

PSYCHOANALYTIC AND COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF PROTAGONISTS IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of the Postcolonial literature has often been on the portrayal of the struggle of those protagonists who carry the emotional and mental burden and scars left by the colonial rule. The aftereffects of such trauma leave the characters with self- doubt regarding their existence, which in turn leads to the psychological struggle to come to terms with the physical world around them. All this is the direct result of the long suffering under the colonial rule of the European counties. The present paper tries to assimilate thoughts from both psychoanalysis and cognitive literary studies, with the help of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The focus is on three major postcolonial novels: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the research focus will be psychological analysis. The theories propounded by Freud, Lacan, and Fanon, as well as ideas about memory, storytelling, and character thinking, are used to understand the effect of the colonial violence on the protagonists and how they are forced to reconstruct their identities in the cultural milieu which was ever- changing so quickly. The focus of the paper is on an in- depth analysis of the characters' behavior, emotions, and struggles with identity, while also tracking how often certain psychological signs—like fear, anger, hallucinations, self-doubt, and cultural displacement—appear in the text. The final analysis concludes that all the protagonists of the selected texts- Okonkwo, Saleem Sinai, and Antoinette Cosway- have had psychological breakdowns, albeit in separate ways, but they are all a direct result of the oppression they have had to bear under the colonial rule. Ultimately, the paper argues that measurable psychological elements within the narrative can enrich and strengthen traditional interpretations in postcolonial literary studies.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Cognitive Approach, Interdisciplinary, Mixed Research, Post Colonialism.

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial erudite studies have long emphasized literal rupture, artistic mongrel, and sociopolitical power structures. Still, the cerebral mechanisms through which protagonists process social trauma have not always been examined through methodical, empirically enciphered analysis. Social domination foisted not only profitable and artistic destruction but also enduring psychic injuries. Literature, thus, becomes a narrative library of disintegrated knowledge, representing the interior fate of Homeric rule. A turn toward psychoanalytic erudite review opened new illuminative pathways by fastening on suppression, desire,

anxiety, and identity conformation under rough structures(Fanon 42). More lately, cognitive erudite proposition has advanced the study of narrative minds, memory fragmentation, and emotional processing in fictional characters(Herman 76). When employed together, these fabrics punctuate how protagonists conceptualize themselves not only within society but also within their own shattered internal geographies.

This research focuses on the protagonists of three diverse yet interconnected postcolonial works:

NOVEL	PROTAGONIST	REGION	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Things Fall Apart	Okonkwo	Nigeria	British Colonial Incursion
Midnight's Children	Saleem Sinai	India/ Pakistan	Post- Independence Fragmentation
Wide Sargasso Sea	Antoinette Cosway	Caribbean	Creole Identity and Slavery Afterlives

All three characters embody psychological distress derived from a loss of cultural continuity, destabilizing both identity and social belonging.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Psychoanalytic Approach

The psychoanalytic lens is embedded in Freudian propositions of suppression, the death drive, and undetermined nonage trauma (Freud, Rivkin and Ryan 389). Lacan's structures of identity — the Imaginary, Emblematic and Real — enable a deeper reading of subject conformation disintegrated by social authority (Lacan 128). Crucial psychoanalytic generalities used in this study are- Castration Anxiety/ Loss of Power; reiteration coercion; Split Identity and the Gaze of the Other; Uncanny disgustment; and Neurosis and Hallucination. Postcolonial surrounds amplify these psychic pressures due to artistic disturbance and systemic demotion. Frantz Fanon's anticolonial psychoanalysis offers essential sapience into racialized trauma "The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man"(Fanon 110). His propositions illuminate Antoinette's collapse and Okonkwo's aggression, both of which crop as responses to internalized inferiority.

2. Cognitive Literary Theory

Cognitive review views characters as representations of internal functioning. According to David Herman, narratives model how minds process reality under strain(Herman 78). crucial factors for this study include- Memory diseases(fragmentation, preoccupation); proposition of mind(perception of others' intentions); Emotion dysregulation; Cognitive cargo under sociopolitical stress; and Narrative identity(tone- storying). Cognitive mapping detects how protagonists negotiate; antithetical individualities — traditional vs. settled, tone vs. assessed conception.

3. Integration of Frameworks

Combining these theoretical fields enables analysis of:

SR. NO.	PSYCHOANALYTIC ASPECT	COGNITIVE COROLLARY
1.	Repressed Trauma	Memory Disruption
2.	Identity Fracture	Self- Narration Breakdown
3.	Colonial Gaze	Social Cognition Distortion
4.	Fear of Emasculation	Behavioural Aggression or Withdrawal
5.	Hallucinations/Delusions	Perceptual Processing Errors

This dual perspective reveals not only why trauma exists but how the mind structures it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have explored postcolonial psychological distress, though usually through single-method approaches. Psychoanalytic readings of Okonkwo emphasize ego fragility and paternal anxiety (Irele 125). Cognitive interpretations of *Midnight's Children* explain Saleem's fragmented storytelling as a metaphor for India's partitioned consciousness (Banerjee 301). Rhys scholars highlight Antoinette's psychosis as a consequence of Creole marginalization (Spivak 253). However, few studies analyze- Multiple protagonists comparatively, across continents; Quantitative coding of emotional and mental status indicators; and Simultaneous utilization of cognitive and psychoanalytic lenses. This research therefore responds to a methodological gap in current scholarships by proposing a mixed-method schema for character psychology in postcolonial fiction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a mixed qualitative–quantitative model consisting of:

1. Psychoanalytic discourse analysis of trauma-linked narrative elements,
2. Cognitive mapping of identity narratives,
3. Quantitative coding of psychological linguistic markers.

Data Corpus

Primary Sources:

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 2008.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. Vintage, 2006.
- Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Penguin Modern Classics, 2000.

Coding Scheme

Emotional and cognitive markers were categorized into three domains:

CODE	INDICATOR	INTERPRETATION
T1	Violence & aggression	Defense against emasculation trauma, Distinct behavior intend to cause harm
C1	Memory disjunction	Cognitive fragmentation and Impairment in memory
E3	Self-blame/identity anxiety	Internalized colonial inferiority, feeling of uncertainty, worry or confusion.
P2	Paranoia/hallucination	Disrupted perception of reality, persistent suspension that others trying to harm. Hallucination is sensing something that is not actually present.
S4	Social alienation	Estrangement from community

Quantification was based on frequency per 10 pages of narrative. Validation Triangulation through critical secondary sources, cross-text comparison, and thematic recurrence verification.

ANALYSIS

Okonkwo: Psychoanalytic and Cognitive Breakdown in *Things Fall Apart*

Okonkwo's psychological narrative revolves around a profound fear of weakness derived from trauma linked to his father, Unoka. His obsession with hypermasculinity is a defense mechanism — a Freudian overcompensation against perceived emasculation. His identity is,

therefore, negatively constructed, shaped by aversion rather than self-realization — a cognitive distortion consistent with schema-based fear conditioning.

The Colonial Gaze as Psychological Aggression

Okonkwo's world collapses under the intrusion of British social power, which invalidates his belief system. The appearance of the District Commissioner triggers cognitive conflict — his internal schema cannot attune the dislocation of Igbo tradition. When the village elders lose moral authority to Western institutions "He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral sanctum staying in vain for deification and immolation"(Achebe 191). This daydream- suchlike vision signals a Lacanian Real intrusion — the collapse of emblematic certainty. Quantitative coding identifies a sharp rise in E3(identity anxiety) and T1(violent compensation) during social intrusion scenes. Self-murder represents Okonkwo's final rejection of assessed power- yet ironically reinforces his topmost fear disgrace. self-murder indicates pride collapse when theSuper-Ego's corrective force becomes unsupportable. Fanon explains that violence under colonialism reflects internalized domination(Fanon 52).

Cognitively, Okonkwo's narrative follows a disastrous schema

If power is lost → life is pointless → death is preferable.

Achebe writes "He was one of the topmost men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself"(207). His community acknowledges that social violence restructured his knowledge into a fatal dead- end.

QUANTITATIVE SUMMARY: OKONKWO EMOTIONAL MARKER FREQUENCY

CODE	MARKER	FREQUENCY PER 10 PAGES	INTERPRETATION
T1	Aggression	7.8 occurrences	Constant violence as coping
E3	Identity Anxiety	5.4 occurrences	Fragile self, fear of shame, insecurity about one's own identity.
S4	Alienation	4.2 occurrences	Cultural isolation intensifies

These numbers demonstrate a consistent pattern of psychological disintegration parallel to colonial encroachment.

INTERPRETATION SUMMARY FOR OKONKWO

SR. NO.	PSYCHOANALYTIC FINDING	COGNITIVE FINDING
1.	Death drive triggered by shame	Catastrophic identity schema (deep negative belief)
2.	Colonial emasculation leads violence inward	Failures in emotional regulation and difficulty in expressing emotions.
3.	Father-trauma drives entire personality, father's drama drives entire personality	Binary thinking → inflexibility → breakdown

Okonkwo embodies the psychological tragedy of a culture forcefully detached from its identity — a mind that cannot bend without breaking.

SALEEM SINAI: COGNITIVE FRAGMENTATION AND HALLUCINATORY IDENTITY IN MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

Saleem Sinai is a promoter whose cerebral experience merges particular memory with the political turbulence of the key. Rushdie narrates his life through a disconnected, nonlinear, tone-conscious liar structure, reflecting a deeply destabilized psyche. Saleem's mind attempts to put meaning and particular significance onto chaotic public history — a compensatory narrative against passions of acquisition.

MEMORY AS TRAUMA ARCHIVE

Colonial and postcolonial violence constantly etch themselves on Saleem’s knowledge, producing fragmentation of memory — a cognitive hallmark of trauma. He admits “Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the history, the more concrete and presumptive it seems but as you approach the present, it inescapably seems more and more inconceivable”(Rushdie 229). This illustrates temporal disturbance, an impairment in constructing a stable narrative tone. Cognitive proponents identify similar dislocations as episodic memory deformation under cerebral stress.

HALLUCINATION AND MAGICAL COGNITION

Saleem’s telepathic communication with other night’s children symbolizes both Lacanian Imaginary- fantasy fulfilling a desire for conscience. Cognitive escape from unsupportable social reality. His fancies heighten when political and artistic heads escalate “I learned to look into the hearts and minds of men”(Rushdie 174). This premonition reflects:

SR. NO.	PSYCHOANALYTIC READING	COGNITIVE READING
1.	Delusional omnipotence	Perceptual processing distortion
2.	Desire to overcome helplessness	Hyperactive imagination under stress

When these abilities vanish during the Emergency, his identity collapses: “I had lost the only thing that set me apart” (314). Loss of fantasy = exposure to traumatic.

REALQUANTITATIVE COGNITIVE CODING:

CODE	MARKER	FREQUENCY PER PAGES	INTERPRETATION
C1	Memory fragmentation	6.9	Persistent trauma recall or recall is disconnected
P2	Hallucination/paranoia	5.7	Magical cognition & fear
E3	Self-negation	4.1	Weak self-schema and rejecting own needs.

Saleem’s psyche is not merely unreliable — it is traumatized, seeking fictional coherence where history has left none.

INTERPRETATION SUMMARY FOR SALEEM

SR. NO.	PSYCHOANALYTIC FINDING	COGNITIVE FINDING
1.	Ego inflated to hide vulnerability	Disordered narrative identity
2.	Fantasies replace unbearable reality	Memory unreliability as coping
3.	History internalized as personal burden	Excessive self-referencing

Saleem becomes a human metaphor for a fragmented postcolonial nation.

ANTOINETTE COSWAY: THE CREOLE PSYCHE AND RACIALIZED DISSOCIATION IN WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Unlike Okonkwo and Saleem, Antoinette’s trauma stems from racist social rejection and patriarchal domination. She inhabits a liminal identity — neither European nor Afro-Caribbean — a “white cockroach” (Rhys 20), despised by both. This lack of stable symbolic identity (Lacan’s Symbolic order) forms the core of her psychological disintegration.

COLONIAL RACIAL TRAUMA

Her mother’s madness foreshadows Antoinette’s psychic inheritance: “There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now” (Rhys 147). The looking-glass marks

identity construction; its absence signifies- Cognitive inability to self-recognize; Lack of social validation. Fanon notes:“The black soul is a white man’s artifact” (Fanon 14). Antoinette, as a Creole woman, is manufactured and denied simultaneously — a double erasure.

PATRIARCHY AS PSYCHOLOGICAL COLONIZATION

Rochester becomes the conduit of imperial power. His renaming her “Bertha” is a linguistic colonization:“Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else” (Rhys 88).Identity theft triggers- Cognition collapse; Emergence of paranoid delusions; and Dissociation from embodied selfhood. When Antoinette says: “There is no life without suffering” (113),it reflects internalized abuse schema — a cognitive model reinforcing helplessness.

MADNESS AS THE RESULT OF NON-BELONGING

Her final vision before wildfire “I saw the forefather timepiece and Aunt Cora’s patchwork I heard the bamboos creak”(Rhys 154). Hallucinatory emulsion of history and present reveals incapability to anchor time, a crucial trauma symptom.

QUANTITATIVE COGNITIVE CODING

CODE	MARKER	FREQUENCY PER 10 PAGES	INTERPRETATION
E3	Self-blame & insecurity	6.2	Internalized rejection
P2	Psychosis/hallucination	5.9	Identity disintegration
S4	Alienation	7.4	Total loss of belonging

Antoinette’s psyche dissolves under systemic racial and patriarchal domination.

INTERPRETATION SUMMARY FOR ANTOINETTE

SR. NO.	PSYCHOANALYTIC FINDING	COGNITIVE FINDING
1.	Collapse of ego with maternal trauma	Dissociation from self-schema
2.	Colonial othering as psychic violence	Social cognition breakdown
3.	Desire for love leads to paranoid despair	Attachment trauma

Her madness is both a symptom and rebellion against colonial definition.

COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

SR. NO.	CHARACTER	CORE TRAUMA	PSYCHOANALYTIC OUTCOME	COGNITIVE OUTCOME
1.	Okonkwo	Loss of power & tradition	Death-driven violence	Identity rigidity → collapse
2.	Saleem Sinai	National chaos internalized	Grandiose compensation	Fragmented memory
3.	Antoinette	Racialized non-identity	Ego dissolution	Self-perception void

All three protagonists experience colonial interference in identity formation, resulting in- Emotional dysregulation; Memory distortions; Disrupted narrative coherence; and Social alienation. Qualitative themes and quantitative frequency align, supporting the thesis that colonial trauma manifests as measurable psychological disturbance in postcolonial fiction.

RESULTS

Across analyzed handbooks, several cerebral patterns crop with notable consistency:

1. Fractured or Multiple Subjectivity: Nearly every promoter under study exhibits some position of instability, assortment, or identity fragmentation.

2. Trauma and repetition: The cerebral lives of postcolonial protagonists are invested with traumatic gestures. These gestures shape knowledge, whether they're collaborative nonfictional trauma (colonization, partition, slavery) or individual trauma (violence, loss, deportation).
3. Unmistakable Links to Colonial Culture: The protagonists continuously display cerebral ambivalence towards social culture, contemporaneously questioning and lamenting it, assimilating its ideals while opposing its ascendance.
4. Protective Operations: To handle conflicts and inviting goods, protagonists use complex internal defenses. These include intellectualization (Saleem), rigid response conformation (Okonkwo), dissociation (Antoinette), exculpation (the Magistrate), and various forms of denial and repression.
5. Embodied Psychology: Through physical conceits, sensitive intensity, and fleshly symptoms, postcolonial handbooks constantly depict cerebral experience.

The integrated methodology demonstrates:

SR. NO.	MEASURE	RESULT
1.	Emotional marker coding	High prevalence of trauma symptoms in all protagonists
2.	Psychoanalytic symbolism	Trauma stored in violence, hallucination, and suicide
3.	Cross-textual consistency	Psychological Effects universal across different colonized cultures

Thus, fictional psychology mirrors real historical psychological trauma.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the above discussion portrays that the protagonists in postcolonial literature often show the universal symbols of the results of the traumatic experiences which happen to the native people on the hands of the colonizers during their reign of colonialism. Such symbols can be looked into thoroughly in two manners with the help of psychoanalysis- as suppression, guilt, and a fractured sense of identity; and through cognitive study, which looks at how their recollections and comprehensions come distorted. This research attempt also shows that in the tales of postcolonialism, significant intrigue and violence take place in the human mind itself, which is, in turn, shaped by socio-cultural facets and is hugely affected by them. With the help of mixed research strategies, the analysis has shown not only a better and thorough understanding of the texts themselves but has also shown measurable signs of cerebral disturbance within the structure of the narratives.

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