

Positioning a Literary Work into Major or Minor Literature: Comparative Studies of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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ABSTRACT

In World Literature, there are two divisions in literary work; major and minor. Therefore, confusion appears in judging literary works that belong to a major and minor one. Implicitly, when a literary work is categorized as World Literature, it can clarify its position as the major one. Meanwhile, in fact, there are some considerations in categorizing a literary work into major or minor categories. This paper attempts to analyze the position of two Nigerian authors and their works; Chimamanda Adichie, the newbie author, and Chinua Achebe, a professional author. Though Adichie's name appears in the anthology of World Literature and most of her novel's theme is about social and political power, she is still categorized as the minor one. This categorization is later analyzed through the concept of minor literature by Deleuze and Guattari. This research applied qualitative and descriptive research methods in comparing and describing major and minor work. As the result, it is the language, political theme, and collective value that can signify the position of the two novels.

INTRODUCTION

The term Literary Canon has constituted the division or categorization of literary work. Being considered the most important work in a particular time period has generated some literary works to gain certain authority. A literary Canon is categorized as a group of literary works that are widely studied and respected (Luhar, 2014). For instance, most of the 'classic' English literature belongs to the English literary canon because it holds everlasting aesthetic, rhetorical, and moral values (Atkinson, 1995; Eagleton, 2000, as cited in Abu-Shomar, 2013). The term canonization has been addressed to some famous authors, such as Shakespeare and Dante. Despite the fact that Canon gives some literary works a special place, thus the power of deeming their worth is still debated (Thomsen, 2017). For the debate, Robert von Hallberg once explained that:

A Canon is commonly seen as what other people, once powerful, have made and what should now be opened up, demystified, or eliminated altogether. Rarely does one hear a critic, especially a professor, confess to dreams of potency, perhaps because now that canons are recognized as the expression of social and political power, intellectuals are, by virtue of a consensus as to their adversarial role, almost required to view these aspirations skeptically. (Hallberg, as cited in Lorre, 2006, p. 80)

The statement gives a view that it is no longer about religious issues that construct Canon's definition but more about the representation of society. Therefore, not all of the literary works that reflect society's power can be categorized into Canon. Smith (as cited in Lorre, 2006) describes canon formation as the product of continuous interactions among a variably constituted object, emergent conditions, and cultural selection and transmission. So, canonization is more to the process rather than the single vote from the audience.

For the issue, thus this paper attempts to look at how the major and minor can be positioned through the analysis of language, theme, and value. The focus is to analyze how the three elements work in each literary work and how it represents social and political conditions in different ways.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the previous reason, it can be understood that the process of canonization opens the chance for the minor literature to challenge the new formation of the Canon. Minor literature, which has been silenced over the years, appears in some anthologies by bringing up the issue of social inequality and political power. Apparently, this paper assumes that the consideration of categorizing a literary work based on its canonization is failed. Both major and minor literature can appear in Canon based on some considerations to

categorize a literary work as the major or minor one. As it is proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (as cited in Bogue, 2013) that there are three elements in categorizing minor literature. The first element is a deterritorialized language. Minor literature is not written in a minor language but is built by a minority in a major language (Tuckerova, 2017). Through the use of major language, minor literature brings the political concept and expressive value through an expressive form (Deleuze & Guattari, as cited in Tuckerova, 2017). The use of major language is considered as minors' resistance and escape from oppressive forces, such as states and language as well, and thus they have an inseparable and hostile relationship with the center of power (Ryle, 2018). The common interpretation of this argument is that the use of English as the major language in minor literature is not for showing imperialism but for the distribution of minority power and cultural establishment.

The second element proposed by Deleuze and Guattari is the political theme. They mentioned that minor literature is thoroughly political, focusing on individual conflict (Bogue, 2013). As this minor literature comes from the silenced minority, then their representation of the theme is quite political by proving the theme of social and political power. The political and collective's goals are two crucial things in minor literature rather than the aesthetic and individual contribution, such as language, sentence, structure, and so on (HE, 2020). Minor literature represents more the involvement of individuality in the political condition and social situation where they live in. Thus, the political is strong rather than individualistic representation.

The third element is the collective value. Deleuze and Guattari describe substantial characteristics between major and minor literature. Major literature concerns individual problems which tend to join other less individual problems with social backgrounds. While minor literature, it purely shows the individual concern linked to the political (Bogue, 2013). A good "minority writer" is really rare. Therefore, at the same time, it is even more welcomed as it can explain situations that cannot be explained by the major literature (Cergol, 2016). Since minor literature deals with national consciousness toward social and political power, the authors' voice represents the collective or group aspiration. The enunciation of social and political issues might raise nationalism. So, minor literature is the works speaking for collective value by a single author.

Up to now, this paper is in the same line as Deleuze and Guattari's element of categorizing the minor literature. From the use of language, the minor literature has confirmed its global characteristic. Though translation can be the tool used by minor literature, using direct English can reflect its ability to reach equality with colonialization language. The social and political theme can be the gate for the minority to criticize the inequality in society. Hence, minor

literature does not only refer to specific works anymore but more to the revolutionary condition in literature which shows people's struggle in political and social conditions.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research method was applied in this research to describe the comparison of major and minor literature of two Nigerian novels. To support the analysis, the writer used the concept of major and minor literature by Deleuze and Guattari. It addresses critiques toward the categorization of major and minor literature. The data collection method was textual or content analysis. This method is identified as a technique for investigating the experiences and perspectives of a group or individual (Paradis et al., 2016). Here, the writer used research articles and referenced books to collect the data, description, and explanation related to the topic.

The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis. Bailey (2008, as cited in Harding & Whitehead, 2013) mentioned that the data needs interpretation and judgment. Thus, the writer read and interpreted data from related journals and books to analyze the characteristics of major and minor literature. Data analysis is conducted in three steps. First, the writer analyzed the novel and found related issues related to language, theme, and the collective value of the novel. Then the problem was interpreted and the questions were put together. Finally, the writer identified the concepts to analyze the data, which are the major and minor literature by Deleuze and Guattari.

In this case, Minors who represent political issues become literature that can raise public awareness. Small literature emerges with a new value, while large literature defends its cultural value. This contrasting perspective made "defense" great, but it did not undermine the importance of trivial literature as a tool to undermine colonization.

RESEARCH RESULT

Before coming to the positioning of the two novels, this paper comes to the analysis of the novel's elements. Related to the previous three elements from Deleuze and Guattari, the first requirement is already fulfilled since *Purple Hibiscus* and *Things Fall Apart* are written in English. Later, the representation of the theme (a social and political issue) and the collective value will be described through the intrinsic element, such as characterization and theme.

A. Intrinsic element in *Purple Hibiscus*

1. Characterization

a) Kambili Achike

She is portrayed as an intelligent girl, a thoughtful, religious young woman. At the same time, Kambili is shy and self-conscious. The

rigorous role of his father built her identity as an introvert. Violence and psychological cruelty are also reasons for fear of speaking her mind. However, this condition turns into a good atmosphere after she spends a long time away with Aunt Ifeoma and her family. Ifeoma's attention and love bring serenity to confronting fear and silence.

b) Eugene Achike

Eugene is Kambili's father. He is a wealthy businessman, a very strict Catholic, and has strict control over his family by implementing a strict religious system at home. He manages almost every aspect of the family's life, including scheduling the lives of Kambili and Jaja, so that every minute of the day is scheduled for them. Eugene, on the other hand, is an important figure in his society, donating large sums of money to people in need and philanthropy. As a result, he is prone to violent explosions in his family's home, exposing his wife Beatrice and her two children to severe corporal punishment.

c) Beatrice Achike

Beatrice, the mother, and wife of the Achike family, has a quiet and maternal personality in many jobs, showing a calmer and warmer presence in the house, as opposed to Eugene's often domineering presence. She is also passive, and this passiveness allows her husband to take control and even use violence. In this context, Kambili says, "There were a lot of things she didn't care about (Adichie, p.19)." In the end, Beatrice disagrees with Eugene's actions and poisons him.

d) Jaja Achike

Called "Jaja" by his family, Chukwuka Achike is a smart young man about two years older than his sister. For most of the novels, he is dominated by his father as well as the rest of his family, but he eventually shows a more pronounced rebellion than they do, especially in the Palm Sunday communion. The result of not going causes a large family scene. He is liable for his mother's crime and spends nearly three years in prison before being amnesty. During this time, his personality has solidified, but it has not broken.

e) Aunt Ifeoma

Aunt Ifeoma is the sister of Eugene, a tall, striking, and intelligent woman who teaches at the University of Nigeria. She is very talented in many aspects of her life and is determined and witty when it comes to raising children without her husband. Despite her financial difficulties, she creates a much happier environment for her children than her brother Eugene did for his family. She really shows feminism in her life.

f) Father Amadi

Father Amadi is a young and charming priest in the circle of Aunt Ifeoma and her family. He is described as young, indigenous, and familiar with modern life. His character represents a "new generation" priest, as opposed to a white European priest in a country.

2. Theme

In this novel, there are several themes that can be proposed:

- a) Traditional indigenous belief in relation to contemporary Western belief
Kambili's father, Eugene, has influenced much by Catholicism, the new western religion brought by missionaries. For this western belief, Eugene becomes sensitive to his traditional belief, the Igbo belief. He qualifies other beliefs as irreligious ones, as presented below:

That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him," Papa said, as he unlocked the ...

(Adichie, *...* p. 22)

Compared to his traditional belief, Igbo, Eugene mostly admires Catholic and white conservative, Father Benedict. Eugene's strict rules for this belief are also reflected through these lines:

.... Papa wanted Father Benedict to hear our confession. We had not gone in Abba because Papa did not like to make his confession in Igbo, and besides, Papa said that the parish priest in Abba was not spiritual enough. That was the problem with our people, Papa told us, our priorities were wrong; we cared too much about huge church buildings and mighty statues. You would never see white people doing that. (Adichie, *...* p. 22)

Eugene's judgment then is shared with his children and it makes Kambili affected much by his father's tenet. The strict rules make the family gets punished if they do something considered a sin for Eugene, as reflected below:

The Igwe's palace was a few minutes from our house. Mama had greeted him the traditional way that women were supposed to, bending low and offering him her back so that he would pat it with his fan-made of the soft, straw-colored tail of an animal. Back home that night, Papa told Mama that it was sinful. You did not bow to another human being. It was an ungodly tradition, bowing to an Igwe. So, a few days later, when we went to see the bishop at Awka, I did not kneel to kiss his ring. I wanted to make Papa proud. But Papa yanked my ear in the car and said I did not have the spirit of discernment: the bishop was a man of God; the Igwe was merely a traditional ruler. (Adichie, *...* p. 62)

Eugene's tenet adheres to Kambili's mind and it makes her grow a bad perspective of her ancestor's beliefs. It is to say that Kambili is blinded by Eugene's convictions. In contrast, her grandfather is a follower of Igbo belief and Kambili's curiosity brings her to the intuitive knowledge of her tolerance. Furthermore, the depiction of Igbo beliefs is much kinder than the Catholic one to show the rejection of Western domination, as depicted below:

"But what's the point, then?" Amaka said to Father Amadi, as if she had not heard her mother. "What the church is saying is that only an English name will make your confirmation valid. 'Chiamaka' says God is beautiful. 'Chima' says God knows best, 'Chiebuka' says God is the greatest. Don't they all glorify God as much as 'Paul' and 'Peter' and 'Simon'?" (Adichie, p. 171)

So, the religious issue that appears in this minor literature is not only presented as the background for the story but it can influence and change readers' perspective toward minor society and western domination.

b) Unstable political condition

This novel presents the political condition in Nigeria, as it is delivered by Kambili:

... When he came back, we drank the mango juice, which Sisi served in tall glasses, while he talked about the coup. He looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another because they could, because they were all power drunk.

Of course, Papa told us, the politicians were corrupt, and the *Standard* had written many stories about the cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads. But what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. *Renewed Democracy*. ... (Adichie, p. 19)

Besides giving information on the political condition, this statement is also in paradox since Eugene, himself, is not honest in his career. His nickname, a Big Man, leaves something miserable for her daughter as is reflected in the dialogue between Amaka and Kambili below:

"I thought the Igwe was supposed to stay at his palace and receive guests. I didn't know he visits people's homes," Amaka said, as we went downstairs. "I guess that's because your father is a Big Man."

I wished she had said "Uncle Eugene" instead of "your father." She did not even look at me as she spoke. I felt, looking at her, that I was helplessly watching precious flaxen sand slip away between my fingers. (Adichie,_, p. 62)

Even though Eugene also does something bad in his career, by doing charity to be famous in society, at least he still can give an image of how the political situation in Nigeria, the real condition encountered by the country can affect society's life as it is presented below:

.... The gate man waved with both hands over his head as we drove off. His name was Haruna, he had told Jaja and me a few days before, and in his Hausa-accented English that reversed *P* and *F*, he told us that our pather was the best Big Man he had ever seen, the best employer he had ever had. Did we know our pather faid his children's school pees? Did we know our pather had helped his wipe get the messenger job at the Local Government oppice? We were lucky to have such a pather. (Adichie,_, p. 68)

In this minor literature, political issues are represented to determine the individual concerns, whether they can defend or even betray their own values.

c) Family value

This novel does not only use individual concerns with family life as the background. Therefore, the life of the main character, Kambili is affected much by the condition of her strict father. The fear that grows in the family reflects the power of the father as the breadwinner in family. It describes the situation of some families who cannot speak their opinion and desire as it is described as follow:

I had just hobbled back to my bed when Papa opened the door and came in. He knew. I wanted to shift and rearrange myself on the bed, as if that would hide what I had just done. I wanted to search his eyes to know what he knew, how he had found out about the painting. But I did not, could not. Fear. I was familiar with fear, yet each time I felt it, it was never the same as the other times, as though it came in different flavors and colors.

"Everything I do for you, I do for your own good," Papa said. "You know that?" (Adichie,_, p. 126).

In the novel, Papa decides everything and will punish his children for everything they did and considers it a sin. Wrapping a religious belief in family values has made this minor literature deliver strong individual and political issues.

B. Depiction of *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

Chinua Achebe is one of the great authors from Nigeria, and *Things Fall Apart* is categorized as a seminal novel. A seminal novel is a creative and original fiction, which is considered to be of great influence because it

contains the seeds of the future development of literary work (Casimir, 2020). Being considered a seminal novel, Achebe's works must have something different from other minor literature. Besides the use of English as the language, the difference is the choice for individualistic concerns. It is not like *Purple Hibiscus* that raises the political and social issues that force individual's changes, it is rather focused on how the individual will struggle for freedom within their relation with surroundings.

Things Fall Apart (1958) focuses on the defense of the traditional culture of Nigeria. This novel is a critique of the European perspective that sees Africa as a less cultural land. *Things Fall Apart* portrays the clash between Nigeria's white colonial government and the traditional culture of the indigenous Igbo people. It tells a story about a small village in Nigeria, called Umuofia. The novel is divided into three chapters. It takes a set at the end of the 19th century, for the coming of Europeans who try to impose their culture and their religion on the Africans. All inhabitants of Umuofia belong to the same clan which means that they share the same customs and help each other. The whole village is very religious. However, they already have had their own religion because they believe in several gods. In the same way, the people are lively isolated because they have no contact with the rest of the world. They are farmers who produce things such as palm oil, which they usually use to cook. One of the village's leading persons is Okonkwo. He really has a great influence on other people. However, the relationship with his son is difficult because he is scared that his son Nwoye would grow up like his grandfather Unoko who does not work hard enough. One day, the situation in Umuofia turns out completely. The Europeans come and destroy the neighbored village. At the first moment, the people are totally shocked by the white men. Then missionaries from Europe arrive in Africa and they want the Africans to become Christians. The white men work very hard to persuade them. Consequently, more and more people are exploited by the white men and they finally join the new religion. Okonkwo could not trust his eyes because now his ideas are not so important anymore. The white men gain more and more influence. They create a new kind of government, build new courts and judge people who disobey the new laws. The missionaries build new churches, hospitals, and schools. It is a great thing for many inhabitants because they can learn to write and read. Apart from these facts, the Europeans improve trading and Umuofia is getting rich. While the others are interested in the new religion or the new government, Okonkwo tries to preserve his customs. Even his son joins Christianity and Okonkwo is left alone with his ideas. Only his best friend, Obierika, can understand him. Meanwhile, he realizes that the people only see the good things brought by

the white men. The white men control the whole village. Okonkwo cannot bear the pressure and decides to punish the white men for what they have done. He kills one chief official. Afterward, he notices that life will never be like in the old days. In his opinion, there is no other solution and he commits suicide.

DISCUSSION

Based on the finding of the intrinsic element in *Purple Hibiscus*, the characterizations above implicitly give an image of the contrastive condition between religion, personality, and modern society. The reflection of the social condition can be read from the depiction of the characters indeed. Eugene Achike, for instance, his character shows a deviation from a religious value in life. It shows the reality of life where people are known as the strict follower of certain religions yet they never practice behaving like the real follower. Religion is used as a mask to cover their identity. Besides religious issues, personality can be described as the result of certain demands and conditions. Deleuze and Guattari (1984, as cited in Hong & Ferguson, 2011) distinguish the major and minor literature based on their political context in which the minor one doesn't need the Oedipal intrigues because it becomes one in a large space. As Deleuze and Guattari have introduced their theory of materialist psychiatry which has two goals: introducing desire into the social realm and introducing production or economy into desire (Peters, 2020). This reflects the unity of elements in minor literature where the individual and political are put together in one story, being different from the major one which put the social milieu just as the background.

Moreover, the pressured condition forces all individual intrigues to connect with politics. The chaotic condition and many pressures from the surrounding have constructed the identity of the individual. The space has forced the individual to unconsciously involve in a political situation. Kambili, for instance, her early identity as a shy person can be shifted into the open-minded one while she gets nurturance from her aunty. The relationship with others has awakened her unconscious and her ideal to see reality. Ifeoma, a tough woman, subverts the perspective of a woman as the second class in society. Her effort as a single parent and lecturer has shown her spirit and power to reduce the social perspective of women as the weak ones. So, the religious, social, and political condition is not only described as the background but it affects the changes in individualistic identity and character.

While for characterizations and themes above, it can clearly reflect how *Purple Hibiscus* can be put under the scope of minor literature. Sullivan (2005) mentions that a minor practice is always political it is possibly because it is always opening itself up to the outside in this sense. He clearly describes that

the minor produces a different kind of relative autonomy through the theme and characters who are 'being against' the major in common. Rothberg (2009, as cited in Caldeira, 2016) also mentions that the group of marginalized writers may act as an 'ethical subject' that can resist cultural confiscation. In another word, they propose a sense of belonging and identity in the community. Similar to the idea of being political, Deleuze and Guattari also mention that the individual concern in minor literature becomes more necessary, indispensable, and magnified because it vibrates the whole story (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). Though the author's name appears in the World Literature anthology, she is still categorized as the minor one. The language used, the representation of political and social conditions which also contributes much to the changes of individual characters, and the collective value implied from the minor theme, are the consideration for the categorization.

In comparing *Purple Hibiscus* and *Things Fall Apart*, it can be reflected that Achebe does not want to write about the African empire, but about democratic roots in Igbo culture. Achebe reveals that the Europeans' ideas of Africa are mistaken (Rhoads, 1993). This novel is to subvert the western negative perspective toward Africans, but it is represented in a different way. It is not like in the *Purple Hibiscus* which explicitly shows the attack on western ideologies; the description of bad social life as the result of western values. In Achebe's novel, it focuses on individual concerns, Okonkwo and his tribe with religion and culture as the background of the concern. *Things Fall Apart* is Achebe's sincere attempt to guide people in their struggle to make their freedom meaningful, functional, and relevant (Sumbul, 2013). Achebe's novel portrays native Africans' life from a European perspective. It is quite strange though that Achebe represents the harsh life of African society, even in its old and strict tradition that seems to be inhuman. The old tradition has put the African tribe in a miserable life where they can even have no other choices. In the case of Okonkwo's adopted boy, he is isolated just because of the alert from nature, the old belief that something bad will happen if the adopted boy still lives with the tribe. It is like the human soul is not worthy enough, and they rely their life and soul on nature, culture, and traditional beliefs. It is to imply that the culture is their God. Even though the political situation also exists in this novel, it cannot change their value, they just still hold on to the culture. This can be seen as a different kind of resistance toward the political issue in major literature.

On the other side, Adichie represents the influence of social and political conditions on individual values in which the condition can affect them to go out from being marginalized. In Achebe's case, he represents the defense of the individual toward their culture. While in Adichie's novel, the political condition

changes individuals to leave their past and struggle for revolution, Achebe represents his characters as the keeper of traditional culture yet it also opposes the new tradition from the western. Achebe appears to test Igbo culture against the goals of modern liberal democracy and to show how the Igbo meet those standards (Rhoads, 1993). This marks the difference between Achebe's work, *Things Fall Apart*, and *Purple Hibiscus* as the major and minor ones.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So, though this literature is categorized as major and minor, both of them have contributed so much to World Literature. The minor that represents the political issue becomes literature that can raise national consciousness. Through this minor literature, readers can detect how social and political issues repress individuals and thus they do resistance toward repression and inequality. The resistance brings enlightenment to them and creates new value. In contrast, major literature stands in a unique way where they use political issues to defend their culture. Minor literature appears with a new value, while major one defends its cultural value. This contrastive perspective has put the 'defensive' one to be the major, yet it does not reduce the importance of the minor literature as a tool to subvert colonialization.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This paper has broadened the discussion to three main points proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. Therefore, the next researcher may bring specific theories, such as feminism, to compare how the major and minor literature describe women in literary work.

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