

## **The Theme of the Colonialism as Embodied in Chinua Achebe's Fictions: with Reference to *Arrow of God, Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease***

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### **Abstract:**

*This research article aimed at displaying the theme of the colony as embodied in Chinua Achebe's novels "Things Fall Apart" (1958), "No longer at Ease" (1960), and "Arrow of God" (1964), that demonstrated the beauty and validity of the African life before it was destroyed by an alien civilization. It also showed how Achebe in "No longer at Ease" (1960), brilliantly highlighted the catastrophe and the painful process of adjustment that post-independence African society as a whole must undergo as it looks for new values to replace those so regrettably destroyed by the colonial act. The subject matter of this article is to discuss the theme of the colony embodied in Achebe's fictions using the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method to analyze the data that have been assembled from different literatures, sources, literary works and manuscripts which traced Achebe's description of the changes wrought in Nigerian life during the twentieth century; the period that witnessed the beginning with the pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger and ending in post-independence setting.*

**Key words:** Theme of Colony, Arrow of God, Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease

## INTRODUCTION

More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. It is easy to see how important this has been in the political and economic spheres, but its general influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples is to some extent less evident. In fact, in Africa, there are so many fields of life that were affected by colonialism, such as education, political, moral, social, cultural, and religious. Actually, literature is known for its power in reflecting and tackling the important issues in life, whether handed down by word, mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality." Achebe believes that literature has social and political importance. It is much more than a creative ornament. It provides a necessary critical perspective on everyday experience which educates us on the meaning of our actions and offers us greater control over our social and personal lives. According to Achebe, literature works by "enabling us to encounter in the safe, manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found in our problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us.

Achebe, in his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987:124) mentioned that:

“...only the story...can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the of brave fighters. It is the story that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of

the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us.”

Therefore African writers focused on literature to face the negative effects of colonialism that made the life of African people more difficult and complicated. One of the most important issues that draw the attention of African writers is the way the colonists look to Africa as the land of darkness and the land of primitive people that has no culture, and that they bring lights to Africa through colonialism, this leads to the so-called cultural conflict between colonialists writers and African writers.

## **CHINUA ACHEBE'S BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Achebe's parents, Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam, were converts to the Protestant Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria. The elder Achebe stopped practising the religion of his ancestors, but he respected its traditions. Achebe's unabbreviated name, Chinualumogu ("May God fight on my behalf"), was a prayer for divine protection and stability. The Achebe family had five other surviving children, named in a similar fusion of traditional words relating to their new religion: Frank Okwuofu, John Chukwuemeka Ifeanyi Chukwu, Zinobia Uzoma, Augustine Nduka, and Grace Nwanneka.

### **Early life**

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born in the Igbo village of Ogidi. Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam Achebe stood at a crossroads of traditional culture and Christian influence; this made a significant impact on the children, especially Chinualumogu. After the youngest

daughter was born, the family moved to Isaiah Achebe's ancestral town of Ogidi, in what is now the state of Anambra.

Map of Nigeria's linguistic groups. Achebe's homeland, the Igbo region (sometimes called Ibo), lies in the central south.

Storytelling was a mainstay of the Igbo tradition and an integral part of the community. Chinua's mother and sister Zinobia Uzoma told him many stories as a child, which he repeatedly requested. His education was furthered by the colleges his father hung on the walls of their home, as well as almanacs and numerous books – including a prose adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1590) and an Igbo version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Chinua also eagerly anticipated traditional village events, like the frequent masquerade ceremonies, which he recreated later in his novels and stories.

## **Education**

In 1936, Achebe entered St Philips' Central School. Despite his protests, he spent a week in the religious class for young children but was quickly moved to a higher class when the school's chaplain took note of his intelligence. One teacher described him as the student with the best handwriting in class and the best reading skills. He also attended Sunday school every week and the special evangelical services held monthly, often carrying his father's bag. A controversy erupted at one such session when apostates from the new church challenged the catechist about the tenets of Christianity. Achebe later included a scene from this incident in *Things Fall Apart*.

At the age of twelve, Achebe moved away from his family to the village of Nekede, four kilometres from Owerri. He enrolled as a student at the Central School, where his older brother John taught. In Nekede, Achebe gained an appreciation for Mbari, a traditional art form which seeks to invoke the gods' protection through symbolic sacrifices in the form of sculpture

and collage. When the time came to change to secondary school, in 1944, Achebe sat entrance examinations for and was accepted at both the prestigious Dennis Memorial Grammar School in Onitsha and the even more prestigious Government College in Umuahia.

Modeled on the British public school, and funded by the colonial administration, Government College had been established in 1929 to educate Nigeria's future elite. It had rigorous academic standards and was vigorously elitist, accepting boys purely on the basis of ability. The language of the school was English, not only to develop proficiency but also to provide a common tongue for pupils from different Nigerian language groups. Achebe described this later as being ordered to "put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the language of their colonisers". The rule was strictly enforced and Achebe recalls that his first punishment was for asking another boy to pass the soap in Igbo.

Once there, Achebe was double-promoted in his first year, completing the first two years' studies in one, and spending only four years in secondary school, instead of the standard five. Achebe was unsuited to the school's sports regimen and belonged instead to a group of six exceedingly studious pupils. So intense were their study habits that the headmaster banned the reading of textbooks from five to six o'clock in the afternoon (though other activities and other books were allowed).

Achebe started to explore the school's "wonderful library". There he discovered Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), the autobiography of an American former slave; Achebe "found it sad, but it showed him another dimension of reality". He also read classic novels, such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Treasure Island* (1883) together with tales of colonial derring-do such as H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887) and John Buchan's *Prester*

John (1910). Achebe later recalled that, as a reader, he "took sides with the white characters against the savages" and even developed a dislike for Africans. "The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts."

### **The Theme of Colony in Achebe's Fictions**

The starting point of the cultural conflict appears in the European writing when they start to describe the life in Africa after a short visit, such as Josef Conrad in his novel "Heart of darkness" and Joyce Cary's "Mister Johnson" which tell a tales from the European points of views depicting Africa as the land of barbarians and primitive people. Furthermore, they describe them as savages who needed to be enlightened by Europeans, portraying a comic African who slavishly adores his white colonist boss, to the point of gladly being shot to death by him, and throughout their novels, they show how African cultures vary among themselves and how they changed over time.

As a result, many African writers start to use their ink to reply, defending Africa against the European cultural colonialism, showing that before the coming of the white man African people have their own values, customs and traditions, and it's the colonialism that leads these things to fall apart. Chinua Achebe is one of the most famous African writers who has played the big role in convincing and inspiring his fellows to fight against the colonialist views, and through his writing Chinua Achebe has succeeded in telling the world about the African culture before the coming of the white man and after it and the consequences of the colonialism in the African people views.

Achebe deals vividly with most of his novels with all aspects of the community life, portraying African societies with specificity and sympathy and examines the effects of European

colonialism from an African perspective, he wanted his own stories about Africa to show the complexity and sophistication of African societies before European arrival and to reveal the deep wounds colonialism had inflicted on the country's social, cultural, and political fabric.

Also, he wanted to remind his own people of their past and to assert that it had contained much of value.

Although many Africans in his time were ready to accept the European judgment that Africa has no history or culture worth considering or mentioning.

Thus his delineation reminds the world both African and European that Africa had a rich past and legacy, Achebe comments in an interview London, 1957:

“African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans, that their society was not mindless but has a philosophy great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all they had dignity, it is this dignity that many African people were lost in the colonial period, and it is this dignity that they must regain”.

The message is made clear for the Europeans and the rest of the world as well, thus Achebe assumes for himself the roles of culturally explaining the traditions of his people. He takes on himself the responsibility to rectify the savage of the African as for a discernible in European writing.

Achebe (1971:3) writes that:

“That a 'critic' playing of the ideological team of colonialism should feel sick and tired of Africa's 'pathetic obsession with racial and cultural confrontation' should surprise no one. Neither should enthusiasm for those African works that show 'no easy antithesis between white and black'. But an African who falls for such nonsense, not only in spite of Africa's so very recent history but, even more, in the face of continuing Atrocities committed against millions of Africans in their own land by racist minority regimes, deserves a lot of pity....”

Achebe as a critic of colonialism, unwilling to accept the validity of sensibilities other than his own, has made a particular point concerning (dismissing) the African cultures. He has written many novels to prove its existence largely on the grounds, and that his kinsmen's daily activities, customs and tradition are completely African genres, a fact which would interest the African if their ambition was to glorify and accept 'African' cultures as they were. But, in any case, the black people in Africa were deprived of their own values and cultures, forced by the colonizers adopt the western's culture and to accept the white's religion, values, customs and traditions to replace the African ones.

Achebe (1971:7) claims that:

“My people speak disapprovingly of an outsider whose wailing drowned the grief of the owners of the corpse. One last word to the owners. It is because our own critics have been somewhat hesitant in taking control of our literary criticism (sometimes - let's face it -- for the good reason that we will not do the hard work that should equip us) that the task has fallen to others, some of whom (again we must admit) have been excellent and sensitive. And yet most of what remains to be done can best be tackled by ourselves, the owners. If we fall back, can we complain that others are rushing forward? A man who does not lick his lips, can he blame the harmattan for drying them?”

Achebe succeeded in clarifying African history from the injustice description of the Europeans when they tried to find additional excuses for their invasion and colonialism in Africa, attempting to convince the rest of the world that their entrance to Africa was completely positive and it was a good move in wearing the African people humanity by bringing culture, religion and modern way of life, which helped them in replacing the unworthy mentioning things that the African used in that dark days. Achebe's success is presented in some of his



successful novels, like “Things Fall Apart” 1958, “Arrow of God” 1964, “No longer at Ease”1960, “A man of The People”1966 and “Anthills of the Savannah”1987. He wrote them to highlight and reflect the African life before colonialism and then to show the destruction of this life after the European invasion.

Achebe (1971) mentions that:

“When my first novel was published in 1958 a very unusual review of it was written by a British woman, Honor Tracy, who is perhaps not so much a critic as a literary journalist. But what she said was so intriguing that I have never forgotten it. If I remember rightly she headlined it 'Three cheers for mere Anarchy!' The burden of the review itself was as follows: These bright Negro barristers . . . who” talk so glibly about African culture, how would they like to return to wearing raffia skirts? How would novelist Achebe likes to go back to the mindless times of his grandfather instead of holding the modern job he has in broadcasting in Lagos?”

Broadly speaking, the African novel is a response to and a record of western capitalistic colonialism in Africa, and its impact on the traditional values and institutions of the African peoples. This largely is the preoccupation of Chinua Achebe.

Chinua Achebe's 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 consciousness. Many critics believe that the theme of colonialism which Achebe has made inimitably his own is one of the most persistent notes in the literature of all newly emerging nations. Wilfred Cartey believes that this theme “appears of historical necessity and will continue to be present in many kinds of literature, for its effects on individuals and societies have been completely wrenching, participating the falling a part of things.

A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African traditions (particularly Igbo varieties)

and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The village of Umuofia in “Things Fall Apart”, for example, is violently shaken with internal divisions when the white Christian missionaries arrive. Nigerian English professor Ernest N. Emenyonu describes the colonial experience in the novel as "the systematic emasculation of the entire culture". Achebe later embodied this tension between African tradition and Western influence in the figure of Sam Okoli, the president of Kangan in “Anthills of the Savannah”. Distanced from the myths and tales of the community by his Westernized education, he does not have the capacity for reconnection shown by the character Beatrice.

The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often affected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. The character of Obi in “No Longer at Ease” succumbs to colonial-era corruption in the city; the temptations of his position overwhelm his identity and fortitude. The courts and the position of District Commissioner in “Things Fall Apart” likewise clash with the traditions of the Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in structures of decision-making.

The standard Achebean ending results in the destruction of an individual and, by synecdoche, the downfall of the community. Odili's descent into the luxury of corruption and hedonism in “A Man of the People”, for example, is symbolic of the post-colonial crisis in Nigeria and elsewhere. Even with the emphasis on colonialism, however, Achebe's tragic endings embody the traditional confluence of fate, individual and society as represented by Sophocles and Shakespeare.

Still, Achebe seeks to portray neither moral absolutes nor a fatalistic inevitability. In 1972, he said:

"I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the new must win. The point is that no single truth satisfied me...and this is well founded in the Igbo world view. No single man can be correct all the time, no single idea can be totally correct."

His perspective is reflected in the words of Ikem, a character in "Anthills of the Savannah" (p.154):

"whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism." And in a 1996 interview, Achebe said: "Belief in either radicalism or orthodoxy has too simplified a way of viewing things ... Evil is never all evil; goodness, on the other hand, is often tainted with selfishness."

Ali Mazrui the famous political African scientist observes that "political colonialism may in a sense be a thing of the past, but the moral and cultural consequences of colonialism are still very much part of the present".

One of the most disastrous consequences of colonialism is the Africans acceptance of the inferiority of his culture and his race.

Obichina in an interview says:

"The direct result of European colonization of Africa was the depreciation of the African image in the popular European imagination, for the imposition of political control also involved conscious or unconscious devaluation of the African culture. loss of political freedom was also inevitably attended by loss of cultural confidence by Africans..."

It was clear that the standards of cultural assessment were based on the factors of western civilization. The Europeans consider any people who did not invent writing system or who had not had an industrial revolution were regarded as primitive

and so, of course, Africa not having both, and so they were regarded lightly.

In the nineteenth century then, the popular image of Africa in the European mind was a primitive place with primitive institutions, inhabited by primitive irrational people on whom should be imposed the civilizing will of Europe.

In the twentieth century, this picture did not change in the minds of millions of westerners still lurk the more unavowable but persistent prejudices and myths concerning Africans, from the unsophisticated Hollywood stereotype of blacks swinging naked through the jungles to the intuitive feeling that less technologically advanced societies must be humanly inferior.

As mentioned, such situations make it obligatory on Africa's serious writers to help the African view his past and therefore his present and future as well. In the words of Gareth Griffiths, "the task of African writer is to rehabilitate the culture which the colonizing culture has overlooked or distorted." This means that the African writer is not a free artist writing for writing's sake, he has a special commitment to write about Africa in a way that will restore her dignity.

This paper attempts to explore how Chinua Achebe in "Things Fall Apart" (1958), and "Arrow of God" (1964), demonstrates the beauty and validity of the traditional African life before it was destroyed by an alien civilization. It also shows how Achebe in "No longer at Ease" (1960), brilliantly highlights the catastrophe and the painful process of adjustment that post-independent African society as a whole must undergo as it looks for new values to replace those so regrettably destroyed by the colonial encounter.

## CONCLUSION

Achebe's novels reveal the changes wrought in Nigerian life during the twentieth century, the period beginning with the pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger and ending in the post-independence setting. This sequence of novels reveals the extent to which traditional values have been turned upside down and ends in gloom and uncertainty. Achebe chooses his examples from the Nigerian society he knows best (Ibo society). But analogies with other ethnic groups are apparent to readers from those groups.

Achebe's fiction reflects the effects of colonialism in Nigerians life, so according to Achebe's novels, the first novel, *Things Fall Apart* shows how the African society was shocked and impotent by colonialism, then, in *Arrow of God* we see colonialism tearing at the fabric of the familial, religious and political life of the people, in *No Longer at Ease*, the human psyche is now culturally ill at ease while a problematic elite is spawned on the nation, In *A man of the People*, the society is shown to be morally and politically decaying, responsible for the attitudes and the values of the characters which is politically alienated of European colonialism.

The changes brought by the colonial encounter are very destructive in African societies. But here at this point, a question arises. Had these changes occurred originally from within these societies? To know this we have to trace back Achebe's fiction, which surely indicates the simplicity of those people and at the same time the complexity of their values, customs and traditions, things that can't be understood to outsiders, but the real thing is that those societies would not have been brutally disrupted, though they would inevitably have been altered. The colonial administration, having at its disposal the military strength to enforce its will, deprives the African traditional society of the power and the will to defend

its interests. The result is the breakdown of social homogeneity and the collective outlook, which were the two distinguishing features of life in African before the forces of colonialism began to attack it. Furthermore, the Europeans destroyed African institutions of authority and government and have left a major political gap. The rules of living together which prevailed in the pre-colonial period, the values and the collective responsibilities of traditional social life, were replaced by artificial norms imported from Europe as Mazrui has described it.

As for the positive impact of Europe – or rather of European colonialism—on African, it is often said that Africa gained a lot from the colonial encounter. Ali A. Mazrui admits the negative impact of Europe on the socio-political conditions of habitation in Africa; he also recognizes the positive impact of the colonial encounter.

He wrote in this connection (1972:7)

“In relation to minimum ecological conditions of habitation, the European impact on Africa has been progressive. Europe has not changed Africa's climate but has enabled Africans to better understand processes such as soil erosion and what is nowadays referred to as desertification. Understanding ecology is the first step towards either controlling it or adjusting to it. Closely related to all this is Europe's impact on the technical skills have found their way to Africa by way of the colonial transmission belt. Africa is now better equipped to deal with diseases and to build road and railways than it was before European penetration and colonization”.

Walter Rodney (1974:223) tends to dispute this argument about the benefits of Africa from colonialism. He strongly believes that Europe is responsible for the present under-development in Africa. According to him:

“The argument so far has been aimed at showing that benefits from colonialism were small and they were not gifts from the colonialists, but rather fruits of African labour and resources

for the most part. Indeed what was called "the development of Africa" by the colonialists was a cynical shorthand expression for "the intensification of colonial exploitation in Africa to develop capitalist Europe." The analysis has gone beyond that to demonstrate that numerous false claims are made purporting to show that Europe developed Africa in the sense of bringing about social order, nationalism, and economic modernization. However, all of that would still not permit the conclusion that colonialism had a negative impact on Africa's development. In offering the view that colonialism was negative, the aim is to draw attention to the way that previous African development was blunted, halted, and turned back. In place of that interruption and blockade, nothing of compensatory value was introduced".

Chinua Achebe believes that Africa has gained a lot from its encounter with Europe. He said in this respect:

"I am not one of those who would say that African has gained nothing at all during the colonial period, I mean this is ridiculous – we gained a lot. But unfortunately when two cultures meet, you would expect, if we were angels shall we say, we would pick out the best in the other and retain the best in our own, and this would be wonderful. But this doesn't happen often. What happens is that some of the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added to them".

Some educated people agree with Achebe that Africans gained a lot during the colonial period, but these gains are really nothing compared to the losses; the loss of dignity, self- respect and wealth which had been stolen through European colonialism and, worst of all, our acceptance of racial inferiority.

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