2006 national election, the party won 2,9 per cent of the votes. In the following election, in 2010, the party almost doubled its votes to 5,7 per cent (Rydgren & Ruth, 2011, p. 714). In the 2014 election the party grew markedly and managed to establish itself as the third biggest party in Sweden, with approximately 12,9 per cent of the votes (Loxbo, 2015, p. 169; The Election Authority, 2014).

As a long term consequence of the above mentioned, racism has become an everyday issue in the Swedish society. Several studies have shown that immigrants, not least Afro-Swedes, often feel discriminated because of their ethnicity (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2014; Kalonaityte, Kawesa & Tedros, 2008). This discrimination can, oftentimes, be found in educational environments in the form of insulting language use, violation of integrity, sexual harassment and/or hate crime (Kalonaityte, Kawesa & Tedros, 2008).

In Sweden and in the Swedish school system the Education Act, other Swedish laws and international conventions are founded to protect students from discrimination. For instance, one aim of the Education Act (2010) is to combat discrimination of children and students (Chapter 6). Similarly, the purpose of the Discrimination Act (2008) is to “combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age” (Chapter 1). Further, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (Article 1).

Considering the laws and conventions described above, educators are responsible to counteract racism. One way to do so is by multicultural education; several studies have shown

that this creates respect and understanding and in turn, also, social stability (Wiesendanger and Tarpley, 2010; Janks, 2013). However contradictorily, our society has created a canon which often perpetuates western ideologies about, for instance, Christianity and whiteness (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso & Petrone, 2014, p. 123).

In order to work with other “non-western” ideologies as well, students could “read the word and the world”, meaning that they could read literature from a critical point of view (Janks, 2013). Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to show how Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*, with the help of critical literacy, can be used in the English classroom in order to highlight the dangers of racism and work for a democratic Swedish society.

2. Background

The following section deals with educational theory. Also, current research in the field of critical literacy and postcolonial criticism will be addressed. Finally, Chinua Achebe and his novel *Things Fall Apart* will be described shortly and also, current research about the novel will be presented.

2.1 Educational theory

The Swedish national curriculum for English at upper secondary school is vague, and because of that, Compton and Hult (2014) argue “they [educators] need to be aware of what the policies allow for or constrain and they need to be creative in how they interpret the policies so as to maximize language and educational development for their students” (p. 4). For instance, it is mentioned that “literature” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 3) (for English 5) and “older literature” (pp. 7, 11) (for English 6 and 7) should be taught. Further, as an aim of the subject, it is stated that “students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (p. 1).

2.2 Critical literacy

The definition of critical literacy has been debated since the 1980s (Kuo, 2013) and still, the term has no single definition (Green, 2001, as cited in Ko, 2013). Just as Janks (2013) argues, “[...] words are not innocent, but instead work to position us. Likewise, it [critical literacy] recognizes that our world – geographically, environmentally, politically and socially – is not neutral or natural. It has been formed by history and shaped by humanity” (p. 227). Because of that, educators need to teach students to approach texts critically. This is where critical literacy comes into the picture; just as the name of the method reveals, critical literacy is a way to critically approach different kinds of literature. Similar to a close-up camera that only focuses on one thing while the rest gets blurred, this method only examines the issues concerning the chosen perspective in order to understand it clearly. For instance, one can approach the literature from a feminist, Marxist or postcolonial perspective (Tyson, 2006). Cervetti, Pardales and Damico (2001) propose that questions such as ‘How are the meanings assigned to a certain figure or events in a text?’, ‘How does it attempt to get readers to accept its constructs?’, ‘What is the purpose of the text?’, ‘Whose interests are served by the dissemination of this text?’, ‘Whose interests are not served?’, ‘What view of the world is put forth by the ideas in this text?’ and ‘What views are not?’ can be asked in order to examine and approach literature critically (As cited in Abednia & Izadinia, 2012, p. 339). By teaching students to ask these questions, educators give them a language of critique which aims at producing “agents of change”, namely citizens who want to change the world for the better (Janks, 2013, p. 229; Ko, 2013).

Several studies have shown that critical literacy can have a beneficial effect in educational settings. For instance, Abednia and Izadinia (2013) examined the effects of critical literacy in an Iranian English language classroom. The participants were twenty-seven BA freshman English literature students (four males and twenty-three females) at the age

range between 18 and 21 that participated in a reading comprehension course at Allameh Tabataba'i University in Tehran. The investigation was conducted over a 12-week period using 126 journals that the students wrote about their personal opinions on the topics they had treated in class. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data; by familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes, the students' critical treatments of issues were identified. The findings showed a considerable number of cases where the students had approached the themes critically.

Further, Kuo (2013) examined a critical literacy approach and its outcomes in an English class with 33 college freshmen students in Taiwan. By using self-discovery texts, follow up assignments and classroom discussion, the study was carried out. Various qualitative data, such as students' assignments, three open-ended questions and students' reflection papers were conducted and analyzed, and it was found that the method enhanced students' self awareness and facilitated critical dialogues.

Similarly, Ko's (2013) study inspected a college teacher's experience in teaching critical literacy to an English class with non-English students in Taiwan. The research questions focused on how a college teacher, in a university level English foreign language reading classroom in Taiwan, teaches critical literacy. Further, it was asked how this can be developed, and what difficulties there might be with such an approach. The participant was the teacher of a reading course who had a PhD degree in English literature and had been teaching English for over 20 years at the time of the study. He was invited to participate in the study because he had an interest, but no further knowledge, in the field of critical literacy. During one semester, classroom observations, audio-taped class discussions, course syllabuses, face-to-face interviews, informal conversations with the teacher and individual interviews with students were collected and later, these were also analyzed. The findings

showed that the teacher underwent a professional development where he moved from being an information-giver to a critical facilitator who, through dialogues with his students, raised their critical consciousness.

2.3 Postcolonial criticism

Postcolonial criticism is a form of critical literacy which, by contrasts and comparisons, seeks to “understand the operations – politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically – of colonialist and anticolonialist ideologies” (Tyson, 2006, p. 418). In order to approach postcolonial literature critically, Tyson (2006) argues, the following questions might be asked:

1. How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? Special attention is often given to those areas where political and cultural oppression overlap, as it does, for example, in the colonizers’ control of language, communication, and knowledge in colonized countries.
2. What does the text reveal about the problematics of postcolonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity?
3. What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance? For example, what does the text suggest about the ideological, political, social, economic, or psychological forces that promote or inhibit resistance? How does the text suggest that resistance can be achieved and sustained by an individual or a group?
4. What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference – the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity – in shaping our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live? *Othering* might be one area of analysis here.

5. How does the text respond to or comment on the characters, topics, or assumptions of a canonized (colonialist) work? [...] examine how the postcolonial text reshapes our previous interpretations of a canonical text.
6. Are there meaningful similarities among the literatures of different postcolonial populations? One might compare, for example, the literatures of native peoples from different countries whose land was invaded by colonizers, the literatures of white settler colonies in different countries, or the literatures of different populations in the African diaspora. Or one might compare literary works from all three of these categories in order to investigate, for example, if the experience of colonization creates some common elements of cultural identity that outweigh differences in race and nationality.
7. How does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonization and/or its inappropriate silence about colonized peoples? Does the text teach us anything about colonialist or anticolonialist ideology through its illustration of any of the postcolonial concepts we've discussed? (A text does not have to treat the subject colonization in order to do this). (pp. 431-432)

2.4 Chinua Achebe and *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a postcolonial novel that depicts the life of Okonkwo, a wealthy local leader and warrior of the fictional Nigerian village Umuofia. The novel is split into three parts; the first two describing the Igbo people and their culture and the third describing the British and the colonial conquer of Umuofia.

In an interview carried out by *The Atlantic Online*, Achebe explained how the idea for *Things Fall Apart* came to him:

The last four or five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very bad light and Africans in very lurid terms. The reason for this had to do with the need to justify the slave trade and slavery. [...] This continued until the Africans themselves, in the middle of the twentieth century, took into their own hands the telling of their story. (Achebe, 2000)

Similarly, in another interview by *The Paris Review*, he said:

There is that great proverb – that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. That did not come to me until much later.

Once I realized that, I had to be a writer. I had to be that historian. It's not one man's job. But it is something we have to do, so that the story of the hunt will also reflect the agony, the travail – the bravery, even, of the lions. (Achebe, 1994)

Thus, Achebe argues, he tells the other side of the story.

Further, there are numerous studies that examine how Achebe depicts pre- and postcolonial Africa in *Things Fall Apart*. As an example, Ayub, Ghani and Baloch (2014) argue that Achebe described how the Igbo people had a complex precolonial society but that this society, nonetheless, asked for change. Because of that, they mean, there was no resistance against the colonialists and their ideology when they came to Africa. Further, Bekler (2014) investigates how ceremonies, rituals, beliefs and customs of Africans are portrayed in the novel. The analysis shows that the Igbo people had a well functioning society before the colonizers came. However, Bekler argues, the colonizers came with some ideas that the native people had never thought of. One of these things was a trade market where people could buy and sell goods and services. Because of that, he claims, not only bad things came with the colonization.

3. Method

For this study, Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* was analyzed deductively¹ through a postcolonial perspective. Deductive analysis was chosen in order to use existing and well established principles and categories from postcolonial theory to guide a close reading of the text. Further, the reason for the choice of perspective was that, just as Tyson (2006) argues, some literature lends itself better to certain angles (p. 5) and as the previous chapter proposed, *Things Fall Apart* has a postcolonial agenda.

The research questions that follow, inspired by Tyson's questions in the previous section (section 2.3) were used for the analysis of the novel:

1. How is the native culture and society portrayed?
2. How are the colonialists, and their culture and ideology, portrayed?

Thus, the native people and the colonialists were compared and contrasted. Additionally, the study intended to give concrete examples of why and how educators might use the novel in the classroom in order to work for a democratic Swedish society.

The analysis was organized using coding method²; by using different colored pencils, different themes in the novel were highlighted. Also, as the previous section (section 2.3) presented, there are specific postcolonial issues (political, social and cultural) and because of that, the issues chosen for the analysis were "Religion" (4.1), "Politics" (4.2), "Economics" (4.3), "Social hierarchy" (4.4), "Material things" (4.5), "Society" (4.6) and "Encounters" (4.7).

¹ To analyze deductively means to establish theories, principles and categories in advance and to later look for examples of these (Nunan, 1992, p. 229).

² To organize an analysis by using coding method means to interpret a text and divide it into different categories (Saldaña, 2013).

4. The natives VS. the colonialists

The following analysis compares and contrasts the description of the native people and the colonialists in *Things Fall Apart* through political, social, and cultural operations.

4.1 Religion

The natives have a polytheistic belief in which the god Chukwu is the “supreme”. He is said to have a lot of other minor gods to help him because his work is too great for one person (Achebe, 1994, p. 180). For instance, there is the goddess of the earth, called Ani, to whom the natives sacrifice in order to obtain a good harvest (p. 17). The importance of religion for the natives can be seen in that Chukwu is called the “supreme” (highest ranked) and also, the sacrifices indicate this. Further, Okonkwo’s reaction when his son Nwoye has converted to Christianity is an evidence of this. He, then, sends for his other five sons and tells them the following:

You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so that I can curse him. If you turn against me when I am dead I will visit you and break your neck. (p. 172)

The fact that Okonkwo rejects Nwoye as his son and as the brother of his sons for the sake of religion shows that the faith is very important to the natives.

Looking at the colonialists, they have a monotheistic belief; they are Christian. According to them, there is only one god, and he made heaven and earth (p. 179). Because of their strong belief, they condemn the Igbo-peoples’ religion, telling them that their gods are not real, and that they are only “pieces of wood and stone” (p. 146). In order to spread their faith, they build churches (p. 174) and schools (p. 181) in which their faith is conveyed. The fact that these men believe that god made heaven and earth, and that their god is the only,

shows that religion is very important to them. Another evidence of this is that they travel all the way to Africa, leaving their homes, families and friends, and work hard to spread their faith.

In all, it is clear that religion is an important matter, both for the natives and for the colonialists. Even if the natives' religion is polytheistic and the colonialists' monotheistic, they both believe that there is a higher power, a god, that controls life and death and thus, their faith is similar.

4.2 Politics

The natives' political system is closely related to religion. For instance, when Okonkwo is in exile because of an accidental murder, the elders set fire to his houses, demolish his red walls, kill his animals and destroy his barn because it is "the justice of the earth goddess" (p. 125). Thus, the elders' decisions are based on their wisdom, and what they believe is the will of god. If, however, the elders are incapable of solving an issue, the Egwugwu, the nine spirits and the founders of the nine villages, are called for. As an example, they judge a marriage case where the husband beats his wife (pp. 90-94). Also here, the Egwugwu decide themselves how this case should be closed. Finally, the oracles also have a say in the governance of the people; they are some kind of medium between the gods and the people. For instance, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves pronounced that a boy, Ikemefuna, should be killed (p. 57). This oracle is, otherwise, an ordinary woman called Chielo. Thus, she is the one taking stand in the political question.

If one looks at the system of the colonialists, it is a bit more modern; they have a court, a judge, court messengers and a prison (p. 174). However, the law of the court is "the white man's law" (p. 174) and thus, equality before the law is not established. Nonetheless, the white men seem to believe that it is, and this can be seen in the following extract, where the District Commissioner talks to some natives:

We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen. (p. 194)

Further, the use of the noun “justice” here indicates that the District Commissioner believes that their judge is the correct and fair one.

Both the natives and the colonialists have a developed and functional political system. Even if the natives’ system is religiously bound while the colonialists’ system is political throughout, the systems are similar. In both, there are appointed “judges” who have the power to decide what is right and what is wrong.

4.3 Economics

The natives use cowries as currency. Sometimes, these cowries are measured simply as “cowries” (p. 4) and sometimes, they are measured in “bags of cowries” (p. 73).

The colonialists’ currency is not, on the other hand, described in the novel but since they are British, they do probably use British pound. In the novel, however, they decide that Okonkwo and five other men who have violated the white man’s law should pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries to them in order to get their freedom back (p. 194). The fact that the men are forced to pay in cowries might be because they want to punish them; for the natives, cowries are very valuable. Also, it might be that the colonialists use this currency when they are here in Umuofia and that they, because of that, need cowries. How matters really stand is not stated in the novel, and thus, this is a mystery to the reader.

In conclusion, the economy of the natives and the colonialists seems similar. The colonialists’ currency is not described in the novel, however, it is assumed that they use British pound. Even if they use different currencies, both people use money (i.e. cowries or British pound) to, for instance, pay for goods and services.

4.4 Social hierarchy

Even if it is not explicitly illustrated, there is a social hierarchy among the natives. Since religion plays an important role in their society, Chukwu is at the top. This can be seen in that he is called “Master” and “supreme” (p. 180). After him comes his minor gods, and this is proved by the natives’ prayers and sacrifices to them (p. 180). Connected to the minor gods are the other religiously bound persons, such as the Egwugwu and the oracles. Their power is visible in that they decide, for the natives, a lot of important issues. For instance, the Egwugwu decide the faith of a marriage where a husband beats his wife (pp. 90-94). After the religiously connected people comes the men of title, also stated as the men that are successful. To be successful is measured in the amount of barns, wives and children. For instance, Okonkwo describes a man who had “three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children” as a wealthy man who had taken a good title (pp. 18-19). Contrastively, he describes his father as an unsuccessful man (p. 4) and failure because he was poor (p. 5) and he had taken no title when he died (p. 8). Thus, to own a lot shows that a man is an accomplished and successful citizen. After the men come the women who are, throughout the novel, inferior to men. This is indicated a lot of times, not least when Okonkwo beats his wife Ojiugo because she is not at home to cook him his afternoon meal (p. 29). Further, there are comments such as “Looking at a king’s mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast” (p. 26). Thus, to suck on a mother’s breast is considered weak and something that a powerful king looks like he never did. Situated at the bottom of the hierarchy are the “Osu” people; people who are dedicated to only one god. They are taboo and this is indicated in that they cannot marry the free-born, attend their assemblies or live together with them (p. 156).

When it comes to the colonialists, there is no clear description of their hierarchal order. However, there are indications of that god is the greatest. For instance, it is mentioned that god is the creator of everything; of all the world and all the men and women (p. 145).

Further, Mr. Brown says that god is “supreme” (p. 179), which actually means that he is ranked as number one. Also, the queen of England seems to be an important character in the colonialists’ lives. She is referred to as the “great queen”, who is “the most powerful ruler of the world” (p. 194). Among the people, however, everyone seems equal. This is indicated when Mr. Kiaga explains for the natives that “We are all children of God” (p. 156). The use of “we are all”, in this sentence, shows that he believes that everyone is equal.

Both the natives and the colonialists have some kind of social hierarchy among their people. Even if this ranking is different, both the natives and the colonialists rank god as number one.

4.5 Material things

It is indicated, in the novel, that the natives and the colonialists use different material things. For instance, the natives have horses, while the colonialists have bicycles (“iron horses”) (p. 145). The reason that the natives call the bicycle for “iron horse” is, probably, because it is the most similar thing that they can compare it to. Also, the natives have palm-wine (p. 4), while the colonialists have wine (p. 185). Throughout the novel, the natives drink this palm-wine. However, the Christians do not seem to use the beverage as diligently. The only time that the wine is mentioned is in connection to the church (p. 185). Further, it is mentioned how the colonialists have clothes (shorts) (p. 174), shoes (p. 74) and glasses (p. 149) while the natives are mostly naked. This can be seen in their comments about the natives’ clothes; they call them “Ashy-Buttocks” because of their ash-colored shorts (p. 174). Also, the following extract is an indication of this: “She [Ekwefi] began to run, holding her breasts with her hands to stop them flapping noisily against her body. She hit her left foot against an outcropped root, and terror seized her” (p. 103).

Since Ekwefi’s breasts flapped noisily when she ran, she probably wore no bra nor shirt. Also, since she got hurt when her foot hit an outcropped root, she probably wore no shoes.

In all, the natives and the colonialists use different material things for the same purpose. For instance, the reason that the colonialists use clothes while the natives do not, is probably due to weather differences in Nigeria and Britain. In Nigeria, it is hot and because of that, the natives probably do not want to use clothes. At the same time the British are, most surely, not used to such weather and because of that, they need to protect themselves from the intense sun. Thus, both of the groups use the material things in accordance to their needs.

4.6 Society

The natives' society is agricultural and because of that, everything revolves around the harvest. For instance, it is mentioned in the novel that "This year, the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams. One man tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself" (p. 24).

It is clear that the harvest is very important since a man hanged himself because of it. Further, that the farmers wept also proves this since men, usually, did not show any emotions in Igbo-culture (p. 28).

The colonialists' society is not as thoroughly described since the setting is in Africa. However, there are indications of that it is a bit more modern. For instance, Achebe mentions how the colonialists came to Umuofia with a trading store which made a lot of money (p. 178). Further, they also established schools that taught people how to read and write (p. 152). These two establishments indicate that the colonialists had an industrial society back in England; since trading makes a lot of money, this is probably one of the main businesses that the colonialists have. Further, since children are able to go to school, this means they are not needed at home to work like in agricultural societies.

Both the natives and the colonialists seem to have a complex society. Considering the colonialists, their society is not thoroughly described. However, it is indicated that it is

industrial. The natives, on the other hand, have an agricultural society. Even if the colonialists' society seems a bit more modern, the natives' society is well functioning.

4.7 Encounters

Several social meetings between the natives and the colonialists are depicted in the novel. One of these, similar to the rest, is the following one: "The first people who saw him ran away, but he stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones went near and even touched him" (p. 138). After this, the elders consult an oracle who says that the strange man is going to destroy them and their clan. Because of that, the natives kill the man and also, they tie his "iron horse" to a tree, since the horse looks like if it is about to run away and call the man's friends (p. 138). This shows that already from the beginning, the natives are scared of the colonialists. This is, probably, due to the colonialists' skin color; what is unknown is, oftentimes, also scary. This is, indeed, indicated later since the oracle calls the man a "strange man".

Another more calm and different meeting is the one about religion between Mr. Brown and Akunna. When they discuss their faiths, they show respect to each other. For instance, Akunna says "you say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth. We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods" (p. 179). On this, Mr. Brown answers that "there are no other gods. Chukwu is the only God and all the others are false" (p. 179). That Akunna says that his people also believe in the supreme God, only that they call him Chukwu, implies that he does not, totally, criticize Mr. Brown's earlier statement about one god. As an answer, Mr. Brown argues that "Chukwu is the only God" and hence, he does not condemn Chukwu. Thus, both of the parts talk to each other respectfully.

In conclusion, the two groups are scared of each other because they look different. However, some people in the groups are able to, despite the different skin colors, see the similarities.

5. Discussion

The following discussion deals with the issue of why educators should address Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. Further, advice for educators, inspired by current research introduced in this paper, is presented.

5.1 Why should educators teach Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*?

There are several reasons for educators to address *Things Fall Apart* in their classroom.

Firstly, with backdrop to the background, the Swedish national curriculum for English at upper secondary school mentions that educators, in English 5, 6 and 7, should teach literature. For the English 5 module, it is not specified what kind of literature should be addressed. For the English 6 and 7 modules, however, it is stated that this literature should be "older". Considering that *Things Fall Apart* originally is from 1958, it could be argued that the novel counts as an older novel too.

Another reason for teaching *Things Fall Apart* is that it is stated, in the curriculum, that students should get the chance to expand their knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. As the analysis of *Things Fall Apart* showed, living conditions, social issues and cultural features are present in the story of Umuofia. Even if the village is fictional, Achebe, as he stated in the interviews with *The Atlantic Online* and *The Paris Review*, tells the story of the Africans. Further, Nigeria is a part of the world where English is used; even if, for instance, Igbo is one of the major languages, English is the official language.

Also, just as Achebe argued in the interviews with *An African Voice* and *The Paris Review*, the conquered are never heard because history is written by the victors. However, there are always two sides to every story. In order for educators to be as objective as possible in their teaching, they need to consider, and teach, each of these sides. Then, it is up to the students if they want to form a subjective picture of the issue.

Finally, as discovered in the analysis above, there are not only differences but also a lot of similarities between the natives and the colonialists when it comes to political, social and cultural operations. For instance, they have a similar faith, political order and economical system. Still, as suggested in the “Encounters” section (section 4.7), the groups only seem to see the differences. This can be compared to today’s Swedish multicultural society, where racism, ruled by an “us and them” mentality, has become a major issue. By addressing *Things Fall Apart* in the classroom the students will, probably, compare the society depicted in the novel to the Swedish society and realize that there are, actually, more similarities than differences between “us” and “them”. In that way, educators facilitate an increased understanding for other cultures and teach for social stability.

5.2 How should educators teach Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*?

There are multiple ways to treat *Things Fall Apart* in the classroom. Be that as it may, several studies have proven critical literacy to be an effective method and because of that, teachers should make use of the approach.

Combining the current research on critical literacy in this paper, one way to treat the novel would be to, just like Abednia and Izadinia (2013) suggested in their study, address different issues in class. These could be elicited, just like in this paper, through a coding method and for instance, they could treat postcolonial operations (political, social and cultural operations). Also, educators could, just as Ko’s (2013) study proved effective, act critical facilitators during the class discussions. By letting the students discuss the issues, instead of

teachers leading them, this could be achieved. Thus, teachers should only help the students keep the discussion going. For instance, this could be done by using the five “wh-questions” (who, what, where, when and why). Additionally, the students could write reflective journals as homework treating whatever they thought was interesting and worth addressing about these issues. The journals could, as a suggestion, be one computer written page long. In that way, they are not too long and demanding at the same time as they are not too short. Further, comments on the parts in the reflective journals that are not critically approached could be handed back to the students in order to develop their critical thinking process.

6. Conclusion and future research

There are several reasons for Swedish educators to address Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* in the English classroom. Firstly, the Swedish national curriculum for English at upper secondary school states that educators need to address literature, and older literature, in their teaching. Since the novel is from 1958 it could, arguably, be treated as an older novel too. Also, living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used are decided to be treated. Since the novel, as discovered in the analysis of this paper, treats these issues it is a good source to use to cover these requirements. Also, just as Achebe argued in the interviews with *An African Voice* and *The Paris Review*, there are always two sides to every story. In order to be as objective as possible in their teaching, educators need to address each of these sides. Finally, as suggested in the analysis, there are a lot of similarities between the natives and the colonialists in the novel, even though they do not seem to notice that. Compared to the Swedish multicultural society where racism is an existing issue, the novel is very similar. Because of that, it could be a good source to use in order to make the students realize that even if we might be different, we are often very similar.

There are several ways to address *Things Fall Apart* in the classroom. With backdrop to the current research presented in this paper, educators can treat postcolonial issues elicited through a coding method and address these in classroom discussions. During these discussions, teachers can work as critical facilitators instead of information givers in order to increase the critical thinking outcomes. Further, these issues could work as a foundation for reflective journals; one computer page written journals, treating whatever the students feel is important, could be homework for each lesson. In order to maximize the critical thinking outcomes of the reflective journals, teachers could write comments on the parts that are not critically approached and hand them back to the students.

Considering the limitations of this study it is, firstly, angled for educators who teach English at upper secondary level in Sweden. As a suggestion, future research could conduct differently angled analysis in order to demonstrate the possibilities of similar teaching methods in other contexts and parts of the world. Secondly, this essay only treated one novel; however, there are several novels that could be used in order to work for a democratic society. Thus, it is proposed that future research conducts similar analysis on other books. Thirdly and finally, this essay examined *Things Fall Apart* through a postcolonial critical lens. However, there are several critical lenses that can be applied to the novel. Because of that, it is suggested that future research generates other themes and applies other critical lenses in order to show how the novel can be used in the classroom to change the world for the better.

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