

AFRICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY:
THE NOVELIST (CHINUA ACHEBE) AS A WITNESS

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David Shachia Agum
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Examining Committee Members:

Dr. Abu S. A Barry, Advisory Chair, African American Studies
Dr. Nathaniel Norment Jr., African American Studies
Dr. Edward Lama Wonkeryor, African American Studies
Dr. Virgilette Nzingha Gaffin, External Member, Cheyney University

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ABSTRACT

**African Social and Political History:
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David Shachia Agum
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Doctoral Advisory Committee Chair: Dr. Abu Abarry**

This study examines the role of African novelists as major sources of historiography of Africa, and the socio-cultural experience of its people. Although many African novelists have over the years reflected issues of social and political significance in their works, only a few scholarly works seem to have addressed this phenomenon adequately. A major objective of this dissertation then is to help fill this gap by explicating these issues in the fiction of Chinua Achebe, a great iconic figure in African Literature.

Utilizing the conceptual and analytical framework suggested in C.T. Keto's, *Africa-Centered Perspective on History* (1989), the contexts, themes, structures and techniques of the following five novels were examined: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). The novels were shown to be replete with cogent social and political insights which provide an accurate portraiture of African/ Nigerian history of the 19th and 20th Century. The study seeks to make a modest contribution to the steadily mounting body of Africa centered criticism of the African novel/fiction within the context of African social and political history.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my Father, Iorhuna Agum, who taught me the value of hard work.

To Chinua Achebe, the master teacher himself, whose life works of writing continue to teach and inspire us; scholars, critics, and students alike.

To my Mother, Martina Agum, who taught me the value of an education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the African novelists as major sources of historiography of Africa, and the cultural experience of its people. The focus on the fictional novels of Chinua Achebe aims to provide a scholarly exegesis of the texts and introduce readers to important contextualizing historical and cultural perspectives it defines. A brief examination of the burgeoning literary scene in post-war West Africa and the experimentation with the novelistic form that early African writers were undertaking during the period under examination would be carried out. In several ways, the fictional novels of Achebe, especially *Things Fall Apart* represent a direct response to a whole canon of books written about the history and cultures of Africa by European writers from the sixteenth century. We will review the history of this writing, and analyze its ideological imperatives with the view to providing the background on the discourse about the African novelist as a witness to history. The question at the heart of the discussion is the kind of history described and how it is represented. The underlying racist discourses of some of the works by European writers were to be echoed in much of the later European fiction that was set in Africa. Achebe states in “African Voices”:

“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, took into their own hands the telling of their

story.”¹

Achebe’s views about the African novel reflected in pronouncements such as highlighted above portray the dexterity of African writers given their peculiar relationship to history. This study attempts a critical evaluation of Achebe's novels for their insightful interpretations of African history as well as impartial observations of contemporary African politics and society. The fluency of his works is consistent with the strivings and agitations of African writers as shapers of their own history.

The resolve to use the literary power of the pen to confront the yoke of oppression became a major milestone in the history of resistance of people of African descent across the globe. The African novelists attempted to illuminate the global experiences of Africans in an imaginatively, distinctive manner – thematically and structurally. Though they were writing within the literary traditions of their “oppressors” represented by Eurocentric scholarship, they employed linguistic properties that wholly explained the interpretation, reception, and reputation of their works to their intended readership. This was achieved mainly through the effective literary use of characterization in a way that was completely unique to the African experience. In most cases, African writers reflected their ideas through the voices and actions of characters, phenomena that allowed for several levels of interpretations without losing focus of the interpretive standpoint of history.

Many scholars have already written about the various themes of Achebe’s fictions such as class, cultures, and corruption. However, there is not much analysis on the social,

¹ Chinua Achebe, “An African Voice,” in <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/08/an-african-voice/306020/>

historical, and political insights of his works. This dissertation examines Achebe's insight into the social and political history of Africa and its significance to shapers and scholars of African history and literature.

Solomon Iyasere observes that of all works of literature, the novel is the most referential, the most discursive, and the most elusive.² Fiction, of course, is not a fact one can readily apprehend and this is either false or unreal. But, it could be argued that the reverse could be the case that one's access to reality is based on fiction rather than fact, that we understand something only insofar as we tell ourselves a story about it. By this assertion, it could be argued that fiction is inherently truer than fact, and that what we call facts is actually nothing more than good fiction. Simon Gikandi opines that fiction is not merely about a set of texts which are studied, but it is also about the real and familiar world of culture and human experience, of politics, and economics.³ Every work of fiction could be said to be worthy of acceptance. In essence, the concepts which make reality real are in the individual rather than out there in the open, and what makes them real has to do with the web of beliefs which allow us to interpret our experiences.

The political and literary struggles to locate the African identity and its meaning within the larger global context involve a range of histories needing to be read in ways that acknowledge the various, specific textualities informing them. Thus, Africa has become politically contested terrain, a flagship of African nationalism, cornerstone of

² Solomon O. Iyasere. "Art, A Simulacrum of Reality: Problems in the Criticism of African Literature." in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. II, No. 3 (Sept. 1973) 447-455 Cambridge University Press

³ Simon Gikandi. "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture." in *Research in African Literatures* 32:3 (2001) 3-8

African-American identity politics and the emerging field of Black Studies, and the target of those scholars who claimed that African history is nothing more than the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe.⁴ African literature constantly explores themes that are consistent with locating Africa and the African Diaspora within the interpretation of histories from a multiplicity of experiences. Understandably, history is very often based on interpretation and not merely facts. How one interprets history often depends largely on their philosophical and ideological perspective. Thus, an Africa centered interpretation of Achebe would form the major bane of this research.

II. **Significance of Study**

The study joins the steadily mounting body of Africa centered criticism of the African novel/fiction within the context of the social and political history of Africa. It sets out to explore the link between literature and history using the non-fiction works of Chinua Achebe as case studies. This is because Achebe has created a significant body of work in his writings, whereby he offers a close and balanced examination of contemporary Africa and the historical forces that have shaped it. This work is significant to both non-fiction writers and teachers of history who have to navigate between the interpretation of history and the fictionalization of reality. It explains how the historical novel in Africa provides readers with insight into aspects of the social and political history of the continent. The

⁴ Candace Goucher, "Connecting African History to the Major Themes of World History" in *World History Connected* 2. 1, (2004), pp.1 – 8

study also demonstrates the viability of using the Africa centered perspective on history in analyzing and understanding the historical works of fiction in Africa

III. Definition of Terms

The key terms “Africa centered,” and “characterization” feature extensively in several sections of the dissertation and should be understood as follows:

Africa centered: The interpretation of this term is borne out of C. Tsehloane Keto’s definition of the Africa centered perspective of history which is premised on the argument that the African historical experience can provide a focus for scholarship that explains the world and its development through the prism of African eyes and experience. In this study, Africa centeredness refers to the placement of the African literary and historical experience at the center of analysis about the works of Africans in the texts under consideration. The Africa centered perspective in this context provides the framework for analyzing the works of Achebe.

Characterization: The term is a literary technique which refers to the way in which the writer portrays the characters in a book or play. In essence, it is the way in which a character is developed throughout a story. Characterization also enhances the setting and tone of a novel greatly, because it allows the authors to provide the readers a more comprehensive impression of the message that their book is trying to convey. Since the works analyzed are works of fiction, characterization will most often be used to refer to context and specific examples.

Point-of-View: This is a narrative technique that describes how the story is being narrated in a text. This technique is very significant because it is crucial to a reader's

understanding of the text. The Point-of-View technique can vary from text to text depending on how the author wants it. For example, Achebe's plots in his first three novels; *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *Arrow of God* (1964), adopt the omniscient point of view – that is a technique where by an all-knowing narrator relays the narrative in a text. The point-of-view in Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People* (1966), is the first person narrative point of view, where the narrative is told from the perspective of a single character, Odili. In the first person point of view, every detail of the narrative must be relayed through the single character. The plot of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe's fifth book combines both the first person narrative and the omniscient narrator technique. In this case the narrative is told from the perspective of three characters, and an omniscient narrator who takes over the story from each of them when the need arises. Achebe's combination of both techniques in *Anthills of the Savannah* is important because it allows the reader to have several different perspectives of the same events, or people.

IV. **Methodology**

The methodology utilized in this study is Africa centered. I adopt C. Tsehloane Keto's definition of the Africa centered perspective on history which is premised on the argument that the African historical experience can provide a focus for scholarship that explains the world and its development through the prism of African eyes and experience. Accordingly, the method "Africa centered" will be applied in the context of Keto's conceptual framework. In essence, the Africa centered methodology will provide the analytical framework for Achebe's works by examining its themes and context to

establish historical significance. Thus, the research utilizes considerate cultural and literary materials.

The research is based largely on the evaluation of Chinua Achebe's works of fiction. In essence, the methodology involves a close reading of the selected texts of Achebe, using Keto's Africa centered perspective of history as the conceptual framework for analyzing them. The central hypothesis of the discourse is that the Africa centered perspective provides a luminal space within which history and fiction about Africa and the African experience can be analyzed. Moreover, Achebe's works of non-fiction and the works of other critics who have looked at his works will be critically examined. Crucial to this study is the critical analysis of the historical context of Achebe's novels which is a reflection of the role of the African novelists who use their narratives as bench markers of history. Attention is also given to the works of renowned scholars in political history and the social sciences to help understand Achebe's political and social conceptualization of African history.

Molefi Kete Asante argues that there is a paradox about Africa, one which makes it a subject that attracts considerable attention and yet rarely is there a full appreciation of its complexity. It is his opinion that African historiography has typically consisted of writing Africa for Europe, instead of writing Africa for itself from its own perspectives.⁵ David Carroll's position is closely aligned with Asante's when he suggests that the image of Africa portrayed was the "Africa of the European novel, with its impenetrable forests, throbbing drums, and primitive customs, an African so alien that it can only be described

⁵ Molefi Kete Asante, *The History of Africa*. New York: Routledge, 2007 p 1

in paradox.”⁶ On the other hand, Tsehloane Keto envisions an Africa centered perspective of history that revolves around the simple argument that the African historical experience can provide a focus for scholarship that explains the world and its development through the prism of African eyes and experience.⁷ It is in this context that Achebe’s approach to African history using the novel must be seen as very relevant to the discourse about the role of the African novelist as a witness to history. His views about the African novel abound in several commentaries about the concerns of African writers given their peculiar relationship with history. He states categorically that those who strive to define African literature without taking cognizance of the complex nature of Africa of the period being depicted are bound to fail.⁸ In Achebe’s view, only Africans can legitimately write on African experiences, and as long as these experiences dictate the vision of the artist, the novelist is free to use the novel form to educate.⁹

The quest for an Africa centered analysis of Achebe becomes even more imperative given that several scholars and literary critics have analyzed his works of fiction and non-fiction from a multiplicity of theoretical and ideological perspectives. While several of such perspectives provide his readers with useful insights into some the varying influences that have impacted the author over time, it has perhaps become

⁶ David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970, p15

⁷ C. Tsehloane Keto. *The African Centered Perspective of History and Social Sciences in the Twenty-First Century*. Blackwood, New Jersey: K.A. Publications, 1989, 6

⁸ Chinua Achebe, “The African Writer and the English Language,” in *Morning Yet On Creation Day*: New York: Doubleday, 1975. p93

⁹ Chinwe Christiana Okechukwu, *Achebe the Orator*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001. P8

important to suggest that the different perspectives be scrutinized and discussed within the distinct experience of the author as an African writer using an Africa centered perspective and methodology as his approach to narrating the history of and about Africa and the African experience. The Africa centered methodological framework does not in any way claim to be hegemonic or non-inclusive and as a result acknowledges the fact that the choice of Achebe and his works as the focus of this study has been the constant subject of critics and scholars, but at the same time, it tries to interrogate some of the assertions made by the critics and scholars in such a manner that highlights a reflection of the African experience in Africana letters. The Africa centered interpretation of Achebe should perhaps be seen as another continuity in the interpretations of the role of African novelists and fiction writers; coming to terms with the history of their societies as the fundamental necessity for African centered historiography; one which interprets Africa's history within the context of the African experience. Patrick Chabal argues perceptively that African writers "did more to reveal the reality of postcolonial Africa than most African scholars."¹⁰

This research also critically explores the centrality of intertextuality in the production and appreciation of Chinua Achebe's fictions. Intertextuality deals with relations among texts: as no text is an island. The significance of intertextuality to the creation of postcolonial African (Nigerian) literature establishes the fact that the social facts that are being refracted are real. The research, therefore, demonstrates that Achebe's fictions are a derivative of the corpus of "verifiable", realistic literature on

¹⁰ Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa: An Essay in Political Interpretation*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1994, p.8

several aspects of Africa's postcolonial experience. Ralph Waldo Emerson maintains that fiction reveals truth that reality obscures. That is the "truth" about Achebe's fiction. Thus, the remit of our textual analysis here are Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, which largely border on the social and political history of Nigeria. Every of Achebe's fiction has a trace of earlier ones, at least indirectly. This is fundamentally true about his postcolonial fiction, which refracts Nigeria's "postcolonial disillusionment"; and it is a product of "... a plural productivity in which multiple voices – textual, socio-historical and ideological – coexist and communicate."¹¹

V. Literature Review

As regards literature review in this study, we interrogate the works of Chinua Achebe, to critically examine the role of the African artist as a witness to history in order to provide a scholarly exegesis of his texts and his readers. This would enable us to important contextual historical and cultural perspectives. Towards the achievement of this goal, Chinua Achebe's trilogy *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), as well as *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) will form the major focus of the research. In addition, each of the novels explored in this research demonstrates a distinctive aspect of the author's approach to the interpretation of history in its critical and cultural unfolding.

At the core of Achebe's quest for the redefinition of Africa in world history is the overbearing question of the humanity of the African. In his 2009 collection of essays

¹¹ Lara-Rallo, C., "Pictures Worth a thousand words: Metaphorical images of textual interdependence," in *Nordic journal of English studies*, 8(2), 2009, pp.91-110.

titled *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, Achebe narrates the story of a kite flown high by a small white boy. It's a brilliant summer day, with the loveliness of houses and gardens encircling the boy. The kite soars so high that it gets stuck to an airplane, and is carried far away to an African village. There, above a clearing pocked with little round huts, the kite falls on a coconut tree. A small black boy is about to pick a coconut, but his is frightened by the kite. So, he falls out of that same tree. Achebe writes:

The boy's parents and neighbors rush to the scene and discuss this apparition with great fear and trembling. In the end they send for the village witch doctor, who appears in his feathers with an entourage of drummers. He offers sacrifices and prayers and then sends his boldest man up the tree to bring down the object, which he does with appropriate reverence. The witch doctor then leads the village in a procession from the coconut tree to the village shrine, where the supernatural object is deposited and where it is worshipped to this day.¹²

The story originated in a book that Achebe's daughter Chinelo was given as a young girl. His daughter attended a nursery school "run by a bunch of white expatriate women" who favored "expensive and colorful children's books imported from Europe." The books, Achebe says, were a "poison wrapped and taken home to our little girl."¹³ It's easy enough to agree with this statement of Achebe's. The image of Africans filled with awe worshipping a strange object that dropped out of the skies exudes of colonial patronage. Wrath at this prolonged and indeed willful misconception of Africa and

¹² Chinua Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009 p70

¹³ *ibid*

Africans by Europeans is a prevalent idea that runs through many of the sixteen essays in the book written between 1988 and 2009.

It is a great irony of history and geography that Africa, whose landmass is closer than any other to the mainland of Europe, argues Achebe, should come to occupy in the European psychological disposition the farthest point of otherness, should indeed become Europe's very antithesis. Achebe further maintains that the origin of the perception problem was not ignorance as was argued by some critics, but a deliberate invention devised to facilitate two gigantic historical events: "the Atlantic slave trade and the colonization of Africa by Europe."¹⁴ Such derogatory images especially as that portrayed by Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* lead Achebe to feel Conrad's refusal to see Africans as fully human.

Rethinking the humanity of the African, Achebe compares Conrad with David Livingstone, a near-contemporary who famously wrote that Africans are "just a strange mixture of good and evil as men are everywhere else."¹⁵ Achebe concludes by maintaining that "Without doubt, the times in which we live influence our behavior, but the best or merely the better among us, like Livingstone, are never held hostage by their times."¹⁶ Achebe grounds his fury in a refusal to see anything or anyone one-dimensionally, a position which reflects C. T. Keto's concept of the 'Africa centered' perspective open to multiple ways of examining phenomena. He does grind away at the failure of Europeans to see Africa plainly, and he does revile at the "protection" offered

¹⁴ Ibid, p78

¹⁵ Ibid, p82

¹⁶ Ibid, pp90-91

by the British to Nigeria. “At the center of all the problems Europe has had in its perception of Africa,” writes Achebe, “lies the simple question of African humanity: are they or are they not like us?”¹⁷ It is a question that must be fully engaged in discussing all aspects of the African experience.

Leonard Cohen argues that ‘History decrees that there are Losers and Winners. History cares only whose turn it is!’¹⁸ In essence History poses the question of whose turn it is to win or lose. Margaret Turner maintains that in the Hegelian system, there are winners and losers, masters and slaves; in history’s movement toward the universal and homogeneous state there are winners and loser as well.¹⁹ As is the case of history, Hegel does not appear to care for the cases of individuals, nor does the historical process of colonization and cultural confrontation and domination. One of the most significant aspects of history is its interpretation. Thus, history, has, until recently, favored the “colonizer”, whose turn it has been to win, often at the painful expense of the “colonized”, the perceived losers who receive little or no attention. Nevertheless, the position of the colonized is very significant because it cast light on the entire colonial institution. Achebe’s novels attempt to highlight the plight of the colonized by depicting the historical process of cultural confrontation and domination. He complains about the critics who lay ‘claim to the deeper knowledge and a more reliable appraisal of Africa

¹⁷ Ibid., p88

¹⁸ Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers*, New York: Bantam, 1967, p. 151

¹⁹ Margaret Turner, “Achebe, Hegel, and the New Colonialism” in *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1991, p. 31-40

than the educated African writer has shown himself capable'²⁰, arguing that his role as artist was to teach history and awaken cultural nationalism.

Achebe interrogates the neutrality of Western and universal critical methodology and standards of literature. He also studies the bitter and ambiguous experience of colonialism²¹ and the accelerated change which has occurred in African nations. The facts of history determined that Africa and Africans will live out the great tragedy of colonization, where they become victims held hostage by the power of the imperialist. It is the struggle to survive such mundane situations that some of Achebe's characters end up tragically, as we see for example in the case of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*.

Achebe is one of the most important writers to emanate from contemporary Africa with a literary discernment that has profoundly swayed the form and content of contemporary African literature and history. In his novels, he has narrated the colonization of Nigeria by the British and the political turbulence following its independence. Achebe's novels represent some of the earliest written works in English that enunciate an intimate and genuine account of African culture and customs. A significant thesis of Achebe's writings is the social and psychological effect of European imperialism on indigenous African communities, especially with respect to a distinctly African awareness in the twentieth century. Critics have praised Achebe's novels for their insightful narrations of African history as well as fair scrutiny of contemporary African politics and society.

²⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. New York: Anchor Press, 1975, p5

²¹ G.D. Killam, ed., *African Writers on African Writing*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. xii

In his writings, Achebe has created a significant body of work in which he offers a close and balanced examination of contemporary Africa and the historical forces that have shaped it. It is such feat that led Gerald Moore to conclude that Achebe's distinction is to have [looked back] without any trace either of chauvinistic idealism or of neurotic rejection.²² In assuming the role of the writer as teacher, Achebe stressed the need to maintain the truth while adopting a historical approach to it in his novels:

The question is how does a writer re-create the past? Quite clearly there is a strong temptation to idealize it – to extol its good points and pretend that the bad never existed. This is where the writer's integrity comes in. Will he be strong enough to overcome the temptation to select only those facts which flatter him? If he succumbs he will have branded himself as an unworthy witness... we cannot pretend that our past was one long, Technicolor idyll. We have to admit that like other people's pasts ours had its good as well as its bad side.²³

Achebe's struggle to locate the writer's role in literature highlights the relationship between postcolonial literature and the writing of history. In essence, it is important to question how post colonial writers represent the past. What historical stance should postcolonial writers assume toward their own history? Achebe clearly highlights the problematic of such representation. It is in this light that Achebe's novels such as *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* not only situate themselves in periods of historical transition (Nigeria at the turn of the century and in the late 1950s) but also superimpose these periods on each other through a series of inter-textual connections, thus suggesting that postcolonial writers are the products of all the historical periods through which their

²² Gerald Moore, *Seven African Writers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962, p.18

²³ Chinua Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in New Nation," in *Nigeria Magazine*, 81, 1964, pp. 59-60

cultures have lived. It is significant to note that while Achebe urgently feels the need to recuperate an African past that has been lost or overlooked, to tell the story that has not been told, he nevertheless recognizes the importance of maintaining a sense of intellectual and historical integrity.

Representing the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial experience from an Africa centered historical perspective provides a more balanced picture of the African experience. Scholars who hold this position emphasize that the colonial period must be set in the perspective of African history as a whole. Such exponents as J.F. Ade Ajayi have criticized those who study the European impact and the African response to colonialism without any reference to the internal history of Africa and its people. He argues that the correct historical context for a full assessment of the colonial period 'is not the history of the colonization of Africa or the history of African reactions to European colonization, but African history as such.'²⁴ Achebe understood this concept when he reaches back to the African past and its cultural conflict with the European culture it interacted with.

According to G.D. Killam, Achebe's prose writing reflects three essential and related concerns, "first, with the legacy of colonialism at both the individual and societal level; secondly, with the fact of English as a language of national and international

²⁴ J. F. Ade Ajayi, 'Colonialism: An Episode in African History,' in Gann and Duignan, *Colonialism*, 1870-1914, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. P. 499

exchange; thirdly, with the obligations and responsibilities of the writer both to the society in which he lives and to his art.”²⁵

Achebe, The Man

Chinua Achebe was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria on November 16, 1930. The son of protestant converts; he attended Government College in Umuahia from 1944 to 1947 and the University College, Ibadan from 1948 to 1953. Though he was initially accepted at the University College of Ibadan, then affiliated to the University of London, to study medicine, Achebe switched studies to liberal arts and majored in English, history and religion. At the university, he rejected his British name and took the short form of his indigenous name Chinua. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1953. Before joining the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos in 1954, he traveled in Africa and America, and worked for a short time as a teacher. In the 1960s he was the director of External Services in charge of the Voice of Nigeria.²⁶

During the Nigerian Civil War which lasted from 1967 to 1970, Achebe served in the Biafran government service. He also taught at American and Nigerian universities. Achebe also co-founded a publishing company, the Citadel Press at Enugu with the late poet Christopher Okigbo, in 1967. Later he was appointed a research fellow at the

²⁵ G.D. Killam, “Achebe’s World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe” in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1985, pp. 684-685

²⁶ Keith Booker M. ed. *The Chinua Achebe Encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003, p.3

University of Nigeria, and eventually became a professor of English before retiring in 1981. Achebe had been a professor emeritus at the University of Nigeria since 1985. He has also taught as a Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. It was also while he was at Amherst that he met James Baldwin, also a faculty member, who was Professor of African studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. Achebe also taught literature at Bard College, New York, a liberal arts school. Until his passing on March 22, 2013, Achebe was the David and Marianna Fisher Professor and Professor of Africana Studies in the Department of Africana Studies at Brown University, where he also oversaw the Chinua Achebe Colloquium on Africa, an initiative in keeping with his life's work to foster greater knowledge of Africa.²⁷

Achebe became a renowned writer and has written several books to his credit. *Things Fall Apart*, which was his first novel, was published in 1958. The novel was centered on customary Igbo life as it conflicted with colonial forces in the form of missionaries and colonial administrators. It has been translated into more than fifty languages. Achebe's first novel was followed two years later by *No Longer at Ease* (1960), a novel which narrates the story of a man, Obi Okonkwo, who leaves his village for a Western education in England, and a job in the Nigerian colonial service. He struggles to adapt to a Western lifestyle and ends up involved in a bribery scandal.²⁸ In essence, the novel examines the legacy of colonial domination on African culture.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ezenwa Ohaeto. *Chinua Achebe: A Biography*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997 p 14

Achebe emphasizes how Europeans thrust their ways, traditions, and values, upon Africans and the destruction and dislocation the colonial process brings.

In 1964, Achebe published his third fiction, *Arrow of God*. Set in the 1920s, the book presents a central character Ezeulu, a priest, who sends one of his sons to a school operated by missionaries, and profits in some ways, with the commendation of the English district superintendent. However, Ezeulu is predestined to fate, because in guarding the customs of his people he is unbending, unable to reach an agreement, and afraid of losing his own authority. Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People* was published in 1966. The novel is presented as a satire of corruption and power struggles in an unnamed state in Africa in the 1960s. The main characters include, Chief Nanga, the Minister of Culture, who is also known as the man of the people, Odili, a teacher, through whose eyes the story is told. Odili rises against the government. However, the reader discovers that it is not because of ideological reason but purely personal reasons: Chief Nanga has seduced his girl friend. Their political showdown becomes fierce, Nanga's violent thugs inflict havoc and chaos, and the army reacts by staging a coup. The novel manifests Achebe's deep personal frustration with what the Nigerian nation had become since independence. Among his later works is *Anthills of The Savannah* (1987), a text whose story is set in an imaginary West African state where Sam, a military officer trained at Sandhurst, has become President. Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi, his friends, die when resisting brutal abuse of power. A military coup eliminates Sam. Beatrice Okah -

Chris's London-educated girl friend - is entrusted with her community of women to restore the political sanity of a country at the brink of collapse.²⁹

Achebe has also gained fame with his collection of essays, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), *Hopes and Impediments* (1988) and his long essay *The Trouble With Nigeria* (1983). In an earlier article "An Image of Africa" (1975), Achebe criticizes Joseph Conrad's racism in *Heart of Darkness*. He has defended the use of the English language in the production of African fiction, insisting that the African novelist has an obligation to educate, and has attacked European critics who have failed to understand African literature on its own terms. Achebe has defined himself as a cultural nationalist with a revolutionary mission "to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement."³⁰ This explains why Achebe's depiction of "Okonkwo" in *Things Fall Apart* forms an integral part of the analysis in this research. But Achebe has not stopped criticizing postcolonial African leaders who have plundered economies. During the military dictatorship of Gen. Sani Abacha, he left Nigeria several times as a result of his fallout with the government. The first novelist to offer an African perspective on colonialism, Achebe has turned the same critical eye to contemporary ills such as the rampant corruption of Nigeria's rulers. In October 2005, he declined the National Merit Award awarded to him by President Olusegun Obasanjo of his home country, Nigeria because of his perceived abuse of office by the presidency. Yet in one of his criticism of the Nigerian leadership titled: "The

²⁹ Ibid. p. 18

³⁰ C. L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe* New York: NY Cambridge University Press, 1990, p105

Clouds are Gathering,” Achebe accused President Obasanjo of subverting Nigeria’s democracy, saying the administration “has taken the country as low as she has ever gone.”³¹ In 2011, Achebe again rejected the offer of an award of national merit by current Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, arguing that the reasons for which he had earlier rejected the initial offer when it was first offered have not yet been addressed, let alone solved.³² Achebe has never shied away from expressing his disappointment with contemporary African states for failure to move forward since the arrival of independence. It is perhaps the adage that ‘charity begins at home’ that informs the harsh criticism of his home nation, Nigeria and its leaders. As a sociopolitical commentator and public policy analyst, the world-renown author kept pace with Nigeria’s ups and downs as it evolved into the nation that it has currently become.

It is Achebe’s candid opinion that the history of Africa must be understood within the holistic context of examining the totality of African people. The twin discourse of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism sum up the totality of the African experience which provide the context for understanding contemporary African issues:

In my mind, there are two parts to the story of the African peoples ... the rain beating us obviously goes back at least half a millennium. And what is happening in Africa today is a result of what has been going on for 400 or 500 years, from the “discovery” of Africa by Europe, through the period of darkness that engulfed the continent during the trans-Atlantic slave trade and through the Berlin Conference of 1885. That controversial gathering of the leading European powers, which precipitated the “scramble for Africa,” we all know took place without African consultation or representation. It created new boundaries in ancient kingdoms, and nation-states resulting in disjointed, inexplicable,

³¹ <http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=74628>

³² <http://loladeville.blogspot.com/2011/11/chinua-achebe-declines-national-honour.html>

tension-prone countries today.³³

Achebe seeks to use much of his writings to tell the story of Africa first, at the level of understanding his traditional Igbo society, but also at the secondary level of the larger Nigerian story within the West African sub-region. In his writings, Chinua Achebe affirms the educational operation of literature and creates a human context for discerning modern Nigerian history: the first interactions between European and African cultures at the turn of the century in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the succeeding institutionalization of European religious and political systems in *Arrow of God* (1964), the perturbed years instantaneously preceding independence in *No Longer at Ease* (1960), the agitation and frustration of Nigeria's First Republic in *A Man of the People* (1966), the agony of the Nigerian Civil War in *Girls at War* (1972) and in *Beware Soul Brother* (1973), and the corrupt despotism that has become a feature of Nigeria's Second Republic in *Anthills in the Savannah* (1987). Indeed, the title of Achebe's 1983 commentary, *The Trouble With Nigeria* highlights a burden that has been central to all his works of fiction and non-fiction .

Achebe's most recent work *There Was a Country* (2012), recently released, is a memoir about the Nigerian Civil War. The book, a provocative memoir from the victim's point of view, critically discusses the Nigerian Civil War, the ugly conflict that claimed up to three million lives, mostly from disease and starvation, and mostly of Achebe's

³³ Chinua Achebe, "Nigeria's Promise, Africa's Hope, in *The New York Times*, January 15, 2011, p.12

Igbo ethnicity. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) broke out seven years after independence from Britain. Writes Ken Saro-Wiwa:

There Was A Country is a memoir of the Nigerian Civil War in four parts. The pre-war section is testimony to the immense promise of a Nigeria that would soon be disfigured by greed and war. The later parts, however, covering the postwar years, read like an afterthought, with broad-brush ruminations on contemporary Nigeria that end with an abrupt elegy to Nelson Mandela.³⁴

Achebe holds the international community responsible for the marginalization and killing of the Igbos by the Nigerian government while the United Nations did nothing. Needless to say that Achebe receives a barrage of criticisms from some who argue that he exaggerated the issue of perceived bias against the Igbos, just as some argued that he misrepresents facts about the war in order to favor the Igbos.

It is important to note that in his attempt to provide a reasonable account of African history, Achebe does not idealize the pre-colonial past, for he knows that it cannot survive unaltered in a modern world; rather, he urges his readers to study continuities with the past that can coexist with contemporary society. The difficulty in reaching such a balance is mirrored in the struggles of Achebe's protagonists who are constantly in conflict between self realization and social responsibility as noticed varyingly in the narrative of his novels.

On the other hand, Africana literary critics often relate Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to the very differing Eurocentric standards of literary criticism. This is quite convenient given that Achebe like many of his contemporaries is coming on board within

³⁴ Ken Saro-Wiwa, "Achebe Recall's Nigeria's Greatest Tragedy From a Victim's Point of View, in *The Globe and Mail*, November 16, 2012.

the realm of post-colonial discourse; and in his specific case, post-colonial literature. One such example is the description of Achebe's frantic application of literary realism in the African fiction. Chinua Achebe's fiction is regarded as the supreme example of African literary realism. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is also often described as historical realism, especially when he seeks to recover the African past from its suppression in colonial discourse. He describes himself as practicing "applied art," suggesting that realism is also a politically committed and transformative form as opposed to the tradition of "art for art's sake." For Abiola Irele, it is this concern with historical and sociological reality that makes African literature a more accurate and comprehensive account of contemporary African reality than sociological or political documents.³⁵ For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe portrays Okonkwo as an archetypal violent and masculine man. Therefore, Okonkwo is restricted to making decisions based on that archetype. As the archetypal violent and masculine man, Okonkwo is precluded from telling his son that he comprehends his conversion to Christianity and that he wants to be included in his son's life.

Simon Gikandi finds in Achebe's writing a colonialist discourse which makes it possible for Achebe to initiate narratives of resistance.³⁶ He further argues that if Achebe's readers do not tune their ears to the written and unwritten discourse that blocks his attempt to recover the essential forms of Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart*, then they will often miss the value of the novel as a form of cultural formation. In essence, Gikandi

³⁵ Abiola, Irele. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann, 1981 p67

³⁶ Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction*. London: James Currey, 1991 p.25

questions the strategies Achebe develops to reply to his colonialist precursors, or rather to turn the Western fantasy on Africa upside down, a gesture of reversal and arrives at the conclusion that a reading of *Things Fall Apart* which fails to relate it to the discourse that shadows it misses the revolutionary nature of Achebe's text.³⁷ Gikandi maintains that in view of Achebe's self-conscious desire to produce an African literature which will use the language of the hegemonic culture to express the desire for cultural liberation, he cannot start writing until he locates himself in a strategic linguistic and ideological position in relation to an obscurant colonial tradition. Perhaps, C. Tsehloane Keto's thoughts on the focus of the Africa centered perspective of history can resolve the issue of hegemony. He maintains that the African centered perspective of history revolves around the simple argument that the African historical experience can provide a focus for scholarship that explains the world and its development through the prism of African eyes and experience.³⁸ Achebe exhibits that discretion and develops techniques, and promotes ideologies whose primary purpose is to contest, and wrestle with, the silent shadows and forms of colonialist discourse and Okonkwo, his lead character in *Things Fall Apart* best exemplifies that struggle to challenge hegemony and its different ramifications.

In his works, Achebe uses language, which he sees as a writer's best recourse to expose and combat the propaganda generated by African politicians to manipulate their own people. Faced with what he termed as his people's growing inferiority complex and

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ C. Tsehloane Keto, *The African Centered Perspective of History and Social Sciences in the Twenty-First Century*. London, UK: Research Associates School Times Publication, 1994, p 8

his leaders' disregard for the truth, the African writer, argues Achebe, cannot turn his or her back on his or her culture. It is his strong belief that a writer has a responsibility to try and stop the damaging trends because unless the African culture begins to take itself seriously it would never get off the ground.³⁹ He further defines the mission of the writer as an opportunity to revolutionize by helping their society regain credence in itself and put away the inferiority sense of feeling of the years of derogation and self degradation.

Benedict Chiaka Njoku argues that Achebe's fictional world is realistic, and at times verges on naturalism as he delves into photographic reenactments of Igbo traditional life and cultures, especially such as can readily be adapted to the resources of the English language.⁴⁰ But in terms of actualities, he opines that Achebe's four novels are imperfect, fictional recreations of historical moments, not a photographic synthesis. The vision of these moments according to Njoku is uniquely that of the author and nobody else. Achebe's representation of Igbo society is both historical and political and the long term effect of his representation is literary and aesthetic.

VI. Outline of Study

For the purpose of clarity and better understanding, the study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One (Introduction) introduces the study and its background by highlighting its aims and objectives, reviewing the literature, and articulating the

³⁹ Chinua Achebe. "The Novelist as Teacher." In *Morning Yet On Creation Day: Essays*. New York: Doubleday, 1975. 91-103

⁴⁰ Benedict Chiaka Njoku, *The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe: A Critical Study*, New York: Peter Lang, 1984 p. 7

methodology. Chapter Two (The Pre-Colonial Era) examines the Pre-Colonial era of African history reflected in *Things Fall Apart*, and *Arrow of God* and how this affects Achebe's writing. Chapter Three (The Colonial Era: *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*) critically examines the Colonial Era of African history as represented in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*. The chapter will give an in-depth analysis of the historical contexts of the novels and the major agency of Achebe's characters and the significance of his narrative. Chapter Four (The Post-Independent Era: *A Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah*) looks at the history of African independence and post-independent challenges faced by African people as represented in Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Chapter Five (Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation), sums up the findings and recommendations of the research, and its implication on the interpretation and writing of African history.

Achebe's four fictional works together represent a microcosmic view of the making of modern Africa.⁴¹ The reader is introduced to the Achebe's Okonkwo about the period of 1875 pre-colonial Nigeria in *Things Fall Apart*. In 1905, it was shown earlier, Okonkwo's friend Obierika told of the massacre at Abame village which established the white man's authority through terror among the clans. In 1922, Tony Clarke, the junior political officer of *Arrow of God*, read the newly printed report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, an actual report which signaled the end of the practice of 'indirect rule' in Eastern Nigeria. In 1956 Obi Okonkwo the grandson *Things Fall Apart*'s Okonkwo, returned from England to begin his career in the civil service in *No Longer at Ease*. In

⁴¹ Robert Wren, *Achebe's World*, Washington, DC.: Three Continents Press, 1980, p. 77

1966, the same year that *A Man of the People* was published, a military coup overthrew the civilian government of Nigeria in a similar fashion as espoused in the novel. Wren argues that dates in fiction and fact attest to Achebe's sense of history and to his consciousness of the times and their change. Beyond the dates in Achebe's fictional Africa a deeper history is subtly suggested again and again, some already documented and published, much of it remembered and retold by older people in Achebe's youth. In the embedded deeper history may be found suggestions of how things came to be as Achebe depicts them.

CHAPTER 2:

THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA: *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*

G.D. Killam wrote:

So much has been written about the anthropological and Sociological significance of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* – Their evocation of traditional nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century Ibo village life-... that the overall excellence of these books as pieces of fiction, as works of art, has been obscured.⁴²

Very little has, either before Killam or since been published that goes behind the novels, exploring their mysteries, examining Achebe's assumptions, testing his allusions, defining the novels' context. There is no denying that there is much that is mysterious and complex about the novels. To trained Africanist scholars, some of the questions raised from the texts can be easily answered. But this is not always so obvious to Achebe's common readers. They encounter artfully devised mysteries, ambiguities, pseudo-historical persons and events, sometimes actual persons and events; they are confronted with a cosmology that is alien and possibly incoherent, a pattern of social and family behavior of unclear origin, political systems that defy explication through conventional wisdom. In fact, the more alert the reader, the more sensitive, the more he or she suspects that there is far more to the novels than unlimited re-reading will reveal. In this case, they are entirely correct.

Achebe's common reader will, as experience has shown, enjoy *Things Fall Apart* on the first reading, willingly suspending questions while appreciating the texture of life in Umuofia, being carried along the thin thread of plot involving the harsh ambitious hero

⁴² G. D. Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*. London: Heinemann, 1969, p. 1.

Okonkwo and his offenses against the Earth Goddess. He or she will be engaged by the complex effects of the coming of the white man, and fascinated by the spectacle of a society falling apart, as the title of the novel predicts. The white chauvinist may complain briefly that Achebe has blackened the white man and civilized the savage, while the black chauvinist will delight in recognizing the falsity of the very notions of the “African primitive mind” and the “civilizing influence of the European.”

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays Africa, particularly the Igbo society, right before the arrival of Europeans. *Things Fall Apart* analyzes the destruction of African culture by the appearance of the white man in terms of the destruction of the bonds between individuals and their society. The focus on the fictional novels of Chinua Achebe aims to provide a scholarly exegesis of the texts and introduce readers to important contextualizing historical and cultural perspectives it defines. A brief examination of the burgeoning literary scene in post-war West Africa and the experimentation with the novelistic form that early African writers were undertaking during the period under examination would be carried out. In several ways, the fictional novels of Achebe, especially *Things Fall Apart* represent a direct response to a whole canon of books written about the history and cultures of Africa by European writers from the sixteenth century. A review of the history of this writing and its ideological imperatives would be undertaken with the view to providing the background on the discourse about the African novelist as a witness to history. The question at the heart of the discussion is the kind of history described and how it is represented. The underlying racist discourses of some of the works by European writers were to be echoed in much of the later European fiction that was set in Africa. Achebe writes in “African Voices”:

“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, took into their own hands the telling of their story.”⁴³

Achebe has variously projected himself as a chronicler of the transition brought to Igbo society by the colonial encounter, with the function to teach:

that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period that it is this dignity that they must regain.⁴⁴

The colonial experience was a destructive assault on Africa and on the psyche and self-evaluation of the African. Perhaps the writer of fiction can be permitted to recreate the past in order to establish what actually took place, different from the standard expositions of that reality through the Eurocentric framework. After the publication of *Arrow of God*, Achebe wrote more intensely about the theme of colonial confrontation and the black writer’s consciousness to it:

Without subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounter with Europe, one could still say, in all fairness, that she suffered many terrible and lasting misfortunes. In terms of human dignity and human relations, the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers

⁴³ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/08/an-african-voice/306020/>

⁴⁴ Chinua Achebe, “The Role of the Writer in the New Nation,” in *Nigeria Magazine*, 81, 1964, 157

have shown again and again how strongly this traumatic experience can possess the sensibility.⁴⁵

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* must be seen as such expressions of a response to that "traumatic experience" referenced above.

In looking at the tragedies of Achebe's individual characters, his readers must not lose sight of his expressed emphasis on the society in conflict and transition. Though much of the narrative of the novels is centered on the main characters, the novels do aim essentially at the states and reactions within the Igbo community at the most crucial points of the colonial penetration and subjugation of the Igbo people and their spirit.⁴⁶ Achebe's treatment of the society in all its facets, and the society's confrontation with Europe, must therefore be given the strategic positions they hold in the total novelistic exploration of the theme.

The theme of *Things Fall Apart* is stated clearly on page 160: 'He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.' With the arrival of the white man and his new religion and administration, traditional society's cracks and weaknesses, hitherto concealed by the common fear of the ancestors and the gods, break open and the once-stable community collapses. In order to impress on the reader the tragedy of its collapse, Achebe devotes great skill in evoking his society as it used to be; and this is one of the reasons for the novel's enduring appeal. Those who open this novel hoping to find a description of noble savagery where the tensions of modern Western society do not

⁴⁵ Chinua Achebe, "The Black Writer's Burden," in *Presence Africaine*, 59, 1966, p135

⁴⁶ D.Ibe Nwoga, "The Igbo World of Achebe's "Arrow of God" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1981, pp. 14-42

exist are likely to be disappointed. Umuofia society is proud, dignified, and stable, because it is governed by a complicated system of customs and traditions extending from birth, through marriage to death. It has its own legal, educational, religious, and hierarchical systems, and the conventions governing relations between the various generations are as elaborate as any to be found in a Jane Austen novel.⁴⁷

One way to highlight aspects of the pre-colonial era in *Things Fall Apart* is to focus on Achebe's description of pre-colonial Igboland. The title of the book *Things Fall Apart* in itself connotes a historical timeline and a historical event. It can be argued that Achebe's focus on pre-colonial Igbo society highlights the idea that there was a time when Igbo society was relatively intact and this was way before the period when it fell apart due to the intervention of colonialism. The story of the novel is narrated as a cultural history. Achebe highlights pre-colonial Igbo society by providing detailed descriptions of the judicial process, the social and community rites, the marriage traditions, the process of communal leadership, religious tenets and practices, and the opportunities for virtually every individual to ascend the clan's hierarchical order of success through their individual efforts. Through the lenses of the village of Umuofia, Achebe depicts an elaborate synthesis of pre-colonial Igboland. Harry Nii Koney Odamtten argues that that the community of Umuofia is presented with its socially constructed understanding of a cosmos: encompassing an integrated and co-dependent world of material (living things including human beings); ethereal such as Aní, the earth goddess; and animate/inanimate objects such as the shrine of agandinwayi, the legendary

⁴⁷ Eustace Palmer, "Achebe" in *An Introduction to the African Novel*, Africana Publishing Company, 1972, p 48-72

one-legged old woman.⁴⁸ This avid reference to the cosmos of Igbo society as represented in 'Umuofia' can be said to be a reflection of the spirituality of traditional African/Igbo society and its significance to the functioning of the societies it espoused. Achebe is careful to portray the complex, advanced social institutions and artistic traditions of Igbo culture prior to its contact with Europeans. Yet he is just as careful not to stereotype the Europeans; he offers varying depictions of the white man, such as the mostly benevolent Mr. Brown, the zealous Reverend Smith, and the ruthlessly calculating District Commissioner.

Things Fall Apart can best be understood by focusing on the first part of the novel. In the first part; chapters 1-13, Achebe relates the story of the undiluted, unalloyed, normal life of Umuofia people before the advent of Europeans. The narrative focuses on the common solidarity shared by the people. Some of the traditional traits of the expressed by the people included the respect for law and order, respect for elders, hospitality, holiness, diligence, and a high sense of spirituality. The narrator attests to this trait by observing:

but there was already a strong and ordered culture stemming from religious beliefs and respect for authority and tradition. P.39

The people of Umuofia expressed a strong solidarity that was deeply rooted in their traditional institution as represented in their marriage customs, wrestling competitions, New Yam festivals, the Week of Peace festivals, in their family unity, and their system of law and justice.

⁴⁸ Harry Nii Koney Odamtten, "The Significance of Things Fall Apart to African Historiography," in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 11:2, 2009, 161-165

Africanist historians and scholars of African history have had the arduous task of converting African notions of time and history into their western-derived historical timelines. J.F.A. Ajayi and K.O. Dike offered the following insights on Africa-derived modalities of history:

A belief in the continuity of life, a life after death, and a community of interest between the living, the dead, and the generations yet unborn is fundamental to all African religious, social, and political life. Thus although the serious writing of African history has only just begun, a sense of history and tradition has always been a part of the African way of life.⁴⁹

Ajayi and Dike additionally assert that African history and traditions of origin were made and transmitted orally, not in writing, but through factual and symbolic traditions like genealogies and reigns of kings, or literary traditions such as stories, fables and proverbs, as well as through formal institutions like initiation, age grades and secret societies.

Evidence of these modes of historical consciousness abound in *Things Fall Apart* and attest to its use by scholars who teach African history in the West. The African use of the concepts of time and history is a significant feature of *Things Fall Apart*. A typical example of this is seen in the following narrative by Obierika, the best friend of Okonkwo:

Three moons ago, on an Eke Market Day a little band of fugitives came to our town. Most of them were sons of our land whose mothers had been buried with us... During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan. (TFA, p138)

The concept of ‘three moons ago’ is a reference to the celestial bodies, while the ‘Eke Market Day’ and ‘last planting season’ represent Igbo anthropocentrism, a concern with

⁴⁹ Dike, K. O. and Ajayi, J. F. A. “African Historiography,” in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, New York: Macmillan, pp. 394-399

the here and now of human living.⁵⁰ The best reference to the African cycle of birth to the afterlife is the narrative about Ezinma, Okonkwo's *ogbanje* child, who haunts her mother by being continually reborn after death, a cycle which only comes to an end when the child's *iyi-uwa* is found. *Iyi-uwa* is a distinct kind of stone that holds great significance because it constitutes a link between an *ogbanje* and the world of the spirit. The child is only spared from death if the *iyi-uwa* is discovered and destroyed. It can then be argued that collectively, the Igbo concepts of seasons, reincarnation and celestial movements are ways by which the Igbo symbolized time. These forms of temporality have enabled Africanist historians to signify times by which certain events occurred in Africa.

From a Western perspective, Igbo traditional beliefs might appear to be quite superstitious. An example of this is the belief in such supernatural phenomenon as *ogbanje*. Some social practices of the Igbo seem extraordinarily cruel, especially the abandonment of twins at birth and the mutilation of infant corpses identified as *ogbanje*. However, in spite of such practices lies a society which, while quite set apart in its ways from European cultures, was nonetheless sophisticated and complex. Various traditional aspects of Igbo life and culture are highlighted in *Things Fall Apart*. Through the entire household of the tragic protagonist Okonkwo, Achebe's readers learn of the Igbo concepts of family and gender. Okonkwo's social position, his fame as a wrestler and title-taker and prosperous farmer, his membership of the *Ndichie* (male elders), his friendship with Obierika, and his guardianship of Ikemefuna, the pawn from the neighboring village of Mbaino, give insight into Igbo thought and culture. These literary

⁵⁰ Op cit

descriptions collectively offer a historical background to how pre-colonial Igboland functioned and how social relationships such as marriage were formed and negotiated. There are various contradictions as regards the role of women in the book. Igbo thought conspicuously uses a metaphor of masculinity and femininity in its principle of balance—male and female categorize farming crops, types of crimes in the society, kinship structures, story-telling, religious rites, and of course social roles. Igbo culture is comprised of a cosmology, philosophy of self and the world, environmental awareness, symbiotic relationship to the earth and the natural and supernatural world, ritual, social contracts and conduct and so much more, all woven into a language of being that is only nominally transactional, but which instead performs a profound reach into the ineffable.

The role of gender in *Things Fall Apart* is very significant in understanding the concept of gender roles in traditional Igbo society. The entire Igbo society is based upon the combining of the male and the female principles.⁵¹ The male is portrayed as being strong and warlike, while the female is tender and supportive in times of adversity. This balance is captured in Uncle Uchendu's explanation of the expression "Mother is Supreme":

It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you (*TFA*, p. 124)

On the one hand it appeared that some women are treated like property in Umuofia society, and yet the most important goddess of the society, *Ani* the earth goddess, is

⁵¹ Diana Akers Rhoads, "Culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1993, pp. 61-72

female. In the Igbo system, the earth goddess acts as a counterbalance to male strength. *Ekwefi*, Okonkwo's second wife, is able to desert her first husband and marry Okonkwo for love. On the other hand, it could be argued that Okonkwo often fails to reconcile the male and female virtues as they are understood in Umuofia society, and that plays into the fact that all the disasters which happen to him result from his offenses against the mother goddess, the earth.

If Igbo society had not struck the ideal balance between the male and the female, then perhaps it could be argued that they do seek to limit a male's abuse of his control over the female, and there abound instances that males in society see their wives as equals. The community of Umuofia's subscription to the adage that it is not bravery to fight a woman is severally recurrent in *Things Fall Apart*. Much of the traditional Igbo life and culture portrayed in the novel is structured along the roles of gender. Essentially all of Igbo life in Umuofia is set along portrayals of gender. The ranges from the kind of crops that are grown be women and men, to the portrayal of crimes. The reader faces the challenge that in Igbo culture, on the one hand women are invested with sterling qualities that make them deserving of adoration, like the capability to bear children, and on the other hand, they are viewed as the weaker sex. First, the predominant role conceived for women was to make modest bride for men of honor. Secondly, they were to be submissive wives, and thirdly, they bore the task of bearing many children. The perfect man provided for his family materially and showed superior skill on the battlefield. The protagonist Okonkwo is extremely preoccupied with being hyper-masculine and shows no value for everything feminine, thus portraying him as rather irrational. Much of the theme of gender in *Things Fall Apart* centers on the idea of balance between feminine

and masculine and forces – body and soul, emotionally and rationally, father versus mother. If one is lacking in proportion, it makes the whole system disorderly. Although Okonkwo spends much of his time indicating his masculinity, he often neglects or desecrates feminine tenets like peace and value for one's family. It is a credit to the principle of a balanced respect for women that the evading of all things feminine leads Okonkwo to commit ever-increasing crimes that finally lead to his downfall. Whittaker and Msiska argue that although Achebe portrays Umuofia society as a society dominated by the hegemony of male-dominated institutions and patriarchal discourses, he is also insistent in documenting the importance of a powerful 'female principle' in the metaphysical, ontological and cosmological systems that govern the culture.⁵²

The ordered cosmology of the Igbo is highlighted by Achebe and portrayed as complex as that of any society. The people of Umuofia believed in a supernatural God but also acknowledged the presence of lesser deities and ancestors in one great cosmos. Although the religion of the Igbo is considered pagan by such characters as the adamant missionary Mr. Smith in *Things Fall Apart*, it is also exceptional for its complexity. A great example of this discourse by Achebe is witnessed in the conversation in chapter twenty-one between the earliest Christian missionary to Umuofia, Mr. Brown, and one of its leaders, *Akunna*. *Akunna* claims that the Igbo do believe in one supernatural God, whom they call by the name *Chukwu*. However, Mr. Brown objects to the Igbo exercise of polytheism (the belief in more than one god) and refers to an idol carved of wood

⁵² David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. New York: Routledge, 2007, p.11

hanging from Akunna's rafter. But Akunna explains calmly that the Igbo approach Chukwu the all-mighty God through lesser assisting gods, just as a tenant would approach a powerful landlord through his servants, out of respect for His sovereignty and greatness. Such a religious concept alludes to the sophistry of an organized people. Episodes as this are highlighted by Achebe to show that the Igbo have a highly sophisticated structure of religion which functions as efficiently as Christianity. The Igbo religious practices just as those of Western Christianity are evenly often irrational but, both function along similar lines to sustain morality. To the Christians represented by Mr. Brown, it seems ridiculous to worship wooden idols, but to the Igbos, it seems crazy to say that God has a son when he has no wife (*TFA*, p 136)

Achebe takes his readers through the pantheon of Igbo cosmos by identifying *Chukwu* as the supreme God and a host of deities such as *Agbala*, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, *Ufejioku*, the god of harvest; *Amadiora*, the god of thunder, *Idemili*, the river goddess and, *Ogwugwu*, the giver and protector of life. Undoubtedly the most significant and influential deity in *Things Fall Apart* is *Ani*, the Earth goddess who is the arbiter of ethical conduct. With the deities are also priests and priestesses who are dedicated to individual deities and perform rites and scarifies at shrines to their gods.

The Igbo reverence for ancestors, a common feature of the African worldview is espoused in *Things Fall Apart*. The concept of *egwugwu* best captures this phenomenon and it underscores the significance of tradition in the Igbo value system. It attests to the respect that Igbos have for their dead relations and not simply an emblem of “ancestral

worship.”⁵³ Egwugwu are men who disguise themselves as the ancestral spirits of the village and judge disputes among the villages. There are nine *egwugwu*, one for each of the nine villages started by the sons of the father of the clan long ago. Thus, in *egwugwu* the dead do not simply pass into the oblivion. They are commemorated and still form part of the family lineage.

The inhabitants of pre-colonial Igbo communities believed that the world in which they lived had its double counterparts, their *chi*, in the spirit land.⁵⁴ Hence they developed religious and ritualistic systems that enabled them to maintain the balance and harmony between opposite beings. The result was that they invoked the attendance of spirit beings during their meetings, rituals, and festivals as noticed in *Things Fall Apart*. It is the challenge of their traditional ways of doing things that set them on a collision course with the intruding culture. The striving for balance between opposing forces is a significant aspect of Igbo spiritual thought. This concept postulates that nothing can stand on its own terms without opposing complementary force beside it. The Igbo conception of the cosmos can be characterized as dualistic, with an otherworldly domain coexisting with the phenomenal world of people, animals, plants, and things. The otherworldly domain is the realm of the Igbo’s’ pantheon of deities, the ancestors, and various benevolent and malevolent spirits.⁵⁵

The importance of the individual in the overall interest of the survival of the community is also captured in *Things Fall Apart*. What is perhaps worthy of note is the

⁵³ Benedict Chiaka Njoku, *op. cit.* p. 16

⁵⁴ Kalu Ogbaa, *Understanding Things Fall Apart*, Westport, CT: The Greenwood Press

⁵⁵ David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, *op cit*, p.28

idea that in Igbo society, every individual has an equal opportunity to advance and gain success through their own efforts. For example, this explains why though Okonkwo's father Unoka was widely looked upon as lazy and weak, the villagers of Umuofia do not view Okonkwo in similar fashion. The narrator clearly explains in the first chapter, "among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (*TFA*, p. 8). Pre-colonial Igbo society measured worth based on individual acquisition and hard work, rather than on class systems or affiliations with powerful figures. Okonkwo attained his powerful status in Umuofia because of his relentless hard work as a farmer. This attests to the concept of fairness, justice, and responsibility in society. The narrative centers on Okonkwo's values and his sense of self-worth within the context of Igbo culture and traditions. Communal life is underscored everywhere in the novel. In keeping with the Igbo tradition of deep religious fervor, Achebe's characters are involved in the communal rituals, and the life of each character assumes special significance within the communal rituals. Every member of the Umuofia participates in this communal drama which runs throughout the novel.

Another example of the importance of the individual in communal salvation is highlighted in Okonkwo's participation in the slaying of his adopted son, Ikemefuna. Ezeudu, the oldest and most respected man in the village had earlier warned Okonkwo not to partake in the boy's death. "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death," advises Ezeudu (*TFA*, p. 57). Some commentators suggest that the gut reaction to see Ikemefuna's death as a cruel and unjust act prevents critics from recognizing that Igbo morality is based on the good of the community, not of the individual – the death of this one person can prevent war between the villages and thus avert many other deaths.

The society is built on the principles of collectivist societies where group interests supersede those of the individual and the individual is important in so far as their contribution to the survival of the entire community. Patrick Nnoromele sums this concept up succinctly:

Among the Igbos, a person's obligation to the society calls for cooperation. It calls for submission to the council of elders, the precepts, and laws of the land, which are established for the good of the society. I think the most difficult aspect of it all is the subordination of one's own interest to that of the group or society.⁵⁶

The communal nature of the traditional society was defined by what Mazrui refers to as “social collectivism.”⁵⁷ It is a reference to the complex of loyalties which tied the individual to their own specific society, which commanded their affections for their kith and kin, which aroused their protectiveness for the soil of their ancestors, which enabled them to serve and, very often, to love their people.

Achebe succeeds in depicting Umuofia as an ordered and sophisticated society that has a complex judicial system, an acephalous form of egalitarian democracy, a highly developed religious belief system and elaborate moral and ethical codes. By characterizing Umuofia as a civil society that evolved a sophisticated culture, Achebe subverts the view that such societies are ‘primitive,’ in the terms pejorative sense, and instead asserts that the notion that this was, in reality, an advanced culture that displayed

⁵⁶ Patrick C. Nnoromele, “The Plight of a Hero in Achebe’s ‘Things Fall Apart,’” in *College Literature*, Vol. 27 No. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 146-156

⁵⁷ Ali Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, London: Heinemann, 1978, p.68

little in the way of ‘savagery’.⁵⁸ Thus, Achebe presents the peculiarities of Igbo culture, especially its beauties and wisdom of its art and institutions, while also highlighting its weaknesses which require change and which aid its destruction. Although he has the Igbo culture set its own standards which match any in the world, he nonetheless does not idealize the past. He presents the past as admirable, but not without flaws which can be eliminated. This is understandable because at issue is the credibility of the historian in recreating the truths of history including its imperfections:

This is where the writer’s integrity comes in. Will he be strong enough to overcome the temptation to select only those facts which flatter him? If he succumbs he will have branded himself as an untrustworthy witness. But it is not only his personal integrity as an artist which is involved. The credibility of the world he is attempting to re-create will be called to question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts. We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like other people’s past ours had its good as well as its bad sides.⁵⁹

Perhaps it can be argued that these faults are partly responsible for why the British imperialist were able to destroy the old Igbo culture

While *Things Fall Apart* is set in the 1880s, Achebe’s third novel *Arrow of God* is set in 1920’s colonial Nigeria. However, like *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe crafts a narrative that also highlights aspects of traditional Igbo experiences to show how the intrusion of foreign cultural forces affected colonial Africans and their traditional way of life. David Carroll opines that in *Arrow of God*, Achebe goes back to Igbo village life in the 1920s

⁵⁸ Patrick C. Nnoromele, “The Plight of a Hero in Achebe’s ‘Things Fall Apart,’” op cit, p.27

⁵⁹ Chinua Achebe, “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation,” in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed. G. D. Killam, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 p.9

before it has experienced any sustained contact with Europeans.⁶⁰ At the center of the narrative is the protagonist, Ezeulu who as his name indicates is the Chief Priest of Ulu, the most influential of all deities of the six villages of Umuaro. As chief priest, Ezeulu's role is to interpret to Umuaro the will of the god and to perform the two most important rituals in the life of the villages; the festival of the Pumpkin Leaves and that of the New Yam.

Ezeulu's priestly functions, and his involvement, through Ulu, in making and implementing plans for the security of Umuaro are combined with his attitude toward life and understanding of Igbo thought to give an insight into Igbo society. In the performance of his duties to Ulu and Umuaro, he shows a desire to preserve both for posterity. Ulu, created by the people in a time of stress, is Umuaro's god of protection and symbolizes the Igbo's emphasis on the group. Ezeulu's desire to preserve this concept becomes the core of Achebe's portrayal of duality in Igbo thought.⁶¹ The depiction of this concept in *Arrow of God* revolves around Ezeulu and his responsibilities as the priest of Ulu, facilitating Achebe's exploration of Igbo traditions and art.

The pre-colonial Igbo society portrayed in *Arrow of God* was one of those popularly referred to by critics as acephalous or stateless societies. Acephalous societies were societies without a central state structure in which power was vested. The political decisions in the six villages of Umuaro are taken by a congress of title elders, some of whom happen to be priests of very significant deities. Tejumola Olaniyan maintains that

⁶⁰ David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe*, New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1983, p.89

⁶¹ Anthonia C. Kalu, "The Priest/Artist Tradition in Achebe's *Arrow of God*," in *Africa Today*, Vol. 41, No. 2, , Indiana University Press, 1994 , pp. 51-62

the spiritual and secular are close but also distant, and the slippery and gray area between the two makes the code of morals as well as reparations for violations strict.⁶² Thus, the deity Ulu was created to spiritually cement the union.

Like *Things Fall Apart*, the setting of *Arrow of God* is built up with extraordinary detail as an Igbo community in which religion played a pervading role. The influence of the supernatural is seen at all levels. The domestic forces, their nature, effect, and the manner of their use are described: the ikenga, "the strength of a man's right arm," the ofo, the personal staff of justice with which a man prays, the okposi carved for a living individual, and the okposi of the ancestors, all these are presented in a short passage (*Arrow*, p. 6). In the course of explaining why Ezeulu's wife gave him a late evening meal, the reader is introduced to a nature deity, Ota of the river Ota (*Arrow*, p. 7):

the nearer stream, Ota, had been abandoned since the oracle announced yesterday that the enormous boulder resting on two other rocks at its source was about to fall and would take a softer pillow for its head. Until the alusi who owned the stream and whose name it bore had been placated no one would go near it. (*Arrow* p. 7)

The pantheon of Igbo nature deities like *Ota* and protective deities like *Idemili*, *Ogwugwu*, and other gods of *Umuaro* are explored. Interestingly, even the concept of evil is given a spiritual identity in *Ekwensu* whose destructive hand manifests in the affair of things to show that they are reprehensible (*Arrow* p. 28). All of these go to show that the system of belief being portrayed it is highly organized and sophisticated.

⁶² Tejumola Olaniyan, "Chinua Achebe and an Archeology of the Postcolonial African State," in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2001 pp. 22-29

In *Things Fall Apart*, the concept of the Supreme God was discussed to highlight the cosmology of the Igbo and its significance in their spiritual lives prior to contact with Europeans. A similar picture is presented extensively in *Arrow of God* about the complete cosmos of the Igbo. Here Achebe's readers learn about Igbo recourse to the supreme god in moments of crisis when the matter approaches cosmic dimensions, the relationship between a man and his chi (especially in *Arrow*, pp. 26-28), and the use of masquerades to generate communion between the ancestors and the living community (*Arrow*, pp. 39 and 194-201).

Above all, the ritualization of communal unity through sacred festivals is emphasized and presented in detail in *Arrow of God*. Several annual festivals are mentioned and briefly explained, some of them minor in nature. The minor festivals include the quiet retreat called *Oso Nwanadi* to placate the resentful spirits of kinsmen killed in war or in other ways made to suffer death in the cause of Umuaro," held by the six villages; and *Akwu Nro*, by *Umuachala*, an occasion when memorial offerings were made by widows to their departed husbands (*Arrow*, pp. 193-194). The major festivals are presented with great vigor and drama and much of the dignity and intense poetic and religious imagination of the Igbo are revealed in these situations. The Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves provides occasion for a dramatic renewal of the myth of the founding of Ulu, the communal god of Umuaro.⁶³ Adults and children, friends and relations, gather in a festive and sacred mood of oneness and the sins of groups and individuals are communally cleansed by the chief priest acting as scapegoat. It is the women who perform the ritual act of waving the

⁶³ Donatus Ibe Nwoga, "The Igbo World of Achebe's *Arrow of God*," in *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 2 No. 1 (Spring 1981), pp 14-42

pumpkin leaves over and around their heads, throwing the leaves at the chief priest and praying, as in the example given of Ugoye's supplication:

Great Ulu who kills and saves, I implore you to cleanse my household of all defilement. If I have spoken it with my mouth or seen it with my eyes, or if I have heard it with my ears or stepped on it with my foot or if it has come through my children or my friends or kinsfolk let it follow these leaves. (*Arrow*, p.72)

Nwoye's supplication symbolizes a fervent appeal to Ulu to cleanse the village of Umuaro of any impurities. Towards the end of this ritual, the chief priest runs into the sanctuary of the shrine "triumphant over the sins of Umuaro," which he buries "deep into the earth with the six bunches of leaves" (*Arrow*, p. 73).

The Feast of the New Yam was also the other important festival presented both in its social and religious dimensions. It marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new and opened the way for the general harvesting of the king of crops, yam, and "no man of title would taste new yam from whatever source before the festival" in which the god of yam was venerated. Spiritually, "it reminded the six villages of their coming together in ancient times and of their continuing debt to Ulu who saved them from the ravages of the Abam" (*Arrow*, pp. 20-22). In gratitude, every man in Umuaro offered a good-sized yam to the shrine of Ulu and placed it in the heap from his village after circling it round his head.

These then are festivals in which human activities are given sacred dimensions and ritual reinforcement, in which the unity within the community, and between human beings and the gods, is revalidated. Donatus Nwoga opines that it is through all these presentations, sometimes in dramatic form, at other times by narration, quite frequently

by description and mention in passing that Achebe establishes the religious background to Igbo life.⁶⁴

The novelist settles on a particular theme and has a personal world view to which his theme applies. He organizes events and characters to project this theme. He depends on social and historical reality for his material, but his imagination focuses on particular aspects of this reality. Even when that theme is directed toward a total society and its transition rather than the fate of an individual, that need to make specific choices continues to be the test of the novelist's artistic merit. The fictional world he creates must be one directed by his theme and world view and not one dictated by ethnographic exactitude.⁶⁵ Achebe's achievement in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* must be seen within this theoretical framework. While using his setting to create a broader reality of the Igbo world and the events of Igbo history, he has given narrative emphasis to attitudes which do not aim to be characteristic but which establish his theme and world view. It is in this artistic selectiveness from a variety of options that much of his success as a novelist is reflected. His explanation of the Igbo worldview emphasizes the need for those familiar with the background, setting and characters to begin to see the utility and application of traditional wisdom and its possibilities in the reassessment of current experiences and problems. Representing an African worldview through stories that speak for themselves meant that Achebe would pull from Igbo oral traditions to tell the stories of his traditional Igbo communities, while bearing in mind Richard Bauman's exhortations that in utilizing oral traditions to engage the "canons of elite" Western

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.18

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp.14-42

literary “traditions and texts,” oral narrative must not be taken merely to be “the reflection of culture” or “the cognitive arena for sorting out the logic of cultural codes” in historical writing: instead, oral narratives must be utilized “contextually and ethnographically, in order to discover the individual, social and cultural factors that give it shape and meaning”⁶⁶

This chapter analyzed *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* as Achebe’s examination of the pre-colonial era of African history. This is consistent with Keto’s concept of the Africa centered perspective on history which posits that the African historical experience can provide a focus for scholarship that explains the world and its development through the prism of African eyes and experience. Although Achebe sets out to principally explore the colonial history of Nigeria, he begins with an insight into the state of African communities before the colonial encounter with Europe which he set out to explore in the first place. This is the best approach to the study and teaching African history. Achebe’s focus on the pre-colonial provides the background to the colonial period. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are both narrated in a dual structure. The first structure attempts a portrayal of traditional Igbo society as it existed before its contact with and influence by colonialism; while the second part narrates the painful process in which the Igbo culture loses its autonomy due to the impact of the colonial encounter. This explains why we treated both novels in this chapter as a highlight of the pre-colonial era of Nigeria’s history. We have earlier argued that by highlighting the pre-colonial period, Achebe’s goal was not to romanticize or idealize the past, but was meant

⁶⁶ Kwadwo Osei Nyame, “Chinua Achebe Writing Culture: Representations of Gender and Culture in *Things Fall Apart*,” in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (Summer 1999), pp.148-164

as a rebuttal to the counter myth about Africans and their history which had been propagated by European scholars prior to the colonial encounter. The basis for analysis is the originality of African society, organized with a complex system of philosophy, religion, government, and judiciary. Achebe uses the reference to the pre-colonial to show his grounding in the cultural and historical consciousness of the Igbo communities he is describing. In *Things Fall Apart*, the communities in Umuofia showcase the wealth and depth of their cultural experiences before the intruding influence of the Christian missionaries and their colonialist co-conspirators; a scenario replayed in the 1920's village communities of Umuaro in *Arrow of God*.

CHAPTER 3

THE COLONIAL ERA: *Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, No Longer at Ease*

Chinua Achebe is a great African writer who has not only used his novels for the fictional recreation of the African past but also one who has critically and consistently canvassed the view that the African novelist should explore the African past in order to discover where and when things began to go wrong:

what we need is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain started to beat us.⁶⁷

In Achebe's context, the past has become something of a burden, an integral part of the African past. He describes his novels as "recreations of the history of Africa in fictional terms."⁶⁸ The discussion of Achebe's sense of history should be concerned with how he has displayed a sense of history in his recreations of African history in fiction.

Providing a brief outline of the plot of Achebe's most read novel *Things Fall Apart* reveals a relatively simple narrative: the story is set in the late nineteenth century shortly before Europeans began the onward colonial onslaught of the interior of West Africa. The protagonist Okonkwo is very popular and famous in his Umuofia, a traditional Igbo village in what has come to be known as south-eastern Nigeria. Out of sheer bad luck and a string of misfortunes Okonkwo commits a crime by accidentally killing a clansman which is considered a crime against the earth goddess. As a result he

⁶⁷ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet, On Creation Day*, op cit. p.44

⁶⁸ Chinua Achebe, Personal Interview with Kim Heron, in "A Risky and Dangerous Relationship." *New York Times Review*. December 7, 1988

must take his family into exile for seven years in order to atone for his sins. He gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother's natal village, Mbanta. The intervening years prove to be a great challenge for the village of Umuofia as the British colonialist arrived in Okonkwo's absence and established their system of government and laws, followed closely by the missionaries who began to convert the people from their established traditional ways to the new found faith of Christianity. On Okonkwo's return from exile, he is shocked and dismayed by the changes that had taken place in his absence. He becomes an advocate of armed struggle and resistance to the newcomers and in a fit of rage; he murders a court member with the aim of setting off an insurrection against the settlers. When Okonkwo realizes that his fellow Umuofians will not join in the insurrection against the newcomers, he commits suicide. The synopsis of the plot appears to be a straight forward narrative, but beneath the flow of it lies numerous digressions and explications which provide for a better understanding of the novel.

The first part of *Things Fall Apart* spanning the first thirteen chapters deal with the showcase of Okonkwo as the protagonist while focusing on the customs and traditions of Umuofia. It ends with the exile of Okonkwo. This part provides much of the background material that is significant to the reader's understanding of Okonkwo's character, the culture that produced him and tragedy of his demise. The second part of the novel focuses on Okonkwo's period in exile and the arrival of the white man in Umuofia. This part has six chapters. The third part of the novel also has six chapters and examines Okonkwo's return from exile, the changes that had taken place in Umuofia as a result of the European colonialist, and the eventual suicide death of Okonkwo.

This research focuses on the second and third parts of *Things Fall Apart* as evidence of Achebe's attempt to represent the colonial era in African history. It attempts to look at the colonial era from the perspective of the colonized in opposition to the colonizer, liberation versus oppression. An interesting feature of *Things Fall Apart* is that it elucidated graphically how colonized subjects perceived the arrival of the colonizers. Achebe may have used this technique to show in great detail how the mechanics of the colonial encounter led to the undermining, and eventually to the upstaging of a sophisticated developed African culture. It is interesting to note that it is Okonkwo's best friend Obierika who provides the first stories of the existence of white men to Okonkwo and to Achebe's readers. The first conjecture of the existence is expressed more in the realm of Obierika's fantasy:

“It is like the story of white men who, they say, are white like this piece of chalk,” said Obierika. He held up a piece of chalk which everyman kept in his obi and with which his guests drew lines on the floor before they ate kola nuts. “And these white men, they say, have no toes.” (*TFA*, p.74)

The scantiness of information about the rumors of creatures with such descriptions leaves the people to the conclusion that they were perhaps lepers. Later in his exile, when Okonkwo was informed that the one of these white men visited the village of Abame, he wondered whether this individual was possibly an albino. The attempt to conceptualize the white man as albino, considered a physically aberrant category of people marginalized within Umouofia society, highlights the suspicion and distrust that existed between the colonized and the newcomer colonialists. Despite narrating the story of how the white men had annihilated the clan of Abame, as retribution for killing the first white

man to visit them, it does seem that it is only Obierika who truly has a grasp of the danger that these strange newcomers represent:

“But I am greatly afraid. We have heard stories about white men who made the powerful guns and the strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true (*TFA*, pp.140-141)

There is perhaps some form of apprehension on the part of Obierika which carries with it the weight of the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade on the one hand and the skepticism of Africans who were not yet exposed to it but had a sense that the sudden appearance of the Europeans were an omen of sorts.

The episode of the killings at Abame captures yet another feature which highlighted the colonial European policy of Pacification; a policy which allowed for the beating down or hammering of colonized Africans so that they will stop resisting against colonial rule. The story of Abame closely connects to an actual historical incident. In 1905, a white man Dr. J.F. Stewart set off on his bicycle from Owerri (in Eastern Nigeria) intending to ride to Calabar via Bende. At a branch of the road, he turned toward Obizi, which turned out to be a serious error on his part. He was seized by natives, stripped, bound, and beaten and eventually killed by natives. A.E. Afigbo investigated local tradition about the death of Stewart and found that the Ahiara people “took him to their neighbors ... to show them what they had caught”; they did not know that he was a human being.⁶⁹ Nearly a month after the killing of Dr. Stewart, Captain Fox, a British soldier led two groups of black soldiers (if each had a white officer this would meet

⁶⁹ A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, Humanity Press, 1972, p.67

Obierika's description of "three white men" in *Things Fall Apart*) in the killing of natives in the villages thought to have been the one where Stewart was captured, an episode that strongly influenced the massacre at Abame depicted in chapter fifteen of *Things Fall Apart*. In reprisal attacks, the British killed local indigenes and organized a military campaign to stifle Igbo opposition to British colonialism. The British instituted the Collective Punishment Ordinance in 1912. This held entire villages responsible for crimes committed against colonists. The British administrative system, which replaced old ethnic traditional systems of judiciary and fairness, was reinforced by the military. The people of Achebe's Abame suffered the consequences of the Collective Punishment Ordinance prevalent in the colonial British Empire, a real historical experience. Thus real history is recreated in fiction to give the readers a real sense of the idea of pacification, a constant weapon of intimidation and repression as Robert Wren succinctly observes:

There are few greater ironies than the use of "pacification as a term for what occurred in the Igbo hinterland between 1900 and 1920. The first action was against the Aros, who were sadly unaware that they were in a state of war. ... Villages that resisted were destroyed.⁷⁰

The fictional people of Umuofia have no knowledge of the expedition against the Aro, though they know that white men are not lepers and actually exist. The story of the massacre at Abame is fictionalized history. This is the economy of fiction.

The theme of Christianity as a new way of thought and experience sets out to examining the historical role of the Christian missionaries from Europe and their evangelizing mission and its impact on colonized Africans. Obierika visits Okonkwo in

⁷⁰ Robert Wren, *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe*, op cit p.26

exile after two years to inform him that things have actually grown worse: the white men who had previously been thought to be harmless are amusing because they inhibited the realm of the fantasy of fictive imagination have now made their presence a reality in the shape of Christian missionaries. Their first appearance is in the village of *Mbanta*, they are confined to the Evil Forest by the villagers, which is a space considered to be inhabited by “sinister forces and powers of darkness” (*TFA*, p. 148). The elders of *Mbanta* actually believed that these individuals will be killed by evil forces within weeks. However, to their utmost surprise, nothing happens, and the church soon wins its first three converts. It is important to note that the missionaries begin to recruit their first converts principally from the marginalized subjects in society; the *efulefu* (‘worthless’ men); the *agbala* (women and untitled men); and the *osu* (taboo caste who have been dedicated to specific deities). It is an irony that the missionaries and their colonialist collaborators should choose to recruit followership into their churches and government institutions from these marginalize groups within Igbo society. Whittaker and Msiska assert that this situation represents a paradox for the Umuofians because the tenets of their social contract specifically restrain those, like Okonkwo, who would seek to take revenge on any fellow clansmen who desert their traditions and collaborate with the white men.⁷¹ Abiola Irele maintains that under colonial rule, the reversal of the established hierarchies in pre-colonial Umuafian society ‘draws upon an eminently Christian trope, encapsulated in the biblical sayings about the last coming to be first and

⁷¹ David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, op cit, p12

the meek inheriting the earth.’⁷² On the other hand, Biodun Jeyifo observes that ‘for this group, things did not fall apart!’⁷³

Achebe himself is continually alert to these kinds of important ironic situations and it is therefore not surprising that his readers can see in *Things Fall Apart*, the portrayal of the colonial encounter between the people of Umuofia and the British missionaries and colonialists as both a site of oppression and one of liberation within the colonized subjects. Beneath the text’s overreaching narrative of Okonkwo’s emblematic tragedy, and the historic “pacification” of the indigenous ethnicities by British imperialism, Achebe reveals the subaltern discourses of those marginalized by Umuofian society who are liberated by the colonial encounter.⁷⁴ This is indicative of Achebe’s prowess as a literary historian familiar with the history of his people.

Achebe’s treatment of the impact of the twin forces of colonialism and Christianity on Igbo society is quite complex. The missionaries were often viewed by native Africans as agents of imperialism. The new religion and government of the white man have not only set the outcasts free but also emboldened them to challenge the native religion and government. Achebe introduces a gendered discourse on identity and personality to set up the conflict of cultures between traditional Umuofians and their European counterparts represented in the missionaries and the colonial authorities. The

⁷² Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.136

⁷³ Biodun Jeyifo, “For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and Predicament of Obierika,” in Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds), *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1990, p.65

⁷⁴ David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, op cit, p12

early missionaries led by the character of Mr. Brown are depicted as embodiments of ‘effeminacy’ because of their Christian values of compassion, mercy, love and tolerance. The scheme between masculinity and femininity in to show disapproval of the colonial system runs deep in the novel. In representing the colonial encounter, the village of Umuofia is somewhat symbolized as masculine and dominant, while the white missionaries are perceived as feminine and subordinate. Thus, Umuofia largely consider the missionaries unthreatening to the patriarchal hegemony because of their perceived effeminate status. The perception of the missionaries as effeminate proves a contradiction because they begin to show cohesion and dominance as changes brought about by the new colonial administration began to affect the lives of the Umuofians. This threatened their value for wealth and patriarchal acquisitiveness as the narrator observes:

The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia (*TFA*, p.178)

The above also highlight the fact that sometimes the interest of European merchants and colonizers often coincided with those of the missionaries. In citing David Livingstone, who insisted that Christianity and commerce were inseparable, George Brooks argues that “missionaries shared merchants’ interests in commercial prospects and potential areas of mineral wealth.”⁷⁵ The narrative begins the accord the missionaries qualities of masculinity after ‘feminine’ compromising Mr. Brown is replaced by the uncompromising and stern Rev. James Smith who posses nothing of Mr. Brown’s

⁷⁵ George E. Brooks, “African ‘Landlords’ and European ‘Strangers’: African-European Relations to 1870,” in Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O’Meara, eds; *Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, pp.115-116

tenderness, benevolence, or accommodation. He detests the manner that Mr. Brown attempted to lead the church. He soon discovers that Mr. Brown's methods were more aimed at recruiting more converts to the faith much more than making the Christians as he perceives that many converts are quite unfamiliar with significant religious ideas and rituals. Rev. Smith is portrayed as a stereotype of the rigid Christian missionary resident in Africa. Rev. Smith's uncompromising policy contrasts with Mr. Brown's policy on containment and compromise. Whittaker and Msiska argue that the institutionalized systems of political domination and economic exploitation created under colonialism were predicated on a form of discourse that projected a set of antithetical values and attributes from the 'civilizing' European center onto the marginalized colonies.⁷⁶ Thus, the colonized is perceived by the colonizer as childlike, irrational, deprived, and 'different,' while the European is viewed as mature, rational, and 'normal.' Okonkwo himself opposes Christianity partially because it was associated with Colonialism, and partially because he does not understand its mode of operation. Romanus Muoneke opines that Achebe also revolts against the colonial administration for its arrogance, high-handedness, double standard, and ignorance of the indigenous people and their culture. Scholars of African history often refer to the existence of a complex connection between missionary activity and the colonization of Africa.⁷⁷ Kevin Shillington asserts that the

⁷⁶ David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, op cit, p.13

⁷⁷ Apollos O. Nwauwa, "The Europeans in Africa: Prelude to Colonialism," in *African Cultures and Societies Before 1885*, Toyin Falola (ed), Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2000, pp.303-317

missionaries “were an essential ingredient of increasingly assertive European presence which was a forerunner of imperial control.”⁷⁸

In *Things Fall Apart* a violent resistance to the British had been carried out though it was in reaction to a Christian abomination of unmasking an ancestral *egwugwu*. A new fanaticism emerges within the ranks of the Christians with the arrival of Reverend James Smith. One of the most zealous fanatic combative is Enoch; when he commits a taboo by unmasking one of the sacred ancestral *egwugwus* or masked spirits. A band of *egwugwu* immediately razes the church building to the ground. The District Commissioner inflicts a heavy retribution on the clan when he deceives Okonkwo and five other high-ranking men in the village into being arrested. As soon as they are subdued, he lectures them on the Pax Britannica:

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. I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn peoples' houses and their place of worship. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen; the most powerful ruler of the world (*TFA*, p. 194)

Achebe may have used this incident to expose the weaknesses in the colonial administration. The District Commissioner has had a prior discussion with Mr. Smith the European missionary church leader but has deliberately ignored listening to the villagers' side of the story, yet ironically, he assures that that he will come to their rescue if anyone ill-treats them. In this context, there is definitely no sense of justice or fairness. Achebe is

⁷⁸ Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p.292

attacking the colonial policy which assumes people guilty and punishes them unfairly without a hearing.

Meanwhile, the incarcerated men are humiliated and tortured and a ransom demanded for their release. They are subsequently released after the terms of the ransom has been met. Okonkwo and the other leaders of Umuofia gather for a meeting to discuss their maltreatment by the British colonial authorities. But before the gathered clansmen who decide on any course of action to take, court messengers arrive to put a stop to the meeting with instructions from the colonial administration that for the meeting to be aborted. Outraged by the new imposition, Okonkwo strikes and kills a court messenger, only to tragically comprehend “that Umuofia would not go to war” (*TFA*, p.205). For failure to join him in confronting the white man, Okonkwo commits suicide.

The theme of misunderstanding and misrepresentation runs deep throughout the novel. The refusal of the colonial administration to be fair to the natives breeds misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Towards the end Okonkwo’s tragic death by suicide illuminates this theme. The Scramble and partition of Africa was a significant watershed in the European colonization of Africa and its impact on the unsuspecting Africans. *Things Fall Apart* dramatizes the encounter between Europe and Africa by localizing the encounter in the fictive village of Umuofia. The concluding paragraph of the novel is the best example of Achebe’s attempt to capture the encounter as the narrator summarizes the perspective of the District Commissioner:

The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that the District Commissioner must never attend to so such undignified details of cutting down a hanged man from the

tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about the book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make an interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (TFA, pp.208-209)

It can be argued that Achebe uses this passage to draw the attention of the reader to two issues of significance as to how the colonialists gained dominion and control over the Umuofia of Igboland and Nigeria. The first of such issues is seen in the light of the fact that the District Commissioner's thoughts represent the bigoted attitudes that the colonialists maintained in their encounter with the Igbo. This is a reflection of the famous phrase "the white man's burden" which was used to define the civilizing mission of Europe to colonial subjects as Vincent Khapoya observes:

The cultural reason for colonization was deeply rooted in the ethnocentrism and cultural arrogance of the European people who regarded anyone different as being culturally inferior.⁷⁹

The colonialists saw themselves as possessing a superior culture and civilization that must be imposed on a people they, out of ignorance, considered uncivilized and primitive. However, the narrator and the author knew that it was not a matter of primitiveness or un-civilization but rather a case of cultural difference. This is why the voice of the colonized Africans represented in Okonkwo so vehemently resist the imposition which was the major source of tension and conflict in the text. This explains

⁷⁹ Vincent B. Khapoya, *The African Experience*, New York: Pearson, 2010, p.113

why the people are disappointed when their leader Okonkwo commits suicide. They strategize and look to Obierika, Okonkwo's best friend to provide leadership and maintain the unity of their clan. On the other hand, the colonial leadership represented by the District Commissioner finds a sense of accomplishment after the demise of Okonkwo whom he considered an enemy combatant, a stumbling block to "civilizing" mission. Contrary to the charge that the author allowed Okonkwo to stumble and fall, Achebe did not cause the hero's downfall. He was not responsible for Okonkwo's tragedy. Achebe saw his role as that of a neutral narrator. Thus, he presented, in a non-committal fashion, the tensions and conflicts between traditional values and alien culture, the "private self" and "public man" and their attendant consequences in a pre-colonial society.

Romanus Muoneke describes *Things Fall Apart* as Achebe's attempt to protest against colonial abuses, especially colonial literature, colonial administration, and Christian evangelization.⁸⁰ Emmanuel Obiechina classifies colonial literature into three groups:

- (i) Works in which the writers use Africa merely as an exotic setting. Graham Greene and Joseph Conrad, for example, use Africa as "an allegorical setting within which to explore European civilization"
- (ii) Works in which writers deal with authentic local themes. Such works are often distorted by their authors' ignorance of the African culture and the African mind. These writers are interested in reality and authenticity. They are exploring the Africa of tribal and communal violence.
- (iii) Works used by European writers to present "an attitude, a socio-logical theory, or psychological statement."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Romanus Okey Muoneke, *Art, Rebellion and Redemption*, New York: Peter Lang, 1994, p.44

⁸¹ Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp.22-23

Muoneke asserts that the best example of works in the first category are Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, while in the second category, Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* readily comes to mind. A common theme in the third category, suggests Muoneke, "is the impact of Western culture on the African culture."⁸² He argues that with little or no knowledge of African culture, the writers end up distorting African values.

Against the backdrop mentioned elsewhere in this research that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, was written partly as a reaction to the caricature of Africans in colonial literature of Conrad and Cary, the arguments of Obiechina and Muoneke make a perfect case of Achebe as a literary African historian in terms with the history of his people. In the novel, *Ajofia*, the leading *egwugwu* of Umuofia clearly capture the essence of the misunderstanding of cultures when he says of Mr. Smith:

He does not understand our customs, just as we do not understand his.
We say he is foolish because he does not know our ways, and perhaps
he says we are foolish because we do not know his. Let him go away.
(*TFA*, p.191)

Ironically, the District Commissioner himself claims authoritative knowledge about "primitive tribes" whom in reality he does not understand. Nonetheless, it is disappointing that he is going to write a book about them. Robert Wren argues that the gravest difficulty of the British was that "they were unaware of their central problem: cultural bias."⁸³ He argues further that blinded by their faith in British culture;

⁸² Romanus Okey Muoneke, op cit

⁸³ Robert Wren, op cit p.66

humanistic anthropologists sought not so much to understand African culture as to excuse it.

It can be argued that the District Commissioner's concluding monologue is perhaps Achebe's subtle way of attacking those Europeans described by Muoneke and Obiechina, who write about Africa, knowing little or nothing about its people and customs. It is to the credit of the intended irony of this point that Achebe issues this literary rebuttal of distorted history at the end of his fiction. Thus, to that extent his timing is very significant. Having presented to his reader the picture of a pre-colonial Africa in the face of strong colonial opposition, his conclusion is a colonial official's view which leaves food for thought for the reader. After having written a full narrative exploring the cultural reality behind the apparent tragic suicide of an African man; the District Commissioner thinks that the episode deserves mention in a mere paragraph of his book. Achebe's conclusion suggests that the District Commissioner will misrepresent Africa; he will present a distorted picture of the people. In essence, he is suggesting that the District Officer is not qualified to render a reliable account of Africa because he does not possibly know the people and cannot know them having obstructed the means of knowing them. According to Whittaker and Msiska, what Achebe clearly portrays in the District Commissioner's monologue is the difference between the ways in which the uncomprehending European colonizers recorded the history of the colonial encounter in Africa, together with their documentation of the peoples and cultures colonized, and the reality of this historical encounter as it was actually experienced by those colonized.

While it does appear that some sense of closure has been achieved with the tragic demise of Okonkwo towards the conclusion of the novel, in reality the ending is

enigmatical as the reader is neither privy to his ignominious burial nor the effects of his suicide on Umuofia and the aftereffects of its colonial encounter with Europe. Even the District Commissioner's memoirs remain, speculative, unwritten, and unpublished, leaving Achebe's readers to complete the narrative based on their understanding and interpretation of the colonial encounter between Europe and Africa on the one hand, and their own personal experiences on the other.

Achebe's *Arrow of God* also exhibit most of the common themes of conflict, resistance and misrepresentation prevalent in *Things Fall Apart*. Here Achebe takes his audience back to Nigeria as in *Things Fall Apart*, to explore the impact of change of individuals and communities. Set in 1920s Igbo society represented by Umuaro, southeastern Nigeria, the novel narrates the story of Ezeulu, a native priest of the Ulu deity, faced with the gradual loss of his authority due to a myriad of factors ranging from the advent of Christianity, the encroachment of colonialism, and the prevalence of interethnic rivalries. When Captain Winterbottom, the District Commissioner appoints Ezeulu to serve as a chief warrant officer, part of the new British initiative to decentralize political power and impose indirect rule, he bluntly declines the offer. As a result of the rejection, he is jailed for disobeying imperial authority but eventually released. On his return from incarceration, Ezeulu violates the dictates of his office by refusing to perform the Feast of the New Yam, a ritual that signals the authorization of a new harvest, with the excuse that he did not eat the required ritual yams that mark the new moon while he was in prison. The people of Umuaro respond by abandoning Ulu and his priest Ezeulu and embracing the new Christian faith. Disillusioned by the dramatic diminishing of his

priestly authority, Ezeulu descends into a state of insanity, thus signally that the Christian domination Umuaro has reached its full climax.

The immediate subject of Chinua Achebe's novels is the tragic consequences of the African encounter with Europe. His novels deal with the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African society, and the disarray in the African consciousness that has followed.⁸⁴ Achebe explores his themes around powerful individuals in their society; but in the end, such individuals are unable to survive the colonial encounter. In *Arrow of God* as in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu the protagonist engages in a powerful encounter with the colonial enterprise but does not quite survive it. When the Umuaro people began to encounter the spreading European colonialists, most realized that the colonialists were not like their other enemies and that they could not be defeated in the same way. So, even those most fiercely opposed to the colonial presence at first eventually conformed to its power. However, Ezeulu was not the typical Umuaro villager. As the chief priest of the powerful deity Ulu, Ezeulu felt that he could be subordinate to no one and accordingly rose up in direct confrontation with both the colonialists and his own community. Even as strong of a man as Ezeulu could not fight successfully against such outnumbering odds; Ezeulu was defeated completely and witnessed the breakdown of his family, his religion, and even his own sanity.

The role of the European colonialist is highlighted in *Arrow of God* as one of the external factors that exerted strain on Umuaro society. The British had already

⁸⁴ Abiola Irele, "Chinua Achebe: The Tragic Conflict in His Novels," in *Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing from "Black Orpheus,"* edited by Ulli Beier Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp167-178

established themselves firmly in the nineteen twenties, the period that the novel highlights. They had started the long history of ‘Indirect Rule.’ The fictional world of the novel claims a high degree of verisimilitude in some historical realities.⁸⁵ Njoku maintains that it very well could be that the characters of Captain Thomas K. Winterbottom (the British District Officer), Captain Tony Clarke (the assistant district officer to Winterbottom), and Mr. John Wright (a British worker who works for the Public Works Department PWD), and the rest of the colonial group might as well be pseudonyms of actual colonial administrators.⁸⁶ Achebe presents the world of the British administrators who are responsible for ruling the southeastern part of Nigeria and whose complacency were caught and dismissed with bitter irony on the last page of *Things Fall Apart*.

The British colonial policy of Indirect Rule is critiqued by Achebe as an attempt at the imposition of an oppressive system of governance on the traditional indigenous ways of African people. The policy of indirect rule was a policy that enabled the British to grant limited authority to native rulers and to control the natives through them. Achebe, like most scholars of African history and culture, considered such a policy in Igboland as obnoxious, unrealistic, and oppressive. This worked well for societies with centralized leadership, but for societies where formal centralized leadership was nonexistent, the British created ‘chiefs.’ This is how “warrant chiefs” came to exist among the Igbos of Nigeria. The British administrative style was more systematically formulated by an eminent colonial governor by the name of Lord Lugard, who

⁸⁵ Benedict Chiaka Njoku, *The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe*, op cit, p.132

⁸⁶ *ibid*

implemented it when he was the governor-general of Nigeria at the turn of the century.⁸⁷ The political system in Igboland prior to colonialism was quite peculiar. While several societies were characterized by states or kingdoms ruled by kings and emperors, the Igbo had no king, as they were ruled by groups of elders. Achebe captures this aspect earlier in *Things Fall Apart* in the encounter between the missionaries and the elders of Mbanta, when the missionaries inquired about the leader of the village:

They asked who the king of the village was, the villagers told them that there was no king. “We have men of high title and the chief priests and the elders,” they said (*TFA*, p148).

Arrow of God extensively treats the British colonial policy of Indirect Rule. The policy is seen by the author as a political blunder. This is captured through the reaction of Captain Winterbottom, the District Commissioner who is the chief character in the world of the colonialists, and whose duty it is to effectively implement the system in his district. He receives a memorandum from the Lieutenant Governor, though fictional, looks like it is taken from the original colonial records:

My purpose in these paragraphs is limited to impressing on all Political Officers working among tribes who lack Natural Rulers the vital necessity of developing without further delay an effective system of “indirect rule” based on native institutions. . . In place of the alternative of governing directly through Administrative Officers there is the other method of trying while we endeavor to purge the native system of its abuses to build a higher civilization upon the soundly rooted native stock that had its foundation in the hearts and minds and thoughts of the people and therefore on which we can more easily build, moulding it and establishing it into lines consonant with modern ideas and higher standards, and yet all the time enlisting the real force of the spirit of the people, instead of killing all that out and trying to start afresh. We must not destroy the African atmosphere, the African mind, the whole foundation of his race. . . (*Arrow*, pp56-57)

⁸⁷ Vincent Khapoya, op cit p.127

Captain Winterbottom is of the opinion that this does not make sense because it might be an exercise in futility. As a result of his stiff opposition to the policy, he is demoted in rank from work and he agrees to implement it though reluctantly. Winterbottom argues that unlike some of the more advanced ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria, and to some extent Western Nigeria, the Igbos never developed any kind of centralized society. He very often is very critical of the policy of Indirect Rule:

We flounder from one experiment to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure old savage tyrants on their thrones... we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before (*Arrow*, p36)

The “savage tyrants” referenced are the feudalist chiefs and emirs of Northern Nigeria. Here, Winterbottom is citing two prior incidents in the novel where Mr. James Ikedi, a native was appointed the first warrant chief of Okperi, he went ahead and made himself the king and abused his people. In an investigation, Winterbottom concludes that Ikedi has become corrupt and has extorted money from the people of Okperi. Chief Ikedi became highhanded; he set up an illegal court and prison, married wives without paying the traditional bride prize, thus using his office to abuse traditional values. He was suspended by Winterbottom, but somehow found a way around the system to get reinstated, where he continuous in his scandalous ways unabated. Winterbottom lashes out at the British administration:

This among a people who never had kings before! This was what British administration was doing among the Ibos, making a dozen mushroom kings grow where there was none before (*Arrow*, p.59)

Achebe, just as Winterbottom, found Ikedia's case, an example of what could happen when the colonial administration imposes a man or a system on a people. Very often the result is disastrous which is what the Secretary of Native Affairs finds out after official probe into Paramount Chieftaincy. This is not a surprise to Winterbottom:

The fellow came over here and spent a long time discovering the absurdities of the system which I had pointed out all along. Anyhow, from what he said in private conversation it was clear that he agreed with us that it had been an unqualified disaster (*Arrow*, p.109)

Interestingly, the Secretary's final report was never published, which in itself is Achebe's commentary on the administration's preoccupation with ineffectual inquiries.

Winterbottom's assistant, Tony Clarke argues that the facts are not important to the colonial authorities as the inquiry was meant to be a mere academic exercise. To this, Winterbottom disagrees. It is his conviction that facts are a significant part of the British mission because they aid in the understanding of the people:

Facts are important...and Commissions of Inquiry could be useful. The fault of our administration is that they invariably appoint the wrong people and set aside the advice of those of us who have been here for years (*Arrow*, p.109)

Achebe uses this dialogue as a pointed irony to attack the British colonial administration for attempting to seek understanding of the African people and their culture via bureaucratic means such as official inquiries, with the mere thinking that facts could automatically translate to true knowledge. Winterbottom articulates these sentiments further:

The great tragedy of British colonial administration was that the man on the spot who knew his African and knew what he was talking about found himself being constantly overruled by starry-eyed fellows at

headquarters (*Arrow*, p.57)

Achebe is not only concerned with criticizing the colonial policy of Indirect Rule as a political blunder, but also seeks to expose the difficulty in its implementation. The frequency of the idea of an invented chieftaincy where none had hitherto existed shows the extent to which Winterbottom abhors the system of governance, but also highlights Achebe's protest against the colonial error, using fictional characters, yet another clear example of the intersection between fiction and history.

The British colonialists had failed to see that the traditional system of governance practiced by the Igbos was very unsuitable unlike that of Northern Nigeria. William Greary highlights the words of Sir P. Girouard, Lugard's successor as the High Commissioner of the Northern Protectorate, explains the rationale and expected mode of operation for Indirect Rule:

It was felt that there was need for an increased knowledge on our part of methods of rule and native law and customs before any dislocation of institutions take place – institutions which however faulty had the traditional sanction of the people. Insofar as the Residents were concerned they were to be Administrators in the true sense of the word; not direct rulers. Direct personal rule of British officers would not be acceptable to the people who took to their natural leaders for guidance...⁸⁸

Another incident in the *Arrow of God* which portrays a lack of understanding on the part of the administration is the appointment of Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu, as the Warrant Chief of Umuaro. The very premise on which he is chosen is based on a false impression; he is a witness against his own people of Umuaro in its land dispute with

⁸⁸ William N.M. Greary, *Nigeria Under British Rule*, London: Frank Cass, 1965, p.277

Okperi. Winterbottom finds such virtue to be uncharacteristic of the ingenious natives.

Winterbottom also misinterprets Ezeulu's authority based solely on his name:

I've gone through the records of the case again and found that the man's title is Eze Ulu. The prefix 'eze' in Ibo means King. So the man is a kind of priest-king (*Arrow*, p.107)

Winterbottom gives the name a literal meaning which lends to the suspicion that he may have given it a secular interpretation. The reader knows that Eze-Ulu means Chief Priest of Ulu (*Arrow*, p.26). Even then, his authority as Chief Priest is strictly spiritual and not secular as Winterbottom is thinking. This situation has the potential of further compounding the rift between Ezeulu and his people of Umuaro who have accused him of overreaching his authority as chief priest. The people of Umuaro as was the case with most Igbo and acephalous societies will resist any move to make Ezeulu a Warrant Chief with administrative duties hitherto unknown to their traditional system of governance.

This is reflected in Nwaka's address to the Umuaro assembly:

Nwaka began by telling the assembly that Umuaro must not allow itself to be led by the Chief Priest of Ulu. "My father did not tell me that before Umuaro went to war it took leave from the priest of Ulu... The man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god's ritual and to carry sacrifice to him. But I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. His is a man of ambition; he wants to be king, priest, diviner, all. His father, they said, was like that too. But Umuaro showed him that Igbo people knew no kings" (*Arrow*, pp.26-27).

This contradicts Winterbottom's earlier assertion that his experience with the Africans gives him an understanding in making informed choice about their leadership. By trying to make a spiritual leader a secular leader, it proves that he does not understand the basic custom of Umuaro. It is also obvious that Winterbottom does not understand the

character of Ezeulu who is traditionally conservative and refuses the offer. Thus Ezeulu declines; “Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody’s chief, except Ulu” (*Arrow*, pp.176). As a result of the refusal, Ezeulu is hounded into detention for weeks in Winterbottom’s jail. It is evident that he feels insulted by the white man by the offer. Muoneke argues that Achebe’s rebellion against colonial policy is portrayed in the reaction of his major characters, Winterbottom and Ezeulu, both representing the rulers and the ruled, stressing that the contempt with which they receive the news of the failure of the policy is a further indication of Achebe’s opposition.

Achebe returns to the theme of the misrepresentation of the Africans by the so called experts on the African experience represented in the George Allen, the District Commissioner, much like he did in *Things Fall Apart*. While in *Things Fall Apart*, the District Commissioner intends to write the book about the Africans, the book really gets written in *Arrow of God*, as Mr. Tony Clarke, Winterbottom’s Assistant District Officer, reads the book titled, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, and immediately wonders why the book’s author, George Allen “doesn’t allow, for instance, for there being anything of value in native institutions. He might really be one of the missionary people” (*Arrow*, p.39). Tony Clarke expresses a liberal view with his question, but he is immediately countered by the more conservative Winterbottom; “I see you are one of the progressive ones. When you have been here as long as Allen was and understood the native a little more you might modify some of your new theories” (*Arrow*, p.39). Winterbottom’s conservative posturing prevents him from seeing anything of value in native institutions just like the book’s author George Allen. Ironically, Winterbottom’s claim that he and Allen know the people very well is debunked in the narrative.

Arrow of God presents an alternative picture of the political response of the Igbo people to British colonial rule when Ezeulu's opponents equate his earlier collaboration with the British administration to a handshake with a leper. Towards the end of the novel, the collapse of the cultural and religious resistance to the European colonialist grows out of the preceding events as an inevitable act of survival, a submission to the irresistible forces of change. Achebe indubitably wants to point out the effect, adverse or otherwise, of the colonial presence on the Umuaro society, and by extension, on the Nigerian society at large.⁸⁹ Regrettably, in the fictional world, Captain Winterbottom, representing British imperialism, with its complex of Anglo-Saxon civilization, fails to give credence to the craftiness of the African cultural experience.

The historical role of the missionaries is also criticized by Achebe in *Arrow of God*. They are held to account to share in the blame because they, like the colonial administrators, have also contributed to the denigration and disintegration of the Igbo people and their culture.⁹⁰ In the spirit of balance and fairness, Achebe presents his readers with both the negative and positive sides of the activities of the missionaries. Muoneke maintains that in their excessive zeal to proselytize, the missionaries distorted the tribal values and customs of the Igbo.⁹¹ The "missionaries, like the administrators," writes David Carroll, "had an occupational need to consolidate the image of savage

⁸⁹ Benedict Chiaka Njoku, op cit, p.139

⁹⁰ Muoneke, op cit, p.55

⁹¹ Ibid, p.56

Africa.”⁹² In *Things Fall Apart*, there abound incidences of the missionaries criticizing African values and customs as unchristian. In *Arrow of God*, the reader meets the indigenous missionaries who, although two decades apart from their predecessors in *Things Fall Apart*, have retained their style of evangelization. It is Achebe’s view that these too are just as guilty of distortion. Moses Unachukwu’s uncompromising approach is contrasted with the aggressive approach of John Goodcountry who is bent on doing away with pagan superstition. Moses Unachukwu is the first and most famous convert in the village of Umuaro. He is conscripted for labor as a child by missionaries, and as a result, he grows up traveling with them. John Goodcountry comes from the Niger Delta valley in modern day Nigeria, but he is the catechist in resident at the local church in Umuaro. Based on his literal interpretation of scripture, Moses urges the Christians to kill the sacred python for “it is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve.... (Arrow, p.47). On his initial arrival from the Niger Delta to Umuaro, he had told his converts of the accomplishments of the early Christians of the Niger Delta who fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana. “You must be ready to kill the python as the people of the rivers killed the iguana,” Moses said.

Achebe’s position of the missionaries is focused on their arbitrary condemnation of non-Christian values and beliefs. It is his view that life is complex and truth has many angles of perception. This perception ties with Tseloane Keto’s Africa-centered perspective on history, mentioned elsewhere in this study, which espouses the argument that there are several ways of examining phenomena, and that no one way or approach should be homogenous. Because we live in a diverse and often complex society, it is

⁹² David Carroll, op cit, p.102

common dictate that no human institution should claim to possess the whole truth.

Achebe's critique against a simplistic approach to life is expressed in an interview with

J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada:

I am fully convinced that Igbo tradition is very sophisticated in its appreciation of this complexity of life. It was in fact the Western, the Christian tradition which was more simplistic, more naïve than what the Igbo were already practicing. The Igbo people were practicing a complex view of the world which accepted diversity, which accepted multiplicity of things, of gods even. For them, if the white man comes, well, he must have his own god just as they have their own. But the white man came, claiming to be the way, the light, the truth: nothing else works except him. Now this kind of thinking, this kind of simplicity and self-righteousness, wherever it is emanating from, is dangerous because it is one of the basic causes of distress to mankind today.⁹³

Thus, for Achebe, the missionaries and the colonial administrators are both complicit in the denigration of the Africans. Both claim to be saving the people: the administration in its involvement in the "pacification" and civilization of the primitive people; the missionaries in their commitment to the deliverance of people from savagery. In essence, Achebe sees colonization and proselytizing Christianity as twins of destruction of an existing civilization, the difference being that one is armed with the gun and the other is armed with the bible.⁹⁴ Moses Unachukwu clearly articulates this point better in his response to an age group meeting:

As daylight chases away darkness so will the white man drive away all our customs... The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road – they are all part of the same thing. The white man has a gun, a machet, a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with

⁹³ J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, "An Interview with Chinua Achebe," in *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 28, No. 2, 1987, pp.281-282

⁹⁴ Muoneke, op cit 58

one weapon alone (*Arrow*, p.85)

Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* is an intended sequel to *Things Fall Apart*. It is a story of young urban executive, full of promise, who accedes to inducement when he is finally unable to keep up appearances and make a decent living. The central character is Obi Okonkwo, son of Nwoye (Okonkwo's son in *Things Fall Apart*) and grandson of Okonkwo, and the plot of the novel is set in 1950s Nigeria in the 1950s in a world which is the result of the intermingling of Europe and Africa whose original encounter is earlier witnessed in *Things Fall Apart*.⁹⁵ The novel presents Achebe's readers with an inside depiction of life in pre-independence civil service. It also deals with a compendium of people caught up between Christianity and Western lifestyle while clinging on elements of their traditional ways. The narrative centers on the life of Obi Okonkwo.

Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of *No Longer at Ease*, takes the readers to the 1950's, the pre-independence era of Nigeria; a period of African revival, great expectation, and contentious yearning for political independence. At this point in time the unyielding wills of Europe and Africa have seen the need for compromise in the interest of peace and order, for the transfer of political power from the British to Africans. The story of Obi Okonkwo, a young civil servant and executive, who clearly wants to live above his means, has a much wider import beyond boundaries. Obi's actions are more or less a portrayal of what Okonkwo, the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*, has feared would happen with the introduction of foreign cultures into his Umuofia society such as the

⁹⁵ David Carroll, op cit. p.65

weakening, extremely irritating experiences and the seas of unintended effects that accompany the ruining of one set of cultural elements, and replacing it with another almost diametrically opposed. This is a major contradiction which Achebe highlights in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

The novel shows the traumatic decline of Obi Okonkwo from his period of intellectual preeminence as a college student in England to his devotedness to Nigerian Civil Service at which time he is convicted of bribery and corruption. The novel opens with Obi on trial for a rather hapless offense. Obi Okonkwo is tempted by the excesses of Lagos elegant society, which encourages him to keep up outward impressions and maintain an affluent lifestyle. This translates to living above his means, even though such is against a predominately European Christian principle, neither is it condoned by traditional African values. Therefore, "the forces of Christianity which officially superseded the old tribal ethic are themselves shown to be on the wane in the new generation and no new creed appears likely to take their place."⁹⁶ The traditional ethics of Igbo society as has been depicted in *Things fall Apart* prior was shattered by Christian ethics. Christianity is persevering deeply on foreign strands and has not been deeply rooted as yet.

No Longer at Ease neither has a conventional beginning nor a logical sequence of events. It begins with Obi Okonkwo's trial, the climax of his decline, or simply at the termination of his unimaginative career. The first chapter introduces the readers to the very last career of Obi Okonkwo, while the first six chapters of the novel depict his life and career from the time he leaves to achieve a higher education in England to the time

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

he returns to his village of Umuofia. It is from these chapters that the reader discovers some conflicts in Obi's home in Nigeria. The reader is made to differentiate Obi's domestic conflicts from those emanating from his university education in England. In the novel, Achebe briefly unveils a defenseless and hopeless Obi before returning the reader to the starting point of Obi's story. Thus, the readers are provided with a description of Obi as a bright-eyed young man, returning to his hometown in Nigeria, upon the completion of his university education in England. He is praised as a hero among the Umuofia villagers for being awarded the first opportunity, by the Umuofian Progressive Union, to travel abroad on scholarship to receive a "white-man" education and returning with a degree. One of the most important aspects of Obi's life is that he is educated in England. This small fact shapes the way others treat him and shapes what others expect of him. Obi accomplishes what is considered among the villagers as a seemingly unmanageable task to achieve, and epitomizes an arrogant and self-centered persona. Then comes the moment of great anticipation, as within only a few weeks of his return, Obi is given a prestigious job with the hope to acquire and obtain and sustain financial security. However, Obi finds himself in unpredictable financial difficulties that leave him interrogating the idea of tradition versus advancement within the Umuofia culture. Having been brought up in a generation that will begin to use education as a weapon against the colonial establishment, Obi is confronted with major challenges that will intensely re-examine the tenets that he was raised up believing and imbibing.

Obi has been shaped by the traditional Igbo cultural worldview of Umuofia, the Christianity of his father Nwoye, the idealism of English literature he studied in England, and the corrupt complexity of Lagos, the city away from his village home, but he is not at

'ease' in any of these places. In his childhood days in Umuofia, he dreams of the sparkling lights of Lagos. While studying in England, he writes pastoral visions of an idealized Nigeria. Interestingly, Obi Okonkwo is disappointed by the corruption of Lagos, and so he returns to his village of Umuofia to find consolation, only to surprisingly witness a lorry driver attempting to bribe a policeman. Furthermore, on getting home, he is shockingly greeted by his parents' rejection of his proposed marriage to Clara, his girlfriend.. Obi naively tries to maintain the idea of his own integrity as a non-ethnic biased, rational, thoroughly modern man, but his reintegration into Nigeria is a failure because he is unable to assimilate successfully any of the competing cultures he passes through. He finds it difficult to mediate the conflicting functions that are thrust upon him, and his steady development in the novel is towards helplessness and detachment.

Although *No Longer at Ease* is Achebe's second book, the issues it deals with are more aligned to those of *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, his fourth and fifth respectively. The issues treated are a mix of colonial and postcolonial issues, much so the postcolonial. But the fact that it is set in colonial Nigeria is perhaps Achebe's attempt to interrogate the link between the colonial and the postcolonial, to show that some of the problems of postcolonial African society may in fact have been a carryover from the colonial society. In chapter two, we examined *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* in the context of the pre-colonial, but we see that both are also cast in the realm of the colonial because they highlight the pre-colonial pristine Igbo society shortly before and during the colonial encounter. While both establish the fact of the great African past before contact with Europe, they also show through the characters of Okonkwo and

Ezeulu that perhaps it was not all post-colonial tensions originate from colonial encounter. *Things Fall Apart* in particular famously depicts a fully functioning Igbo society before colonization; it also shows the breakdown of that society under the impact of British colonization. Indeed, it would appear as Achebe seem to show, that some of the problems have their roots in pre-colonial society

One of the major themes explored in *No Longer at Ease* is the clash of values in post colonial society's tensions. This phenomenon is espoused through the character of Obi Okonkwo as Umelo Ojinmah clearly observes:

But more important in the novel is Achebe's view, is that at the period just before independence the destiny of many of the new nations of Africa were in the hands of the emergent black administrative class, represented by Obi Okonkwo. In this class were vested the authority and privilege of shaping and mapping out the course that these colonies would take on independence, and of laying the foundations on which democracy could be built.⁹⁷

It is important to note that Obi is a character which Achebe uses to represent the emerging African leader on the eve of independence – also known as the African intelligentsia; those expected to rid the continent of the vestiges of colonialism. Thus, the character of Obi Okonkwo is used to espouse the dilemma of the society, but Nigeria in particular. According to Shantto Arthur Gakwandi, “Obi Okonkwo is a representative of the African intelligentsia which, on the eve of independence, looked upon itself – and was looked upon by ex-colonial powers, as well as the masses of Africa – as the natural

⁹⁷ Umelo, Ojinmah, op cit p. 38

leaders of the new society.”⁹⁸ This class of individuals had received support from the societies that produced them with the expectation that they will serve as liberators of the people. Like the proverbial saying that it takes a village to raise a child, Achebe recognized that the communities had invested so much in these individual through corporative support of their education:

Six or seven years ago Umuofians abroad had formed their union with the main aim of collecting money to send some of their brighter young men to study in England... They had taxed themselves mercilessly to raise eight hundred pounds to send him [Obi] to England. Some of them earned no more than five pounds a month ... They had wives and school-going children (*No Longer*, pp. 7, 98)

The above passage from the novel speaks to the broader concept of the importance of the individual to the overall survival of the community, a point earlier discussed in *Things Fall Apart*. In essence, the community of Umuofia trained this class of people with the expectation that they will use their skills acquired through education for the overall benefit of the society. Therefore, the novel focuses its searchlight on how these individuals represented by Obi have been able to live up to the mandate of their communities, and the consequences of their failure on the community

In a way, Achebe highlights some of the major episodes of colonial discourse and extensively explores them in *No Longer at Ease*. The clash of ideas is captured severally in such spheres as the traditional Igbo culture, Christianity, idealism, and corruption. The traditional is explored within the context of the relationship between the protagonist, Obi and his traditional Umuofia society of the one hand, and his relationship with his society's customs on the other hand. Part of the conflict comes to fore when Obi's parents

⁹⁸ Shantto Arthur Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1977, p.27

and the entire community of Umuofia rise up against his proposed marriage to Clara who is deemed an *Osu*, an outcast of the society. Obi is torn between the two worlds but ultimately breaks out of this.

Like the character of Winterbottom in *Arrow of God*, and the District Officer in *Things Fall Apart*, Mr. William Green in *No Longer at Ease* represents the European colonial presence in Nigeria, displaying the mannerisms of the quintessential ‘colonizer’ who has brought some good but also a dose of untoward arrogance. Mr. Green is the British supervisor of Obi Okonkwo in the civil service. The author does not fail to capture his chauvinistic attitude towards the Africans through his snide remarks about the corruption and inferiority of the Africans. He represents Europe in the struggle between tradition and European ways of life. It is this struggle between traditional ways of Africans and European ways that is evidenced throughout and that is further amplified by the European presence of characters like Mr. Green.

The concept of bribery and corruption is adequately represented in the text in the context of the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized. Mr. Green maintains that “the African is corrupt through and through... They are all corrupt” (*No Longer*, p.5). He thinks that Africans are corrupt and he treats them as such. It is his contention that educated Africans would spend money on themselves instead of developing the common good. However, it does not occur to him that in order for the Africans to demonstrate their freewill, they must first gain their independence. The idea of bribery or “kola” is such a significant concern for government that when Obi is interviewed for his job, the slumberous Civil Service Commission member asks Obi whether he was seeking the job solely for the purpose of receiving bribes. Obi objects to the question. In his thinking, he

had not lived through the demands that would be placed on his salary to such a point that his income would become inadequate. At this point in the novel, he is honest and idealistic, and thus, sees no reason why his salary would not be enough to sustain him. But the circumstances are quite extraordinary, and Obi does not understand that as an African occupying a position previously held by Europeans, he has had to contend to more demands from his people who now perceive him as richer than the Europeans. In essence, Robert Wren suggests that kinship and its obligations are at the heart of the “corruption” paradox that confronts Obi. On the one hand one’s obligation to the clan is mandatory and yet to resist its urges to protect personal conviction. It becomes difficult to balance community obligations and resolve familial problems within one’s means. Obi is thus faced with two choices of either falling into the moral error of putting the white man’s standard ahead of blood obligation, or putting blood obligation ahead of the standard. Having acquired a westernized education that landed him a job that pays well, Obi now has all the expectations of his people on his back. How much worse could it be, he has fallen in love with an *osu* woman. This has aggravated his circumstances, while he struggles to pay the bills and repay money he owes. As if this is not enough, his mother takes ill and he's faced with committing the sin of giving in to temptation. Obi has to put his priorities in order but can't decide because of the traditions of his people and the new ways of the Western world – yet another clash of cultures, similar to that first espoused in *Things Fall Apart*. Corruption happens because there is collusion between the culture of the people and the idealistic world of the Europeans. Achebe shows that the pressure which is put on the culture of Africans is partly responsible for the brewing of corruption. This is underlined by Abu Abarry and Molefi Asante’s observation that:

But corruption is not just a case of receiving favors from outside. It is also a question of misappropriating funds from inside. To some extent, the problem goes back to the colonial administration, with all its rootlessness and lack of legitimacy. The colonial regime was alienated from the population not only because, by definition, it was a case of foreign control but also because it was artificial, newly invented.⁹⁹

Thus, Obi loses his ability to act based on a fully formed value system, because his own has been torn asunder by the polar extremes of two cultures; two cultures which he cannot reconcile externally or internally. This paralysis is exposed when he is faced with the decision of taking bribes, even though most Englishmen with a post do exactly the same thing:

Then one day someone brought twenty pounds. As the man left, Obi realized that he could stand it no more. People say that one gets used to these things, but he had not found it like that at all. Every incident had been a hundred times worse than the one before it. The money lay on the table. He would have preferred not to look in its direction, but he seemed to have no choice. He just sat there looking at it, paralyzed by his thoughts (*No Longer*, p.158)

The Nigeria of Achebe's world in *No Longer at Ease* is perverted with corruption. Bribery is a common phenomenon among the major branches of the work force, including the customs, police, and Civil Service. But the larger society creates the circumstances that brew the culture of corruption. For instance, the Umuofia Progressive Union can be said propagate the conflict of expectations. The union had earlier granted a loan to Obi to enable him obtain a university education in England with the expectation that he will use his knowledge to protect their lands and secure employment for their children. As much as they expect returns from him, they also require him to repay the

⁹⁹ Molefi Asante and Abu Abarry, *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1996, p.212

education loan and to maintain a standard that best befits his status as a Civil Servant working in the city. The conflict does get more absurd as they expect him to maintain a European lifestyle and at the same time, expect him to be traditional, especially in the case where they attempt to prevent him from marrying an outcast. But the fragmentation in the novel does not end with the union. It also extends to individuals like Joseph, Obi's friend, also from Umuofia, who is both westernized and traditional. Despite his western allegiance, he is opposed to Obi's relationship with Clara, the outcast. Interestingly, Obi's parents are equally divided over their traditional belief and their strong Christian faith. This contradictions highlighted by Achebe in the novel is intended to portray the lack of a solid grounding in both Western and traditional African values – an emphasis on the fact that this lack of grounding is largely responsible for the moral and cultural crisis in the pre-independent Nigeria.

Another issue that Achebe addresses in *No Longer at Ease* is that of the conflict between western education and the traditional African. Obi is presented in the novel as a character that receives a European-oriented education that buries his culture, forcing him to lose sight of where he comes from, who he is, and where he's going. This minor detail molds the way others treat him and shapes others' expectations of him. At the same time, the education he holds dear is also one for which he has felt guilt and one which has often made him a stranger in his own Nigeria, among his own people of Umuofia. As earlier mentioned, at the time of writing the novel, Achebe was principally worried about the emergent new class of Africans who would take on the task of self-governance. This is best captured by Mr. Green's comments to Obi Okonkwo:

You know, Okonkwo, I have lived in your country for fifteen years

and yet I cannot begin to understand the mentality of the so-called educated Nigerian. Like this young man at the University College, for instance, who expects the government not only to pay his fees and fantastic allowances and find him an easy, comfortable job at the end of his course, but also to pay his intended [fiancée]. It's absolutely incredible. I think Government is making a terrible mistake in making it so easy for people like that to have so-called University Education. Education for what? To get as much as they can for themselves and their family. Not the least bit interested in the millions of their country-men who die every day from hunger and disease (*No Longer*, p.116).

Despite the arrogance and intended sarcasm of the Mr. Green, it is important to note that Achebe uses his point to highlight underlying problems of both the emerging class of black administrative intelligentsia represented by the character of Obi, and to some extent Nigeria. Owing to the fact that Nigeria was a country defined at that point in time as a country in transition, Achebe portrays Obi and his emerging cohorts as pioneers, as the President of the Umuofia Progressive Union clearly spells out his philosophy of the expectations for this group: "We are pioneers building up our families and our town. And those who build must deny themselves many pleasures" (*No Longer*, p.82).

Another major critique of Obi's education in England is how it encourages him to reject his society's view of collective community for Western individualism, represented in his decision to study English literature instead of the Law for which his people of Umuofia had paid for him to do. Their collective thinking is that when he has earned a degree in Law, he will help them retain their land, which is a cause for the common good of the community. However, by switching over to English Literature, Obi at this point is thinking more about his survival as an individual than for the collective survival of the community.

As earlier noted, Obi Okonkwo has been shaped by the traditional Igbo cultural worldview of Umuofia as well as the Christianity of his father, Nwoye, the idealism of his contact with English literature, and the corrupt complexity of Lagos but he is neither at ease with any of these. However, his parents' rejection of his proposed marriage to Clara is because she is designated by society's mores as a social outcast. Obi naively tries to maintain the idea of his own integrity as a non-ethnic, rational, thoroughly modern man. Undoubtedly, many of the problems confronting him arise from his uneasy situation in the space between a diminishing colonialism and an emerging Nigerian nation. The central conflict of the novel is the fact that he, the protagonist of the novel, is caught up in between two worlds: that of a traditional Africa and that of a changing and new world that lives amidst two cultures: the English and the African. A young and emerging African man is caught in between tradition and Western ways in his homeland, on the eve of independence; he is entrapped in the dialectic of difference and identity. Obi Okonkwo soon discovers that he cannot completely dissociate himself from the colonial culture which he has inherited from his father, nor can he totally identify with the Igbo culture of his ancestors, the same culture that produced him. Obi got into this conflict because of the education he has received in England. It is the achievement of a higher education earned that put him in a position where he is sadly and interestingly 'no longer at ease'.

As we have seen in his first three works; *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*, Achebe provides a historic narrative of the problems of modern Nigeria from the pre-colonial to the colonial. Each novel serves as some kind of transition or continuation. In *Things Fall Apart*, there is transition from the pristine traditional Igbo society to a colonial presence, the novel ends on the eve of that transition

with the death of Okonkwo. In *Arrow of God*, there is a continuation of the colonial system which had firmly taken root in Nigeria, and among the Igbo. In *No Longer at Ease* there is preparation for a transition from colonial rule to independence, and even a hint of postcolonial problems. In all three, there is constant clash of cultures and clash of personalities. Achebe's protagonists – Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*, and Obi Okonkwo –, who are in opposition between self awareness and social accountability, show the predicament of reaching such a balance. Each character's progression toward communal acceptance is obstructed by the destructive pull of individual pride as opposed to the collective ethos of their people. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo overcomes personal shame to earn the respect of his community of Umuofia, but his unbending refusal to accommodate himself to the increasing sway of colonial government and Christianity alienates him from his clan and drives him to self-destruction. In *Arrow of God*, the priest Ezeulu seriously wishes to be a good religious leader, but his proud refusal to reconcile religious dictates to the necessities of formality leads to Christian ascendancy in his village and eventually his own insanity. In *No Longer at Ease*, the British educated, idealistic Obi self-righteously resists the corruption of government service, thus, separating himself from his fellow civil servants and ultimately, his clansmen of Umuofia who had sponsored his education in the first place. However, when his proud need to maintain an expensive lifestyle leads him to accept a bribe, he did this so amateurishly that he ends up being arrested.

We have also looked at *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* as Achebe's description of the colonial period of African/Nigerian history. The Africa centered perspective on history is clearly articulated in Achebe's attempts to look at the colonial

era from the perspective of the colonized in opposition to the colonizer. An interesting feature of *Things Fall Apart* is that it elucidated graphically how colonized subjects perceived the arrival of the colonizers. Okonkwo and all of Umuofia are quite skeptical of the new encounter with the Europeans, and throughout the novel, flashes of the tense nature of that relationship occurs repeatedly. On the other hand, the tension between the traditional world of the Igbos and the world of the invading Europeans is captured in the numerous conflicts between Ezeulu, his village of Umuofia, and the European colonial administrator. Achebe may have used these strategies to show in great detail how the mechanics of the colonial encounter led to the undermining, and eventually to the upstaging of a sophisticated developed African culture. Achebe's treatment of the impact of the twin forces of colonialism and Christianity on Igbo society is quite complex. The missionaries were often viewed by native Africans as agents of imperialism. The new religion and government of the white man have not only set the outcasts free but also emboldened them to challenge the native religion and government. Achebe introduces a gendered discourse on identity and personality to set up the conflict of cultures between traditional Umuofians and their European counterparts represented in the missionaries and the colonial authorities. The role of the European colonialist is highlighted in *Arrow of God* as one of the external factors that exerted strain on Umuaro society. Ezeulu the protagonist engages in a powerful encounter with the colonial enterprise but does not quite survive it. In those cases, Achebe is able to show the varying degrees of the peoples' suspicions and resistance against the colonial administration. By portraying the perspective of the African's as the center of analysis in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of*

God, Achebe fulfills the mandate of the Africa centered perspective on history about the primacy of African agency in any narrative about the African experience.

CHAPTER 4

THE POST-INDEPENDENT ERA: *A Man of the People, Anthills of the Savannah*

According to Damian Opata, the significant part about history is the concern which the present shows about the past.¹⁰⁰ In essence, it is important to see how the past dialogues with the present and what that portends for the future. An understanding of Chinua Achebe's sense of history and its relevance in analyzing society's problems provides a greater appreciation of the intersection between history and fiction. It has been stated elsewhere in this study that Achebe view of history is borne out of the conviction that the African novelist should explore the African past in order to discover where things started to go wrong. This perception of history then means that there must always be some lesson to be learnt from history.

The history of colonialism is one that has echoed among historians for quite some time. We have followed Achebe's rendition of the African colonial history in chapters two and three, using his fiction as a tool for recreating the African past and its base for understanding the presence in planning for the future. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* highlight the issues peculiar to the pre-colonial and colonial eras of African historical experience. To some extent, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* portrays issues that are represented in the colonial era of African history. *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe's fourth and fifth novels respectively, deal with issues pertaining to the post-independent challenges facing new African countries after independence in the early sixties up to the eighties. The question that interests Achebe's readers is the link

¹⁰⁰ Damian U Opata, "Chinua Achebe: The Writer and a Sense of History," in *Eagle on Iroko*, Edith Ihekweazu et al (eds), Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Plc, 1996, pp.152-165

between the novels about earlier pre-colonial or pre-independence history and novels set in the period just before or after independence. In other words, to what extent do these novels, about different historical periods, though written during one relatively short period, by the same author connect together? In essence, can we see the connections between historical and literary narratives of the crucial historical period with the role and place of the writer in society? Thus, Achebe's position on using fiction to create history is valid because fiction is humanity's attempt to build the world.

At the turn of African independence in the sixties, there was a kind of alliance between indigenous African writers and their counterparts in politics. In the case of Nigeria, writers joined hands with politicians to challenge British rule. During this period, the politician was depicted in literature as a hero who sacrificed everything to liberate his people from oppression and misrule. However, shortly after independence, this unholy romance between the writer and the politician came to an abrupt end. The departure of the colonialists had created a power vacuum which the politician had neither the wit nor manners, nor even the goodwill, to fill up.¹⁰¹ During the struggle for independence, the politician has created great expectations in the minds of the citizenry, ranging from promises of peace, equality, development, and freedom. However, at independence, the politician ascended the throne of power with corruption, greed, thuggery, graft, and despair. According to Wole Soyinka, the writer, who, had been carried away by the euphoria of independence and his newly acquired elitist status, when

¹⁰¹ Muoneke, op cit p.42

he realized that his politician partner was a rogue, turned against him and began to cry foul.¹⁰² Oyekan Owomoyela wrote:

The post- independence fiasco in Africa resulted in an inraelite split, that is, between the political elite and the literati. The handful of nationalist politicians who articulated the demands for self-government (and whose claims were buttressed by earlier novels of identify like *Things Fall Apart*) joined their not-so-educated colleagues (i.e., the commercial elite as well as traditional rulers) to wield power. This arrangement excluded the writers and the bulk of the intellectual class from real power to direct their societies other than as subservient civil servants.¹⁰³

The African writer's yearning to be part of the engagement in the task of nation building was betrayed by the political class. Soyinka best sums the disillusion felt by the writers:

The present philosophy, the present direction of modern Africa, was created by politicians not writers. Is this not a contradiction in a society whose great declaration of uniqueness to the outside world is that of a superabundant humanism . . . when the writer woke from his opium dream of metaphysical abstractions, he found that the politician has used his absence from earth to consolidate his position.¹⁰⁴

The African people were disillusioned and so were the writers like Achebe who noted that "the great collusive swindle that was independence showed its true face to us. And we were dismayed."¹⁰⁵ Achebe's *A Man of the People* is a typical example of works that critiqued that phase in African history. The novel reflects Achebe's disillusionment

¹⁰² Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in an African State," in *Transition*, No. 31, 1967, pp.10-13

¹⁰³ Oyekan Owomoyela, "Dissidence and the African Writer: Commitment or Dependency?" in *African Studies*, Rev 24, No.1, 1981, pp.83-98

¹⁰⁴ Wole Soyinka, op cit, p.18

¹⁰⁵ Chinua Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism," in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, op cit, p.23

with the way things had gone at independence, and a deep sense of despair at the mess created by the introduction of self-rule.

A Man of the People tells the story of the young and educated Odili who is also the narrator, and his prolonged contention with Chief Nanga, his former teacher who launches a career in politics in an African country which is unnamed. Odili is representative of the dynamic younger generation while Nanga represents the conventional customs of Nigeria. The book ends with a military coup, similar to the real-life coups of Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Yakubu Gowon of the 1960s and 1970s. Achebe's often perceived prophetic role in fictionalizing the entire process which turned out to reflect reality cannot be underemphasized. It is to his credit that the book is published barely nine days after the Nigerian military coup in January 1966, fueling speculation by some that Achebe may have had foreknowledge of the coup; a claim that he denies, arguing that any close watcher of events in Nigeria in the few years before the coup could easily have told that something catastrophic was imminent.¹⁰⁶ The reader is quite captivated by the narrative describing events leading up to the coup in the novel. Thus, as we read the novel, we identify with such scenes as the people's fluctuating attitude, and the rounding up of politicians.

Published in 1966, but set in 1964, barely four years into Nigeria's independence, the plot of *A Man of the People* is set in a first-person account of Odili, a school teacher in a fictional country with close resemblance to post-colonial Nigeria. Odili receives an invitation from a former teacher of his, Chief Nanga, who is now the powerful but corrupt Minister of Culture. As Minister, Nanga's job is to protect the traditions of his

¹⁰⁶ Muoneke, op cit, p81

country, and though he is known as "A Man of the People," he instead uses his position to increase his personal wealth. The Minister's riches and power prove particularly impressive to Odili's girlfriend, who cheats on him with the minister. Seeking revenge, Odili begins to pursue the minister's fiancée. Odili accepts to lead an opposition party in the face of both bribery and fierce threats. He eventually triumphs over the Minister when a military coup forces his old teacher out of office.

When *A Man of the People* was published, it was hailed as prophetic of events in Nigeria, what with the uncanny congruence between the end of the government in the story and that of Nigeria's infamous "First Republic." The main thrust of *A Man of the People* is the conflict between high-minded idealism and corruption¹⁰⁷. The hero is young Odili Samalu, a university graduate who is pitted against Chief Nanga, an unctuous, smooth operator with enough savvy to worm his way to the top in a society that has surrendered itself to fate and opportunism. In the story, Odili attempts to counter Nanga's immorality by forming a progressive political party - the Common People's Convention - with other idealistic, albeit indigent, friends. When the elections begin, Nanga, through a combination of thuggery, money pumping, foreign help, and the like, defeats Odili and has him beaten up and his whole party routed. Open fighting between members of Nanga's Party and Odili's supporters (sparked by a shooting incident) eventually results in the army intervening. Overnight, the common folk transfer their praise and allegiance to their new masters as they berate the fallen politicians. The history

¹⁰⁷ Joe E. Obi Jr., "A Critical Reading of the Disillusionment Novel," In *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4, The African Literary Imagination, 1990, pp.399-413

of all this is not lost on the reader as Bernth Lindfors observes the significance of Achebe's works after *A Man of the People*:

Achebe has in effect been writing a biography of his people and his nation since the arrival of the white man, and in *A Man of the People* he brings the record right down to the present day. Indeed, the novel, which was published nine days after the first military coup in Nigeria, even ends with a military coup. This extraordinary coincidence should not blind readers to the fact that Achebe has not yet changed his underlying theme; he is once again dramatizing against the background of a particular era in Nigerian history the consequences of a collision of cultures.¹⁰⁸

Satisfied by the pioneering and often salvic role of the writer in society to recreate a fictionalized reflection of reality, Achebe, considered among the national intelligentsia of the new nation, finds himself in the realm of the oppressed, and *A Man of the People* became an articulation of the frustrations and aspirations of the masses. The articulation he highlights is in itself defined and overdetermined by contradictions. The contradictions are reflected in such issues as dreams versus reality of independence, probity versus degeneracy, nationalism versus primordialism, and affluence versus pauperization. The novel is concerned with contemporary society, and using the rich Igbo satiric tradition, pokes the sharp stick into the defects on the face of a decadent society. The novel is insistently historical and its historicity operates as a satiric deconstruction of the oppressive societal order. Achebe himself succinctly captures the essence of his mission and vision for writing the novel:

Within six years of independence, Nigeria was a cesspool of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth. A certain professor has described the government of many African countries as a kleptocracy. Nigeria could certainly

¹⁰⁸ Bernth Lindfors, "Nigerian Novels of 1966," in *Africa Today*, Vol. 15, No. 5, 1967, pp.27-31

be called that. Elections were blatantly rigged. (One British weekly captioned its story of a Nigerian election NIGERRIMANDERING.) The national census was outrageously stage-managed; judges and magistrates were manipulated by politicians in power. The politicians themselves were manipulated and corrupted by foreign business interests.

This was the situation in which I wrote *A Man of the People*.¹⁰⁹

The book was intended to expose the political decay in post-independent Nigeria. The narrative focuses on the activities of Chief Nanga, a semi-literate, corrupt, opportunistic politician who manipulates his way to the cabinet position of a Minister in the government of a fictitious African country, which even though unnamed, is obviously Nigeria. Once securely entrenched in the influential position, he uses his wielded political power and stolen wealth to secure his re-election. But, almost immediately, his political maneuvering comes to an abrupt end as a military coup topples the government.

Achebe explores the characters of Odili and Chief Nanga as a critique of the ability of Nigerians and by extension, Africans, to govern themselves at independence. As both characters wriggle their way from one form of corruption to another, we see people who have lost all it takes to build and sustain a new stable nation.

Nanga is portrayed as a thoroughbred politician who is liked by the people so much that he even earns the name, “a man of the people,” the irony of the title notwithstanding the fact of his popularity among the people. However, beneath the charming personality and often genuine generosity is a corrupt and deceitful image of the man with craftiness and a love for political ambition by any means.

¹⁰⁹ Chinua Achebe, “The African Writer, and the Biafran Cause,” in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, pp.143-144

At independence, expectations for the new nations by the African citizenry were high as politicians in the newly independent nations made a lot of promises. But politicians like Nanga, just like those, the world over, are won't to condescend to any level gratify the people and secure their votes. Sometimes the pretensions of politicians can be quite ridiculous and annoying. On one when such occasion is captured by the narrator during the Anata reception, as Nanga dances and panders to the people:

The Minister danced a few dignified steps to the music of each group and stuck red pound notes on the perspiring faces of the best dancers. To one group alone he gave away five pounds (*AMOP*, p.14).

Shortly after achieving his spending fit, Nanga settles down to some beer while commenting about the burden of being a cabinet minister in pidgin English: I no de keep anini for myself, na so so troway (I don't keep money for myself as I am always spending it) ... Minister de sweet for eye but too much katakata for inside" (Position of Minister seems juicy, but it comes with too many problems) (*AMOP*, p.15) No one believes him as Josiah immediately chips in that he would not mind being a Minister and putting up with such ministerial problems. Achebe uses this incidence to launch an indirect critique on Chief Nanga's self-serving deceit and extravagance, a typical feature of politics in post-independent Nigeria. It is quite obvious that Nanga is spending money acquired through corrupt means. Through the political thievery exhibited by Nanga in the novel, Achebe indicates that the emergent black administrative class at independence, along with their politician counterparts, has not been adequately socialized to appreciate and give meaning to all the dialects that energize and make democratic governance, as Wilfred Cartey notes:

Many of the characters and types presented in the urban political novels enter politics specifically for its lure, for the momentary glitter and glamor that accompany it, for the prestige and power it gives them. Entry into politics seems to destroy morality of any kind, transforming the politician into a self-seeking and unscrupulous activist.¹¹⁰

Through the actions of uncanny politicians as Nanga, Achebe demonstrates that such important issues as the use of power for the benefit of all people do not have significance to politicians as the scramble for elections into elective offices.

Corruption is endemic in the new nation of *A Man of the People* as in Achebe's Nigeria. Indeed, no part of the country is free of corruption. Chief Nanga epitomizes the uncontrolled corruption of the first Nigerian republic which lasted from 1960-1966. One such example of his corruption is captured when he struggles to see that the road that passes through his village is paved because it will serve as part of the "national cake." He equally uses this reason to ginger support for his re-election. There is also a selfish motive for wanting the road; he has ten luxury buses that will drive on that route (*AMOP*, p.43). Numerous cases of bribery often from lavish government contracts have earned him a fortune to sustain his corrupt lifestyle.

Achebe has consistently maintained and defended the intended lessons of his writings. It is for such purposes that *A Man of the People* scrutinizes what has gone wrong for both the Nigerian people and its rulers. Umelo Ojinmah maintains that Achebe, through his fiction, identifies four basic factors as responsible for the deplorable state of affairs and the resultant tensions. He outlined the factions as: the lack of adequate moral

¹¹⁰ Wilfred Cartey, *Whispers From a Continent: the Literature of Contemporary Black Africa*, London: Heinemann, 1971, p.158

and ethical monitoring yardstick for the actions of people in politics, private greed, society's apathy, and lack of political vision, personal responsibility, and direction on the part of leaders.¹¹¹ Achebe views the lack of political morality as being made complex by the lack of any significant criticism, because the media has clearly abdicated their responsibility in this regard. This explains why Achebe and other writers believe that they have to perform their roles as social critics of society. Achebe's revulsion of the role played by "the people" in post-independence Nigeria is quite revealing. The people are always playing the supportive role and never criticizing the system. It is this docility that portrayed post independent Nigerian society as an ill society afflicted with ignorance, resignation, and cynicism. Eldred Jones writes that the central concern of *A Man of the People*, "is the cynicism of both the politicians and the people which brings about a situation that invites intervention. The politicians cynically use their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people, while the people, with the philosophy born of despair tamely lie down under the imposition."¹¹²

Towards the end of the novel, the military intervene to bring things to a halt; highlighting Achebe's prophetic vision about the introduction of a politicized military in Nigerian politics, in particular, and African politics in general. *A Man of the People* thus symbolized for Achebe, an assessment of the impact of a malfunctioning independence.

Writes Achebe:

This the beginning of a phase for me in which I intend to take a hard

¹¹¹ Umelo Ojinmah, *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1991, p.63

¹¹² Eldred Jones, "Locale and Universe – Three Nigerian Novels," in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 3, 1967, p.130

look at what we in Africa are making of independence – but using Nigeria which I know best.¹¹³

Thus, while the production of *A Man of the People* took place within a particular historical conjecture of over-determined supernatural contradictions, the prophetic coincidence of “text” and “history” is only an astute and correct reading of the signs of the times.¹¹⁴ The failure of politicians in post-independence African states signaled the intervention of the military in politics. Military intervention became a frequent occurrence in a country such as Nigeria. Out of fifty three years of independence, thirty three have been under military government, and the military has intervened at least seven times via military coups. Each military intervention comes as a fresh attempt to salvage the country from greedy politicians and soldiers alike. It behooves on the Nigerian writers as earlier acknowledged by Soyinka, and Achebe, to criticize the pervasive corruption and reckless abandon of exhibited by military dictatorship and poor governance. *A Man of the People* ended with the military coup that overthrew the legitimate elected civilian government. Twenty one years would elapse between the publication of *A Man of the People* (1966) and his fifth fiction, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1983).

Anthills of the Savannah follows *A Man of the People* with its story of postcolonial corruption and the subsequent army coups by those who are no better than the ousted politicians. The novel is Achebe’s most sustained treatment of political issues in post-independence Nigeria. The president of a fictional African state, Kangan (unmistakably

¹¹³ Chinua Achebe, “Chinua Achebe talking to Tony Hall,” in *Sunday Sun*, 1967, p.15

¹¹⁴ Dubem Okafor, “History and Ideology in A Man of the People,” in *Eagle on Iroko*, Edith Ihekweazu et al (eds), Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Plc, 1996, p.191

Nigeria) is intoxicated with power. It tells of the slide from reform to harsh aggressive dictatorship after a general tastes power and wants to be president for life. The ruling elite become estranged from the people. Achebe continues the saga of Nigeria from where he left off in his previous novel. Thus, the novel is set in a fictional African country called Kangan. Though in fiction, the nation's name is presented, the subject matter and the names of the characters identify the country as Nigeria. Though the country's name is disguised, the readers can tell it is Nigeria because the language use and local references allude to Nigeria.

The story focuses on three friends – Sam, Chris, and Ikem, who had attended colonial schools, studied in England, and, after independence, become national leaders. Sam, the graduate of Sandhurst, becomes head of state following the military overthrow of a corrupt civilian regime. Chris, like Nanga in *A Man of the People*, is Sam's Minister of Information, and Ikem, the poet, is the editor of the government-owned newspaper, the *National Gazette*. As the narrative unfolds, we note how Chris and Ikem react as their friend Sam slides from his initial reluctance to rule to an absolute dictatorship in which he terrorizes his citizens. The three friends are intelligent, articulate, and committed; "the cream of our society and the hope of the black race" (*Anthills* p.2). But power corrupts. Sam, the military commander who has assumed the presidency in a coup, brooks no opposition, and he is starving a dissident province into submission to the central authority. They must learn that "this world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented..." (*Anthills*, p.232). Kangan, like other independent African states, has been defined in terms of colonial borders that were originally drawn by the British. Authority within the territory has been usurped by Sam, whose thirst for

power has been fostered at English schools. As head of state, Sam's paranoia, causes him to use the apparatus of the state against Ikem, his outspoken critic, and would eventually lead to his death. Chris, who aligns with Ikem in opposition to the blatant dictatorship, flees to avoid his fate, but even he does not get too far before he is cut down by a power drunken policemen right after the news. Towards the end of the novel, two of the three friends, the poet and the Minister of Information, after having joined the opposition, are murdered, while the third, the president, disappears during still another military coup. Some of Achebe's reviewers think that the birth of a child in the final chapter is a welcome change from the disillusionment with which many African novels conclude.

One of the reasons why *Anthills of the Savannah* is viewed as a commentary on the social and political history of Africa is its subtle criticism of the concept of the nation-state as colonial creation. The circle of three friends who have known one another since their early years, have risen to hold some of the most powerful positions in the country, including that of head of state. If Sam who is the head of state is only concerned with the power wielded by the institutions of state and not with the nation, the people he rules over, others regard the state itself as a foreign imposition. The Abazonians, symbolic representatives of traditional Africa, suffer the most under Sam's rule, and they constitute a homogeneous ethnic group, what Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy would call a "cultural nation" defined by a common culture, as opposed to a "political nation" defined by territorial borders.¹¹⁵ The educated elite living in the capital, among who are Chris, Ikem, and Beatrice, cannot accept the distinction between state and nation-a distinction

¹¹⁵ Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa: From About 1935 to the Present*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1984, p.85

that Sam and the Abazonians both assume. They are nationalists who believe in the nation-state, in the identification of state and nation. The ruler of the state must be from among the people of the nation, and what is more, he must identify with the people. The people would then identify with the state.

Christopher Miller opines that the nation-states into which Africa is divided can be dismissed as arbitrary divisions that were imposed by the colonizers and that have little impact on the identity of the colonized.¹¹⁶ Kangan, like other independent African states, has been defined in terms of colonial borders that were originally drawn by the British. Vincent Khapoya views African nationalism as a feeling based on shared cultural norms, traditional institutions, racial heritage, and a common historical experience; arguing that one enduring historical experience shared by nearly all Africans was colonial oppression.¹¹⁷ Khapoya maintains that along with the sense of shared identity is a collective desire to maintain distinct cultural, social, and political values independent of control from the outside. Chris, the Commissioner of Information in Sam's cabinet thinks it possible to create the nation-state from the top down, by starting with the idea of the state. Drawing upon "his incredibly wide reading and fluency," he explains that Sam's rule is not based on the model of contemporary European nation-states, but on the ancient empires of Moghul India and pre-colonial Africa:

Nations, he said, were fostered as much by structures as by laws and revolutions. These structures where they exist now are the pride of their

¹¹⁶ Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p.48

¹¹⁷ Vincent Khapoya, *The African Experience*, op cit p.150

nations. But every- one forgets that they were not erected by democratically elected Prime Ministers but very frequently by rather unattractive, bloodthirsty medieval tyrants. The cathedrals of Europe, the Taj Mahal of India, the pyramids of Egypt and the stone towers of Zimbabwe were all raised on the backs of serfs, starving peasants and slaves (*Anthills*, p.74)

Chris's argument is centered on the premise that, although Sam does not behave like the president of a modern nation-state (as defined by Europe), his empire-building might still result in the creation of a nation. After all, the original European nation-states, the models for all other would-be nation-states, were not originally democratic expressions of a people's sovereign will, as they now claim to be. They were created according to Sam's model of the nation, from the top down and from the center outward. Through the corrupt and often dysfunctional actions of the political elite in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe seeks to emphasize the point that the concept of the nation-state was alien to African leadership at independence, as Neil ten Kortenaar clearly sums up:

"African nationalism," for instance, does not usually mean the process of nation formation among African states, but the assertion of a black African identity as a means of resisting imperialist European notions of the universal.¹¹⁸

It is significant to note that the educated elite living in the capital city (Chris, Ikem and Beatrice) believe in the creation of nation-state. They refuse to accept the distinction between State and nation, as practiced by Sam, the leader of the nation and Head of State and the people of Abazon. The elite, due to their respect for the people, believe in identifying a State and a national atmosphere where the ruler must come from among the people of the nation, identify with them, and the people in turn would identify with the

¹¹⁸ Neil ten Kortenaar, "Only Connect": "Anthills of the Savannah" and Achebe's Trouble with Nigeria," in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 24, No.3, 1993, pp. 59-72

State. However, Sam's regime, because of its apathy towards the masses does not allow them to have a stake in the country. In the end, His Excellency (Sam) is killed in a coup, and his major weakness is depicted to be his inability to embrace the establishment of a nation-state. He projects the potentially disastrous discrepancy between the state and the nation.

Out of colonialism had emerged a new political order into African societies through the establishing of boundaries and territories hitherto unknown to them. Thus, Africans from different cultural, political, ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds brought together in a forced union to form a state. The state created classes of the very wealth, the not so wealth, and the poor. By the time of independence, Africans inherited colonial structure that left power in the hands of a select few who lord it over the masses of people; as Claude Ake clearly articulates:

At independence the form and function of the state in Africa did not change much for most countries in Africa. State power remained essentially the same: immense, arbitrary, often violent, always threatening... Politics remained a zero-sum game; power was sought by all means and maintained by all means. Colonial rule left most of Africa a legacy of intense and lawless political competition amidst an ideological void and a rising tide of disenchantment with the expectation of a better life.¹¹⁹

Thus, we see in *Anthills of the Savannah* that the post-colonial state becomes an instrument of class domination by the privileged few over the masses. Those who control state power like His Excellency, Sam, use it to make policies that help consolidate their domination, politically and economically; all to the detriment of the suffering masses of

¹¹⁹ Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2001, p.6

Kangan. Thus, the state becomes the source of both wealth and power in Africa; the root of corruption and conflict. As the 'state' triumphs, it remains to be seen whether it has carried along, the 'nation' of people.

Achebe also uses *Anthill of the Savannah* as an interrogation of the leadership crisis in Africa. The book is a fictional working out of Achebe's concerns in his earlier book of essays, *The Trouble with Nigeria*: Nigeria's leaders have placed their own interests before those of the nation, and Achebe probes with great sensitivity the subject of military rule in Africa as elsewhere. In *The trouble with Nigeria* published in 1983, Achebe had diagnosed the uncanny ills of the Nigerian society and affirmed that the trouble with Nigeria lies in its leadership. Achebe's fiction is the fictional exposition of this source of failure. The leaders' inability to act as role models is portrayed as the single most important factor obstructing political progress. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, he dissects with clinical accuracy the trouble with leadership in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, as the imaginary country Kangan has every semblance to Nigeria. At the time of his writing of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe had been a witness to Nigeria and Africa, situations more appalling than "the gargantuan disparity of privilege"; "the institutionalized robbery of the common people...by their public servants"; "the thrusting indiscipline" and "official thuggery."¹²⁰

With the role of the military also comes the role of the people in the governance of the new nation. On the one hand Achebe avers that the military has failed in its messianic role to liberate the people, and on the other hand, he also highlights concerns

¹²⁰ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. London: Heinemann, 1983, pp. 22, 23, 29, 35

about the naivety of the deprived people who unwillingly applaud their oppression. One of such instance is portrayed through Braimoh, the cab driver, who is shocked that Ikem, the Editor of the *National Gazette* owns an old car which is moreover, not chauffeur-driven. Ikem responds that “what is at issue in all this may not be systems after all but a basic human failing” (*Anthills*, p.139). Kez Okafor’s observes:

One may rightly posit that Achebe relates the socio-political problems in society to the individual attitudes. The question “what must a people do to appease an embittered history?” put to Captain Abdul Medani and Emmanuel Obete by Beatrice Okoh, sums up the author’s desire for a “redirection” or reformation of the affairs of the Kangan Society portrayed in the novel.¹²¹

Achebe's earlier novels showed how social structures formed during the colonial period led to the widespread corruption and inefficiency common to Africa. Achebe uses the taxi drivers to give a voice to the common African man, and how he interprets those in power. The drivers, while outwardly impressed by Ikem's status, are also critical of the Editor's reluctance to live opulently, like the government ministers.

As far as the people are initially concerned, the removal of the civilian government is well deserved; “our civilian politicians finally got what they had coming to them and landed unloved and unmourned on the rubbish hip” (*Anthills*, p.12). The novel suggest that it is the corrupt nature of the politics practiced by civilian politicians that has brought about military intervention, an intervention that is expected remedy the situation by embarking on the program intended to restore order to society. However, it does turn out that the military are not quite the messiah that the people had envisaged them to be, as

¹²¹ Kez Okafor, “The Quest for Social Change: Reformation or Revolution,” in *Eagle on Iroko*, op cit , p.224

they (the military leaders) are portrayed as unprepared and inept. All the leaders of the coup needed do was to conscript a young military commander, Sam, who is reported to have “pretty few ideas about what to become ‘His Excellency the Head of State’” (*Anthills*, p.12).

Earlier in *A Man of The People*, Achebe’s scathing political satire, there is a military coup and the civilian administration is overthrown. This was the early period of African independence from colonial rule – precisely in the early sixties. Critics suggest that such ending was a recommendation of the author for the corrupt civilian government to be overthrown to make room for an alternative leadership – a new leadership challenge to be taken over by the military. In reality the military did overthrow the civilian government in Nigeria in January 1966. As it is customary for oppressed people to react to change, especially one that replaces a perceived corrupt government with another, it is no wonder that the people, like Achebe, envision hope for a new kind of leadership. The despair in *A Man of the People* stems from the fact that both the popular politician who is corrupt and the intellectual who cannot drum up enough following have all failed their nation. The only salvation, a cautious hope then by Achebe was hope in the military to be the people’s only solution, hence the suggested abrupt forced change at the end of the novel through military intervention. In spite of this, Achebe still places his hope for the right leadership on the intellectuals. But, it seems like within a period spanning twenty-one years from between the time he published *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe has discovered that the military as a substitute government in Africa has its own deep flaws, as Umelo Ojinmah asserts:

Achebe sees the soldiers as not being any better than the civilians they ousted ...they have become worse , having perfected torture , intimidation and coldblooded killing as weapons to cow the opponents of their policies.¹²²

In his native country of Nigeria alone, at least six successful military coups have taken place within the mentioned period (January 1966, July 1966, July 1975, February 1976, December 1983, and August, 1985). By the time of the publication of *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987, Achebe, having witnessed several military governments in Nigeria and the rest of Africa, has identified the severe weaknesses of military leadership in contemporary Africa, in the words of Ernest Emenyonu, “as mediocrity and terrorism in governance.”¹²³

Early in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe expresses an interesting theory about the concept of military vocation:

According to this theory, military life attracts two different kinds of men: the truly strong who are very rare, and the rest who would be strong. The first group makes magnificent soldiers and remain good people hardly ever showing let alone flaunting their strength. The rest are there for the swank (*Anthills*, p.42).

The reader immediately identifies the second group of military as the one that the author is portraying and criticizing in the novel. They are quite familiar because the author specifies their type when he calls them out; “The real danger today is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America, and from all those virulent misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa sired on Africa by Europe. Particularly those ones”

¹²² Umelo Ojinmah, *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives*, op cit, p86

¹²³ Ernest N. Emenyonu, *Studies on the Nigerian Novel*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Plc, 1991, p108

(*Anthills*, p.52). The references to Amin and Bokassa, is another example of Achebe referring to history in the discourse about military dictatorship. Idi Amin Dada was the third president of the East African country of Uganda, a despot military man, a product of the British colonial army, who seized power from the civilian leadership in 1971 and ruled with iron fist until 1979. Amin's rule was characterized by political repression, corruption, human rights abuse, extrajudicial killings, ethnic persecutions, and nepotism, among other vices.

On the other hand Jean-Bédél Bokassa was the second president of the Central African country of the Central African Republic, and its successor state, the Central African Empire, having seized power in a coup d'état from January 1966 (same year and month as the coup in Nigeria, and the publication of *A Man of the People*) to September 1979 (same year as the ousting of Amin in Uganda). Aided by the French, Bokassa was a self-made emperor who also declared himself a President-for-Life, and his reign was equally characterized by similar vices as those of Amin in Uganda. Achebe's reference to these two individuals is quite revealing and instructive. They belong to his second group of military officers, despotic dictators imposed on Africa by the West (Europe and America). Scholars and students of history are reminded about the antecedents of history. Therefore, there is no doubt whatsoever, as to what type of military leadership the author sets out to attack in the novel. We are reminded that it is the terror disguised as messiah, the eccentric military rule identified as being in the hands of crooked despots as Emenyonu eloquently highlights:

“leaders who openly looted our treasury, whose effrontery soiled our national soul.” (p. 42). At their lowest level we have the reckless, drunk-driving new recruit who “walks with the exaggerated swagger of a

coward” (p. 48), to whom the life of a civilian is no more than the life of a dog. At the apex of is the carefree, president –for-life, larger than the ruthless dictator, in the Kangan state house who builds a barricade between him and the masses; is intolerant of their wishes and indifferent to their precarious destiny.¹²⁴

The military dictator was seen by the people at the initial time of the coup as their Messiah. Sadly, hardly had the euphoria settled down, and then he went down in the memory of their history as the one who betrayed and tormented them. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Sam is fully aware that he is unprepared for his new government leadership role. However, he soon becomes blinded by power, insisting on being called "Your Excellency" and seeking to be elected "President for Life." He and his fellow cadets had been trained by military school to remain stay away from political matters, and he was, at first, quite terrified in his new role. But as events progress, His Excellency, Sam, becomes completely detached from the people he is supposed to be leading. The character of Beatrice clearly captures the transformation of Sam from humility to an alienated despot:

In the early days of his coming to power I had gone fairly often to the Palace with Chris and sometimes Chris and Ikem. But then things had changed quite dramatically after about a year and now apart from viewing him virtually every night on television news I had not actually set eyes on him nor had any kind of direct contact for well over a year (*Anthills*, p.71).

Here, a strong sense of alienation and detachment of the leader from the lead is highlighted. The President recoils up the hill, communes with his cronies and forgets the very people who legitimize his authority. This evidence affirms to the fact that many

¹²⁴ Ibid, 108

postcolonial African leaders often forget the interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and interdependence of everything in order for society to exist.

Underlying Achebe's portrayal of the crisis of leadership in the novel is his challenge of the role of the writer in representing history. Achebe clearly espouses this issue when he provides a critique about the art of storytelling and the storyteller.

Throughout *Anthills of the Savannah* there are references to stories, narratives, and the storyteller. Achebe argues that "the story is everlasting" and that "storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit..." (*Anthills*, p.113) It is significant to note that three of the novel's main characters; Ikem, Beatrice, and Chris, are writers. Ikem is a writer and newspaper editor, Beatrice is a writer of short stories, and Chris is a former journalist who left his post as editor of the *National Gazette* to accept the position of Commissioner of Information. The elder from Abazon speaks at length about the important and lasting role of the storyteller. In his monologue, the old man argues that in his youth he would have said that the battle was most important, but now that he is older and wiser, he understands that the story is more powerful than war (*Anthills*, p.114). It is through narratives that a community can retain its sense of history and tradition, learn from its mistakes, and find guidance for the future. The old man explains that , "Because it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. . .The story is our escort; without it, we are blind" (*Anthills*, p.114). Ikem addresses a group of students later in the novel and expresses his belief that the role of the writer is to ask questions, and not to propose solutions, a reference to the role of the writer as interrogators of society. Achebe writes:

It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate or is indifferent to this argument which calls his humanity in question – for me at any rate; there is a clear duty to make a statement”¹²⁵

In essence it is Achebe’s conviction that no writer worth his salt will refuse to be his society’s social critic – its social critic who must have the courage of his conviction to expose and attack injustice, inequality, corruption in all its ramifications. He further reveals that “a writer in the African revolution who steps aside can only write footnotes or glossary when the event is over.”¹²⁶ Achebe believes that the African writer as the historian of his society’s past and critic of its present condition, must not be a passive observer and recorder, but should help form its vision for moving forward.

Thus, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe uses his fictional characters in post-independence setting as a commentary on leadership, corruption, violence and a critique on neo-colonialism. This is a constant theme that he had repeatedly echoed in his essays and works of non-fiction. Ernest Emenyonu writes:

Achebe reveals in *Anthills* his concealment of frustration about Nigerian society. All real political happenings in Nigeria seem to be at variance with his political beliefs. Thus, there is abundant evidence of parallelism in the context of the fictitious and real characters in the novel. It is to the credit of the author that in the hot political setting of the novel, he brings his writing skills to bear to justify the need for transferred meanings from within the text.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Chinua Achebe, “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation,” op cit, pp.158

¹²⁶ Bernth Lindfors et al, eds, “Interviews with Five African Writers,” in *Palaver*, Austin, Texas: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972, p.6

¹²⁷ Ernest Emenyonu, *Studies on the Nigerian Novel*, op cit p.112

It is important to understand the social and political climate in Nigeria at the time that *Anthills of the Savannah* was published. In the 1980s, the political unrest which had dominated much of the mid sixties and seventies, continued to dominate Nigeria. In 1983, the civilian government of Nigeria's second republic was overthrown in a bloodless coup d'état led by General Mohammadu Buhari.; very much like it happened in Achebe's *A Man of the People*. In August of 1985 another military coup, responding to the growing discontent of the people, overthrew the existing authoritarian military regime of General Buhari, similar to the narrative in *Anthills of the Savannah*. This counter coup was led by General Ibrahim Babangida, who assumed the role of president, banning members of certain past regimes from political involvement for a period of ten years. A few years later, the first tentative steps toward civilian rule were taken, but abandoned. It is the context and climate in which Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987. Thus in the end, we observe that, in portraying the military ruling class as a historical phenomenon, Achebe is realistic enough to indicate at the end of the story that they are still very much a part of the problem rather than the solution. The mood at the end is not very different from that of the closing of *A Man of the People*. Nothing has changed in practical terms. The leadership had changed from civilian to military, and now, to another set of military; but the crisis of leadership remains. The coup has not resolved anything. Sam is the only one missing; 'His Excellency' is still very much around and in the person of the new head of state, Major General Ahmed Lango; and he is not yet about to promise a revolution of the liberation of the people.

Several critics of the colonial enterprise were quite skeptical of the inherent dangers of the cultural politics of colonial legacy. They feared that if the emerging African nations did not make changes to the European inherited system, there would be potential danger for them. On the eve of independence, Frantz Fanon issued an urgent warning about the necessity of fundamentally restructuring colonial economies in his essay on violence in *Les Damnés de la terre*. He argued that if the essentials of the colonial marketplace were to remain intact, the cost to newly independent populations would be profound and long lasting.¹²⁸ Fanon feared that the new political elite were insufficiently prepared by historical experience and that the socio-economic immaturity of this class made Africa's new leaders susceptible to external manipulation. Since Western economies had so much to lose if the ideals of anti-colonial liberation were realized, departing colonials sought to take advantage of the precarious situation. It is with the understanding of this philosophical mindset that Achebe approaches his narrative of the events in his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, and his fourth, *A Man of the People*. Achebe expresses skepticism at the dawn of independence in *No Longer at Ease*, but gets even more nervous when the politicians finally take over in his next novel. In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo's knack for corruption despite the fact that he is supposed to epitomize the best of British society having trained in England is an indication of that indictment. The new ways of the British collide with the traditional way of Umuofia left behind since the period of Okonkwo his grandfather, and he turns out to be a disaster in the civil service on his return. In *A Man of the People*, the political class

¹²⁸ Phyllis Taoua, "The Post Colonial Condition," in F. Abiola Irele ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.210

fails because they try to mix the old with the new. It can be argued that by this critique, Achebe is asking the society to rethink its strategy inherited from colonial attitudes. Thus nothing really has changed. The white faces may have disappeared, but the black neo-colonialist is just as dangerous if not more. Just like Fanon, Achebe is fazed by the penchant for looking up to Europe without any attempt to embrace the things that are truly indigenous to Africa, Africans, and the African experience.

This chapter analyzed *A Man of the People* and *Anthill of the Savannah* as Achebe's historical reflection of the postcolonial era, highlighting the problems of postcolonial African societies. The 1960s was a time of great expectations for the new Nigerian nation just as it was in several African countries at independence. In both novels, Achebe provides the critique of leadership; both civilian (*A Man of the People*) and military (*Anthills of the Savannah*) as a legacy of the colonial encounter. On some levels, the Africa centered perspective on history applies itself to the description of the narrative.

The first level of the Africa centeredness of Achebe is noticed through the point of view technique employed in the novels. In *A Man of the People*, the first person point of view is used and we follow the narrative through the character of Odili, who calls the shots of the narrative. In the novel, Achebe faces a much more complex situation of representing the communal voice to speak on behalf of the people. Achebe therefore, shifts position from the omniscient point of view in his three prior works to the first person narrative point of view, and places the major responsibility for judgment and character analysis on a first person narrator, Odili. Odili presents situations, makes judgments, and even reads the thoughts of other characters. On the other hand, the

narrative of *Anthills of the Savannah* is told from the perspective of three characters, Chris, Beatrice, and Ikem, an indication that Achebe may have deliberately allowed for the multiplicity of views to highlight the diversity of Africa's stories that need to be told by different groups. The Africa centered perspective also argues for the inclusiveness of all ideas with the understanding that there are several ways of examining phenomena, and that no one way has monopoly of knowledge over the other. Achebe's flexibility which allows for multiple perspectives reflects this concept.

On another level, Achebe displays a mastery of the historical consciousness of his people when he identifies the root causes of the problems in colonialism. Here, the concept of Western individualism as opposed to collective communal living is critiqued. The colonial legacy inherited by Africans created rogue leadership structures in Africa. For instance, the critique of military leadership in *Anthills of the Savannah* is reflective of the issues that Achebe identifies in his work of non-fiction, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. By extension, we can say this problem extends to *A Man of the People*, an earlier novel. Achebe's critique is that Nigeria's leaders have placed their own interests before those of the nation. In both novels, he probes with great sensitivity the subject of a corrupt and complacent civilian leadership and military rule in Africa as elsewhere. He dissects with clinical accuracy the trouble with leadership in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, as the imaginary countries so created. By examining the importance of the individual in a communal society, and what happens when they rebel against the communities, Achebe demonstrates a clear aspect of the Africa centered perspective on history which is grounded in the historical consciousness of his people. This explains why his individual

characters for most part end up in failure when they attempt to break free of their society's mores and values.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

The mid-twentieth century witnessed an upsurge in African writers both on the continent and in the Diaspora. This was in itself consistent with strivings and agitations against different forms of European colonial oppression and domination represented by systematic racism abroad and racist colonialism in Africa.

The resolve to use the literary power of the pen to confront the yoke of oppression became a major milestone in the history of resistance of people of African descent across the globe. The African novelists attempted to illuminate the global experiences of Africans in an imaginatively, distinctive manner – thematically and structurally. Though they were writing within the literary traditions of their oppressors represented by Eurocentric scholarship, they employed linguistic properties that wholly explained the interpretation, reception, and reputation of their works to their intended readership. This was achieved mainly through the effective literary use of characterization in a way that was completely unique to the African experience. In most cases, African writers reflected their ideas through the voices and actions of characters, phenomena that allowed for several levels of interpretations without losing focus of the interpretive standpoint of the history they were recreating.

The emergence of the modern African novel can be said to be as a direct consequence of the encounter with Europe, with the historical implications and the social and cultural factors that have conditioned the emergence and evolution of the novel as a literary genre on the continent. Much has been made of the character of Achebe's earlier

novels as a response to the fictions of colonial empire. But the exemplary value of the work resides more in the assured mode of its narrative projection of African life, culture, and history carried through by a craftsmanship that introduced a new level of competence in the making of African fiction as described in previous chapters.

Achebe's most important influence given his goal as a writer, is his contribution to the advancement of a new postcolonial consciousness, particularly as his fictions date from the eve of African independence, thus giving emphatic voice to the pan-African impulse that found political expression in African independence. He chose the novel form to make his most enduring contribution as a postcolonial writer. The significance of his choice of the novel has deep historical roots. This is because the novel form is both the product and medium of the historical process, and this explains why we have consistently followed the progression of Achebe's novels so that the story of Africa, its people, its social, cultural, political and economic life will not be lost on the reader

We have seen that in Achebe's first three works; *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*, Achebe provides a historic narrative of the problems of modern Nigeria from the pre-colonial to the colonial. Each novel reflects a period of transition or continuation as Dan Izevbaye clearly states:

That Africa was an Africa in transition and the inspiration for Achebe's first three novels. The fictions recreate two worlds in conflict: They present the twilight of an old world at the same time as they anticipate the new. In the old Age of Wisdom indigenous knowledge was rooted in experience and the transmission and continuity of ancestral knowledge, rather than the excitement at new discoveries.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Dan Izevbaye, op cit p.35

In *Things Fall Apart*, there is transition from the pristine traditional Igbo society to a colonial presence, the novel ends on the eve of that transition with the death of Okonkwo. In *Arrow of God*, there is a continuation of the colonial system which had firmly taken root in Nigeria, and among the Igbo. In *No Longer at Ease* there is preparation for a transition from colonial rule to independence, and even a hint of postcolonial problems. In all three, there is constant clash of cultures and clash of personalities. As earlier noted, Achebe's protagonists – Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*, and Obi Okonkwo are in constantly in opposition between self-awareness and social accountability, and they portray the predicament of reaching such equilibrium. Each character's advancement toward communal acceptance is frustrated by the destructive pull of individual pride as opposed to the collective ethos of their people. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo overcomes personal humiliation to win the respect of his community of Umuofia, but his inflexible refusal to accommodate himself to the increasing influence of colonial government and Christianity alienates him from his clan and drives him to self-destruction. In *Arrow of God*, the priest Ezeulu seriously wishes to be a good religious leader, but his proud refusal to adapt religious dictates to the necessities of circumstance leads to Christian dominance in his village and his own insanity. In *No Longer at Ease*, the British educated, idealistic Obi self-righteously resists the corruption of government service, thus, alienating himself from his fellow civil servants and ultimately, his clansmen of Umuofia who funded his education. However, when his proud need to maintain an expensive lifestyle leads him to accept a bribe, he did this so amateurishly that he ends up being arrested.

In *A Man of the People*, the cynical Odili, who collaborates in Chief Nanga's political manipulation of rural people, learns to see the corrective significance of traditional beliefs. Achebe's fifth novel, *Anthills in the Savannah*, offers some hopeful view of life, with Beatrice demonstrating that traditional values can exist in altered but viable forms in the present. Achebe associates inflexible refusal to recognize the validity of multiple viewpoints, which is the central flaw of his protagonists, with the cultural arrogance of colonial powers and the cynical greed of Nigerian officials; and this often end up disastrous.

The modern African novel has had its roots in the anti colonial movement in a period of protest and the misrepresentation of African history by European colonial administrators, some of whom were guided by their biases against the Africans. Keith Booker writes:

African novel itself received a tremendous injection of energy from the historical phenomenon of decolonization, which infused that novel with a sense of historical urgency and a desire to contribute to the construction of viable postcolonial cultural identities for the new African nations.

We have seen that Achebe's works of fiction narrates a literary history of Africa, highlighting the socio-political and cultural aspects of African history, such that even those who have no prior knowledge of African or Nigerian history identify with the events described in his narrative. Our analysis of Achebe covered three spheres; the pre-colonial, the colonial, and the post colonial. In retrospect, the novels of Achebe can be divided into two broad categories for easier understanding. The first category focuses on the pre-colonial. The novels in this category are focused on "the recovering and

representing an African pre-colonial culture struggling to retain its integrity against the onslaught of colonialism.”¹³⁰ In essence they are narrative attempts that envision what pre-colonial society looked like before the advent of Europeans and factors that aided the failure of the Igbo culture, and by extension, African culture in the face of the colonial enterprise. Achebe’s two novels; *Things Fall Apart*, and *Arrow of God* fall into this category.

In chapter two, we examined *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* as Achebe’s examination of the pre-colonial era of African history. This is consistent with Keto’s concept of the Africa-centered perspective on history because, although Achebe sets out to principally explore the colonial history of Nigeria, he begins with an insight into the state of African communities before the colonial encounter with Europe. This is the best approach to the study and teaching African history. Achebe’s focus on the pre-colonial provides the background to the colonial period. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are both narrated in a dual structure. The first structure attempts a portrayal of traditional Igbo society before its contact and influence by colonialism, while the second part narrates the painful process in which the Igbo culture loses its autonomy due to the impact of the colonial encounter. This explains why we treated both novels as a highlight of the pre-colonial in chapter two, and as a highlight of the colonial in chapter three. As noted in our introduction, by highlighting the pre-colonial, Achebe’s goal was not to romanticize or idealize the past, but a counter response to the myth that Africans did not have a culture or history before the arrival of colonialists; myths created by European

¹³⁰ Keith M. Booker, ed., *The Chinua Achebe Encyclopedia*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003

scholars of African history like Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary, represented in the novels as the District Officers. Achebe himself reflects on the fact “that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty.”¹³¹ . Achebe paints a picture of village life that is vivid, poignant, but also brutal. With no judgment or steer as a narrator, he succeeds in presenting a community that is robust, with strong mores and religious values, and morally upright characters trying to do their best. He succeeds so well that despite also being shown this life's cruelty, the reader is left reeling with sympathy when the Christian missionaries come to the village and impose their British colonial system, which puts the old life out. The focus on the fictional novels of Chinua Achebe aims to provide a scholarly exegesis of the novels and introduce readers to important contextualizing historical and cultural perspectives it defines.

Achebe’s second set of books, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah* addresses the issue of decolonization. In as much as the earlier novels about the African past have done a great job of correcting the misconceptions created by myth, the second set has been great in addressing postcolonial issues. They were also seen in some instances as the prophetic elements of African history because they predicted the directions of societies based on the author’s interpretation of events, which turned out to be fulfilled. In a much more general sense, all Achebe’s five works of fiction have been influential in capturing the cultural wrongs in which African cultures and traditions have encountered European colonial institutions. In *Things Fall Apart*, the

¹³¹ Chinua Achebe, “The Role of the Writer in a Nation,” op cit p.158

protagonist, Okonkwo, represents the challenges that Africans faced with the onset of colonialism on the continent. *Arrow of God*, Achebe's third novel, is based on a true account of a traditional priest who refuses to collaborate with colonialism. The novel portrays the degree of resistance to colonialism that existed in Africa after the European invasion. *No Longer at Ease*, which is actually Achebe's second, but for which events occurs three generations later, was set in the late 1950s just before independence, when the grandson of Okonkwo returns home after being educated in Britain. Taking up an appointment in employment within the colonial civil service, Obi discovers that his salary is inadequate for taking care of himself, his extended family, and his numerous competing needs. He eventually succumbs to the temptation of bribery and is caught and prosecuted by the British. Though the novel does not quite have the same level of cultural engagement as the other two, it nonetheless is indispensable in identifying the realm of transition from the colonial to the postcolonial; from colonialism to post-colonialism. *Things Fall Apart* derives most of its strength from its ability to juxtapose the pre-colonial Igbo society of Umuofia in opposition to an invading colonial culture. The novel also highlights the problematic nature of Igbo society which weakens it as a result of which it is unable to withstand the encroaching encounter. Thus, the Igbo culture is deprived of its cultural purity. Interestingly, it is those who seek to protect the purity of the culture, like Okonkwo the protagonist who end up as tragic heroes.

In Chapter four, we examined Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *Anthill of the Savannah* as a historical reflection of the postcolonial era, highlighting the problems of postcolonial African societies. The 1960s was a time of great expectations for the new

Nigerian nation just as it was in several African countries at independence. But, with independence also came the challenges of governing the new nations within the inherited structures of governance from colonialism. Thus, the 1960s became a period of great turbulence as Nigeria and emerging African countries witnessed an upsurge in political violence and coups and counter coups, effectively introducing the involvement of the military in Nigeria politics. Students and scholars interested in understanding the violent politics often occasioned by vices of widespread corruption and military coups in the mid sixties will find Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People* a great historical reference. In the novel, Odili, the protagonist is engaged in a battle for supremacy with Chief Nanga, a corrupt politician who impoverishes his people. Odili represents the changing younger generation; Nanga represents the traditional customs of Nigeria. The book ends with a military coup, similar to the real-life coups of Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Yakubu Gowon. Achebe's often perceived prophetic role in fictionalizing the entire process which turned out to reflect reality cannot be underemphasized. It is to his credit that the book is published barely nine days after the Nigerian military coup in January 1966, fueling speculation by some that Achebe may have had foreknowledge of the coup; a claim that he denies, arguing that any close watcher of events in Nigeria in the few years before the coup could easily have told that something catastrophic was imminent. The historical and social referents in his works are so close that it is difficult not to read them as documents of import significance to the African experience. Because of his fictitious depiction of literary reality, Achebe's novels are often notable for their sense of realism.

Achebe's fifth novel *Anthills of the Savannah* is the second novel treated in chapter four. We recall that earlier in the chapter one, Achebe had described his novels as recreations of the history of Africa in fictional terms. *In Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe continues the saga of Nigeria from where he left off in *A Man of the People*. The book is an indictment of the ruling military leadership and their civilian collaborators. The book is a fictional working out of Achebe's concerns in his earlier book of essays, *The Trouble with Nigeria*: Nigeria's leaders have placed their own interests before those of the nation, and Achebe probes with great sensitivity the subject of military rule in Africa as elsewhere. He dissects with clinical accuracy the trouble with leadership in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, as the imaginary country Kangan has every semblance to Nigeria. Achebe avers that the military has failed in its messianic role to liberate the people and they are just as worse as the civilians they had replaced. Prior to the publication of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Nigeria alone had experienced at least six successful military coups within the mentioned period (January 1966, July 1966, July 1975, February 1976, December 1983, and August, 1985). By the time of the publication of the novel in 1987, Achebe, having witnessed several military governments in Nigeria and the rest of Africa, has identified the severe weaknesses of military leadership in contemporary Africa.

Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's major works of fiction represent a microcosmic view of the making of modern Africa. Each novel captures a significant period of the history of his Igbo people and the artificial colonial creation that became Nigeria. But the story of the Igbo and Nigeria goes beyond the geographical space; it is the reflection of the African

experience in its totality. Robert Wren clearly outlines the chronology of Achebe's historical narrative:

It must have been around 1875 that Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* threw Amalinze the Cat in a justly famous wrestling match. In 1905, it was shown earlier, Okonkwo's friend Obierika told of the massacre at Abame which established the white man's authority, through terror, among the clans. In 1922, Tony Clarke, the junior political officer of *Arrow of God*, read the newly-printed report of the Secretary of Native Affairs, an actual report which signaled the end of the theory, if not the practice of "indirect rule" among the people of eastern Nigeria. In 1956, Obi Okonkwo returned from England to begin his career in the civil service, that brief career which is recounted in *No Longer at Ease*. And in 1966, the year *A Man of the People* was published, a military overthrew the civilian government in much the same fashion as Achebe prophesized in the novel. Dates in fiction and fact attest to Achebe's sense of history and to his consciousness of the times and their change.¹³²

What Wren calls 'a sense of history' explains a fundamental feature of Achebe's art as an African fiction writer. The fact is that reading Achebe's novels from *Things Fall Apart* through *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, is like reading about the history of Africa from pre-colonial times through colonialism and the early days of independence to the present, a fact which ties up with the common features of Achebe's characters who have distinctive traits and at the same time epitomize the experiences of African nations and peoples.

In the previous chapters, we have followed Achebe's prowess as a literary historian bearing witness to the African experience as he researched, experienced, and understood it. Achebe has clearly stated over the years that his purpose for this was to help his people understand and appreciate their history as an original people, and to also

¹³² Robert Wren, *Achebe's World*, op cit p.77

help interpret the African experience with a view to knowing what has happened to Africa ('where the rain started beating us,' as he puts it). M.S.C. Okolo sums this up better when he writes:

Achebe's pre-independence novels offer invaluable insight into the traditional life, and events from colonialism with their burden, lessons and challenges to the moulding of an African identity. His post-independence works reflect his direct experience and examine defining political events in modern African history: independence and subsequent disillusionment leading (in Nigeria at least) to civil war and the entrenchment of military rule. They also express faith in the potential of the African peoples and suggestions concerning their future.¹³³

Earlier in the study, we had stated that the most interesting aspect of history is its interpretation. It is in this context that Achebe's novels have been read and interpreted, quite correctly, as fictional chronicles of the major historical and social transformations that have occurred in Africa since the turn of the twentieth century. He has been quoted recently as describing his novels as "recreations of the history of Africa in fictional terms." His works of fiction provide the lens through which we interpret the history he set out to 'recreate.' This also conforms to Tsehloane Keto's concept of the Africa centered perspective on history which formed the basic framework of this study. Keto further writes:

The world of Africans, descendants of Africans and the scholarship about them is the only one that still retains a 'colonial' signature whereby experts and authorities that are outside their communities exceed those that are inside their communities....

...The use of an Africa centered framework provides an opportunity to contribute corrective historical insights in the analysis of the world's social phenomena because of the unique

¹³³ M.S.C. Okolo, *African Literature as Political Philosophy*, London: Zed Books, 2007, p.36

relationship of the African continent to the emergence of homo sapiens and the subsequent rise of human cultures.¹³⁴

This study has been able to prove that Achebe meet's Keto's expectation of the intended impact of the Africa centered perspective especially as regards telling the story of Africa and its multilayered experience. Achebe's life-works of fiction and nonfiction had always had at its core, the intent to teach about the African past, to correct the many years of misrepresentation of the African histories, and to seek an understanding of contemporary Africa, with the goal to fashion a new future.

A summary of how Achebe has fulfilled the mandate of the Africa centered perspective on history can better be appreciated;

(a) **Achebe as teacher** (Achebe's novels as a revision of Africa's history and Image):

The central thesis of Achebe's discuss is to correct the misrepresentation of African history and culture. Earlier in the essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," he strongly objects to Joseph Conrad's point of view and portrayal of Africa and Africans in his famous novel about Africa, titled *Heart of Darkness*. On the other hand, Achebe's very first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is written partly as a direct response in opposition to Conrad's novel. It does challenge Conrad's views misrepresenting the African. By extension it is considered a challenge on western views especially contemporary to the period. Achebe grouse was that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* presented the "otherness" of Africa and Africans. The Africans are viewed the Conrad's Eurocentric lens as marginalized 'others' – colonized people and a race of savages. Achebe feels that *Heart of*

¹³⁴ C. Tsehloane Keto, *The Africa Centered perspective of History*, op cit p.16

Darkness was also a way of "writing back to the centre"¹³⁵ in that it represented the Western consciousness about its dominance and superiority over the alienated African. A second novel that prompted Achebe to respond was Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. Achebe basically revolts against these novels for their caricature of Africans in colonial literature: Writes Achebe:

I was quite certain that I was going to try my hand at writing and one of the things that got me thinking was Joyce Cary's novel set in Nigeria, *Mr. Johnson*, which was praised so much, and it was clear to me that this was a most superficial picture of ...not only the country, but even the Nigerian character and so I thought if this was famous, then perhaps someone ought to try and look at this from the inside.¹³⁶

Suffice to add here that Achebe's novels meant to, in his words "set the score right about (his) ancestors,"¹³⁷ thus earning his role as teacher. Towards the end of *Things Fall Apart*, using the scene that reflected the thoughts of the District Commissioner, Achebe subtly attack those Europeans, as mentioned earlier, who write about Africa without knowing much about its people. Although the District Commissioner's book would be nonfiction, the way in which he proposes to treat his subject is suggestive of the features of European fiction about Africa that prompted Achebe to write *Things Fall Apart* in the first place.

¹³⁵ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa : Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness," in *The Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977) : pp.782 - 794

¹³⁶ Chinua Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England." *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Doubleday, 1989. 30-39

¹³⁷ Kofi Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of the History, Culture and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara*, New York: Doubleday, 1976, p.252

(b) **Achebe as a African Historian (and custodian of culture):**

Throughout this study, we have consistently shown that Achebe played the role of historian. Achebe sums this role up in his essay, when he writes:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.¹³⁸

This point is closely connected with the first. Achebe' operates as teacher all through his novels on several realms. He captures history and all its ramifications at different levels – the pre-colonial, the colonial, and the post-colonial. Achebe represents the cultural roots of the Igbos in order to provide self-confidence, but at the same time he refers them to universal principles which vitiate their destructive potential. Seeing his duty as a writer in a new nation as showing his people the dignity that they lost during the colonial period, he sets out to illustrate that before the European colonial powers entered Africa, the Igbos "had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity."¹³⁹

(c) **Achebe as Social Critic:**

Examples abound in this study highlighting several instances where Achebe functions as the social critic of his society. In deed no part of Africa is spared in this critique. Most of his essays clearly articulate this point. As social critic, Achebe criticizes the misrepresentation and denial of African history, the role of the missionaries and colonialists in Africa, and the role of neo-colonial Africans in the

¹³⁸ Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" op cit pp.71-72

¹³⁹ Chinua Achebe, " The Writer in A New Nation," op cit p. 8

weakening of Africa. All of the novels treated highlight this point. In his thought-provoking riposte on Nigeria titled, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe explains that the principal reason for the horrible state of affairs in the Nigeria is the recurrent blizzard of mediocre and corrupt leadership. *A Man of the People* criticized civilian leadership, while *Anthills of the Savannah* criticized military leadership. All of Achebe's works of fiction and nonfiction are a critique about issues affecting the continent of Africa. One example of Achebe as a social critic stems from his search for the right leadership for Nigeria and this informs his publication of *The Trouble with Nigeria* in 1983

A critical examination of Achebe's novels has shown that he measures to the standard of the Africa centered perspective on history advocated by Keto. It is important to look at some of the techniques that help Achebe succeed in his telling of Africa's story:

(1) Characterization and Point-of-View/Worldview:

As earlier mentioned; Characterization is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character in a play or novel, while, on the other hand the point-of-view describes how the story is being narrated in a text. This technique is very significant because it is crucial to a reader's understanding of the text. The Point-of-View technique can vary from text to text depending on how the author chooses to employ it. Characterization and point-of-view go hand in hand and make for an easier understanding of the thoughts of the novelist.

Characterization is very significant for a novelist like Achebe since for him, people and stories are the end products of the storyteller's storytelling. Achebe's historical novels reflect the peculiar genres of their times. For instance, his first two historical novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* bridge the gap between the oral tradition and the written tradition. As a result, the characters from such genre tend to be generated by the specific contemporary situations of the period under critique. Basic character types are such as the wrestler, farmer, warrior etc, are used to reflect the Igbo past in both novels because they tend to represent traditional Igbo ideas of social and cultural relations, leadership and heroism etc. The old story traditions that Achebe incorporated into *Things Fall Apart* tended to present their characters from the outside mainly because characters fitted into the molds that were shaped by cultural expectations and assumptions.¹⁴⁰ Thus, characters like Okonkwo come from the outside.

The point-of-view helps locate the standing of the author. Thus, a novel like *Arrow of God* is made complex because of the fact that the all-knowing omniscient narrator bares the thought processes of Ezeulu the protagonist to the reader. However, in *A Man of the People*, Achebe faces a much more complex situation of representing the communal voice to speak on behalf of the people. Achebe therefore, shifts position from the omniscient point of view to the first person narrative point of view, and places the major responsibility for judgment and character analysis on a first person narrator, Odili. Here, the moral privilege of the narrator does not free

¹⁴⁰ Dan Izevbaye, "Chinua Achebe and the African Novel," in F. Abiola Irele ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.45

Odili from the scrutiny and critical evaluation of the reader because he is a character. Even then this does not mean that the author has given up his authority as the guide of the narrative. As a matter of fact, as the lead character from who the story of the novel is told, he equally encompasses the point of view of the author. Thus, Achebe the author has shaped his characters in this context, and taken the back stage as the provider of the center of the story. Thus, the first person point of view is used by Achebe in *A Man of the People* to explore the problems of political leadership in Africa.

Novelists of the mid-1960s virtually instituted a literary movement whose weapon was satire and whose major themes fitted into a pattern of false leadership, political betrayal of the people through widespread corruption terminating in a military coup involving the sacrifice of politicians as scapegoats.¹⁴¹ Achebe's fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* treats a multiplicity of social issues ranging from the state of the nation, the state of leadership, and issues of gender. The multiplicity of the issues is an indication that the author sees the need for different interest groups to tell their own stories, hence, combination of both the first person narrative and the omniscient narrator technique. The narrative is told from the perspective of three characters, and an omniscient narrator who takes over the story from each of them when the need arises. It is obvious that Achebe has identified formal frontiers from what he needs to address as a novelist, and this includes the use of representative characters in contemporary contexts, as is the case with *Anthills of the Savannah*. Writes Izevbaye:

141 Op cit

The changing historical periods in Achebe's writings have brought into focus those characteristics that are most representative of the condition of their culture. These periods throw up a succession of characters, changing from wrestler, warrior, and priest(ess), to teacher, and civil servant, to teacher and politician who, in turn, give way to a new wave of professionals – the writer-as-journalist, the writer-as-poet whose alternative voices and points of view challenge the soldier's will-to-power. In every case the writer has placed one of such representative characters in the privileged position where he stands for the dominant view-point of the culture either as the novel's protagonist or its point of view, although the author usually remains as narrator or sometimes as moderator of the proceedings. But each of these central characters has appropriated the privilege of speaking or acting on behalf of their communities for his own individual ends.¹⁴²

In essence, Achebe ensures the independence of his characters. We notice that his point of view technique in the first the last two novels, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, differs from the first three, *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*, where the narrator's omniscience and moral opinion about the characters, events, and communities suggest the constant presence of the author. In his fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, he withdraws from the world of the novel and entrust his protagonist Odili to tell the story, while in *Anthills of the Savannah*, he allows three characters and a partial narrator to narrate the story, an indication of his recognition of the rights of every group of people to have their story told and heard; a strategy which conforms with the position of the Africa centered perspective of history which affirms the

¹⁴² Dan Izevbaye, *ibid*

importance of the need not to “submerge or deny the validity of other people’s perspectives in the world...”¹⁴³

Part of the reason why we identify Achebe’s location in historical consciousness is the fact that most of his characters are intricately bound up in history and social circumstance.¹⁴⁴ Okonkwo (*Things Fall Apart*), Obi (*No Longer at Ease*), and Ezeulu (*Arrow of God*), are genuine characters with individual traits that distinguish them from their societies, yet their attitude is influenced by history and social circumstance in their respective communities. For example, when Okonkwo dies; his death is the demise of an individual, but it also seems as a symbol of destruction of the social fabric of Igbo society as a result of western colonial forces. Likewise, when Ezeulu goes insane, it is symbolic of the demise of the fabric of Igbo culture occasioned by the external forces of colonialism. In the case of Obi Okonkwo the predicament he experiences after his arrest is a reflection of the state of the emerging African intelligentsia who were entrusted with African leadership at independence in the late 1950s and the 1960s. The same analysis can be given of Odili and Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People*. Though they are two very distinct characters, they are symbolic of Nigeria and to some extent other African countries going through similar experiences during the period. In essence, most of Achebe’s characters are symbolically representative of history and social circumstance. This explains why we are indirectly engaging in an interpretation and appraisal of the

¹⁴³ C. Tsehloane Keto, op cit, op cit p.26

¹⁴⁴ Emmanuel Ngara, “The Place and Significance of Anthills of the Savannah,” in Edith Ihekweazu et al eds. *Eagle On Iroko*, op cit p.247

progress or failures of African nations when we follow the progress of Achebe's characters,

(2) Language/Proverbs:

Achebe's views and choices in the area of the language of African literature have often stirred up controversy among critics and novelists alike, especially since language is tied up with the question of identity and nationhood. But these are ultimately minor critical disagreements, given the broad consensus on his achievement, and the fact that he has been able to navigate around this issue with the use of style and technique that is unique to his narratives. All through the works of Achebe examined in this study, we saw that he made extensive use of language to express his ideas. Language forms a huge part of the culture of a people because it is through it that they express their folk tales, myths, proverbs, history. The first three novels of Achebe employ the language of the colonizer to convey the Igbo experience of that colonization. The idioms, proverbs and imagery of these books all invoke his Igbo culture, forcing the reader to accept Achebe's narrative strictly on his (linguistic) terms.

Any reader of *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* comes away with at least a limited knowledge of Igbo words and phrases. Some words such as *obi*, *chi*, *osu*, and *egwugwu* become assimilated very quickly into this knowledge through the way in which Achebe scatters them casually through the text. Others, which occur less frequently, require translation or a few words of explanation, such as *ilo* (the village playground), or *agbala* (woman, or 'man without title'). Proverbs also play a large part in all five of his novels, but more so for the first three. The *English* translations provided by Achebe are a personal rendering, attempting to invoke the spirit of the proverb, while

retaining faithfulness to the phraseology and terminology. Oral and communal storytelling traditions are very much a part of the Igbo culture which he has extolled and used in both his works of fiction and nonfiction. Achebe's mastery of the use of language and proverbs among other literary devices attest to the notion that he is well versed in the consciousness and history of his people, and hence, eminently qualified to tell their story. In the ingredients of his story-telling technique, Achebe does not rely on foreign images and metaphors but on what is authentically indigenous.

Recommendations

- (1) We have seen that the African novelists have contributed to the major sources of historiography of Africa, and the cultural experience of its people as exemplified in the works of Achebe, extensively discussed in this study. It would therefore not be out of place to suggest that the African historical novel such as Achebe's novels should be used as major sources for an Africa centered critical study, interpretation, and understanding of the social and political history of Africa. The Africa centered historic novel' like those of Achebe, provides an early reminder of the historical development of sophisticated, large-scale social and political organization in Africa completely apart from European intervention, as Abiola Irele rightly observes:

In addition to such examples of novels that center on specific events in African history, it is also the case that the African novel, as a whole, is more intensively engaged with politics and history than is its European counterpart. Among other things, the African novel itself received a tremendous injection of energy from the historical phenomenon of decolonization, which infused that novel with a sense of historical urgency and a desire to contribute to the construction of viable postcolonial

cultural identities for the new African nations.¹⁴⁵

- (2) Achebe's novels and those of Africa centered fiction writers like him must be incorporated in the teaching of African history and culture beyond the realm of literary studies. This is imperative because it is instructive to note that what has made Achebe's novel so important to African studies is the fact that even his first time readers need not have prior knowledge about the specifics of African social and political history to understand Achebe's fictitious depiction of historical reality. Critics are quick to note that Achebe's writing is relevant to a multitude of societies, not just those of Africa. Yet, it must be noted that Achebe is first and foremost a contemporary African writer writing novels that carry important messages for and about Africa and the African experience from an Africa centered perspective.
- (3) The methods and narrative techniques that Achebe uses in his fiction can also provide a basis for understanding the significance of the study of African history. Achebe's use of multiple narrative voices indicates that history is more than a set of events in the past to be told; it is also the feelings and ideas that different people have about the events. In essence, this point support our earlier conjecture made in the study, that the most important aspect of history is its interpretation. Our understanding of history is almost always configured by how we come to process and interpret it. In order to have a more holistic approach to the study of Africa centered history, we must engage the African novel as a veritable source for exploring the African experience, as Keith Booker succinctly that "One could make

¹⁴⁵ Keith M Booker, "The African Historical Novel," in Abiola Irele eds. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.141

the argument that virtually all of the most important African novels have been historical novels – at least in the broadest sense of a novel whose events need to be understood as part of a larger historical process.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Keith M. Booker, “The African Historical Novel,” in Abiola Irele eds. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Op cit, p 142

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