



The Hegemonic Ideological Religious Exploitation in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*

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Abstract

To internalize an ideology, one needs to create a kind of hegemony along with the belief intended to be consented. This is what is seen in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* where Soyinka introduces a character who claims to be a prophet. His false prophecy leads him to impose a kind of ideology on his adherents as to be their God-like figure who can turn their life into success, happiness...etc. The image portrayed by Jero himself illustrates how ideology is internalized on his folks to exploit them for his own interest. Ideology is said to be a set of beliefs, customs, traditions or thoughts that a society accepts in consent without coercion. This is what really happens in the play aimed to discuss. The present paper aims at exploring the ideological religious exploitation in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*. It is through discourse and speech making the false prophet Jero could impose his name and create a kind of belief as he is a real prophet. This paper examines how ideology is internalized to create a hegemonic power over the people. It is discussed in the light of Louise Althusser in his Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus.

Key Words: Hegemony, Ideology, Repressive, Apparatus, Soyinka.

The Internalization of Ideology.

In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)", Louis Althusser explains how Ideological State Apparatus can be created through methods to create an ideology. This creation comes usually through consent in the absence of coercion. What comes through coercion is called by Althusser Repressive Ideological State Apparatus, which comes through violence. This creates forceful acceptance of ideas, i.e., ideology. Althusser makes it as:

What are the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)?

They must not be confused with the (repressive) State apparatus. Remember that in Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (SA) contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what I shall in future call the Repressive State Apparatus. Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question ‘functions by violence’ – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms). (Althusser, 142-3)

This shows what Althusser calls as Repressive State Apparatus which comes by means of violence, consent is nowhere in the creation of ideology. The main part of internalizing an ideology as Althusser puts it is State Apparatus Ideology. He illustrates that as:

I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. I propose an empirical list of these which will obviously have to be examined in detail, tested, corrected and re-organized. With all the reservations implied by this requirement, we can for the moment regard the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses (the order in which I have listed them has no particular significance):

- the religious ISA (the system of the different churches),
- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private ‘schools’),
- the family ISA,
- the legal ISA,
- the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties),
- the trade-union ISA,
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.),
- the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.).

(143)

Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatus as a number of realities which are to be considered groups of institutions that create a specific ideology. Althusser lists out different institutions putting the religious ISA as the first one. This institution is usually the most effective institution that consents ideas. It is simply unquestioned by the masses since it is labeled by the name of the Churches, Mosques or Temples for instant. It goes also similarly with the social status of the people who lead these religious institutions. People working in these institutions are viewed with a specific holiness so that what they say gets usually that great influence on the masses. This is exactly what happens in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* in which the claimed prophet is believed to be a man who can change one's fate as what happens with Chume and other followers of the fake prophet who are so adherent to him thinking that he can help them getting what they want. Thus, one finds it related to Althusser's belief of the ISA.

The Ideological Religious Exploitation in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*

Although it is a comedy, *The Trials of Brother Jero* is considered to be a kind of discourse that reflects social hegemony through which control gets place. Therefore, the reader triggers the way religion is used to exploit people in the play. This can be shown in the way Brother Jero could have controlled Chume through all the play. It is actually not only Chume but also all those whom Jero considers as his "customers". This appears clear when Jero suddenly changes his mind and gives permission to Chume to batter his wife, Amope. The reflection of the ideological religious exploitation in the play is seen in the brilliant use of Jero to employ religion as the influence that he can use to get the needs of the worshipers of his church done. In his church, Jero uses words of God and prayers that give the image of his repentant church comers believe in his ability to satisfy their needs. However, it is clear to the reader that Jero is a quack prophet as he predicts the needs of the people and get them done. He exposes that he prepares himself to have a name that makes him viewed to his folks as a prophet who can fulfill the need of these people. This can be noted in his statement:

Jero: I have set my heart after a particular name... Inevitably they must begin to call me... the Velvet hearted Jeroboam. [*straightens himself.*] Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade... (Soyinka, 153)

... You've got to have a name that appeals to the imagination. Must catch the imagination of the crowd. Yes, one must move with the times. Lack of colour gets one nowhere, even in the prophet's business (Soyinka, 153).

Here, Jeroboam prepares his hegemonic discourse through exposing himself to his flock as immaculate and articulate hero. In fact, all what Jero aims at is to serve his own interest as he shows also that all what he does with the people coming to the church "is, in fact, planned" (Soyinka,153). He is using the veil of religion and claiming prophecy so that people accept him as a prophet who can fulfill their needs and desires. Therefore, he highlights himself in different ways in the church based on the need of the repentants or worshipers whom he calls them as "his customers"

What brings up the hegemonic vision is the way that Jero controls the people in his church; for example, one can notice before he appears to be in his church what he states to himself:

Jero: ... This one who always comes earliest, I have prophesied that he will be made a Chief in his hometown. That is a very safe prophecy. As safe as our most popular prophecy, that a man will live to be eighty. If it doesn't come true ... that man doesn't find out until he is on the other side. So, everybody is quite happy. One of my most faithful adherents, unfortunately, he can only be present at weekends – firmly believes that he is going to be the first Prime Minister of the new Mid-North-East State when it is created. That was a risky prophecy of mine, but I badly needed more worshippers at that time. (He looks at his watch.) The next one to arrive is my most faithful penitent. She wants children, so she is quite a sad case. Or you would think so... (Soyinka,157)

This excerpt emphasizes the hegemonic discourse that helps Jeroboam to have the ability to control these worshipers of people who have certain needs to fulfill. The play, thus, shows the hegemonic social and individual discourse.

The play as has been shown above exposes social hegemony through which exploitation happens by creating a belief to the common people that Jeroboam, the prophet, can get their needs done as he is a true prophet, a prophet by birth and inclination. He hegemonies the flock for gaining money and fill his pocket which is his main interest. This happens after he could create religious state apparatus. People as the claimed prophet wants remain helpless and blindly believing in the divine power, he has to pray for them having their desires accomplished. It is right from the start of the play, in the first scene, Brother Jero introduces himself to the readers as the audience in a very dramatic way as to create a divine image of himself that makes him able to control the people.

As the play unfolds and Jero starts to speak the introduction of the controlling figure comes clear to the audience. He powerfully introduces himself as:

Jero: I am a Prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination. You have probably seen many of us on the streets, many in their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, many curing the deaf and many raising the dead (Soyinka,146).

This introduction shows the illustrative power of the exploiter of the religious ideology in social hegemonic discourse in an ignorant society where they easily accept the ideological belief of the Christian false prophet, i.e., Jero. He right from the start states his being "a prophet by birth and by inclination", in addition to his knowledge about the prophets who are on the streets and on their own churches who have the ability to "curing the deaf and many raising the dead". This shows how Jero foregrounds himself among those prophets whom he mentioned with certain abilities. He seems to be saying that he is among that flock of prophets who cure the deaf and raise the dead. All these captions used here by Jero are to emphasize his ability to satisfy the needs of his people using the religious prophecy as his dramatic internalized religious state apparatus to play his tricks on the worshipers of his church whom he calls as his "customers".

As the play passes with the course of events, especially by scene III, it unfolds the hegemonic dimensions in the discourse of the play. Jero here presents himself as the suppressing upper voice who aims at exploiting the masses. His ways of practicing his tricks involved in religion to exploit the people who come to his church is the way of creating the religious state apparatus to internalize the belief of his ideology in the people. He states his ways clearly by referring to his aim to have a name which he already set at heart. He has already drawn a picture of himself as to be called "the Velvet hearted Jeroboam", and the "Immaculate Jero, Articulate Jero of Christ's Crusade". By drawing such images of himself, Jero poses a social vision of himself on the society and cares to be the one as he mentioned to be easily believed and accepted by his flock. He foregrounds himself with this social vision to enable him to control the masses of the adherent worshippers of his church. He states it about himself as:

Jero: I have set my heart after a particular name... Inevitably they must begin to call me... the Velvet hearted Jeroboam.[*straightens himself.*] Immaculate Jero, Articulate Jero of Christ's Crusade...(Soyinka,153)

He reveals it clearly by emphasizing that the "name must capture the imagination of the crowd", whom he has to use and exploit for the service of his interest. The crowd here refers to the people whom he will use and exploit. The exploited crowd of people here reflects the low-class people who are usually used to believe what the religious state apparatus directs to, as explained by Althusser. This can be seen in his statement:

... You've got to have a name that appeals to the imagination. Must catch the imagination of the crowd. Yes, one must move with the times. Lack of colour gets one nowhere, even in the prophet's business (Soyinka,153).

To him what he does is a trade, i.e., capitalism, where the worshippers are his customers as the quote shows. He reveals it to the reader that he feels like he is a shopkeeper every morning where he has regular customers and strange and dissatisfied ones whom he states he intentionally keeps them dissatisfied to keep using them. He foregrounds his knowledge to the people, so that he makes them feel sure he is the true prophet to fulfill their needs. The statement said by Jeros reveals what any representative of the upper voice plans to do to be able to control any flock. He reflects himself as thus:

I am glad I got before my customers, I mean worshippers-well, customers if you like. I always get a feeling every morning that I am a shopkeeper waiting for customers..." The regular ones come at definite times. Strange and dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied..." (Soyinka,153)

Jero after he is sure he has made a name for himself he describes while talking to himself his plans in controlling people and using them. He explains that whatever he does is already planned. He exposes his plan that he has to keep his worshippers dissatisfied with their needs to continue coming to his church and paying to him money which he takes as the service for them. For example, he is seen to emphasize keeping his assistant Chume dissatisfied and stops him from beating his wife. He claims divinely prohibition, and prays to God for forgiving Chume as he has thought to beat his wife. He foregrounds the divinely order of

not being allowed to beat women. He foregrounds that because it is the only way by which he keeps Chume under his control. This reflects the Religious Ideological State Apparatus that Jero uses to internalize his name among the people.

Chume here is a representative of the whole crowd controlled by Jero by the name of religion. He is a lower voice here that Jero exploits for his own interest. Jero explains that he knows if his flocks get contented, they will never come again and as for him he considers that as a matter of trade and these people as his customers. Therefore, "everything is, in fact, planned" by Jero carefully. He has to keep them helpless, so that they will come regularly to him, and he becomes assured that neither Chume nor any other can rebel on him if they are kept helpless. Thus, this method of plans done and practiced by Jero shows the hidden voice which helps Jero to practice hegemony against them. Hegemony here is social since Jero does not seek to be the president rather he aims to be involved in the social needs of those people around him, so that he serves his own interest and line his pocket. Therefore, Jero is aware of the way to treat his "customers" in order to gain as much as possible.

Conclusion

Though the play in itself is a comedy, it is a real representation of social hegemony where ideological religious exploitation takes place. It is when Jero seems to have the power to be controlling over the flocks of his church adherents. Moreover, it portrays social hegemony through the use of religious discourse which becomes the hidden voice of controlling the lower voice of the play, i.e., the masses as represented by Chume and later with the Member, while the upper voice is represented with Jero himself. Religion here is the discursive practice that is considered according to Althusser Ideological State Apparatus.

The social hegemony in the discourse of the play comes to be defined here as the control over the society where an ignorant society is gathered to believe in the religious power of a person who claimed to be a Prophet who satisfy the needs of these people using his religious Prophecy. People are very ignorant in the society of Jero that is why it becomes possible for him to control over them and make the name he planned for as he stated in the beginning of the play. Thus, the play *The Trials of Brother Jero* illustrates ideological religious exploitation. Though the reader is made aware while reading the text how Jero practices false claims to keep himself controlling the flocks, it looks as it is possible to happen at any society. To conclude, *The Trials of Brother Jero* is a good example for the presentation of any example of discourse manipulation and speech making since it has illustrated clearly social suppression and exploitation of one voice over another voice employing a critical method of discourse, i.e., religious discourse which is to be viewed under the umbrella of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus.

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