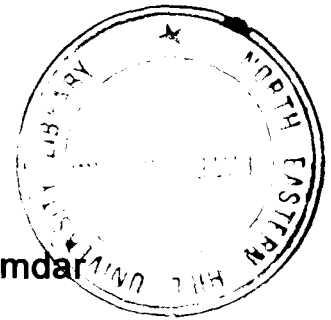


**CRITIQUING THE POSTCOLONIAL CONSTRUCT: A RE-READING OF
CHINUA ACHEBE'S MAJOR NOVELS**

ABSTRACT

Ms. Ranjana Das

Research Supervisor – Dr. Moon Moon Mazumdar



**Department of English
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong – 793022
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CRITIQUING THE POSTCOLONIAL CONSTRUCT: A RE-READING OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S MAJOR NOVELS

Chapter I: Introduction

The act of critiquing the postcolonial construct requires us to address and examine various questions relating to the term 'postcolonial' and its use in literature. Is the issue of colonialism still relevant at all, since all 'postcolonial' societies have achieved political independence? Does the empire still need to write back to the centre long after the dismantling of imperial structures? How long do we need to emphasise that one event in the political history of a nation? Do writers from the erstwhile colonies still need to rewrite/reassert their past and resist imperial constructs of their people and their history? Or, perhaps, should they be constrained to limit their themes to those which owe their genesis and currency to colonial domination? How long can we countenance the 'post' situation in postcolonial theory?

Over the last few decades the idea that postcolonial theory and its praxis have to be appropriated to the altered cultural needs has gained ground. Since then postcolonial studies have gained institutional prominence in academic circles and new cultural theorists of post structural and postmodern sensibilities have emerged and their critical positions have been both engaging and provocative. According to Sylvester O Osagie, this common theoretical persuasion "...threatens to undermine the authenticity of the contradictions generated by the colonial impulse...."¹ There have been debates on questions related to the hegemony of western discourses and the possibilities of resistance. Attempts have been made to intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, and ideas have been generated on bridging their hiatus.

Postcolonialism has been shaped by imperialism and its aftermath, where colonialism

remains the decisive condition and experience. Research in postcolonial studies is growing because postcolonial critique allows for wide ranging investigation into power relations in various contexts. In postcolonial theory, literary activities in the countries which were once colonised are linked to their history and political condition. This approach privileges the colonial experience over all others and gives the feeling that the present has been solely brought about by (the accident of) European colonisation. This misleading approach situates the colonial experience almost at the beginning of a nation's history, ignoring the long precolonial past of African and Asian countries.

Gyan Prakash suggests that postcolonial critique "...does not enjoy a panoptic distance from colonial history but exists as an aftermath, as an after – after being worked over by colonialism." ⁴ The post period of history (after colonialism) appears to be an unmarked and endless period prompting one to wonder when the condition would end. Postcolonial critics have been dissatisfied with the attempt at periodising history in accordance with the terms laid down by western imperialism. Aijaz Ahmad states:

It is worth remarking ... that in periodising our history in the triadic terms of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial, the conceptual apparatus of 'postcolonial criticism' privileges as primary the role of colonialism as the principle of structuration in that history, so that all that came before colonialism becomes its own prehistory and whatever comes after can only be lived as infinite aftermath. ³

This "infinite aftermath" which does not liberate literary activities from its confines can only end when writers take alternative positions towards national and international issues and cultures.

Writers need to go beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis of the colonial encounter as the primary constituent of history. A new discursive space has to be created

with discourses that produce national cultures by moving out of historical imbalances and cultural inequalities engendered by the colonial encounter. Individual absorption of local influences has to be written not only against the white gaze, but outside it so as to claim its irrelevance. Writers need to be freed from the past. The need to look upon one place and group as the arbiter of correctness is no longer the only “politically correct” or obvious choice. The control exerted by colonial administration on thought and human relations have to be shaken off and the scope of writing has to be widened, frontiers redrawn, issues redefined and structures freshly erected. Judie Newman’s view is that, “When colonialism ends, writers must have the right to write about trees or love.”⁴

And it is this right to write beyond the confines of the ‘postcolonial’ which calls for an alternative mode of critique which will be outside the parameters of postcolonial discourse, whose cultural choices will be more accommodating and which will emerge from culturally rich contexts. In such writings, western ways of knowledge production and its dissemination in the past and present will become an area of study aimed at seeking out alternative means of expression to yoke together a diverse range of experiences, cultures and problems.

A re-reading of Chinua Achebe’s novels is occasioned not just because of his location within the canon of postcolonial studies but also because he is among the major writers of today. No syllabus or course on *Postcolonial Literature/ Commonwealth Literature/New Literatures in English* is complete without a text by Achebe, nor is an understanding of Africa complete without a knowledge of the great African spirit reflected in Achebe’s works. Added to this is Achebe’s deep commitment to his people and his awareness of his social responsibilities which prompts us to reflect on the need to appropriate theory to a study of his literary works. The concept of social responsibility could very well be the basis for theorising and interpreting texts in new ways and thus of challenging the hegemony of the western canon.

The objective of this study has been to explore how Achebe's novels articulate his knowledge of his own people and the manner in which he participates in the politics of representation. He ends up critiquing the postcolonial methodology, and seeks out, recovers and provides an alternative narrative of the colonial experience and its aftermath even as he seems to be moving beyond it. Achebe's narrative does not conform to the postcolonial construct of history as telling (rather than recalling) and nations in terms of states (rather than people). Achebe combines the techniques available to the historians (documentation) with those of the novelists (imaginative re-creation of events) for his fictional evocation of the past. He emphasises both the African artists' role in helping to create a more egalitarian society and that of the act of storytelling as a shaping force in people's lives. As he negotiates between his narrative form and realistic subject matter, Achebe puts forward a powerful critique of colonisation and its aftermath. Achebe represents a canonical voice in the emerging discourse of writers struggling to break free from the clichéd world of anti-imperialism and decolonisation.

Achebe's novels have become a significant guide to an understanding of the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial situation of Africa. His first four novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966) written in quick succession present the story of his people, a largely self-sufficient Igbo community in the precolonial times; then follows the account of their encounter with the colonisers and the turbulent days they face after independence. *A Man of the People* presents the abuse of power, the squandering of the opportunities of independence and the failure of the new government to meet the needs of the people resulting in a military coup.

Twenty-one years later, after *A Man of the People*, Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). In this novel he does not present an improved picture of the post-independence scenario but nevertheless ends on a note of hope. Achebe's fifth novel moves beyond the

Igbo village of Umuofia to embrace the vast expanse of the Savannah and addresses larger issues of power which go beyond the confines of what has been traditionally found in postcolonial discourses.

This first chapter also includes a study of views of Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe who are arguably among the most prominent critics striving for a better understanding of the African situation. Fanon, who has greatly influenced theorists as well as writers, derives his critique from a broad range of disciplines like philosophy, psychology, social anthropology and literature. Fanon's pioneering works like *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) dwell on the search for a black identity, the struggle against colonialism and the process of decolonisation.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has dreamt of a true home for all Africans that would restore the communal character of the old culture and even serve to create a pan-tribal, pan-African and pan-Third World identity. His essays in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (1972) emphasise the important social functions of literature. Ngugi believes that a writer lives within history and is shaped by it, and literature is "...primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships."

In *Moving the Centre - The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993), Ngugi calls upon writers to share the responsibility to reshape a distorted history and a misguided society, and to move away from western structures and locations of power, and in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) he campaigns for African culture and exhorts upon the African writers to write in their language which would make cultural and literary productions relevant to the masses.

Wole Soyinka, the first African writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1986), an

award which accorded a long-awaited recognition of the whole African literary tradition, is a chronicler of his traditional Yoruban culture as well as the turbulent history of Nigeria. He views literature as an agent of social change. His commitment to promoting human rights in Nigeria, the humour in his writings and his portrayal of political greed and oppression after independence add a universal dimension to his works. As an honest observer of his land and people, he calls upon African artists not to bask in the nostalgia of their past while neglecting the urgent problems of the present. He writes, “The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past.”⁶ *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Soyinka’s collection of critical essays inspired by Yoruba mythology and cosmology, shows the artist’s role in society as equivalent to that of Ogun, the Yoruba god of creativity, upholding the values of the African world.

As African writers began to write their stories, they had to write about their newly independent nations. Since the concept of the nation keeps undergoing changes along with theoretical inventions, the chapter includes a study of Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

Some points that have emerged about Nigerian writers are as follows: Nigerian writers write against a particular historical tradition and a national context to present their accumulated spiritual experience. Nigerian novelists achieve universality through a sensitive interpretation of their culture. They use their African background to explore the human conditions of pride and power, defeat and dejection, love and loss. Though firmly set in Africa, they are universal in nature. As Bernth Lindfors says:

...accomplished works of art communicate in such a universal human idiom that they are capable of transcending their particular time and place and speaking to all mankind.⁷

Nigerian writings were not entirely influenced by the English novel or the historical events resulting from the colonial encounter. Instead, the Onitsha Market Literature and the literature of the Biafran War have gone a long way in shaping Nigerian literature.

This chapter also attempts a brief study of some major Nigerian novels to show how these works visit the issues relating to postcoloniality and universality.

Chapter II: Storyteller\ Writer as Mediator

The second chapter is a study of the role of writers in bringing about paradigmatic shifts in thinking; it examines Achebe's role as a writer showing how he uses the traditional African art of storytelling in his novels and how writers like him can be viewed as mediators in the debate on location.

Perhaps it would not be wrong to suggest that the power of the story and the storyteller's role can best be studied in the African context because storytelling is an integral part of the African oral tradition. From the traditional storytellers or the *griots* to the modern day writers, the story remains a part of African life. The importance of the story is also significant because stories from Africa presented to the rest of the world have been for long distorted by colonial writers. The myopic view of these writers and their limited understanding of the African way of life never allowed them to make an authentic retelling of the African stories. Thus, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observes that there is "...a strongly felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa."⁶ This observation pertains not just to the act of rewriting of stories as the postcolonial situation demands but also involves the freedom of writers to write new stories.

Writers from Africa attempt to construct an image of Africa in a way that pays heed to the traditions while recognising the demands of a cosmopolitan, international audience. This transition does not necessarily mean an abandonment of the past. The story still remains the

vital means to wed the old to the new. This is because the story embodies a tradition that can adapt itself to the new. Achebe's comment on this aspect of the story is worth recalling here:

So important have stories been to mankind that they are not restricted to accounts of initial creation but will be found following human societies as they recreate themselves through vicissitudes of their history, validating their social organizations, their political systems, their moral attitudes and religious beliefs, even their prejudices... but they also serve to sanction change when it can no longer be denied. At such critical moments new versions of old stories or entirely fresh ones tend to be brought into being to mediate the changes and sometimes to consecrate opportunistic defections into more honourable rites of passage.'

Achebe's novels gain in terms of impact on account of the strong presence of the story. Also the story's role becomes more central with each successive novel. From narrating traditional oral stories such as that of the earth and sky in *Things Fall Apart*, to that of the tortoise and the leopard in *Anthills of the Savannah*, the shift has been from the kind of stories people loved to read to those which are more didactic. Stating in *Things Fall Apart* that, "There is no story that is not true" (*Things Fall Apart*,117), the view of storytellers forwarded in *Anthills of the Savannah* is that "... storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit" (*Anthills of the Savannah*,141). Achebe thus places great responsibilities on the modern day storytellers. In the same novel he says:

...writers in the Third World context must not stop at the stage of documenting social problems but move to the higher responsibilities of proffering prescriptions. (*Anthills of the Savannah*,148)

In this chapter an attempt has been made to show how Achebe's fictionalisation of the condition of writers, artists and activists under the repressive Nigerian regime underscores

the connection between the role of the traditional storyteller and the contemporary writer.

Chapter III: Representing the Colonial Encounter: *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease and Arrow of God*

The third chapter begins with a brief study of the colonial history of Nigeria beginning with the ‘Scramble for Africa’, the Berlin Conference 1884-85 which established ‘spheres of influence’ that seemed to legitimise the control of large sections of the continent by European powers and in turn provided an impetus to more expansionist designs.. The oil-rich West African region has been witness to economic exploitations, ruthless wars and a revised political cartography resulting in a redrawing of the African map that cut across traditional tribal boundaries occasioning traumatic experiences. It is important to note here that Achebe in his representation of the colonial encounter presents the human side of the story. There are references to the religious and political changes - like the coming of Christianity and imposition of new legal systems, but the focus is on how all these changes affected the Igbo community in what is largely an ethnographic study of the group.

Things Fall Apart and *Arrow of God* visit the old story of Africa – its initial struggle to preserve its land and self against the ruthless invaders, while *No Longer at Ease* presents an individual’s struggle to come to terms with conflicts on the eve of independence. The three novels narrate the strong presence of the community and the rich culture of the people.

Things Fall Apart reflects human condition in a culture plagued by internal enemies against the background of great historical changes. Achebe interprets the history of his people not only through the tragedy of Okonkwo but also in the many images he provides of man’s helplessness in the face of historical upheavals which reshape human lives. The theme of colonisation is introduced only towards the end of the novel. Achebe reveals the bias in the District Commissioner’s representation which has no mechanism to bring out

proportions of Okonkwo's heroic exploits. Achebe subtly shows how the coloniser's image of Africa and Africans was largely a negative one. But *Things Fall Apart* cannot be read only as a 'writing back' because Achebe has narrated a story that goes back to a time long before the advent of the coloniser.

In this story Achebe paints a complete picture of the Igbo world without glossing over their faults and weaknesses. By depicting incidents like the killing of Ikemefuna and how there were people who felt helpless about it, Achebe is able to admit to the world that Africans themselves knew and understood the drawbacks within their society and also had the willingness and fidelity to truth to write about them.

Achebe does not shy away from depicting the imperfections and injustices of his society which prevailed even before the coming of the colonisers. The traditional society with all its glory and strength disintegrated under the formidable external force of imperialism and the self-destructive impulses from within. Achebe's refusal to blame the colonial rule for all ills and his recognition of the failures of his own people makes us reconsider the glorification of the subaltern in postcolonial discourse.

Okonkwo's story also comes with the recognition of his failures. This is rarely found in "anti-colonial" fiction. Okonkwo, like the other protagonists in Achebe's novels, does not emerge victorious. He stands revealed as someone weak and unwilling to accept change. He is also guilty of homicide and stands strongly condemned. The incident of Okonkwo having a hand in Ikemefuna's killing draws our attention to the dark side of Africa's pre-colonial history. Ikemefuna's killing is re-read not as a representation of Africa's failure by the west but as Okonkwo's personal failure.

Though *Arrow of God* was written after *No Longer at Ease*, it captures the times and events that took place between the coming of the colonisers and the eve of independence. *Arrow of God* reveals the harmonising principle present in Igbo culture. The twin festivals of

Pumpkin Leaves and the New Yam represent the interaction between the individual on the one hand and the community on the other which serves to balance the clan's spiritual and material predilections. Achebe offers us a powerful description of the historical condition that prevailed during the early period of colonisation to highlight the scramble for power during the early period of colonial rule.

Achebe makes Ezeulu's refusal to eat the sacred yams (based on a real incident) a salutary moment that paved the way for the spread of Christianity. Stories concerning the spread of Christianity have traditionally focussed on the facilitating agency of the colonisers. But Achebe points out the internal factors that were at work in Nigeria. Old practices like the *osu*, the throwing away of twins at birth led to conversions to Christianity. Achebe does not fail to mention the incentives offered by the church like education, monetary benefits and the promise of jobs in the British administration. *Arrow of God* presents a balanced version of how Christianity spread in colonies and the strengths and weaknesses of both Igbo traditional beliefs and Christianity.

Achebe also narrates how the British administration used Igbo practices to make inroads into the traditional order. By imposing indirect rule in Nigeria, the British ruled over a people who were already familiar with democratic traditions. There are administrators like Captain Winterbottom who live up to the white man's burden theory and works for the development of the district, whereas the new officers do not make any effort to understand the people. There are also the warrant chiefs and the local supervisors who turn corrupt and exploit their own people. Achebe narrates how local people worked as agents and perpetrated tyranny on their fellow men.

A postcolonial reading would limit the novel to a study of how the British made inroads into Igbo territory. But Achebe offers an alternative way of viewing this stage of colonisation. He presents a society which had created its own god, was self-sufficient in its

knowledge systems and was prosperous, and how all this was marred by the greed of a small minority of local people. It is this human side of the story that does not allow one to read *Arrow of God* as only a postcolonial novel.

No Longer at Ease, set at the threshold of independence, raises questions on Nigeria's readiness for independence. The story represents the economic and ideological nature of the transition. The widespread corruption in Nigeria is a central problem in Achebe's narrative. He mentions Nigeria for the first time in this novel. Achebe's view of Nigeria on the eve of independence does not present a hopeful future. The impending crisis is felt by Obi as well. As Achebe wonders about the fate of his nation, he makes a shift from the parameters of postcolonial discourse. He neither presents heroes who would lead the nation to freedom nor does he present a united nation, for the truth was that tribalism had begun to divide people along ethnic lines. This gloomy scenario presented by Achebe speaks of his commitment as a writer. He felt he had to show the real state of things and not create an ideal world which does not exist. By writing the story of Obi's failure and the crises faced by the nation, Achebe subverts the postcolonial norm of narrating the emergence of a new nation. He writes from a space where even the writer is uneasy with the prevailing situation of corruption and the erosion of values. Achebe presents a dismal picture of the things to come.

Chapter IV: Independence and After: *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*

The fourth chapter examines Achebe's later two novels which record the events that followed Nigeria's independence in 1960. Independence did not bring about a complete political integration as Nigeria was ravaged by a civil war, several military coups and long periods when there was no civilian rule. In *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe presents a fictionalised debate on nation states and reconstructs the troubled times in the narrative to address some key issues and concepts of nation such as

unjust power relations, problem of the integration of different tribes and communities, role of women, freedom of expression and press. These issues are not specific to the Nigerian situation but find a resonance in the outside world as well. Set in the fictionalised Nigerian city of Bori and the state of Kangan, the novels explore the problems faced by modern nations. Today the educated youths the world over are fighting an unequal war against corrupt political orders. Such individual efforts to fight the iniquities are brushed aside and brutally repressed.

A Man of the People examines Achebe's perspective on the future and meaning of the Nigerian nation and how the novel becomes a space to initiate debates on the success and failure of nations. The fictional coup in the novel had a prophetic quality to it as well. The novel can be read as Achebe's political critique on the future of Nigeria and a reaffirmation of his commitment to writing for a cause. As the novel is set after independence, Achebe could have placed the blame on the coloniser for all ills faced by the nation. But instead he directs his anger at his countrymen for their corruption, indifference and cynicism. The novel engages in a debate on issues facing the nation. More than the failure of the new leaders, the novel reflects the cynicism of the people. The novel raises questions about the viability of army rule instead of nation building which is a major post-independence task. After the departure of the colonisers, the new nation is at a loss to find a true leader, a man of the people.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe mentions "post-colonial" for the first time when he writes that it was "an absurd raffle-draw that apportioned the destinies of post-colonial African societies" (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 168). Achebe narrates the African conundrum through stories. In this novel the art of storytelling has been used powerfully. Achebe adapts the story of the tortoise and the leopard to show that in the unequal fight against the regime, Chris, Ikem and Beatrice were unexpectedly strong. It is through the stories of their

struggles that Achebe shows how writers can be a threat to those who try to curb the freedom of the human spirit. Achebe stands out in his role of the “novelist as teacher” because his stories empower the people in their fight against injustice. He shows how widespread is the suffering of his people. The narrative transcends its historical context and takes a fresh look at the nation and its problems.

Anthills of the Savannah deals with the issue of gender with characters like Beatrice and Elewa enacting the universal saga of human suffering. The ties that bind them are not based on the consideration of colour but on their ability to surmount the odds against them. In this novel Achebe portrays a dictator, Sam, who has his own fears, doubts and feeling of helplessness. He is tortured to death in a coup. Sam’s lack of contact with the people of Kangan reveals the attitude of the government that does not meet the aspirations of the people. Even in the “failure of ... rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed” (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 130-131) there exists “a stubborn sense of community” (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 131). The failure of the state is counter balanced by the deep sense of community in the people of Abazon and by the small gathering at the end of the novel to name Elewa’s child. These communities are what Benedict Anderson refers to.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The academic world continues to attach much importance to the coloniser’s departure and what happened later. Though Achebe occupies a prominent position in postcolonial literature, a re-reading of his novels shows that they are somewhat different. They are unique because they speak of the freedom of the human spirit which refuses to be crushed by any form of oppression, perpetrated either by the colonisers or the enemies from within. Half a

century after *Things Fall Apart* and his other novels, Achebe's works show that one no longer needs to countenance the 'post' situation and that theory has to be appropriated to one's cultural needs. The power of the written word is such that it can transcend boundaries and the limits imposed by theory. His works enable us to arrive upon answers to questions that were raised at the outset. Achebe's novels show that the issue of colonialism is relevant only to the extent of explaining the factors that stunted Nigeria's growth as a nation and sowed the seeds of corruption. He also contends colonial rule as a phase of Nigeria's historical past which despite being inhuman and unfortunate, cannot be erased. The study also shows that the 'empire' no longer needs 'to write back' because Achebe's writing is empowering and does not look out for a centre as the arbiter of correctness. His works have moved beyond the 'postcolonial' situation because the issues he deals with are not always a direct fallout of colonisation.

Achebe's novels are often read against Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939) and Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948). All his novels are also viewed as narrating the story of his people and his nation through the various stages of colonisation. These limited readings through the postcolonial lens do not seem relevant anymore. They may have been relevant at the time they were written or when comparative studies of texts by Conrad, Cary and Greene had been made. But one cannot continue to limit one's readings and should look out for new and empowering methods of reading.

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NOTES

¹ Sylvester O Osagie, Rev. of *Decolonisation Agnostics in Postcolonial Fiction*, by Chidi Okonkwo (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol.40, No.1 (2003) 99. Print.

² Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism" *American Historical Review* 99.5 (December 1994) 1475. Print.

³ Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality" *Race and Class* 36.3 (1995) 6-7. Print.

⁴ Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fiction* (London: Arnold, 1995) ix. Print.

⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972,) xvi. Print.

⁶ Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in the Modern African State", *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988) 19. Print.

⁷ Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1973) 2. Print.

⁸ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, interview, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Website* n.d. Web. 21 November 2007. <<http://www.halfofayellowsun.com/html>>.

⁹ Chinua Achebe, "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?" *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* 1988 (New York: Anchor Books, 1990) 163. Print.

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**CRITIQUING THE POSTCOLONIAL CONSTRUCT: A RE-READING OF
CHINUA ACHEBE'S MAJOR NOVELS**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.**



RANJANA DAS

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR – DR. MOON MOON MAZUMDAR

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG MEGHALAYA INDIA**

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. Ranjana Das, hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Critiquing the Postcolonial Construct: A Re-reading of Chinua Achebe’s Major Novels**” is the record of the research work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Moon Moon Mazumdar, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted to any other University/ Institute for the award of any degree whatsoever.

This thesis is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Ranjana Das
Ranjana Das

(Research Scholar)

[Signature]
Dr. Moon Moon Mazumdar

(Research Supervisor)

Associate Professor in English
North Eastern Hill University
Shillong - 793022

[Signature]
Dr. Moon Moon Mazumdar

(Head of the Department)



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Shillong
2010

Ranjana Das

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Achebe seems to be concerned with those forms of narratives which ...can speak to future generations with new forms of narration that might have the power to liberate us from the circle of our post-colonial moment.

- Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (1991, 131)

The act of critiquing the postcolonial construct requires one to address and examine various questions relating to the term 'postcolonial' and its use in literature. Is the issue of colonialism still relevant at all, since all postcolonial societies have achieved political independence? Does the empire still need to write back to the centre long after the dismantling of imperial structures? How long do we need to emphasise that one event in the political history of a nation? Do writers from former colonies still need to rewrite\ reassert their past and resist imperial constructs of their people and their history? Or, perhaps should they be constrained to limit their themes to those that owe their genesis and currency to colonial domination? How long can one countenance the 'post' situation in postcolonial theory?

Over the last few decades the idea that postcolonial theory and its praxis have to be appropriated to our cultural needs has gained ground. Since then postcolonial studies have gained institutional prominence in academic circles and new cultural theorists of post structural and postmodern sensibilities have emerged. Their critical positions have been both

engaging and provocative. According to Sylvester O Osagie, this common theoretical persuasion "...threatens to undermine the authenticity of the contradictions generated by the colonial impulse."¹ There have been debates on questions related to the hegemony of western discourses and the possibilities of resistance. Attempts have been made to intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, and ideas have been generated on bridging their hiatus. Postcolonial studies, as Jeremy Hawthorn says, "...has created institutional space for the study of a wide variety of non-canonical literatures, and has given academics...a focus for the development of new areas of study."²

The term 'postcolonial', with or without the hyphen, is used to refer to the period after independence in the former colonies, but it also covers the experience of colonialism shared by pre-independence and post-independence societies. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin use the term to cover "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day."³ They also suggest it as the "most appropriate term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted."⁴ The hyphenated form of the term clearly refers to the period after colonialism or independence but is not free from the 'colonial'. Bill Ashcroft in his essay, "On the Hyphen in Post-Colonial" says that it represents:

...an increasingly diverging set of assumptions, emphases, strategies and practices in post-colonial reading and writing. The hyphen puts an emphasis on the discursive and material effects of the historical 'fact' of colonialism.⁵

The enduring effect of the colonial period is suggested by the hyphen which "...signifies difference, resistance, opposition ...it also carves out a space on the post-colonial continuum."⁶ According to Leela Gandhi:

...some critics invoke the hyphenated form 'post-colonial' as a decisive temporal marker of the decolonising process, others fiercely query the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath – on the ground that the postcolonial conditions inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. Accordingly it is argued that the unbroken term 'postcolonial' is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences.⁷

Postcolonial discourse now operates within a large field of study which includes historiography, history of law, anthropology, political economy, philosophy, art history and psychoanalysis. Though diverse in character, it offers a specific critique of the imperialist subject. It is seen by Leela Gandhi as a “disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the colonial past.”⁸ Postcolonial theorists, according to Sally McWilliams share an attempt to “...unweave the complex structures put in place by colonialist rule...revealing the complex interactions of coloniser and colonised... to discuss how subjects are constituted now that the colonial powers no longer have overt political control.”⁹ It acknowledges and theorises the ways in which societies and their subjects are positioned differently and unequally in relation to colonialism which ensures continued problematising of the term 'postcolonial.' Peter Brooker suggests that the prefix 'post' is a “...common attempt to describe a process of change, involving both continuity and new departures.”¹⁰ Postcolonialism to Brooker is “...the study of the ideological and cultural impact of western colonialism and in particular of its aftermath – whether as a continuing influence (neocolonialism) or in the emergence of newly articulated independent national and individual identities.”¹¹

Postcolonialism has been shaped by the study of imperialism and its aftermath, where colonialism remains the decisive condition and experience. The 'postcolonial' seems to describe the second half of the twentieth century in general as the aftermath period of

colonialism and is used to signify a position against imperialism and Eurocentricism. Research in postcolonial studies is growing because postcolonial critique allows for a wide-ranging investigation into power relations in various contexts. The formation of empire, the impact of colonisation on history, economy, science, culture, cultural productions, feminism, marginalised people and contemporary economic context are some broad topics in the field.

Postcolonial literature describes a wide array of experiences. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define postcolonial theory as discussion of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe... and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being.”¹² They suggest that the term should be restricted to signify after colonialism, since all “post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved the problem.”¹³ Postcolonial Literature is often self-consciously a literature of otherness and resistance, and is written out of the specific local experience. It has emerged out of an experience of colonisation, asserted by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power and emphasised by its difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre. A major feature of postcolonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement leading to a crisis of identity between self and place resulting from migration, enslavement and the concern with myths. It intervenes in the subject by resisting tendencies to homogenise postcolonial experiences and draws attention to cultural specifics.

As the term implies, one of the central features of postcolonial theory is an examination of the impact and continuing legacy of the European conquest, colonisation and domination of non-European land, people and cultures. Central to this critical examination is an analysis of the inherent ideas of European superiority over non-European people and cultures and an attempt to uncover the damaging effects of such ideas on the identity of the colonised. A key

feature of this theoretical examination is the analysis of the role played by representation in perpetuating notions of European superiority.

Theorists of postcolonialism like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, have been influenced by the post 1960s intellectual movements of structuralism and post structuralism and stress the importance of concepts of representation, identity and history as central to postcolonial theory. As this study concentrates on the African situation, postcolonial criticism pertaining to African and Nigerian contexts which can be traced in the works of Homi K Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong`o will be discussed later in the chapter.

In postcolonial theory, literary activities in the countries which were once colonised are linked to their history and political condition. This approach privileges the colonial experience over all the others and gives the feeling that the present has been solely brought about by (the accident of) European colonisation. This is a misleading approach which situates the colonial experience almost at the beginning of a nation's history, ignoring the long precolonial past of African and Asian countries. Though postcolonialism claims to celebrate diversity, it sometimes ends up popularising ethnic culture as the 'other.' This creation of the 'other' is capitalised into a valuable intellectual commodity where the critic can pretend to speak for the margin while occupying a space that is more close to the centre. On the whole postcolonial theory creates a monotype homogenised sphere locating upon the literature of the privileged rather than of protest.

This has allowed literary expressions to be determined by the political position of the narrator and the protagonist. Literary themes are based on the quest for identity and culture practiced in a society that has been changed forever by the experience of colonisation. The creative interpretation of history has been seen as a process of recovering or a writing back into a history others have written by rewriting it. Attempts are made to interrogate

misrepresentations of colonial accounts by restructuring the past for the present and using the text as a site for cultural control on account of being motivated by heightened awareness of power relations between Western and Third World cultures. Literature is always the means of giving form and utterance to the despairs and hopes of a nation's history as it moves from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence and from independence to the tasks of reconstruction. The process does not come to an end with political liberation and the task of nation building. The literature resulting from this process stands on its own and does not have to rely on borrowed concepts. Though the colonial situation had led to imitation in its early stages, but as the identity of the colonised gradually asserted itself, it took to creating its own form, structure, syntax and style in all genres of literature.

An examination of literary works on colonial themes seems to suggest that literary activities cease to have much significance at the stage where a nation gains independence. The only task ahead then becomes nation building. The term 'postcolonial' moreover does not let go of the colonial hangover and thus themes do not go beyond the limitations imposed by the term. But if at this stage the frontiers are opened up, it would only help in enriching narratives. Geoffrey Bennington says that, "Frontiers are articulations ..."¹⁴ as they do not just close but also open to an outside world. And opening up the frontiers calls for an end to the 'post' situation.

Gyan Prakash suggests that postcolonial critique "...does not enjoy a panoptic distance from colonial history but exists as an aftermath, as an after – after being worked over by colonialism."¹⁵ This continuation, according to Aijaz Ahmad "... becomes a transhistorical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the world or another."¹⁶ The post period of history (after colonialism) appears to be an unmarked and endless period prompting one to wonder when the condition would end. Postcolonial critics

have been dissatisfied with the attempt at periodising history in accordance with the terms laid down by western imperialism. Aijaz Ahmad states that:

It is worth remarking ... that in periodising our history in the triadic terms of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial, the conceptual apparatus of 'postcolonial criticism' privileges as primary the role of colonialism as the principle of structuration in that history, so that all that came before colonialism becomes its own prehistory and whatever comes after can only be lived as infinite aftermath.¹⁷

This "infinite aftermath" which does not liberate literary activities from its confines can only end when writers take alternative positions towards national and international issues and cultures; for literature must be written, and stories have to be told. As Jonathan Culler says,

Literature is a paradoxical institution, because to create literature is to write according to existing formulas ... but it is also to flout those conventions, to go beyond them.

Literature is an institution that lives by exposing and criticising its own limits, by testing what will happen if one writes differently.¹⁸

Writers need to go beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis without making the colonial encounter the primary structure of history. A new discursive space has to be created with discourses that produce national cultures by moving out of historical imbalances and cultural inequalities engendered by the colonial encounter. Individual absorption of local influences has to be written not only against the white gaze, but outside it, so as to claim its irrelevance. Writers need to be freed from the past. The need to look upon one place and group as the arbiter of correctness is no longer the only "politically correct" or obvious choice. The control exerted by colonial administration on thought and human relations have to be shaken off as the scope of writing has to be widened, frontiers redrawn, issues redefined and structures freshly erected. Judie Newman's view is that, "When colonialism ends, writers must have the right to write about trees or love."¹⁹

And it is this right to write beyond the confines of the postcolonial which calls for an alternative mode of critique which will be outside the parameters of postcolonial discourse, whose cultural choices will be more accommodating and which will emerge from culturally rich contexts. In such writings western ways of knowledge production and its dissemination in the past and present will become an area of study aimed at seeking out alternative means of expression to yoke together a diverse range of experiences, cultures and problems.

Chidi Okonkwo draws attention to the literature created in former colonies and offers his own critique. Okonkwo re-reads and redefines literature of formerly colonised people and views them as strategy for resistance and also as an expression of their perception of history and the universe that seek affirmation through the “reconstruction of the precolonial universe.”²⁰ Okonkwo talks of “an universalist, homogenising discourse”²¹ which integrates all marginalised literatures and empowers marginalised people and their cultures by “asserting the validity of their ... cultural products and world views in opposition to the universalist claims of imperial power.”²² A new reading of these texts is a reflection of the extent to which scholars are drawn to the subject.

The concern of writers with the state of affairs in former colonies can be understood when we narrow down our focus of study to the literature from Africa and particularly to that of Nigeria. The brutal encounter of the African world with the European colonisers is epitomised in the colonial phenomena. A painful colonial period whose wounds hurt deep and long is seen by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze as:

...the indescribable crisis disproportionately suffered and endured by the African people in their tragic encounter with the European world from the beginning of the fifteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century – a period marked by horror and violence of the transatlantic slave trade, the imperial occupation of most parts of Africa and the forced administrations of

its people, and the resilient and enduring ideologies and practices of European cultural superiority (ethnocentrism) and racial supremacy (racism) which goes beyond the brief seventy years between the 1884 Berlin Conference, which partitioned and legitimised European occupation of Africa, and the early 1960s, when most African countries attained constitutional decolonisation.²³

Colonisation affected not only the political and economic spheres of life, but also changed the religious and cultural perspectives of African people. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Europeans acquired an active colonial interest in Africa. Though it continued for only half a century, it left behind a lasting residue. The coloniser achieved political and cultural domination simultaneously, which disrupted all aspects of daily life of the indigenous people, wrenching them from the roots of traditional culture. Yet the sufferings endured by the African people did not kill their creative spirit. Being artists at heart, the changes and sufferings made them more committed towards their creative works. Known as the 'Dark Continent' to the western world which had failed to perceive that this world did not need any western intervention, the Europeans went on to introduce their language and literature to the Africans ignoring the rich oral tradition of the people found in myths, legends, folktales, proverbs and riddles.

Africa has a long literary tradition, although very little was written down until the twentieth century. In the absence of widespread literacy, African literature was primarily oral and passed on from one generation to the next. In colonies where education was introduced by Christian missionaries, literary works were written in English, French and Portuguese. African Literature in English has been influenced to a remarkable extent by the continent's long tradition of oral artistry. Before the spread of literacy in the twentieth century, texts were preserved in memory and performed or recited. They were a source of entertainment, instruction and commemoration.

The foremost among prose forms in African oral literature is the myth. African myths explain the creation of the universe, the activities of the gods at the beginning of creation, the essence of all creatures, and their interrelationships. After myths, come legends which deal with events that occurred after the era of the gods and heroic feats such as establishing dynasties or preventing disasters. The folktale, another prose form, features human beings and animals which present a social commentary and instruction and serve as a means of affirming group values. A trickster tale is the most popular one which features a small but witty animal, cunning enough to protect itself from larger and powerful animals. Examples of animal tricksters are Anansi, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; A`ja`pa, a tortoise in Yoruba folklore of Nigeria; and Sungara, a hare found in central and east African folklore.

African cultures possess a rich repertoire of epigrams, including proverbs and riddles. In many African societies effective speech and social success depend on a good command of proverbs. These treasured sayings convey the wisdom of ages and serve as a reliable authority in arguments or discussions. Closely related to proverbs are riddles as both are based on principles of analogy that require the listener to decipher the intended meaning. African folklore stress on three functional aspects – practical wisdom, moral range and didactic value. Despite the major transformations that have taken place in Africa in the last few centuries, people have remained in close contact with traditional cultures and institutions and oral traditions continue to be a part of their lives. Oral traditions are useful resources for making writings on Africa authentic which further help in the reconstruction of traditional life and in the understanding of Africa.

African literature of the twentieth century has to be primarily seen in relation to the forces that have changed this traditional society. Postcolonial African writers have made an enormous contribution to world literature. These writers examine such issues as emerging

identities in the postcolonial climate, neocolonialism, new forms of oppression, cultural and political hegemonies, language appropriation, and economic instability which have elicited increasing critical attention. According to Eustace Palmer, the African novel "...evolved not from the western novel, but from the well-established tradition of African prose writing and the even more ancient traditions of oral literature."²⁴ Edward Sackey further adds that African writers "...boldly willed themselves to break the rules of the conventional novel form and to show that African literature is reactive. It is a literature that is defensive of the African heritage."²⁵ It must also be remembered that Africa's oral tradition is an integral part of African life whose structures have been appropriated to the needs of a written literary tradition. This integration into the written tradition not only rekindles interest but also strengthens it as an instrument of defence to challenge western misconceptions about Africa. Edward Sackey says that this integration "...shows a tremendous leap forward in African imaginative works of art, from orality to literacy and from tradition to innovation."²⁶

And this calls for a re-reading of post-independence writings from African nations, not as postcolonial texts but as Literature from Africa, the objectives of which would be to look beyond the restrictions of postcolonial discourse. This shift in the focus of study is to see how writings after independence which might have begun as an attempt at decolonisation, moved beyond to offer an alternative critique of the postcolonial construct. The past (the period of colonisation included) is a collective legacy of the African people, and not just certain fragments of it. Colonisation is a great historical, political and sociological fact for African writers which cannot be ignored, nor can the postcolonial situation be overlooked. Colonisation is one historical moment that disrupted the continent's natural development, but, the disturbing times instilled a deeper sense of commitment in the writers who could write their stories even during such troubled days.

African literature in English presents the conflicts and contradictions within the African society and also provides a glimpse of the future as writers interpret contemporary realities. Kolawole Ogungbesan views it as "... the writer's search for an appropriate response to the political moment of his society."²⁷ Accessible to the readers of English anywhere in the world and yet with distinct sensibilities and concerns, these writings project local experiences globally, and secure an identity through images that had not been turned into stereotypes by the imperialists. It is important for writers to alternate histories, put alternative pictures of the world to the ones the world would have one believe and thereby to become adversaries of that process, and threaten a view of the world that is false.

This shift from colonial and postcolonial themes has been justified by Niven Alastair as:

Things have fallen apart creatively. The centre has not held because there is no longer a colonial need to look to one place as the arbiter of correctness. It is all about the shift away from the notion of centrality. Far from attempting to impose unity among diversity, to focus an Eurocentric focus on many different cultures, it recognises a multiplicity of equally valid centres, but then proceeds to evaluate their interconnections and converging their coincidences of history and their individual absorption of local influences.²⁸

What began as an urgent task for writers to contribute to the revision of history, went on to offer a creative interpretation of history. And this could only be possible when they could get rid of the vestiges of colonialism. This has been suggested by Shatto Arthur Gakwandi as:

We must go back to the sources of our values, not to confine ourselves to them, but rather to draw up a critical inventory in order to get rid of archaic stultifying elements, the fallaciousness and alienating foreign elements brought in by colonialism, and to retain only those elements which are still valid, bringing them up to date, and enriching

them with the benefits of the scientific, technical and social revolutions so as to bring them into line with what is modern and universal.²⁹

Getting rid of colonialism calls for a deep search into one's own past to find stories which have remained unaffected by one brief and yet turbulent historical event. These stories find a place in the African novel where the past becomes a rich site of culture. They help in locating other issues that concern writers, who become a "voice of the debates of the century concerning cultural conflict, religious and indirectly, political conflict."³⁰ C.P Lloyd says that the African novel "has developed as a response to the far-reaching social revolution of the twentieth century on the continent."³¹ This concern with contemporary issues has led to interventions in the postcolonial construct by writers who "interpreted contemporary realities and proposed their own visions of the future."³²

While interpreting contemporary realities writers have been able to preserve an identity that is distinctively African, that makes their writing a part of world literature and yet sets them apart. The authors of *Writing and Africa*, Mpalive-Hangson Msiska and Paul Hyland say that "...the need to preserve a distinct cultural identity has always been accompanied by the simultaneous incorporation and rejection of a colonising alterity or modernity."³³ This has led to examination of culture or theoretical projection onto a text. According to G.D.Killam, "Modern African writing has been concerned exclusively with the reality of African life."³⁴ And though the colonial period and its aftermath are a part of African reality, writers have looked beyond this event to create an African identity. Their themes, as Killam says:

...stem from a group past with its ambiguous and generally bitter experience of colonialism, and from a group present which seeks to define the relevance of the colonial experience to the present. They stem further from the contact, in some cases collision, both historical and immediate between the traditional and/or mythic pasts of various ethnic groups and their systems and values, and those imported from Europe.

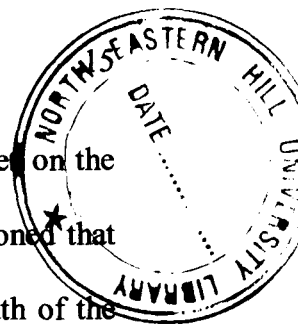
They result from a relatively brief nevertheless intense experience with separate and dominating institutions – political, social, educational and cultural – and express a desire to modify these to suit local and national needs by incorporating what is valuable in the colonial legacy whilst retaining an African identity.³⁵

At the First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Sorbonne, 1956, Leopold Senghor declared, “African literature is politically committed.”³⁶ This sense of commitment to issues related to the political situation of the different African countries has led writers to situate events in their narration within contexts of the historical and the political conditions. The attainment of independence by many African countries and the resultant changes in the political atmosphere of these countries influenced themes of narratives, giving rise to a form of the novel which seeks to interpret the present in terms of the human characteristics of African communities without reference to the past.

All twentieth century intellectual movements in Africa have been associated with nationalism as the intelligentsia searched for a new place in the world for the African. Ben Enwonwu observes that the “...present generation of African artists have to face their political problems, and try to look at art through politics.”³⁷ This has been further strengthened by the common heritage and common destiny shared by Africans. At the Second Congress of Negro Artists and Writers in Rome, 1959, it was stated that –

The negro writers and artists regard it as their essential task and sacred mission to bring their cultural activity within the scope of the great movement for liberation of their individual peoples, without losing sight of the solidarity which should unite all individuals and peoples who are struggling for liquidation of colonization and its consequences as well as all those who are fighting throughout the world for progress and liberty.³⁸

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At this point it would be appropriate to take a look at critics and their discourse on the postcolonial with emphasis on the African context. Here it also needs to be mentioned that discourses on African literature in English usually cover literatures from only south of the Sahara. The literatures of North Africa are not included because North African cultures share greater affinities with the Arab world than with sub-Saharan people and cultures. The literature of South Africa is also excluded as it is more closely linked with the European literary heritage.

The western construction of Africa as the 'Dark Continent' ignored its historical origins that date back to antiquity and it became a dominant western stereotype of the continent in the nineteenth century, which is the period of European colonial expansion in Africa. Colonialism in Africa undervalued the African literary tradition and failed to recognise the extent of their autonomy, particularly in the periods before and after colonisation. Although the colonisation of Africa began centuries earlier, it was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that European economic and political rivalries resulted in the appropriation of African territory that came to be known as the 'Scramble for Africa'. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 established 'spheres of influence' that seemed to legitimise the control of large sections of the continent by European powers and in turn provided an impetus to more expansionist designs, resulting in a redrawing of the African map. This had repercussions in the post-independence period, as such political cartography imposed borders that cut across traditional tribal boundaries bringing about traumatic experiences.

Independence did not bring an end to the traumatic experience. Decolonisation involved a process of change bringing about economic, cultural and psychological transformations. In cultural contexts, the privileging of the Western has led to contesting such hegemony. Movements in Africa like Negritude and Pan-Africanism are two such intellectual

movements which challenged western cultural hegemony and went on to influence African literary discourses.

Négritude, a black consciousness movement originated among African students in Paris in the 1930s. It sought to assert pride in African cultural values in order to contest the inferior status accorded to them in European colonial and cultural discourses. The movement's most important figures were Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire who were inspired by the Harlem Renaissance's efforts to promote the richness of African cultural identity. Négritude emphasised that African consciousness is different from the European and that all people of African descent share certain common characteristics. Négritude, in the history of Africa can be seen as a phase in the development of African consciousness.

Pan-Africanism believes in the unity of all Africans and is a political movement that seeks a united Africa. The movement was founded at the first Pan-African Congress in London, 1900. The movement gained momentum in the 1930s when Italy invaded Ethiopia. After World War II, Pan-Africanism was associated with the independence struggle of Sub-Saharan African nations. In the post-independence era, the movement seeks to promote co-operation among African nations.

These developments in the continent influenced discourses on culture and literature. African writers with a first hand knowledge of their own people, cultures, languages and problems set out to present their views. Works of critics like Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe who are arguably among the most prominent, need to be studied for a better understanding of the African context which would further help in critiquing the postcolonial construct.

To begin with Frantz Fanon, who has greatly influenced postcolonial theorists as well as writers, draws his critique on a broad range of disciplines, which include philosophy, psychology, social anthropology and literature. Fanon's works can be divided into three

sections – the search for a black identity, the struggle against colonialism, and the process of decolonisation. His work on black identity was formed through his experiences in psychiatry, deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, which is illustrated in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). This work can be seen as a pioneering example of psychoanalytical theory being used as a critical tool in political theoretical writing. Here Fanon suggests that colonialism with its concepts of white racial superiority has created a sense of division and alienation in the identity of non-white colonised people. The imposed history, culture, language, customs and beliefs of the coloniser further created a strong sense of inferiority in the colonised subject, leading to the construction of stereotypes presented as primitive and uncivilised. Fanon's writing rejects such representations and calls for the creation of subjects that would reach out for the universal. In this book he presents his desire to go beyond history as he writes, "I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and my future."³⁹

The second stage of Fanon's critical works is the struggle against colonialism, which grew out of his active involvement in the Algerian war of independence. Fanon's contribution to the struggle against colonialism involves the claiming back of history by the colonised from the versions produced by the colonisers. He stresses the importance of culture and representation of the past as central to the creation of new subjects which are necessary in the post-independence era. The emphasis on history can be found in Fanon's most famous and widely read work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), a passionate and revolutionary work of political critique and a cornerstone of postcolonial theory. Fanon writes:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.⁴⁰

The process of decolonisation relates to the third stage of Fanon's critical activity. Along with the reclamation and reconstruction of their own history and culture as the basis for the new postcolonial forms of nation and national identity, Fanon also discusses the role of the middle-class intelligentsia in the new nations. He says the educated must be aware that their education is based on the ideologies and beliefs of the colonisers and so they must take care not to reproduce the inherently racist concepts while rebuilding the nation.

Fanon's works set the stage for development of political consciousness in colonised nations and with the liberation of most African countries, his works have continued to influence spheres of culture and literature. Fanon proposes a "national literature"⁴¹ engaged in the formation of national consciousness and committed to the struggle for national liberation, armed with the unconditional affirmation of African culture. The formation of a national consciousness began from the rediscovery of the African identity with its beginnings in the rich past. Fanon writes that,

...it was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity.⁴²

Fanon's critique does not confine itself to Africa but seeks an international dimension as he writes, "National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension."⁴³

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is another critic who dreams of a true communal home for all Africans which would re-establish the communal character of the old culture on new plans and move on to create a pan-tribal, pan-African and Pan-Third World. And to achieve this, Ngugi considers education as a catalyst to development, the moulder of new leaders who will guide through the changes of the world. His essays in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (1972), emphasise the important social functions of literature. Ngugi believes that a writer lives within history and is shaped by it, and

literature is "...primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships."⁴⁴ He goes on to say that the African writer was born on the crest of an anti-colonial upheaval and worldwide revolutionary ferment. The consequences of that history of inequality and oppression made writers more assertive of Africa. In *Moving the Centre - The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993), Ngugi writes:

It was Africa explaining itself, speaking for itself and interpreting the past. It was an Africa rejecting the images of its past as drawn by the artists of imperialism. The writer even flaunted his right to use the language of the former colonial master anyway he liked ... to subvert the master.⁴⁵

With an intense sense of progressive social commitment it called for writers to share the responsibility to reshape a distorted history and a misguided society. *Moving the Centre* calls for a moving away from western structures and locations of power, where Ngugi writes:

Moving the centre in the two senses – between nations and within nations – will contribute to the freeing of world cultures from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender. In this sense, I am an unrepentant universalist. For I believe that while retaining its roots in regional and national individuality, true humanism with its universal reaching out can flower among the peoples of the earth.⁴⁶

In the postcolonial period, this moving away becomes even more important as the site of resistance changes with the end of colonial domination. Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) campaigns for African culture and African writers to write in their language which would make cultural and literary productions relevant to the mass of the people. Here he writes, "Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control,

through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relation to the world.”⁴⁷ To break free from this control, Ngugi set an example by first writing in his own language, Gikuyu, and then translating them into English. His novels present pictures of Kenya from the 1930s to the contemporary days, the struggle against western domination, and the Mau Mau rebellion.

Language was a powerful tool used by the coloniser to assert a linguistic hierarchy and suppress the traditional oral literature which Ngugi argues strongly against:

Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next...The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized.⁴⁸

His views emphasise the important social functions of literature, a view shared by many African writers.

Wole Soyinka, the first African writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1986) is acknowledged as a distinguished contemporary critic of postcolonial African literature besides being a novelist and a dramatist. Though there are no doubts that the Nobel Prize was for his plays, the prize can be seen as a recognition of the whole African literary tradition by the world outside Africa. Soyinka is a chronicler of his traditional Yoruban culture as well as the turbulent history of Nigeria, who views literature as an agent of social change. His commitment to promoting human rights in Nigeria, the humour in his writings and his portrayal of political greed and oppression after independence add a universal significance to his works. As an honest observer of his land and people, he calls for African artists not to bask in the nostalgia of their past while neglecting the urgent problems of the present. He writes, “The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past.”⁴⁹

In 1967, at the African Writers' Conference held in Stockholm, Soyinka in his lecture urged African writers to end their preoccupation with the past and focus on those forces which threaten to disintegrate African society. Soyinka suggested that writers had to move beyond the sins of the imperialists and write about the chaotic state of affairs in African countries. When Soyinka delivered this lecture, most African countries had become independent; the first military coups had taken place in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone; Congo had had a civil war and the Nigerian Civil war was beginning. African society was still trying to come to terms with the turbulent consequences of colonisation that followed the end of imperialist occupation. Soyinka pointed out that the African writer had to be sensitive to the changes in his community and act as the conscience of his nation. New values had to be discovered to stand against the prevalent corruption, incompetence, nepotism, social inequality and debasement of standards in their countries. If a writer could face up the truth, he could make his readers see them as well. This called for writers to be socially committed and involved in the affairs of their society.

According to Eustace Palmer, "The consequence of Soyinka's call is that in the later 1960s and early 1970s the focus in African writing shifted from historical, cultural and sociological analysis to penetrating social comment and social satire."⁵⁰ Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965) are two examples of this shift in the African novel. While Achebe's novel presents the political scenario of post-independence Nigeria, Soyinka exposes the decadence of African society.

Myth, Literature and the African World (1976), Soyinka's collection of critical essays inspired by Yoruba mythology and cosmology, presents the artist's role in society as equivalent to that of Ogun, the Yoruba god of creativity. Soyinka upholds the values of the African world when he writes:

Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other 'world' is unique. It possesses, however, in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity. To ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent.⁵¹

Writers from Africa have been inspired to pursue this simple route which leads to the rich world of Africa, never discovered by the conquerors and thus it leaves the responsibility on the African writer to retrace it.

As African writers began to write their stories, they had to write about their newly independent nations. And as concepts of the nation undergoes changes with theoretical inventions, it would be helpful to take a brief note of critics like Homi K Bhabha and Benedict Anderson. Postcolonial debates over 'nation', 'nationalism' and 'cultural nationalism' are concerned with the creation of cultural and national identity cutting across differences of race, class, gender and cultural traditions. Bhabha argues that cultural identities cannot be pre-given, irreducible and scripted, nor can coloniser and colonised be viewed as separate entities defined independently. He suggests that the negotiation of cultural identity involves continual exchange of cultural performances that produce representations of cultural difference. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha writes:

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformations.⁵²

The space of transformation between culture and historical periods referred to as the 'liminal' space by Bhabha, also extends to the space between theory and application. Bhabha's 'liminality' leads to a re-thinking "the realm of the beyond" that until now has been understood only in terms of the prefix "post: postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism."⁵³ This rethinking has been due to "the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion."⁵⁴ Liminality in postcolonial theory identifies the space where cultural transformation can take place. Bhabha uses psychoanalysis and deconstruction to deal with postcolonial identity, its boundaries, temporalities and movements and the liminal space opens the way,

...to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalistic histories of the 'people.'⁵⁵

Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) narrates stories of the nation from different perspectives and its effect on narratives and discourses. Narrations are central to nations as there are always stories of a nation's origins, myths of founding fathers and genealogies of heroes. Bhabha views the nation as an ambivalent construction which, he says, "...haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality."⁵⁶ He goes on to add that the "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of

a national culture.”⁵⁷ Bhabha’s critique of nation and narration has been influenced by Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Anderson’s influential work advances the view that nations are narrative constructs that evolved from the fictions of ‘imagined communities.’

Anti-imperialist resistances of the twentieth century resulted in not just the formation of new independent nations but also found expression in various literary texts where writers have used the nation as a metaphor and emphasised on the role of the community in the construction and contestation of the nation. Anderson’s book examines the creation and global spread of the imagined communities of nationality from a small beginning, where the idea of a nation grew when a significant number of people in a community considered or imagined themselves to have formed a nation. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined community because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁵⁸ He also adds that the nation is imagined as “both inherently limited and sovereign”⁵⁹ It is limited because “even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite...boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” and sovereign because “the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.”⁶⁰

The nation is imagined as a community because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail...the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship...it is this fraternity that makes it possible ...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings.”⁶¹ Anderson writes that the imagined world is visible in everyday life where “..fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.”⁶²

Anderson also says that “print capitalism...made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”⁶³ Anderson’s definition of nations as communities and the use of the print to reach out to the people has found expression in the works of many African writers, whose works are not just literary creations but assume a greater role of involving the readers in the process of narrating the times they are living in.

This relation between writers and readers, artists and society can be seen in Nigerian novelists, which has led to interventions in the postcolonial construct as writers have been able to create a distinctive literature from Nigeria. Their works can be read without placing them in the category of Postcolonial Literature, as their narrations have moved beyond the situation created by the coloniser’s departure. Their moving beyond brings an end to the ‘post’ conditions and liberates their writing from the confines of a term that does not seem justified to be used decades after independence. This also confirms their commitment to writing which they have been able to pursue even during the disturbing times their country has gone through.

Nigeria, along with Benin, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Togo constitute West Africa. This oil-rich region has been witness to economic exploitations, ruthless wars, redrawing of maps and colonial rule. The Berlin Conference divided the West African countries between different European powers who ruled till the 1960s when most of them gained independence.[The history of colonial rule and the events that followed Nigeria’s independence will be discussed in the chapters on the colonial encounter (chapter III) and independence and after (chapter IV)] The chain of events that follow imperialist occupation of a land creates a deep impact on the mind of the people as they try to preserve their land and self. Writing then becomes a way of fighting back the invaders and gradually of preserving their heritage. Nigerian writers have moved beyond this

in creating a distinctively national ethos. The Nigerian situation has led to the emergence of a national literature, as discourses that emerge in moments of historical transformation produce a national culture. A national literature emerges when a community's cultural collective existence is called into question and it tries to put together the reasons for its existence.

Nigerian writers write against a particular historical tradition and a national context to present their accumulated spiritual experience which also lends a universal appeal to their works. *Nigerian novelists achieve universality through a sensitive interpretation of their culture.* They use their African background to explore the human conditions of pride and power, defeat and dejection, love and loss. Though firmly set in Africa, they are universal in nature, as Bernth Lindfors says:

...accomplished works of art communicate in such a universal human idiom that they are capable of transcending their particular time and place and speaking to all mankind.⁶⁴

Nigerian writings were not entirely influenced by the English novel, or the historical events resulting out of the colonial encounter. Instead, the Onitsha Market Literature and the literature of the Biafran War have gone a long way in shaping Nigerian literature.

Onitsha Market literature emerged in the late 1940s as a popular form of pamphlet writing. It took its name from the town of Onitsha which stands on the Niger in Eastern Nigeria and can be marked as a liminal space where various segments of society met, cultural interaction took place, language forms ranging from Igbo, Yoruba to pidgin were brought together leading to cultural productions. Onitsha pamphlets were easily accessible to literate Nigerians and facilitated the emergence of writers like Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe. Achebe in his essay "Onitsha, Gift of the Niger" writes:

Onitsha was always the market-place of the world. In its ancient emporium the people of Olu and Igbo – the riverain folk and the dwellers of the hinterland forests – met in

guarded, somewhat uneasy commerce; old-time farmers met new, urban retail traders of known and outlandish wares. Onitsha was the original site of evangelical dialogue between proselytising Christianity and the Igbo religion; between strange-looking toeless harbingers of white rule and (at first) an amused and indulgent black population that assembled in their hundreds to enjoy the alien spectacle. It was finally the occult no-man's land between river-spirits and mundane humans.⁶⁵

Situated at the threshold, it became a space for cultural productions, influencing the works of writers like Achebe as David Carroll writes, "Onitsha seems to epitomise sharply for Achebe the basic features of life which traditional Igbo society acknowledged and sought to accommodate within its own structures and *mores*. And the persistent features of this social system are clearly related to the qualities customarily associated with the Igbo – his individualism and ambition, his tolerance and egalitarianism, his down-to-earth practicality and mistrust of authority."⁶⁶

The Biafran War or the Nigerian Civil War was another event for the development of Nigerian writing as it led to the production of many works which recognised the persistent problems facing the newly independent nation. Biafran authors include Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Isidore Okpewho whose writings express the commitment to the revolutionary struggle of the people. The artistic responses to the civil war became a dominant and recurrent area of concern in contemporary Nigerian literature. The civil war stands as a historic experience of a whole generation of Nigerians and the literature of the Biafran war, according to Arthur Ravenscroft, "...symbolises a unique thematical development in modern African writing...continues the tradition of professing the right of man to live in freedom and to fight injustice."⁶⁷

This sense of concern and commitment to problems faced by the nation continues to be reflected in the works of the Nigerian novelists. Novelists like Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Cyprian Ekwensi, Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie universalise the Nigerian conditions and this liberates them from writing on themes which are within the parameters of postcolonial discourse.

To begin with Wole Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, though more famous as a dramatist, his two novels, *The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1973) analyse the social conditions of Africa. He makes extensive use of Yoruba myth, ritual and cosmogony in a wide cultural perspective with poetic overtones. *The Interpreters* present a comprehensive exposure of the decadence of modern Africa. The novel begins with five interpreters of society in a night club, uses a number of flashbacks to reveal the characters and then the narration moves forward. Soyinka presents all sections of society through his characters. They are Sagoe, a university educated journalist; Egbo, a foreign service official; Sekoni, an engineer and sculptor; Kola, an artist and art teacher and Bandele, a university lecturer. Though all of them have had a western education, they have managed to retain their African consciousness. What also qualify them as interpreters of society are their honesty, sincerity, idealism, concern for truth and justice, aversion to corruption, snobbery and hypocrisy. According to Eustace Palmer, Soyinka represents through them "...the brutal masses, the aimless intellectuals, the affected and hypocritical university dons, the vulgar and corrupt businessmen, the mediocre civil servants, the illiterate politicians and the incompetent journalists"⁶⁸ who constitute not just the African but modern nation states as well. Like Soyinka's plays, *The Interpreters* has Yoruba myth and cosmology at its core as each character is confronted with the need to undergo Ogun's journey bridging two worlds as they pass from despair to creation. Their quest takes the novel beyond a criticism of modern Nigeria and a study of the independence generation to a deeper soul-searching journey.

Season of Anomy was written at a time when the post-independence years of Nigeria had given place to another era of dictatorship and a prevailing atmosphere of fear. The country had witnessed two blood-filled and violent military coups, a bitter civil war, genocide, military dictatorship and suspension of democracy. Soyinka's imprisonment and voluntary exile were a part of this disturbing phase in the history of Nigeria. The novel presents the horrors of those days when humanity was degraded. The consequences of greed and lust for power and the lack of proper values in the society are narrated. Eustace Palmer says, "Soyinka skillfully interweaves a number of elements - reality and fantasy, the modern and the classical, African nature myths and rituals and European archetypal allusions."⁶⁹ The natural community of Aiyero is set against the unnatural world of the dictators. Soyinka makes use of symbols and images from the world of vegetation and fertility. For example, grain is not merely a symbol of food but as Palmer says, it represents "germination, revitalisation, fertility, healthy luxuriance and prosperity. It represents the germ of a promising idea which will grow into a powerful movement that will ...eventually revitalise the entire country bringing material prosperity, spiritual health and a concern for the proper values."⁷⁰ This commitment of a writer to revitalise his country and to present the true picture of its degradation sets Nigerian writers apart.

Another Nigerian novelist who used Yoruba myths and legends is Amos Tutuola, whose first published novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) received international recognition. Written in an unconventional form of English, it presents imaginative journeys involving encounters with the supernatural – ghosts, demons and magic, which serve as means to spiritual growth and the acquisition of wisdom. Tutuola's ability to recreate in written form the Yoruba oral tradition and to rework and modernise the folklore makes his work unique. An episodic quest novel, rooted in the storytelling tradition, it narrates the tale of a palm wine drunkard who journeys into the land of the Dead to bring back his favourite tapster, or wine

maker, who has died in a fall. The drunkard enters a magical world populated by devils and other supernatural beings. Tutuola's narrative technique which makes extensive use of Yoruba oral modes and customs is a distinctively Nigerian form of fable that appears to have affinities with magic realism. In order to "find out where my palm-wine tapster who had died"⁷¹ the drunkard begins his travels through physical and cultural terrains:

When I saw that there was no palm-wine for me again, and nobody could tap it for me, then I thought within myself that old people were saying that the whole people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they were living in one place somewhere in this world... One fine morning, I took all my native juju and also my father's juju with me and I left my father's hometown to find out whereabouts was my tapster who had died.⁷²

The Palm-Wine Drinkard was followed by *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), an underworld odyssey of an eight-year-old boy, abandoned during a slave raid. He flees into the bush and embarks on an interior journey that makes him choose between the various ghosts he encounters. Tutuola's subsequent novels were less successful. All his novels present a timeless world where ancient Yuroba folklore and rituals exist but they speak to those who are aware of the political, social and economic realities of Nigeria.

Ben Okri also uses traditional Yoruba forms and elements of culture with a touch of magic realism. Okri has experimented with new literary forms, different styles, genres and traditions. He started as a realist with postcolonial themes and stream of consciousness artist who used realism, modernism and Yoruba oral traditions. This style can be viewed as an example of magic realism with African flavour. Okri makes use of Yoruba myth and local beliefs as part of the real urban world. His first two novels, *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) and *The Landscapes Within* (1981) are bildungsroman where young protagonists struggle to come to terms with the realities of contemporary urban life.

Okri achieved international recognition with his Booker Prize winning novel, *The Famished Road* (1992), a tale of Abiku, an African spirit-child on an imaginative journey that comments on the present state of the nation. The story is set on the eve of Nigeria's independence and the narrator is Azaro, an *abiku*, a spirit-child. Azaro, a famished baby of ambiguous existence, is destined to die in infancy and be reborn to the same mother again and again. Okri describes Azaro's struggle to resist his fate and to survive with his family through hunger, disease and violence. The story is situated simultaneously in the world of dreams, of those waiting to be born, and of the dead. As Azaro's spirit companions try to pull him back into their world, his father fights a series of mythic battles and his mother keeps the family together with her courage and hard work. Madame Kota, whose bar Azaro visits degenerates him with her corrupt deals. Smells and aromas are described throughout and are a major form of imagery used in almost every scene and situation. They are used not only to describe the smell of objects like mud, filth, garbage etc. but also to illustrate how human emotion can smell. Smells are also used to make a shift from the physical to Abiku's spirit world. Azaro is left to choose between pains of mortality of the real world and the immortal world of the spirit.

The Famished Road forms a trilogy with *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998) which present the author's mythical and poetic view of the world and bring together modernist narrative strategies and Nigerian oral and literary traditions. *In Arcadia* (2002) presents the notion of paradise to ordinary people and to those in our modern civilisation who have lost the sense of paradise on earth while living in a daily hell of anxiety.

The use of Nigerian oral and mythical traditions in literature successfully represent an African world view which has been further strengthened by the use of the languages of different African tribes. Gabriel Okara, famous poet and novelist of a single novel, *The Voice* (1964) manipulates English with Ijaw to express African values. His poems are embedded

with Ijaw imagery and symbols and his novel is a successful poetic presentation of the travails of the individual soul as it responds to the outside world. The novel presents Okolo's hallucinatory quest through Sologa which ends in self-sacrifice and death. In its parabolic approach, the disillusionment in a morally bankrupt society is narrated with the help of a linguistic experiment where English is written in the Ijaw word order. This underscores the writer's need to express his ideas in his own language.

As a writer who is sensitive to what happens around him, *The Voice* presents his dream for a corruption-free society as he lives in a country where corruption pervades all sectors of society. The novel is a gloomy parable of Nigerian social and political life where the artist is an interpreter of life's mystery. Okolo's search for 'it' leads to conflict with political authorities. The novel tries to provide answers to contemporary problems which does not require either a renunciation of western thoughts nor a return to tribal religion. Okara makes us aware of an order of meaning beyond the mere self and affirms faith in the supreme value of human faculties.

Cyprian Ekwensi, one of the pioneers of modern West African fiction, began as a collector of Igbo folktales. Ekwensi portrays the moral and material problems faced by rural West Africans when they migrate to cities. His ability to write realistically about current issues affecting ordinary people makes him a successful writer. His first novel *When Love Whispers* (1948) was published in Onitsha which contributed to the explosion of writing known as Onitsha Market Literature. *People of the City* (1954) chronicles the frantic pace of life in modern Lagos, Nigeria's former capital, presenting a critical view of urban existence. It recounts the growing political awareness of a young reporter and band leader in an emerging African country. His most successful novel *Jagua Nana* (1961) tells the story of a socially ambitious prostitute. She falls in love with a young teacher, Freddie, whom she agrees to send to England to study law on the understanding that they will marry upon his return. The tragic

potential of the arrangement is finally undermined by a contrived happy ending. Ekwensi has crafted in his heroine one of the most memorable characters in Nigerian literature. A vibrant middle-aged prostitute, she moves between the corrupt, pleasure-seeking life of the city and the pastoral life of her rural origins.

Burning Grass (1962) subtitled '*A Story of the Fulani of Northern Nigeria*', portrays with anthropological accuracy the life of nomadic cattlemen through the adventures of Mai Sunsaye and his sons. *Beautiful Feathers* (1963) reflects the nationalist and pan-Africanist consciousness of the pre-independence days of the 1950s and how the young hero's youthful commitment to this ideal leads to the disintegration of his family. During the Nigerian Civil War, Ekwensi was the Director of the Broadcasting Corporation of Biafra, a war which sensitised his restless imagination and his later writings reflect on the war and its aftermath. *Survive the Peace* (1976) interrogates the problems of survival after the civil war where there is so-called peace. The novel presents the pathetic fate of James Odugo, a journalist who has survived the war only to be cut down on the road by marauding former soldiers. *Divided We Stand* (1980) reverses the wise saying that unity is strength and shows how ethnicity, division and hatred bring about distrust, displacement and war. *Jagua Nana's Daughter* (1986), a sequel to his earlier novel *Jagua Nana*, reveals Ekwensi's fascination with the character of Jagua Nana. The novel is about her daughter Liza, who unlike her mother is an educated professional woman. This social elevation enables her to marry into the privileged class and find security. This novel also presents a realistic picture of the pleasures and hazards of Nigerian city life.

Women novelists from Nigeria like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie give voice to women's experiences. These three novelists are Igbo and are concerned with gender roles in traditional Igbo society and the quest for values. Flora Nwapa who is often viewed as Nigeria's first woman novelist is best known for her novels *Efuru*

(1966) and *Idu* (1970) which depict the problems faced by women in Igbo society. Narrated in the oral storytelling tradition, Nwapa recreates life and traditions from a woman's viewpoint. *Efuru* uses the Igbo myth of the lake goddess, Uhamiri to tell the poignant story of a woman's desire to be a mother. *Idu* narrates a woman's search for her husband in the land of death. *Never Again* (1975) relates to the Biafran War. Initially its protagonist, Kate, starts as a supporter of the Biafran cause but ends up exhausting her strength in her struggle to survive. *One is Enough* (1981) is a powerful and compelling story that depicts the life of a Nigerian woman Amaka who like other women in Nigeria, is still caught between two worlds - the modern one and another in which traditional tribal customs hold sway. The novel shows how the role of women within traditional Nigerian culture is changing and evolving to meet modern day situations. *Women Are Different* (1986) is the story about the trials and tribulations of Nigerian women from their early childhood through their adult lives.

Buchi Emecheta's stories are of the world where women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression. *The Bride Price* (1976) depicts forced arranged marriages in traditional Igbo society, a theme that is narrated again in *The Slave Girl* (1977). *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) presents Nnu Ego as a victim of patriarchal gender codes of traditional Igbo society and her vulnerable position even after she moves to Lagos. *Destination Biafra* (1982) narrates a woman's journey across the country at the time of the Biafran War, highlighting how women suffer most during wars. The only novel where Emecheta writes about Africa's colonial history is in *The Rape of Shavi* (1983) which is an allegorical account of European colonisation of Africa. In her later novels she moves on to other themes which centre on women. *Gwendolen* (1989) is the story of a young West Indian girl living in London while *Kehinde* (1994) is the story of a middle-aged Nigerian wife and mother who returns to Nigeria after living for many years in London. *The New Tribe* (2000) relates to the issue of adoption and how children adopted from different cultures face various problems.

The story is of an African child adopted by white parents who dreams that he is an African prince.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) centres around fifteen year old Kambili and how she and her brother Jaja emerge out of the trauma they have suffered at the hands of their father. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) named after the flag of the short lived nation Biafra, narrates the lives of people before, during and after the war. The novel narrates how the war changed the lives of people and looks at the undying spirit of humans who live through and survive the hardships. The story of the Biafran war is also narrated to show how the world remained silent when so many people lost their lives.

Except for Buchi Emecheta's single novel on Africa's colonisation by Europe, none of the women novelists of Nigeria have written on themes related to Nigeria's encounter with the coloniser or its impact after independence. They have remained committed to themes on women – their sufferings, how they struggle to lead dignified lives and how political and historical events like a civil war affect the lives of women. These women writers write of real-life challenges and situations.

Much of what is known as literary and critical theory developed in the largely monolingual, mono-cultural contexts in the West. A rather non-critical acceptance of theory and attempts to implement its various manifestations in interrogating literary and cultural practices of African countries [the reference to Africa is because this study is on an African writer] or India have created confusion and bewilderment, making theory almost esoteric. Diverse discourses from different locations need to be integrated from a location in contemporary Africa, paving ways for rethinking theory to generate new dynamics through creative engagement with various issues related to appropriateness of theory and problematic of cultural exchange, and to the question of an alternative position.

A re-reading of Chinua Achebe's novels is occasioned not just by his position within the canon of postcolonial studies but also because he is among the major writers of today. No syllabus or course on Postcolonial Literature\ Commonwealth Literature\ New Literatures in English is complete without a text by Achebe, nor is an understanding of Africa complete without a knowledge of the great African spirit reflected in Achebe's works. Added to this is Achebe's deep commitment to his people and his awareness of his social responsibilities which prompts us to reflect on the need to appropriate theory to a study of his literary works. The concept of social responsibility could very well be the basis for theorising and interpreting texts in new ways and thus of challenging the hegemony of the western canon. So it is also important to realise that any appropriation of a given theory in the African context must be integrally connected with the struggle of the African writers as presented in their works.

Chinua Achebe's novels put forward a powerful critique of the colonial experience which does not culminate at the dawn of independence or end with nation building which is a major post-independence task, but moves on to other issues and concepts like power, rule, authority that are universal in nature. Achebe's narrative does not conform to the postcolonial construct of history as "telling" (rather than recalling) and nations in terms of states (rather than people).

Achebe's novels are a significant source for an understanding of African precolonial, colonial and postcolonial histories and realities. His first four novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966) written in quick succession present the story of his people, a largely self-sufficient Igbo community in the precolonial times; then follow an account of their encounter with the colonisers and the turbulent days they face after independence. *A Man of the People* presents

the abuse of power, the squandering of the opportunities of independence and the failure of the new government to meet the needs of the people resulting in a military coup.

Twenty-one years later, after *A Man of the People*, Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). In this novel he does not present an improved picture of the post-independence scenario, but nevertheless ends on a note of hope. Achebe's fifth novel moves beyond the Igbo village of Umuofia to embrace the vast expanse of the Savannah and addresses larger issues of power, the failure of nation states, the role of individual and community which go beyond the confines of what has been traditionally found in postcolonial discourses.

Achebe combines the techniques available to the historians (documentation) with those of the novelists (imaginative recreation of events) for his fictional evocation of the past. He emphasises the African artists' role in helping to create a more just society and the role of storytelling as a shaping force in people's lives. As he negotiates between his narrative form and realistic subject matter, Achebe puts forward a powerful critique of colonisation and its aftermath. Achebe's novels articulate his knowledge of his own people and the manner in which he participates in the politics of representation. He ends up critiquing the postcolonial methodology, and seeks out, recovers and provides an alternative narrative of the colonial experience and its aftermath, even as he seems to be moving beyond it. Re-reading Chinua Achebe can best begin with his famous words:

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. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct and pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive.⁷³

Achebe combines art and education in his works to continue the long tradition of the African artists whose role have been functional and utilitarian for the community. Achebe blends African oral tradition with a specific and definite narrative rhythm and it exposes the African belief that art ultimately has a purpose and a meaning. This shows the writer's concern with both the past as well as the future. Achebe assumes both the role of a cultural nationalist, explaining the traditions of his people, and a teacher, instilling dignity into his own people.

In his critical works, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (1975), *The Trouble With Nigeria* (1984), *Hopes and Impediments – Selected Essays* (1988), *Home and Exile* (2000) and *The Education of a British-Protected Child – Essays* (2010) Achebe puts forward his commitment as a writer to issues related to his nation and how writers have a great responsibility towards their people. This has led him to present stories from the African point of view as he says, “It suddenly seemed to me that we too might have a story to tell.”⁷⁴ Achebe goes on to say:

We must seek the freedom to express our thoughts and our feelings, even against ourselves, without the anxiety that what we say might be taken as evidence against our race.⁷⁵

Writing out of an African experience and a commitment to the future, Achebe's novels “...form a sequence and reflect, broadly speaking, the changes which have taken place in Ibo, and by implication Nigerian life as a result of what Achebe calls the ‘chance encounter’ between Europe and Africa during the imperial-colonial period.”⁷⁶

Achebe represents a canonical voice inscribed in the emerging discourses of writers struggling to break free from the clichéd world of anti-imperialism and decolonisation. This change in perspective has brought about an alternative mode of critique which has emerged from culturally rich contexts and whose choices are more accommodating. The new site chosen by writers has led to alterations in theoretical concepts which can be seen as a necessary step in the direction of representation and relocation. Literatures which for long

have been associated with the history of colonisation, need a new location of debate, a new space to write, free from the burden of a past that holds back.

To open this new area of study, the role of writers needs to be studied first. The next chapter will be a study of the role of writers in bringing about paradigmatic shifts in thinking. The chapter will focus on the Nigerian context, Achebe's role as a writer and how writers can be viewed as mediators in the location debate.

NOTES

[English (U. S.) spellings have been used whenever they appear in citations.]

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CHAPTER - II
STORYTELLER/ WRITER AS MEDIATOR

There is no story that is not true.

- Chinua Achebe

Things Fall Apart (1988,117)

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.

- Chinua Achebe

Anthills of the Savannah (1987,114)

The storyteller has a very special place in cultures the world over. Before written language was used, historic, religious and cultural knowledge was passed from generation to generation orally, and as the keeper of all this collective knowledge, the storyteller was one of the most important person in the community. Even today, reading a story is wonderful, but being in the presence of a storyteller who gifts us a story from the heart is truly a wondrous experience. A 'field' is created between the storyteller and the listeners which is also a space to learn, change and grow. The storyteller creates the experience, while the audience perceives the message and creates personal mental images from the words heard. In this experience, the audience also becomes a creator of the art. In the power to tell a story lies the power to shape our reality, to alter our perceptions and to create new worlds of experience.

Robin Ikegami says that "...the power of the story (and the storyteller) lies in its ability to bring past, present and future together."¹ He goes on to say that storytelling, "... seeks to

actively bring about change”² which makes storytelling a political or social act. The art of storytelling combined with the power of imagination provides an alternative way to face reality. Perhaps it would not be wrong to suggest that the power of the story and the storyteller’s role can best be studied in the African context because storytelling is an integral part of African oral tradition. From the traditional storytellers or the *griots* to the modern day writers, the story remains an integral part of African life.

A *griot* or a traditional storyteller in West African communities was considered a repository of oral tradition. He was a poet, praise-singer, historian and wandering musician who also used his knowledge to comment on current events. He preserved the community’s history and traditions through songs, and passed on the inherited tradition to later generations. The performance of the *griots* depended on the presence of an audience, and thus everyone became a part of the story. As Edward Sackey says, “The performance of an African folk or oral literature is a group affair in which all who so wish take part freely. There is no distance between the performance and the audience.”³

The importance of the story is also significant in the African context because stories from Africa presented to the rest of the world have been for long distorted by colonial writers who wrote them. The myopic view of these writers and their limited understanding of the African way of life never allowed them to make an authentic retelling of the African stories. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observes that this is “...a strongly felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa”⁴ Here she is not merely referring to the situation occasioning the rewriting of stories as the postcolonial situation demands but also the freedom to write new stories. As Judie Newman says, “When colonialism ends, writers must have the right to write about trees or love.”⁵

The African writers’ freedom over choice of themes also requires an appropriate response to the political and social changes and interpretation of contemporary realities. There are

writers who have projected local experiences globally, and secured an identity through images that are not stereotypical of imperialists. What is important for writers is to devise alternative stories, present fresh pictures of the world. In a way the role adopted is an adversarial one - one that opposes the false extant views of Africa propagated by erstwhile writers on Africa.

Later day writers from Africa attempt to construct an image of Africa that respects the traditions while recognising the demands of a cosmopolitan, international audience. Writers aim at reclaiming their heritage and at the same time presage and direct constructive changes, while adapting to a global economy and responding to the pressure for reform and international cooperation. Despite making a transition to the new world these writers do not abandon the past but devise vital means to combine the old with the new through the help of the story. The story embodies a tradition that can adapt to the new. The problem that the writers confront is that of preserving the national and cultural identity in the face of the inevitable blending of different cultures. Achebe's comment on the creative energy of stories is worth recalling here:

So important have stories been to mankind that they are not restricted to accounts of initial creation but will be found following human societies as they recreate themselves through vicissitudes of their history, validating their social organizations, their political systems, their moral attitudes and religious beliefs, even their prejudices ... but they also serve to sanction change when it can no longer be denied. At such critical moments new versions of old stories or entirely fresh ones tend to be brought into being to mediate the changes and sometimes to consecrate opportunistic defections into more honourable rites of passage.⁶

In continuing the tradition of storytelling the African writers reassert the fact that art ultimately and always has a purpose and a meaning beyond what apologists for "art for art's

sake” indicate. The African writer’s role in storytelling also emphasises that literature must be written and stories must be told or else without this imaginative act, any coherent world view collapses and all that we are left with are malignant fictions. It also goes on to reiterate the significance of literature not merely in aesthetic but also in social and political terms. The onerous task of dispossessing other versions of Africa in literature calls for suitable stories which can match life and experiences and requires writers who can compose them. David Carroll says that in doing so, “... the African writer is working within a society to which he has a responsibility. In this he is continuing the long tradition of the African carver, dancer, sculptor whose role is essentially communal, functional and utilitarian.”⁷

African stories yield to their folklore origins where the artist and his audience are in close communion. Achebe says,

...the artist and his people are in a very close communion. They do not all have to agree on how to make the best mask. But they are all interested in the process of making and the final outcome. The resulting art is important because it is at the centre of the life of the people and so can fulfill some of that need that first led man to make art: the need to afford himself through his imagination an alternative handle on reality.⁸

The transition from oral to written literature coincides with the disappearance of bards and since there can be no single version of an oral text, writers need to assume the task of storytelling. Alain Ricard says that,

In any language, the literature is made of the additional and eventful cross-fertilization, of collections of oral lore with or without an adaptation of original written works. In Africa today the disappearance of bards and the passing of textual production in many languages are potential cultural disasters. Few texts are there to be recorded... it is up to intellectuals to produce new texts – writing is always a rapture.⁹

Modern stories from Africa thus have to be seen as having their roots in the traditions of oral literature.

The integration of Africa's oral tradition with the written text has rekindled interest in readers and critics. Writings from Africa have become an instrument to challenge western misconceptions about Africa. This integration, according to Edward Sackey, "... shows a tremendous leap forward in African imaginative works of art, from orality to literacy and from tradition to innovation."¹⁰ African imaginative works of art have traces of the anthropomorphic energy and the temper of myths and symbolism which in turn instills a new-found confidence in writers and readers to create a new space. African writers thereby are perpetuating the long tradition of the African artists whose roles have traditionally been a communal one imbued as they have always been with a deep sense of responsibility towards their society. The village drummer, proverbs, stories about the origin of different tribes and myths associated with them go back in time to an age long before the arrival of the colonisers. This underscores the fact that colonisation is just a part of history, which no doubt signalled a lot of changes, but was certainly not the beginning of Africa's history.

Writers in West Africa, gifted with the power of imagination have to be seen as direct descendants of storytellers who are not concerned merely with the aesthetic aspects of art and entertainment but also with values and socio-political change. Art is never an autotelic activity as it has been for the artist in the west and therefore instead of formalistic experiments and language games, African writers present a fictional blueprint for political and social regeneration. This aspect is clearly visible in the works of writers like Chinua Achebe. This also explains why the disturbed West African situation and particularly that of Nigeria has not been able to deaden the creative spirit, and a great number of writers have emerged as tell stories directly to their own people and the rest of the world.

Nigerian writers are also activists who have participated in the Biafran war and fought for freedom. This is what makes their stories so powerful. Christopher Okigbo, the poet lost his life in the war and Chinua Achebe was politically active during the Biafran war. He became a spokesperson for the Biafran cause in Europe and North America. He also served as a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka which was renamed the University of Biafra during the war.

In Nigeria's long history, apart from the colonial period, the Biafran war represents three painful years of starvation and genocide with none of the issues for which the war was fought being resolved. To Igbo writers, the war presented stories which they wanted to forget but chose to write about so that future generations would cherish the Igbo spirit to survive as they had always done from the days of tribal wars, through the colonial encounter to the present day fight against different forms of corruption in Nigerian life. Though Chinua Achebe does not write about the Biafran war in his novels, his essays, poems and short stories express his distress with the war. The long gap of twenty-one years between his two novels, *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) leaves a gap in his narration of Nigeria's story.

The revisiting of the Biafran war site by present day writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) shows how deep rooted are the memories of the war in the Igbo psyche. The civil war appears to have been so shocking that the long years of foreign domination seemed to have been relegated to the background. The civil war can yet be seen as a bequest of colonialism where the ill-conceived policies of the British rule led to the situation where a newly independent country divided itself further to enjoy the benefits of freedom. This also explains why Nigerian writers have moved away from writing about the colonial days and are more concerned with issues related to the present.

Independence in Nigeria did not bring the freedom that comes with the end of a foreign rule. Nigerian writers did not get the time and space to write freely nor could they debate on issues related to the postcolonial situation as the situation immediately after independence was marked by military coups, corruption and a civil war. Earlier it had been easy to write against imperialism but the changed times pitted the writer against the ruling classes within and thus they were forced willy-nilly to write quite different stories.

During the later part of the 1960s, the West African Republic of Nigeria was engaged in a civil war in which the federal government fought the secession of the Eastern Region, an area declaring itself at the moment of its revolt, the Republic of Biafra. Achebe saw himself and other Biafran writers as expressing their commitment to the revolutionary struggle of their people for independence. Writers who rallied to his call included Christopher Okigbo, Cyprian Ekwensi, Gabriel Okara and Flora Nwapa. Achebe in his essay, "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause" says,

The involvement of the Biafran writer in the cause for which his people are fighting and dying is not different from the involvement of many African writers - past and present - in the big issues of Africa. The fact of war merely puts the matter in sharper focus.¹¹

Biafran writers were committed to the revolutionary struggle of their people for justice and true independence. They thought that this commitment was no different from the African storyteller's obligation to be the collective memory of the African people.

Among these storytellers, Chinua Achebe emerges as the frontrunner among those who are most widely heard or read storytellers. Though a storyteller who lives far from home, for a long time Achebe has been telling the world the story of Nigeria. In spite of living away from Nigeria for a long time (as he has been teaching in the United States at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, The City College of New York and at the Bard college), Nigeria

has remained central to his literary concern. In his writings, he affirms the educational function of literature and establishes a human context for understanding modern Nigerian history. He writes about the first contact between European and African cultures at the turn of the twentieth century in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the subsequent institutionalisation of European religious and political structures in *Arrow of God* (1964), the uneasy years immediately preceding independence in *No Longer at Ease* (1960), the excitement and disappointment of Nigeria's first republic in *A Man of the People* (1966), the sufferings of the Biafran war in *Girls At War* (1972) and in *Beware Soul Brother* (1973), and the corrupt authoritarianism that was seen during Nigeria's second republic in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Even the title of his commentary, *The Trouble With Nigeria* (1983) identifies the concern that has been central to all his works.

Achebe strives to communicate the human complexity of Nigerian existence, to establish the independence of African literature and to demonstrate the value of traditional Igbo culture. He does not idealise the precolonial past as it cannot survive unaltered in a modern world and that is why he encourages his readers to explore continuities with the past that can coexist with modern society.

Achebe's protagonists, who are in conflict between self realisation and social responsibility, demonstrate the difficulty of reaching such a balance. Each character's movement towards acceptance by the community is thwarted by the destructive pull of individual pride. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo overcomes personal humiliation to win the respect of his Igbo community, but his inflexible refusal to accommodate himself to the increasing influence of colonial government and Christianity alienates him from his clansmen and drives him to self-destruction. In *Arrow of God*, the priest Ezeulu earnestly wishes to be a good religious leader, but his proud refusal to adapt his religious convictions to the changing times leads to Christian dominance in his village and his own madness. In *No Longer at Ease*,

the idealistic Obi self-righteously resists corruption, alienates himself from his clansmen who funded his education, but his proud need to maintain an expensive lifestyle leads him to accept bribes resulting in his arrest. In *A Man of the People*, the cynical Odili learns to see the political manipulation of the new government and the corrective value of traditional beliefs. *Anthills of the Savannah* offers a hopeful view, with Beatrice showing that traditional values can exist in altered but viable forms in the present.

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, educates us on the meaning of our actions and offers us greater control over our social and personal lives. Literature provides a way to handle reality and enables us to encounter from the safety of a make-believe world the threats of real life. Literature leads us through a journey of self discovery and helps us cope with the threats present within ourselves and in the world around us.

Achebe represents a particular reality - a modern Africa whose rich variety of ethnic and cultural identities had been complicated by the impact of European colonisation. His works intend to challenge stereotypes of Africans as primitive savages, and present the complexities of African societies with their alternative sets of traditions, ideals, values and behaviours. Achebe describes his dual mission: one of which is to educate both African and other readers and the other to reinstate a sense of pride in African cultures. Achebe states his mission in his essay, "The Novelist as Teacher":

Here is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of society meet.¹²

While describing his dual mission as a writer, Achebe states that, "... the role of the writer, the modern writer, is closer to that of the griot, the historian and poet, than any other practitioner of the arts."¹³ African novelists are seen as wordsmiths who perform roles analogous to those of the traditional *griot*. Stressing the need for the post-independence West African artist to assume the social responsibilities akin to those of the *griot*, Achebe argues, "The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done."¹⁴ His argument is supported by William Abraham, a Ghanaian professor of philosophy who says,

Just as African scientists undertake to solve some of the scientific problems of Africa, African historians go into the history of Africa, African political scientists concern themselves with the politics of Africa; why should African literary creators be exempted from the services that they themselves recognize as genuine?"¹⁵

Achebe's works present the obligations and responsibilities of writers both to the society in which they live and to their art.

Onyemaechi Odumukwu says that Achebe's contribution to the Nigerian novel "...reveal an understanding that life has a peculiar meaning for the inhabitants of the geographical location and political entity we call Nigeria."¹⁶ He goes on to say that the "...significance of Achebe's creativity manifests itself in his revelation of lived experience in Nigeria and its harrowing verities."¹⁷ The "Nigerian experience" includes Achebe's evocation of the reality such as the lack of contact between the leaders and the ordinary people, the unevenness of development, debates on the gains of military rule and the continued domination of the Nigerian economy by western imperialism and other foreign interests.

While representing the colonial period in his novels, Achebe does not deal with the history of colonialism in Nigeria but with what it did to the Igbo spirit. And imperialism is not seen as the only defining factor in the changes that came about. Achebe presents the

faults that lie within his own community and as Ngugi says, he makes "...a brave and successful attempt to recreate the dynamic spirit in a living community."¹⁸ Ngugi adds that "...scholars of economics and politics have recognised imperialism as a social force in Africa but literary scholars are suspicious of it."¹⁹

This explains why Achebe is more concerned with the story of his people rather than the story of Nigeria's colonial encounter. Achebe's concern is shared by Ngugi who says that, "Literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships."²⁰ The past that Achebe presents is neither idyllic nor savage but is composed of real and vulnerable people and their ancestors and is a far cry from the figments of missionary and colonialist imagination. As a neutral narrator, there is a marked absence of sentimentalism in the portrait of the nation's past and present. It is a proof of the fact that the author recognises not only the weaknesses but also the strong points of his people. In the years following Nigeria's independence, Achebe's novels present the nation in terms of people and not just a political state, where a writer's task has to go beyond nation building. Odumukwu says that, "Achebe's creative endeavours in post-independence reveal a specific consciousness oriented toward leadership and political activism for his country."²¹

The sense of concern seen in his creative endeavours emerges from the position occupied by the African artist. Achebe says that a writer in Europe "...lives on the fringe of society...He is in revolt against society."²² Whereas in Africa, an artist is perceived very differently as art always has a didactic purpose and works by writers are seen in terms of the particular socio-historical time they are written in. Achebe goes on to say that "...our writer and his society live in the same place."²³ This position occupied by writers places greater responsibilities on them; as Achebe writes, "What is not so well documented is what society expects of its writers."²⁴

The writer's role extends beyond a documentation of unrecorded events to a higher and noble role, that of a teacher. In his essay, "The Novelist as Teacher", Achebe presents a letter received from a reader, which reflects the admiration and reverence traditionally reserved for writers.

Dear C. Achebe,

I do not usually write to authors, no matter how interesting their work is, but I feel I must tell you how much I enjoyed your editions of *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. I look forward to reading your new edition *Arrow of God*. Your novels serve as advice to us young. I trust that you will continue to produce as many of this type of books. With friendly greetings and best wishes.

Yours sincerely

I. BubaYero Mafindi ²⁵

In keeping with the expectations of his readers and his responsibilities as a writer, Achebe defines his role in the following words:

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. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive.²⁶

Achebe's position is that of a cultural nationalist explaining the traditions of his people to the world and a teacher who instils dignity into his people. By instilling dignity into his people, Achebe wants to emphasise 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, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost.²⁷

Achebe's works show how far he has gone beyond helping his people regain dignity and self-respect to that of documenting cataclysmic changes in human history as things fall apart, cultures crumble and civilisations disintegrate while history marches ahead taking every thing in its stride. As a writer, he participates in the historical and political transformations by intervening in them and contesting the hegemonic misinterpretations of Africa in colonial discourses, and by setting up alternative images of Africa through his accounts of his culture and people.

In his early essays and interviews, Achebe asks the African writer to take up the responsibility of transforming his society. In *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, Achebe sees his task cut out for him:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word.²⁸

In Achebe's fiction the writer/ storyteller is seen as doubling up to become a teacher capable of transforming his society. Achebe's many and diverse statements about what constitutes an African writer's responsibilities all refer back to one overarching responsibility he bequeaths to him - the writer must restore dignity and self-respect of his people. Although Achebe's statements are anchored firmly in his concern for his own people, he suggests that a writer

can restore confidence in his people by reclaiming the initiative in writing his own history, by rewriting and making himself the subject of alternative histories.

Writing alternative histories involves writing about Nigeria's political and economic circumstances which are so dire, the social problems so urgent that a novelist cannot overlook them. G.D. Killam says that Achebe's novels "... with their modern settings have been seen as Achebe's analysis of the conflicting forces, political and social, which determine the quality of contemporary Nigerian life."²⁹ He goes on to add that, "His novels form a sequence and reflect, broadly speaking, the changes which have taken place in Ibo, and by implication Nigerian life as a result of what Achebe calls the 'chance encounter' between Europe and Africa during the imperial-colonial period."³⁰

While interpreting contemporary realities, Achebe uses old myths and contextualises them to the present and uses the African tradition of storytelling to narrate contemporary events. The extensive use of storytelling in his novels is not only a way of continuing the rich oral tradition of Africa but also becomes an alternative way of presenting the African story. Achebe's novels gain in terms of impact on account of the strong presence of the story. Also the story's role becomes more central with each successive novel. From narrating traditional oral stories such as the story of the earth and sky in *Things Fall Apart* to that of the tortoise and the leopard in *Anthills of the Savannah*, the shift is from the kind of stories people loved to listen to didactic ones.

To begin with *Things Fall Apart* (1958) where Achebe narrates not only the story of Okonkwo who "...was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond"³¹ but also stories of the mighty Igbos, folktales and the coming of the white man and in them he combines myth, memory, fact and fiction. Achebe asserts:

There is no story that is not true. (117)

and starts to narrate stories which not only present the rich African tradition of storytelling, but also unfold a deeply human universal wisdom.

Things Fall Apart presents "...stories of the land - masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (53) and "women's stories" (53) which are "stories of the tortoise and his willy ways, and of the bird *eneke-nti-oba* who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat" (53). In the first part of the novel, the stories come from the heart of those who lived in times that were not touched by any political upheavals. The story of the quarrel between Earth and Sky is one story that is loved by all:

...sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could not be buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth. At last Vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to soften his heart with a song of the suffering of the sons of men...At last Sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of cocoyam. But as he flew home his long talon pierced the leaves and the rain fell as it had never fallen before. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that it did not return to deliver his message but flew to a distant land, from where he had espied a fire. And when he got there he found it was a man making a sacrifice. He warmed himself in the fire and ate the entrails. (53)

The coming of the locusts also has a story where,

The elders said locusts came once in a generation, reappeared every year for seven years and then disappeared for another lifetime. They went back to their caves in a distant land, where they were guarded by a race of stunted men. And then after another lifetime these men opened the caves again and the locusts came to Umuofia. (54)

Okonkwo's disturbed sleep due to mosquitoes brings to his mind another story, which he had heard from his mother as a child.

Mosquito...had asked Ear to marry him, whereupon Ear fell on the floor in uncontrollable laughter. 'How much longer do you think you will live?' she asked. 'You are already a skeleton.' Mosquito went away humiliated, and any time he passed her way he told Ear that he was still alive.(69)

In the second part of the novel, Achebe narrates the coming of the 'white man' who "...riding an iron horse"(115) reached Abame. The Oracle was consulted which said "...that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them" (116). The Oracle also said that "...other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain" (116). And so he was killed, but the events that followed wiped out Abame, and the clan, even the sacred fish of the mysterious lake fled and the water turned the colour of blood. The killing of the first white man brought more of them, paving the way for the outsiders to make inroads into the pristine society.

They killed him and tied up his iron horse. This was before the planting season began. For a long time nothing happened. The rains had come and yams had been sown. The iron horse was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree. And then one morning three white men led by a band of ordinary men like us came to the clan. They saw the iron horse and went away again. Most of the men and women had gone to their farms. Only a few of them saw these white men and their followers. For many market weeks nothing else happened. They have a big market in Abame on every other Afo day...the whole clan gathers there. That was the day it happened. The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a

handful of men and women whose *chi* were wide awake and brought them out of that market. (116)

The “great evil” (117) that had come upon the land proved other stories of the white men true and raised fear.

‘But I am greatly afraid. We have heard stories about white men who made powerful guns and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true.’
(117)

Even as Achebe narrates the arrival of the white man to Africa, he does not fail to tell the other side of the story where the Africans themselves were responsible for the bloodshed that followed. The people of Abame had ignored the traditional wisdom:

Never kill a man who says nothing. Those men of Abame were fools. What did they know about the man? (117)

This point is further illustrated by a story:

‘Mother Kite once sent her daughter to bring food. She went, and brought back a duckling. “You have done very well,” said Mother Kite to her daughter, “but tell me, what did the mother of this duckling say when you swooped and carried its child away?” “It said nothing” replied the young kite. “It just walked away.” “You must return the duckling,” said Mother Kite. “There is something ominous behind the silence.” And so Daughter Kite returned the duckling and took a chick instead. “What did the mother of the chick do?” asked the old kite. “It cried and raved and cursed me,” said the young kite. “Then we can eat the chick,” said the mother. “There is nothing to fear from someone who shouts.” (117)

Arrow of God (1964) was written after *No Longer at Ease* (1960), but it narrates the time and events that took place between the coming of the colonisers and the eve of independence as narrated in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. In this novel, Achebe continues to

present the rich folklore of the Igbo community. Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu's shrine reenacts the 'First Coming of Ulu', a creation myth associated with the Divine:

At that time, when lizards were still in ones and twos, the whole people assembled and chose me to carry their new deity. I said to them:

'Who am I to carry this fire on my bare head? A man who knows that his anus is small does not swallow an udala seed.'

They said to me:

'Fear not. The man who sends a child to catch a shrew will also give him water to wash his hand.'

I said: 'So be it.'

And it was set to work. That day was Eke: we worked into Oye and then into Afo. As day broke on Nkwo and the sun carried its sacrifice I carried my Alusi and, with all the people behind me, set out on that journey. A man sang with the flute on my right and another replied on my left. From behind the heavy tread of all the people gave me strength. And then all of a sudden something spread itself across my face. On one side it was raining, on the other side it was dry. I looked again and saw that it was Eke.

I said to him: 'Is it you Eke?'

He replied: 'It is I, Eke, the One that makes a strong man bite the earth with his teeth.'

I took a hen's egg and gave him. He took it and ate and gave way to me. We went on, past streams and forests. Then a smoking thicket crossed my path, and two men were wrestling on their hands. My followers looked once and took to their heels. I looked again and saw that it was Oye.

I said to him: 'Is it you Oye across my path?'

He said: 'It is I, Oye, the One that began cooking before Another and so he has broken pots.'

I took a white cock and gave him. He took it and made way for me. I went on past farmlands and wilds and then I saw that my head was too heavy for me. I looked steadily and saw that it was Afo.

I said: 'Is it you Afo?'

He said: 'It is I, Afo, the great river that cannot be salted.'

I replied: 'I am Ezeulu, the hunchback more terrible than a leper.'

Afo shrugged and said: 'Pass, your own is worse than mine.'

I passed and the sun came down and beat me and the rain came down and drenched me. Then I met Nkwo. I looked on his left and saw an old woman, tired, dancing strange steps on the hill. I looked to the right and saw a horse and saw a ram. I slew the horse and with the ram I cleaned my matchet, and so removed that evil. (390-391)

Arrow of God narrates the presence of the story in everyday life, like in a lullaby or in a solitary singer's song.

Tell the mother her child is crying

Tell the mother her child is crying

And then prepare a stew of uziza

And also a stew of uziza

Make a watery pepper-soup

So the little birds who drink it

Will all perish from the hiccup

Mother's goat is in the barn

And the yams will not be safe

Father's goat is in the barn
And the yams will all be eaten
Can you see that deer approaching
Look! He's dipped one foot in water
Snake has struck him!
He withdraws!
Ja- ja. Ja kulo kulo!
Traveller Hawk
You're welcome home
Ja- ja. Ja kulo kulo!
But where's the length
Of cloth you brought
Ja-ja. Ja kulo kulo! (447)

The song of the solitary singer presents the changing times with the coming of the colonisers and the spread of Christianity.

I was born when lizards were in ones and twos
 A child of Idemili. The difficult teardrops
 Of Sky's first weeping drew my spots. Being
 Sky-born I walked the earth with royal gait
 And mourners saw me coiled across their path.
 But of late
 A strange bell
 Has been ringing a song of desolation:
 Leave your yams and coco-yams
 And come to school.

And I must scuttle away in haste

When children in play or in earnest cry:

Look! A Christian is on the way.

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ... (547-548).

As Achebe's narration shifts to the years before independence in *No Longer at Ease* (1964) one learns that folk stories are forbidden by the new faith that has spread among the people. Obi's mother, who would tell folk stories to her eldest daughter had to stop because her husband, a catechist forbade her to do so,

'We are not heathens,' he had said. 'Stories like that are not for the people of the Church.' (221)

This leads to occasional set-backs for Obi as he grows up. One such set-back takes place in his school:

There was one lesson which he loved and feared. It was called 'Oral'. During this period the teacher called on any pupil to tell the class a folk-story. Obi loved these stories but he knew none which he could tell. One day the teacher called on him to face the class and tell them a story. As he came out and stood before them he trembled.

'*Olulu ofu oge*,' he began in the tradition of folk-tales, but that was all he knew. His lips quivered but no other sounds came out. The class burst into derisive laughter, and tears filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks as he went back to his place. (222)

As Obi does not know any folk-tales, he cannot relate to the rest of the class. Stories told by his mother, when his father goes for his evening prayer meetings come to his rescue the next time he is called to tell a story.

Some weeks later Obi was called up again. He faced the class boldly and told one of the new stories his mother had told him. He even added a little touch to the end which made everyone laugh. It was the story of the wicked leopardess who wanted to eat the

young lambs of her old friend the sheep. She went to the sheep's hut when she knew she had gone to the market and began to search for the young lambs. She did not know that their mother had hidden them inside some of the palm-kernels lying around. At last she gave up the search and brought two stones to crack some of the kernels and eat before going, because she was very, very hungry. As soon as she cracked the first, the nut flew into the bush. She was amazed. The second also flew into the bush. And the third, the eldest not only flew into the bush but, in Obi's version, slapped the leopardess in the eyes before doing so. (222)

An occasional folktale that appears in the novel reflects the efforts of the Igbos living far from their homes, who try not to sever the links with their roots. Obi, because of his western education does not use proverbs like others from Umuofia, his hometown, who have always known the art of conversation. Though on his return from London after completing his studies, he cannot relate closely to his people who belong to eastern Nigeria, he is able to go beyond tribal affinities and dream of his land as a nation and write a poem:

God bless our noble fatherland,
 Great land of sunshine bright,
 Where brave men chose the way of peace,
 To win their freedom fight.
 May we preserve our purity,
 Our zest for life and jollity.

God bless our noble countrymen
 And women everywhere.
 Teach them to walk in unity
 To build our nation dear;

Forgetting region, tribe or speech,

But caring always each for each. (257)

No Longer at Ease also presents the changing aspect of Nigeria's culture on the eve of its independence. The Highlife music played and enjoyed in clubs where Nigerians are now allowed to become members is a strong assertion of African culture. Highlife is a type of West African popular music, which evolved in the 1920s in Ghana from the repertory of dance bands performing for the social elite, or highlife. African, Caribbean and African American elements were infused into European ballroom forms and this became popular in Nigeria around 1960 where it was combined with the music of Igbo palm wine festivals, local rhythms and lyrics. Highlife went into decline at the time of the Nigerian Civil War, but re-emerged in the 1970s.

Amidst the changes which the Igbo society has undergone from the days before the coming of the colonisers to the eve of independence, the story does not lose its sanctity. Even though Obi keeps himself away from his community in Lagos, the Umuofia Progressive Union, does not alienate him. Their advice to him or even their visit after his mother's death is never complete without a story. After his mother's death, Obi does not take leave to go home for the funeral and a number of Umuofia people come to meet him. No one dwells unduly on his sorrow and soon begin to talk about normal affairs of life, but in the far corner of the room Nathaniel is heard telling a story.

Tortoise went on a long journey to a distant clan. But before he went he told his people not to send for him unless something new under the sun happened. When he was gone, his mother died. The question was how to make him return to bury his mother. If they told him that his mother had died, he would say it was nothing new. So they told him that his father's palm tree had borne a fruit at the end of its leaf. When tortoise heard

this, he said he must return home to see his great monstrosity. And so his bid to escape the burden of his mother's funeral was foiled. (307)

The next two novels, set in independent Nigeria present modern day storytellers – teachers, writers and journalists, who continue the tradition of storytelling, The two novels, *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) show the emerging significance of the story when Nigeria is going through a disturbed phase and storytellers have a very important role to play. The storytellers' role ranges between that of a mediator between the people and the fast changing political situation to that of a reactionary one as they are later perceived as a threat to the people who indulge corruption in Nigeria.

In *A Man of the People*, Odili Samalu, a teacher narrates the story of his nation - a newly independent country which has still not recovered from the long years of exploitation and cannot look forward to a bright future because of the prevailing corruption which is practiced by the present day rulers. Odili narrates the conditions of the day, such as the ever widening gap between the rulers and the masses, the squandering of the promises of independence which lead the intelligentsia to mediate and how the crisis leads to a military coup. Chief the Honourable M.A Nanga, M.P represents the politicians of the newly independent nation who have "...started the country off down the slopes of inflation."³² It is the politicians who have been engaged in their "...nefarious plot to overthrow the Government of the people, by the people and for the people with the help of enemies abroad" (5). They are the ones who "...have bitten the finger with which their mother fed them" (5). It also needs to be seen that most of the corrupt politicians have received western education and it is they who perpetuate the exploitation after independence. This leads the *Daily Chronicle* to publish in its editorial:

Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders

are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people...(4)

But no one speaks the language of the people as all that they (the political elite) seem to want is their fair share of the “national cake” (12). Odili also narrates the luxury enjoyed by those in power.

The first thing critics tell you about our ministers’ official residences is that each has seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms, one for everyday of the week... I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me. When I lay down in the double bed that seemed ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a *lappa* I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one for ever. (36-37)

During his stay ay Bori, the nation’s capital, Odili notices the wide gap between the rulers and the people.

The surprises and contrasts in our great country were simply inexhaustible. Here was I in our capital city, reading about pails of excrement from the cosy comfort of a princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming, silent action, water-closets! (41)

In spite of the widening gap between the present day rulers and the people, the trouble with the newly independent nation is that there is nobody to unite the people against the perpetrators of exploitation.

A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation – as I saw it then lying on that bed – was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say “To hell with it.” We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best – had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase – the extension of our house – was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house. (37)

The launch of the Common People’s Convention of which Odili the narrator is also a member, is made up of a trade-unionist, a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher and a newspaper columnist, who “... having watched with deepening disillusion the use to which our hard-won freedom was being put by corrupt, mediocre politicians had decided to come together...” (78). Like all educated citizens of the country, they feel that things are going seriously wrong.

We complained about our country’s lack of dynamism and abdication of the leadership to which it was entitled in the continent, or so we thought. We listened to whispers of scandalous deals in high places – sometimes involving sums of money that I for one didn’t believe existed in the country. But there was really no hard kernel of fact to get one’s teeth into. (40)

They all share the dream of restoring the lost glory of their nation and fulfilling the high promise of freedom as expressed by Max in a poem:

I will return home to her – many centuries have I wandered –

And I will make my offering at the feet of my lovely Mother:

I will rebuild her house, the holy places they raped and plundered,

And I will make it fine with black wood, bronze and terra-cotta. (82)

Max, in his election campaign tells an old story to interpret the prevailing corruption where political parties fight over the nation's wealth.

Once upon a time a hunter killed some big-game at night. He searched for it in vain and at last he decided to go home and await daylight. At the first light of morning he returned to the forest full of expectation. And what do you think he found? He saw two vultures fighting over what still remained of the carcass. In great anger he loaded his gun and shot the two dirty uneatable birds. You may say that he was foolish to waste his bullet on them but I say no. He was angry and he wanted to wipe out the dirty thieves fighting over another man's inheritance. That hunter is yourselves. Yes, you and you and you. And the two vultures- P.O.P. and P.A.P.(125-126)

In Odili's narration that follows, he tells the story of a few individuals who take it upon themselves to put an end to the rampant corruption and reform the election process which is manipulated by those in power with the help of the state machinery. The chaotic situation which follows and how it all ends in a army coup are all described in course of the narrative. Max is killed but his death is avenged by Eunice. The sudden turn of events with their sense of uncertainty and unease does not deter the storyteller from narrating the triumph of the spirit which first resulted in the struggle. The spirit endures and the same is the case with the struggle:

...a regime in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man's stick and later in the evening saw him again mounting the altar of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant – in such a regime, I say, you died a good death if your life had inspired some one to

come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest – without asking to be paid. (149-150)

The struggle continues in *Anthills of the Savannah*, where the storytellers are the modern day writers, represented by Ikem Osodi, a journalist. Ikem's writings narrate stories of the present as he writes on various issues highlighting the role of a writer.

And now the times had come round again out of storyland. Perhaps not as bad as the first times, yet. But they could easily end worse. Why? Because today no one can rise and march south by starlight abandoning crippled kindred in the wild Savannah and arrive stealthily at a tiny village and fall upon its inhabitants and slay them and take their land...³³

Ikem highlights the presence of the oppressed everywhere and how writers are concerned about them.

The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest. But they are not the only ones. There are others – rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialized countries, Black people everywhere including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries. The most obvious practical difficulty is the magnitude and heterogeneity of the problem. There is no universal conglomerate of the oppressed. Free people may be alike everywhere in their freedom but the oppressed inhabit each their own peculiar hell. The present orthodoxies of deliverance are futile to the extent that they fail to recognize this. You know my stand on that. Every genuine artist feels it in his bones. The simplistic remedies touted by all manner of salesman (including some who call themselves artists) will always fail because of man's stubborn antibody called surprise. Man will surprise by his capacity for nobility

as well as for villainy. No system can change that. It is built into the core of man's free spirit. (90)

He goes on to say that, "Every artist contains multitudes...Because a genuine artist, no matter what he says he believes, must feel in his blood the ultimate enmity between art and orthodoxy" (91-92). Ikem also narrates stories about Igbo legends and traditions and about their "... forbears and the divinities with whom they had evolved" (96). Ikem begins with the story of Idemili:

In the beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty.

She came down in the resplendent Pillar of Water, remembered now in legend only, but stumbled upon, some say, by the most fortunate in rare conditions of sunlight rarer even than the eighteen-year cycle of Odunke festivals and their richly arrayed celebrants leading garlanded cattle in procession through village pathways to sacrifice. It rises majestically from the bowl of the dark lake pushing itself upward and erect like the bole of the father of iroko trees, its head commanding not the forest below but the very firmament of heaven.

At first that holy lake was the sole shrine to Idemili. But as people multiplied and spread across the world they built little shrines farther and farther away from the lake wherever they found good land and water and settled. Still their numbers continued to increase and outstrip the provisions of every new settlement; and so the search for land and water also continued.

As it happened, good land was more plentiful than good water and before long some hamlets too far from streams and springs were relieving their burning thirst with

the juice of banana stems in the worst days of dry weather. Idemili, traveling through the country disguised as a hunter, saw this and on her return sent a stream from her lake to snake through the parched settlements all the way to Orimili, the great river which in generations to come strange foreigners would search out and rename the Niger. (93-94)

The power of the story is felt even more deeply when Ikem goes to the University of Bassa that he calls his lecture “The Tortoise and the Leopard – a political mediation on the imperative struggle” (141). When the nation undergoes a troubled period, the story of the leopard and the tortoise rekindles the spirit.

Once upon a time the leopard who had been trying for a long time to catch the tortoise finally chanced upon him on a solitary road. ‘*Aha*’, he said; ‘*at long last! Prepare to die.*’ And the tortoise said: ‘*Can I ask one favour before you kill me?*’ The leopard saw no harm in that and agreed. ‘*Give me a few moments to prepare my mind,*’ the tortoise said. Again the leopard saw no harm in that and granted it. But instead of standing still as the leopard had expected the tortoise went into strange action on the road, scratching with hands and feet and throwing sand furiously in all directions. ‘*Why are you doing that?*’ asked the puzzled leopard. The tortoise replied: ‘*Because even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here.*’ (117)

This story draws our attention to the fact that in the unequal fight against the regime, Chris, Ikem and Beatrice were unexpectedly strong. The old man from Abazon from whom Ikem had heard the story of the tortoise and the leopard, was being held in solitary confinement by the regime which wanted to crush everything and Achebe shows how storytellers can be a threat to those who try to curb the freedom of the human spirit.

...storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit – in state, church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever. (141)

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe places greater responsibilities on the modern day storytellers – the writers when he says:

...writers in the Third World context must not stop at the stage of documenting social problems but move to the higher responsibilities of proffering prescriptions. (148)

This higher responsibility placed upon writers reflects in Achebe's storytelling where the stories form part of a healing process in the crisis-ridden Nigeria and at the same time makes a point on who should be writing the stories of Africa.

Achebe's combination of folktales, myths, memories, facts and fiction creates the tapestry of the rich culture of Nigeria. The point that has to be noted however is that he does not believe in idealising or in transporting his readers / listeners to a past which is flawless. Achebe's pre-occupation with the past and its representation with all its warts is in keeping with his view of the modern writer's duty to help his people see where they had failed. To do this, Achebe believed that the writer had to explore his people's condition in depth and with subtlety. In the end the stories of such a writer would enrich not only the lives of his own people but also that of people living in other parts of the world.

How writers, artists and activists react to the repressive policies of the government often becomes a potent theme in Achebe's fiction. At such points Achebe seems to be drawing our attention to the fact that the role of the traditional storyteller and the resistance that he offered to the version of the colonial masters is similar to what the present-day artists are doing to challenge authoritarian rule. Achebe reaffirms the role of the novelist as teacher and mediator in the location debate, who with his chosen site can alter accepted views and present his own.

The next two chapters on Achebe's five novels [Chapter – III “Representing the Colonial Encounter: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*” and Chapter – IV “Independence and After: *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*.”] will be an attempt to show how as a writer Achebe's narratives offer paradigmatic shifts in thinking during political and cultural transitions.

NOTES

[English (U.S) spellings have been used whenever they appear in citations.]

¹Robin Ikegami, "Knowledge and Power, The Story and the Storyteller: Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*" *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 37 No. 3 (Autumn 1991) 502. Print.

²Ikegami, "Knowledge and power, The Story and the Storyteller: Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*" *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol.37 No.3 (Autumn 1991) 503. Print.

³Edward Sackey, "Oral Tradition and the African Novel" *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol.37 No. 3 (1991) 398. Print.

⁴Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, interview, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Website* n.d. Web. 21 November 2007. < <http://www.halfofayellowsun.com/html>>.

⁵Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London: Arnold,1995) ix. Print.

⁶Chinua Achebe, "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?" *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* 1988 (New York: Anchor Books, 1990) 163. Print.

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⁸Chinua Achebe, "The Writer and His Community" *Hopes and Impediments* 58. Print.

⁹Alain Ricard, "From Oral to Written Literature" *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28 No. 1 (Spring 1997) 197. Print.

¹⁰Edward Sackey, "Oral Tradition and the African Novel" *Modern Fiction Studies* 405. Print.

¹¹Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause" *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann,1975) 30. Print.

¹²Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 44. Print.

¹³Chinua Achebe, interview, "An Interview with Chinua Achebe" by Charles H. Rowell, *Callaloo* 13.1 (1990) 18. Print.

¹⁴Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 45. Print.

¹⁵Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 45. Print.

¹⁶Onyemaechi Odumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence" *Modern Fiction Studies* Special Issue - Post Colonial African Fiction Vol.37 No. 3 (Autumn 1991) 471. Print.

¹⁷Odumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence" *Modern Fiction Studies* 472. Print.

¹⁸Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972) 44. Print.

¹⁹Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre – The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993) 83. Print.

²⁰Ngugi, *Homecoming* xvi. Print.

²¹Odumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence" *Modern Fiction Studies* 473. Print.

²²Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 40-41. Print.

²³Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 41. Print.

²⁴Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 41. Print.

²⁵Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 41- 42. Print.

²⁶Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 45. Print.

²⁷Chinua Achebe, "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation" G.D.Killam, ed., *African Writers on African Writing* (London: Heinemann, 1973) 8. Print.

²⁸Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* 44. Print.

²⁹G.D. Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969) 1. Print.

³⁰Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* 30. Print.

³¹Chinua Achebe, *The African Trilogy – Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, Arrow of God* (London: Picador, 1988) 17. Print. All Subsequent references to the three novels have been incorporated in the text.

³²Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* 1966 (New York: Anchor Books, 1989) 2. Print. All subsequent references to the novel have been incorporated in the text.

³³Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* 1987 (New York: Anchor Books, 1988) 30. Print. All subsequent references to the novel have been incorporated in the text.

CHAPTER – III
REPRESENTING THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER: *THINGS FALL APART,*
NO LONGER AT EASE AND ARROW OF GOD

We must seek the freedom to express our thoughts and our feelings, even against ourselves, without the anxiety that what we say might be taken as evidence against our race.

- Chinua Achebe

The Black Writer's Burden, *Presence Africaine* (1966, 139)

The colonial encounter featured in the three novels, *Things Fall Apart*, *No longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*, cover the period from late nineteenth century to the eve of Nigeria's independence. Achebe's representation of this period in Nigeria's history depicts conflicts in the Igbo society, generated partly by the impact of colonialism and also by tensions within the society itself. Achebe narrates a world where violence, war and sufferings of the people are balanced by the strong presence of tradition, rituals and social coherence. The disruption of the balance is depicted through the ruin of Okonkwo, Ezeulu and Obi in the three novels. But their individual tragedies do not represent the destruction of an entire culture. While narrating Nigeria's colonial encounter, specifically the Igbo community's contact with the British, Achebe presents stories of the political and economic changes and the changes in human life.

Achebe uses knowledge and power, the two indivisible foundations of authority to tell the story of his people. In representing the past, Achebe traverses the boundaries of conventional disciplines like history, literature and anthropology to seek out an integrated form of knowledge where 'to know' is 'to change' or to possess power. Achebe uses the power of his

knowledge (of his own people) to define the African subject and derive an immanent African epistemological order from it. Writers like Achebe have often functioned as critics. His own works have been the site of critiques of imperial representations, language and ideological control.

Achebe has for long been read as a postcolonial writer whose writings seek a reclamation of space through a replacement of the imperialists' accounts by discourses which resist colonial appropriation. The three novels *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* can be studied as examples of narratives that offer nuanced responses to the British district commissioner's myopic articulations contained in a single paragraph with regard to Okonkwo.

As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Everyday brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make 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.¹

They also have to be read along with what Achebe has to say about his commitment to his people:

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. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct and pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive.²

Re-reading Achebe shows that this sense of commitment does not consist of merely writing against the imperialists' versions, or rewriting to set the facts right, but it has far reaching and

a deeper sense of association with the written word and the world. The past with its omnipresent ancestors, the solidarity of communities and the legitimacy of social contract cannot be categorised only as a counter discourse. As G.D Killam says, Achebe's novels "... form a sequence and reflect broadly speaking, the changes which have taken place in Ibo, and by implication Nigerian life as a result of what Achebe calls the 'chance encounter' between Europe and Africa during the imperial-colonial period."³

Going back to the past and writing about it to rediscover the African identity not only fell within the parameters of postcolonial discourse but also became a way of instilling a feeling of pride in the people of a continent whose lives had been distorted both by the colonial rule and in imperial representations. Fanon views this as:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.⁴

And when a writer writes about the rich past, describing a beautiful and splendid era, it becomes an affirmation of African culture. In Fanon's words, "...it was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity."⁵

Achebe's documentation of the sophistication of traditional Igbo society provides vivid dramatisation of the protagonists' psychology and how contradictory forces of internal conflicts and British rule determine their destinies. This looking back at the past yields a balanced view of how things stood, as Achebe says, "What we need to do is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us."⁶

Narrated within a specific locale, Achebe provides alternative sets of traditions, ideals, values and behaviour while reclaiming his heritage and at the same time provides directions for constructive changes. This is evident in the absence of sentimentalist and nostalgia for the

past of the nation. The author recognises not only the weaknesses but also the strong points of the old dispensation. According to Anuradha Ghosh, Achebe's narration of the precolonial world presents,

The unsullied, untarnished image of an Africa with her several gods and goddesses, rituals and taboos, languages, cultures and traditions, songs and dances, bounty and grace, health and well-being may be a romantic reconstruction of the primal world of peace and happiness – a kind of golden age that is posited in order to counter-point the humiliation, the squalor and the ugliness of colonial exploitation. The notion of freedom and beauty and the poignant rendering of a world that has not yet lost its fine sense of balance is a harmonious extension of trying to find roots in the collective unconsciousness of the people who had their own folk forms of expression, ways of living and belief systems suited to the needs of their contexts.⁷

Achebe narrates the loss of the pristine glory of a civilisation that had flourished on the strength of its own merits and demerits. The strong presence of the community, the rich culture of the people, the democratic impulse behind the village meetings and the mediation of disputes by village elders highlight the sophistication and democratic tradition of the Igbos. Achebe's evocation of the past is not just to portray a cultural resistance but to see things as they were which he advocates as:

How does the writer recreate this 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 that 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 recreate will

be called to question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts.⁸

In order to understand Achebe's world as described in his novels, a brief ethnographic account of the Igbo society would be helpful in understanding the cultural and historical background to Achebe's works. The Igbo territory in south-eastern Nigeria stretches from the low-lying swamp land of the Niger Delta through the tableland of the region's centre to the hills of Onitsha in the north. According to Victor C Uchendu 'Igbo' is used in three senses, "Igbo territory, domestic speakers of the language and the language spoken by them"⁹ M.A Onwuejeogwu further goes on to define the Igbo culture areas, which he marks as "...a geographical delimitation of areas that have the same dominant and significant culture traits, complexes and patterns."¹⁰ He draws the Igbo culture area as "...an area delimitable by an imaginary line running outside the settlements of Agbor, Kwale, Obiaruku, Ebu (West Niger Igbo area), Ahoada, Diobu, Umuagbayi, (Port-Harcourt area), Arochukwu, Afikpo, Ndinioafu, (Isiogo Abakaliki area) and Enugu Ezike (Nsukka area) and Nzam."¹¹ The people living within the Igbo culture area speak the same Igbo language and constitute a speech community sharing grammatical, lexical and phonological features.

The Igbo as a whole never had any centralised institution to govern them nor did they have any powerful chief. Traditionally, power has been divided among numerous small groups with the aim of dispersal of authority rather than its concentration in the hands of a few people and the same is reflected in the social structure. The basic social unit is the patrilineage which is made of a single hamlet of several homesteads or compounds. Each compound has the house of a man, his wives and his sons. A number of lineages made up of a group of hamlets make a village which is autonomous. A cluster of villages share a meeting place and are linked by common shrines and myth of descent. David Carroll says that, "This scattered social grouping is symptomatic of a persistent feature of Igbo life which runs

directly counter to the European stereotype of the African tribe with its rigid hierarchy and all-powerful chief.”¹²

The traditional Igbo concept of political power and authority is structural and determined by their concept of *Umunna* (one’s membership of a patrilineage and one’s rights and duties) and the membership of associations based on an elaborate title system. This political structure had two layers – the village and the village group and authority in the family. Victor C Uchendu elaborates this further, “Government at the village level is an exercise in direct democracy. It involves all the lineages and requires the political participation of all the male adults. Though it forms part of the village-group, the widest political community, the village is autonomous in its affairs and accept no interference or dictation from any other group.”¹³ The dispersal of power allowed villagers to participate in public meetings and express their views.

When the British colonial administration took control over Igbo land in the first decade of the twentieth century, they imposed their direct administration. Victor C Uchendu views it as the failure of the British to understand the traditional political institutions of the Igbos, “Failing to find powerful chiefs who wielded influence over a large territory, as were found in the northern and western parts of Nigeria, they naively concluded that the Igbo were living in “ordered anarchy.” Without considering the implications, they imposed a system of direct administration on the Igbo.”¹⁴

Direct rule was imposed in 1900 which divided Igbo territory into areas to be controlled by ‘native courts’ consisting of a British district commissioner, warrant chiefs, court clerks and court messengers. Under the Native Courts Proclamation (1900), the all-purpose native courts derived their revenue from direct taxation. The origins of this policy can be traced back to a period earlier than 1891 when Sir Ralph Moor laid down the first structural arrangement based on definite legislation with specific rules for putting it into practice. The

warrant chief system was similar to the Native Court system in the Eastern Provinces during the period 1891-1929. A E Afigbo views this as "...an attempt by the British to rule these people through what was thought to be their indigenous political organization."¹⁵ The warrant chiefs were handpicked by the British to represent the village groups in the court area, and they were not always people who were acceptable to the village community. David Carroll says that, "This system was deeply resented by the Igbos because the warrant chiefs were often men without status, who had come forward to welcome the imposition of alien rule."¹⁶

In 1918, the district commissioners were removed from the native courts and the British rule became indirect with more power been given to the warrant chiefs. The abuse of power by the local officials led to further reorganisation in 1930 when native courts were modified and authority was given to communities rather than to individuals, which ensured greater flexibility and adaptability to the local conditions. This system of government lasted till Nigeria's independence in 1960 which brought about political integration without disturbing the authority of the traditional village groups. The power held by the village groups is reflected in *Anthills of the Savannah*. The village groups from the Abazon province did not support the new regime and thus it could not receive absolute majority.

The pluralistic, flexible and authoritarian traditional Igbo system was fostered by the highly individualistic temperament of the Igbo. David Carroll observes that the Igbo was known for his "...individualism and ambition, his tolerance and egalitarianism, his down-to-earth practicality and mistrust of authority."¹⁷ Victor C Uchendu further adds that "Igbo individualism is rooted in group solidarity"¹⁸ which he elaborates as, "The Igbo world is based on an equalitarian principle. Equality or near equality ensures that no one person or group of persons acquires too much control over the life of others."¹⁹ Their leaders were never allowed to become too powerful over their people. This fact is represented in *Arrow of God* when Ezeulu refuses to be chief and is imprisoned, he refuses to eat the sacred yam.

Ezeulu's decision disrupts the daily life of the people and they no longer seek his religious advice and move away. Igbo leaders were "...essentially "opinion" leaders ... sensitive to public opinion and embody what is the best in Igbo tradition."²⁰

Igbo society allowed an individual considerable freedom of action to move up the social scale and also to express his views. Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* stands tall as one who in spite of his father's failure could acquire titles, improve his finance and be counted as an important and respected member of his village. M A Onwuejeogwu says that, "The Igbo derive their spirit of individualism from the structure and organization of the simple family or compound family units which encourage individual achievements within the communal context of the Umunna units."²¹ Individualism and communalism are reflected not only in the political sphere but also in the social and ritual life of the Igbo.

The Igbo world maintains a cosmological balance where change is expected and where man's existence is interrelated with the material and the spiritual. David Carroll comments, "There is constant interaction between the world of the living and the dead, between the visible and invisible, the material and the spiritual. Any calamity or untoward event indicates a loss of equilibrium which must be diagnosed through divination and then put right by sacrifice or by an appeal to the ancestors."²² The Igbo cosmos is made up of Uwa – representing the visible world made of human beings, forests and animals; Mmuo – dead ancestors; Alusi – supernatural forces and Okike – creator. Igbo religion consists of the worship of public deities, the cult of personal gods, and the worship of ancestors. The cult of the personal god or *chi* believes that each person is granted a *chi*, a soul by Chukwu the supreme god at the moment of conception, which determines his abilities and fortunes and fulfils the destiny determined for him by the creator.

This probably explains why the first Christian missions were established in Igbo land only as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. Christianity in West Africa was introduced in

the fifteenth century by Portuguese Roman Catholic priests who accompanied traders and officials. Several churches were built to serve the Portuguese community and a small number of African converts. With the withdrawal of the Portuguese from the West African coast the influence of the Catholic missionaries also ended by the eighteenth century. The church in Britain had been influential in the drive to abolish the slave trade and significant missionary activity started in the 1840s and was confined to the area between Lagos and Ibadan. The first missions were opened by the Church of England's Church Missionary Society (CMS). They were followed by other Protestant denominations from Britain, Canada, and the United States. In the 1860s the Roman Catholic religious orders joined in and worked actively among the Igbo. Achebe's fictional world presents the conflicts between the new religion and the old world of the Igbo, the gradual spread of Christianity among the outcastes of the clan and discussions on Christianity vis-à-vis Igbo religious practices and beliefs.

One aspect of Igbo social life is the kola hospitality, which Victor C Uchendu says, "The kola nut is the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality."²³ Every guest is welcomed with a kola nut as a way of showing respect. It is also used in every auspicious occasions and ceremonies. Achebe in his novels describes how this gesture continues to be a part of Igbo life.

Igbo society was not without its flaws. When a woman delivered twins she was made to part with them. Achebe narrates the pain and helplessness of those who had to discard twins born to them. The system of *osu* was another social evil. An *osu* was an outcaste, having been dedicated to a god. They were not allowed to mix with the freeborn and their future generations were destined to share the same fate. Victor C Uchendu says, "The *osu* system of slavery constitutes the greatest contradiction to Igbo equalitarian ideology."²⁴ Achebe in his narration shows how this practice continues even with the spread of Christianity.

A study of Igbo society would not be complete without the study of the position of women. Igbos held mother as supreme – *Nneka*, laying stress on her lineage. Igbo women

took active part in the village markets where they sold their crops. Within the homestead each wife had a hut along the other co-wives. A man could have as many wives as he desired. Achebe's novels show the improvement in the position of women as they progress and begin to take part in nation building. They are no longer silent spectators in wars between clans and are shown as capable of changing the course of their nation's history.

Igbo society held homicide as an offence. Achebe problematizes the Ikemefuna episode in *Things Fall Apart* to counter the western view of the African as savage and upholds the universal feelings of helplessness, pain and ancient ways of rendering justice.

The Igbo have been good orators whose language was replete with proverbs of universal wisdom; they were also excellent craftsmen who attributed religious importance to carving masks; finally they were great warriors. It was this society with which Europeans first made their contacts – the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the slave traders in the eighteenth century, Christian missions in the middle of the nineteenth century and the British political intervention at the end of the nineteenth century. British interest in the Igbo is explained by A.E. Afigbo as:

British colonial officials became interested in Igbo culture history partly for scientific reasons, partly to provide explanation for certain mental, psychological, linguistic and other traits which they considered peculiar to the Igbo, and partly to understand the Igbo and their society as a first step towards evolving suitable institutions for governing them.²⁵

A brief history of Britain's political intervention in Nigeria and the changes that came in its wake is attempted here. Achebe's protagonists who struggle through the conflicts within themselves and in their clan do not remain unaffected by the political turmoil. Their lives are changed as the colonial encounter brings in new systems of administration, religion and education. These had the effect of making men more corrupt and perpetuate divisions among

people. It also heightened ethnic consciousness, as each of the different tribes in Nigeria wanted to participate in the new order of the day.

The Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-85 carved Africa into 'spheres of influence' for European powers. Britain claimed Nigeria and consolidated its territory – the colony of Lagos which was expanded in 1887 with the creation of a new protectorate, Oil Rivers in the Niger Delta. The British also waged ruthless wars to secure their hold on the south. Britain granted the Royal Niger Company a trading monopoly in the north which in turn agreed to advance British economic and political interests. In 1900 Britain revoked the Royal Niger Company's charter and declared that a colonial government would administer Nigeria as two protectorates – one in the south and the other in the north. Simultaneously, Britain went to war against the Sokoto caliphate in the northwest and conquered it in 1903 and quelled other resistances in northern Nigeria over the next few years. In 1914, the two protectorates were joined into a single colony and in 1922, a part of the German colony of Kamerun was attached to Nigeria as a League of Nations mandated territory.

Britain governed Nigeria through indirect rule, a system in which local leaders continued to rule their traditional lands so long as they collected taxes to ensure British prosperity. Indirect rule operated relatively smoothly in the north where the British worked with the Fulani aristocracy, who had long governed the Sokoto caliphate and were able to administer traditional Islamic law alongside British civil law. In the south, however, traditions were less accommodating. In Yorubaland indirect rule disrupted historical balances in society by increasing the power of some chiefs. Moreover, although the Yoruba kings had long been powerful, few had collected taxes, and citizens resisted their right to do so under British mandate. In the southeast, in Igboland, which had never had chiefs, those appointed by the British received little or no respect. [This is reflected in Achebe's works where court

messengers, called kotmas were never welcomed (*Things Fall Apart*) and in Ezeulu's refusal to be appointed as chief (*Arrow of God*).

The British carried out a few reforms which included the gradual elimination of domestic slavery from the Sokoto Caliphate and introduction of western education. Britain redirected Nigeria's trade away from Africa towards itself which undermined the northern region's large and centuries-old trade across the Sahara. Nigeria's economy was further changed by the introduction of new crops and expanding old ones, such as oil palm, cotton, groundnuts, and cocoa, which were sold for export. As Nigerians had to pay taxes in cash, most of them had little choice but to grow cash-yielding crops.

The traditional village market days yielded the days in the Igbo calendar. The names of the days of the week were derived from the names of the market days. The markets in turn gave women some amount of economic freedom. These spaces had been sites of cultural exchange before the coming of the colonisers. Markets like the Onitsha which stands on the Niger was a space where various segments of society met and cultural interaction took place. Achebe writes:

Onitsha was always the market-place of the world. In its ancient emporium the people of Olu and Igbo – the riverain folk and the dwellers of the hinterland forests – met in guarded, somewhat uneasy commerce; old-time farmers met new, urban retail traders of known and outlandish wares. Onitsha was the original site of evangelical dialogue between proselytising Christianity and the Igbo religion; between strange-looking toeless harbingers of white rule and (at first) an amused and indulgent black population that assembled in their hundreds to enjoy the alien spectacle. It was finally the occult no-man's land between river-spirits and mundane humans.²⁶

Throughout the early Twentieth century, Nigerians opposed foreign rule in many ways which intensified during World War I. Workers in mines, railways and public services often

went on strike over poor wages and working conditions. Ire over taxation prompted a battle in 1929, fought mainly by Igbo women in the Aba region. There were also instances of passive resistance like avoiding being counted in the census, working at a slow pace, and telling stories ridiculing the colonisers. Political groups were formed to campaign for independence which included the National Congress and National Democratic Party. In 1937, the growing resistance was given a voice by Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo nationalist who founded the newspaper, *West African Pilot*.

During the World War II, many Nigerians fought for the British even as they witnessed a growing anticolonial feeling which increased the pace of nationalism. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon, led by Azikiwe and supported mostly by Igbos and the Action Group, led by Obafemi Awolowo and supported by Yorubas strongly articulated the movement for independence. By the 1950s, other parties like the Northern People's Congress, a conservative northern group led by the Hausa-Fulani elite emerged. The regional power bases of these parties foreshadowed the divisive regional politics that continued even after independence.

The movement for independence within Nigeria along with pressure from other colonies and reformers over the world, led to the introduction of a new constitution in 1947. This divided Nigeria into three regions: The Northern Region which was Hausa-Fulani and Muslim, the Eastern Region was Igbo and Catholic and the Western Region was Yoruba and was Muslim and Anglican. Each region had its own legislative assembly with appointed rather than elected members and was overseen by a weak federal government. Though the constitution was short-lived, it had a serious long-term impact as it encouraged regional, ethnic politics.

The constitution failed on several counts, was abrogated in 1949, and was followed by other constitutions in 1951 and 1954, each of which had to contend with powerful ethnic

forces. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) argued that northerners, who made up half of Nigeria's population, should have a large representation in any federal legislature. The NPC was especially concerned about questions like respect for Islam and the economic dominance of the south. The western based Action Group also wanted autonomy, fearing that their profitable western cocoa industries would be tapped to subsidise less wealthy areas. In the poorer east, the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) wanted a powerful central government and a redistribution of wealth.

The eventful compromise was the 1954 constitution which made Nigeria a federation of three regions with powers evenly split between the regional governments and the central government. The constitution also gave the regions the right to seek self-government, which the western and eastern regions achieved in 1956. The northern region, however, fearing that self-government would leave it at the mercy of southerners, delayed the imposition until 1959, which in turn delayed British withdrawal.

In December 1959, elections were held for a federal parliament. None of the three main parties could win a majority, but the NPC because of the size of the northern region won the largest majority. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, head of the NPC entered a coalition government with the eastern NCNC and became prime minister. The new parliament was seated in January 1960 and Nigeria became independent the same year on the first of October.

Achebe's narration goes back to a time long before the scramble for Africa, revealing that the colonial encounter is only a part of Africa's long history. This brief colonial occupation of Nigeria not only transformed the pristine world but left behind lasting impressions which lasted even beyond political independence. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe presents a world long before the coloniser came. Achebe presents a world complete in its order, where there were conflicts between tribes, land disputes, marital disputes which were settled by the village

communities. The old ways of rendering justice preserved the balance in the society and upheld the necessary laws of the clan. It was also a self-sufficient society well served by its institutions, laws and men who dispensed justice. The colonial rule was resisted because it altered and sometimes corrupted that which had stood the test of time.

Achebe looks at the Igbo through their own eyes as they celebrate the various rituals and holidays that mark important events in the year and in the lives of the people. The Igbo are depicted as a people with well-developed and time tested social institutions and having a rich culture impressively civilised civic life with traditions and laws based on justice and fairness. They are not ruled by a chief or a king but in accordance to democratic principles in which all males gather and take decisions through consensus. Ironically, it is the Europeans, who boast of bringing democratic institutions to the rest of the world, who tried to subvert these clan meetings in Umuofia. The Igbo also take pride in their high degree of social mobility as men are not judged by the wealth of their fathers and Achebe emphasises that a title and high rank is attainable for all freeborn Igbo. Achebe does not shy away from depicting the injustices of Igbo society. The Igbo are deeply patriarchal. They have a great fear of twins who are abandoned immediately after birth. Violence is not unknown to them but they cannot comprehend warfare on a European scale.

Things Fall Apart irrevocably changed the perception of African Literature in English. Jeffrey Meyers says that:

Achebe celebrates the bonds of kinship in family life, the respectful and ceremonial visits, the worship of the ancestral spirits, the veneration of the Oracle and of the elders, ... the arrangement of the bride price, the feasts of marriage, of harvest, and of farewell; the singing, the drumming, the dancing and the wrestling; the village councils and the oratory, the courts of justice and the last rites of the dead.²⁷

The theme of colonialism is not introduced until about the last fifty pages of the novel. By then, Okonkwo the protagonist has lost everything and has been driven into exile. Within the traditions of Igbo culture there is still hope for his redemption and he is not completely abandoned by his clan, who still visit him and make arrangements to help him. The arrival of missionaries in Umuofia, followed by representatives of the colonial government completely disrupts Igbo life. As Igbo society undergoes a phase of transition, a series of tragic events test Okonkwo whose fear of being considered as weak leads to his suicide. Okonkwo decides to remove himself rather than live under an alien rule and in a clan which has shifted its loyalties to the new rulers. The conflict between Okonkwo and his community arises because he remains faithful to the ideals of the clan while others have learnt to accept change.

The general perception is that the change triggered off by the arrival of the coloniser was too sudden for the Igbo to cope with, which led to the rapid disintegration of institutions and values. The traditional society with all its glory and strength disintegrated under the formidable external force of imperialism and the self-destructive impulse of the individual from within. *Things Fall Apart* analyses not only the shift from communal life to the individual consciousness but also the weaknesses of the society the coloniser had taken advantage of and exploited. Achebe's refusal to blame the colonial rule for the destruction of Igbo society makes one reconsider the postcolonial contention. Achebe's works mark an important shift. He says:

I cannot simply assign blame this man or that man. The society itself was already heading toward destruction... [but] Europe has a lot of blame... [T]here were internal problems that made it possible for the Europeans to come in. Somebody showed them the way. A conflict between two brothers enables a stranger to reap their harvest.²⁸

As the Igbo society undergoes transition, Achebe locates it in the liminal space of history where it grapples with the colonial power and devises ways to counteract it. *Things Fall*

Apart shows the last phase of precolonial history as it is taken over by colonial rule. In the textual politics of subversion, Achebe has been able to bring alive the story of his people with all their frailties and shortcomings. He presents the socio-historical crises among the Igbo that existed long before the arrival of the British and later created opportunities for the spread of Christianity. Achebe's recreation of the precolonial past shows that it was neither wholly a savage condition nor an ideal era. The Igbo ancestors were brave but vulnerable people and their world had fallen apart because they could not comprehend and counter the violence of colonisation. The picture of the past is made without any attempt to romanticise it and it is accepted with dignity while understanding its imperfections without apology. G.D. Killam says that *Things Fall Apart*,

...is a vision of what life was like in Iboland between 1850 and 1900. Achebe makes a serious attempt to capture realistically the strains and tensions of the experiences of Ibo people under the impact of colonialism... Achebe is a twentieth century Ibo man, a decolonized writer, and recognizes the wide gulf which exists between his present day society and that of Ibo villages sixty years ago, sixty years which have seen remarkable changes in the texture and structure of Ibo society.²⁹

The sixty years refer to the time before 1958 when *Things Fall Apart* was written. As the Igbo village of Umuofia and the protagonist Okonkwo confront the beginnings of the colonial process, *Things Fall Apart* presents the story of Okonkwo. "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond" (17). It had been a long struggle for him to reach this position in society.

...Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men had. He neither inherited a barn nor a title, nor even a young wife. But in spite of these disadvantages, he had begun even in his father's lifetime to lay the foundations of a prosperous future.

It was slow and painful. But he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death. (28-29)

Okonkwo's life is reduced to a paragraph by the British District Commissioner in his book "*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*" (168). Mala Pandurang views this as the "...indigenous oral account of Okonkwo...usurped by the written 'official account'."³⁰ The authority of the British officer is viewed by Biodun Jeyifo as, "...a figure not merely of political, administrative power but also of narrative, discursive, epistemic authority."³¹ Achebe uses his knowledge of the Igbo and gives a detailed account of Okonkwo's life. Rewriting a distorted story falls within the parameters of postcolonial discourse, but what sets Achebe apart is the way he narrates it.

In Okonkwo, Achebe presents a hero who dies fighting not the coloniser but the forces within his own people. Okonkwo stands in opposition to Igbo culture as he fights to preserve it. His struggle is to maintain the cultural integrity of the traditional life of Umuofia against the forces of imperialism. Emmanuel Obiechina says that, "Okonkwo is one of the first people in Umuofia to realise with clarity the nature of the threat which faces the traditional way of life as a result of the establishment of the missionary outpost in the village."³² His warnings go unheard by the clan.

Okonkwo stands out not as one who failed because he could not accept the changes that came along with colonisation but as one who despite his best intentions failed against his own people. Reading Okonkwo's character as a psychological study would reveal his suicide as an escape. Achebe presents his protagonist with human weaknesses who at a time of great historical upheavals tried to save his people but failed. Achebe brings alive the story of a hero's failure which would never have been recorded in mainstream history and rarely found in the fictional recreation of those who rose against imperialism.

As Achebe narrates the past, the episode of the killing of Ikemefuna, the young boy sent from the village of Mbaino as compensation for the wrongful death of a young woman from Umuofia, stands out. Much has been written about Okonkwo's weakness in his killing of Ikemefuna. A re-reading of the event in the context of the present study shows that Achebe used the incident to present not only the dark side of a society but also to show the wisdom and helplessness of the clan. The village elders who had warned Okonkwo against interference had obviously foreseen the tragic outcome. Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a respected member of Umuofia had said to Okonkwo: "The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you father"(55).

This old way of rendering justice was resented even then. Obierika who did not join in the killing tells Okonkwo: " 'If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families'" (63). Achebe touches upon this event again in *No Longer at Ease* to show that the incident was not only remembered but resented as much by the Igbo as by the world outside – "Even in those days some elders said it was a great wrong that a man should raise his hands against a child that called him father" (286). Achebe does not hide the warts and fissures in the Igbo society, nor does he attempt to gloss over the individual failures. Achebe believes that not writing about them would mean defending these old practices which would in turn only help the west to call Africa primitive.

Things Fall Apart narrates the position of women in Igbo society in the precolonial era. In the apparently patriarchal society there were some women at least who did enjoy some empowering privileges. Each married woman had her own homestead and a share of the land to grow crops which could be traded. Though women had no say in community meetings, the priestess Agbala mediated between the world of man and the other world. Though there was

hierarchy among the wives of a man with the eldest wife wearing the anklet of her husband's titles, there were also man who treated their wives as equals. There were men like Nulue who "...could not do anything without telling her" (64). The Igbo philosophy of "Nneka – Mother is Supreme"(112) is explained as:

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... And that is why we say mother is supreme. (113)

The deep respect for women can go unrecognised in any essentialist reading. A woman's fate is not different from that of many men across communities. The wise Igbo know it and so when a Igbo woman dies, they sing:

For whom is it well, for whom is it well?

There is no one for whom it is well. (113)

The people of Umuofia lived their lives close to the earth and a reflection of this is available in the celebrations marking their harvests – the Week of Peace "to clear the bush to make new farms" (38), The Feast of the New Yam "held every year before the harvest began to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits. New Yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers" (41). They pray for kinsmen – "We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its aching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsmen to scratch him" (136).

The Igbo also acknowledge the power of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves which connect them to the other world. "The Land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the

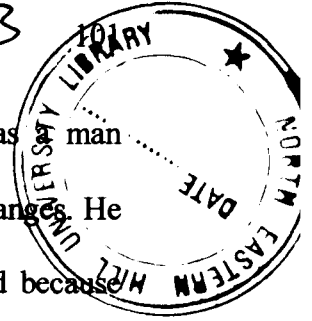
ancestors. There was coming and going between them... A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought them nearer and nearer to his ancestors"(104). They worship idols which is explained by Eustace Palmer as, "In worshipping wooden representations of these gods the Ibo people far from indulging in idolatry were merely manifesting the belief similar to the Christian theory of the omnipresence of God, that they were present in all aspects of creation through which they could speak to their people."³³

When Christian missionaries began their work in Umuofia it captivated Nwoye, Okonkwo's son – "It was the poetry of the religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague but persistent question that haunted his young soul – the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth" (122). The new religion failed to make allowances for the Igbo religious and spiritual practices. But it was able to bring into its fold individuals like Nwoye who was disturbed by what he had seen and heard; Nneka, who had borne twins four times and had to discard them immediately; and members of the *osu*.

Arrow of God heralds the far reaching changes that are to come in the wake of the spread of the new religion and the establishment of the British administrative control. Though *Arrow of God* was written after *No Longer at Ease*, it captures the times and events that took place between the coming of the colonisers and the eve of independence.

The suppression of the traditional African way of life is shown as leading to conflicts between the individual and the community with the corollary of British intervention in the administrative, educational and religious fields. The early signs of this conflict between the community and individual which was featured in *Things Fall Apart* is dealt with at length in *Arrow of God*. Here it spreads deeper. Ezeulu with all his powers as the chief priest of Ulu

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stands tall in his responsibilities towards his people. Achebe presents Ezeulu as a man wedded to the traditional values of his clan and yet pragmatic enough to accept changes. He even sends one of his sons to be educated by the missionaries. Ezeulu is doomed because while defending the traditions of his people, he is unyielding and unable to compromise with the new dispensation. He is afraid of losing his authority. His madness, as narrated in the novel mercifully spares him the “knowledge of the final outcome” (555) that his society had not only failed to understand him but had also embraced the new religion.

Ezeulu’s story is based on a real incident in which a priest named Ezeagu rejected a District Commissioner’s offer to be Warrant Chief in 1913. He was imprisoned and so could not roast the sacred yams during the days of his imprisonment.³⁴ Ezeulu’s refusal to eat the yams delays the feast of the New Yam as he cannot announce the appearance of the new moon. The villagers suffer from hunger and some begin to turn to the Christian harvest festival. Ezeulu’s outburst of arrogance, his attempts to restore his prestige and to reassert the power of his god alienates him from his community and the missionaries alike. The historical factors behind these events are placed in the background by Achebe. In colonial Africa, records exist of instances of desecration of ancestral masks, indifference to the customs and traditions of the people and conversion to Christianity to project the unquestioned white supremacy over the African people. Amidst these changes, Achebe narrates how human nature changes along with the struggle to accept the altered situations. G.D Killam says that *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* “...are expressions in terms of imaginative art of the tensions, stresses and conflicts, presented in personal, social and spiritual terms of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ibo society.”³⁵

The imagery-laden style of *Arrow of God*, full of metaphors and proverbs carries intimations of the spiritual world of the Igbo. The creative practices of mask-making and the various rituals and festivals bring alive the rich oral tradition. While re-reading Achebe’s

recreation of the past, one comes across Ezeulu, the high priest of the village deity, an intellectual who can see the weaknesses of his clan members and sense the need for change. His isolation from his community cannot be blamed only on the historical changes or on the clan's failure to understand him. His greatest failing is his own pride. Ezeulu's conflict with his self and his clan lead to further debates on the binaries such as religion and power, spiritualism and materialism and continuity and change.

The issues of religion and power in *Arrow of God* have to be read in terms of religious powers held by Ezeulu over his clan vis-à-vis the administrative powers of the British rule which interfere with the religious order of Umuaro. Ezeulu believed that he was "no more than an arrow in the bow of his god" (516) since he was the chief priest of Ulu, the village deity of Umuaro. He held traditional authority in the household and also at village meetings. Once he had gone against his clan in a land dispute and on that occasion he reminded everyone that his "fathers did not fight a war of blame" (337). Ezeulu's decision divided Umuaro into groups and the infighting set the stage for British intervention.

The white man, not satisfied that that he had stopped the war, had gathered all the guns in Umuaro and asked the soldiers to break them in the face of all, except three or four which he carried away. Afterwards he sat in judgment over Umuaro and Okperi and gave the disputed land to Okperi. (347)

The white man occupies larger space in Achebe's narration as he debates on the theory of the white man's burden. The book which the District Commissioner had planned to write in *Things Fall Apart* is now consulted by new British administrators. One now comes to know that *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* was written by George Allen who in his book calls upon the British race to come to Nigeria and "lead the backward races into line" (352).

Achebe does not merely conform to the norms of postcolonial discourse while showing how colonisation made inroads and disrupted the old order. He goes further than that: in *Ezeulu* he shows a character who can foresee the changes that were about to take place. In a spirit of accommodation he sends his son to receive the new ways.

At first he had thought that since the white man had come with great power and conquest it was necessary that some people should learn the ways of his deity. That was why he had agreed to send his son Oduche, to learn the new ritual. He also wanted him to learn the white man's wisdom, for Ezeulu knew from what he saw of Wintabota and the stories he heard about his people that the white man was very wise. (361-362)

Ezeulu is insightful enough to understand that the new religion was threatening to displace the old religious order. It is "...like a leper. Allow him a handshake and he wants to embrace" (362). He understood that it was difficult to thwart its progress: "The world is changing...I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: "Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching"(365). This same thought had come to Okika in *Things Fall Apart* when he had said:

We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland. If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of our clansman. But we must do it. Our fathers never dreamt of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done. Eneka the bird was asked why he was always on the wing and he replied: "Men have learnt to shoot without missing their mark and I have learnt to fly without perching on a twig." We must root out this evil. And if our brothers take the side of evil we must root

them out too. And we must do it *now*. We must bale this water now that it is only ankle-deep...(164)

Ezeulu also could understand the importance of the white man's education and how it would work to his advantage. His decision to educate one of his sons on western lines is expressive of his pragmatic appraisal of the ground realities.

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow. (365)

Ezeulu's son Oduche also realises this when a West Indian missionary visits his church: "...this man, although black, had more knowledge than white men" (366).

Alongside the progress of the new religion and education, came the measures of administrative control. The British saw that the Igbo did not have any kings or chiefs and so decided to impose indirect rule.

To many colonial nations native administration means government by white men. You are all aware that HMG considers this policy as mistaken. In place of the alternative of governing directly through Administrative Officers there is the other method of trying while we endeavour 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... (375)

The imposition of indirect rule had its own limitations because as things turned out, it became apparent that power was abused by those who held it. Captain Winterbottom appointed James Ikedi as Warrant Chief for Okperi as he was “an intelligent fellow who had been among the very first people to receive missionary education in these parts”(376). But within a short time there were rumours of his setting up of an illegal court and private prison:

The latest thing he did was to get his people make him an *obi* or king, so that he was now called His Highness Ikedi the First, Obi of Okperi. This among a people who abominated kings! This was what the British administration was doing among the Ibos, making a dozen mushroom kings grow where there was none before.(378)

Captain Winterbottom who was against the imposition of indirect rule, blamed the aberrations on the Africans. He could “only put it down to cruelty of a kind which Africa alone produced. It was this elemental cruelty in the psychological make-up of the native that the starry-eyed European found so difficult to understand” (377).

Achebe shows how both the British and the Africans in power, abused their positions. “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 one weapon alone”(405). In his two novels set in independent Nigeria, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe deals with the abuse of power on a larger scale. But the beginnings can be seen in *Arrow of God* where he as a writer does not fail to show how historical changes could make man more materialistic. Though the Igbos were attached to material things also, they had a spiritual side to their nature which enabled them to maintain a balance. Colonialism subverted their spiritualism. Their materialistic leanings increased in proportion to the advancement of western values. This received further impetus from the conflict between Christianity and Igbo faith. When John Goodcountry, a new teacher from the Niger Delta came to Umuaro he “spoke the white man’s language as if it

was his own” and “told the converts of Umuaro about the early Christians of the Niger Delta who fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana. He told them of Joshua Hart, his kinsman, who suffered martyrdom in Bonny”(366). These events along with the incident of the killing of the sacred python highlight how Christianity insinuated itself into Igbo life.

In spite of these changes, Umuaro does not lose its continuity. The old ways of life continue to exist, as seen in the Festival of the First Pumpkin Leaves where there are rituals for the purification of the earth and man. Bonnie J Barthold says, “...the good life exists within a unified community, in which material blessing and spiritual sanctions are also unified. At the centre of these values is a concept of time that implies both perpetual renewal and perpetual responsibility. In *Arrow of God*, as the leader becomes divorced from the community, human responsibility fails and the cycle is broken.”³⁶ Ezeulu’s delay in announcing the harvest followed by the death of his son and his subsequent insanity is seen by the clan as a punishment from the gods. “Their gods had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors – that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against his clan”(555). Ezeulu loses not only his godhead but also suffers a loss of self. The community emerges stronger than before as it believes that if man could create gods, he could also destroy them, see the moon for himself and record the seasons without a priest. As Chidi Amuta says, “...in the world of Umuaro, man creates a god to serve his social and economic needs ...the supreme deity, Ulu, is a ‘synthetic deity’ fashioned by the people of six villages that make up Umuofia to meet their needs for collective security against the ravages of the slave traders.”³⁷ Soyinka’s comment on this is very apt. He writes, “The confrontation between god and priest is channelled off harmlessly through a prophetic glimpse of the god’s own faith.”³⁸ Achebe creates a hero in Ezeulu and shows how his fall is brought about by his

own pride. He is deserted by his god. Perhaps such a saga is not depicted in any glorified postcolonial account.

Shatto Arthur Gakwandi says that: “Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God stand out as the major expositions of the dialogue between western values and ancestral values of their communities.”³⁹ Both Okonkwo and Ezeulu stand alienated as their community’s values are undermined by new ones. But Ngugi wa Thiong’o affirms that,

Okonkwo and Ezeulu are the makers of history...Achebe has succeeded in giving human dignity to his characters whether living in their traditional communal life or resisting European colonialism. Achebe sees his task as helping his society to regain belief in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration...and a brave and successful attempt to recreate the dynamic spirit in a living community.⁴⁰

In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe turns to the last phase of the colonial rule. The novel opens with the trial of Obi Okonkwo on a charge of accepting bribes. He stands in the dock awaiting justice for a crime in accordance with western legal system. The British judge is shocked to learn that he is a beneficiary of western education yet corrupt. Achebe in this novel weighs the materialistic gains of western education against traditional African values and shows that it is the failure of an individual to hold strongly to his values which leads to his downfall and the death of his community’s dream. As Nigeria is looking forward to freedom and yet is enmeshed in corruption, we are witness to enactment of the crisis of the nation in the life of the protagonist.

As Nigeria stands at the threshold of independence, Achebe raises various questions in his narration – Is Nigeria ready for freedom from foreign rule? Is western education to be held responsible for leading the nation to corruption and if so to what extent? How long would the traditional bonds of communities survive in the face of the attempts by individuals to break away from them? How has the spread of regionalism affected the federal structure? The

history of former colonies is full of stories of the struggle for independence to bring to an end the colonial rule. But Achebe's narration does not present a very hopeful future as he questions not merely the colonisers who would eventually grant freedom but also the people who would receive it. He wonders at the future leaders' sense of commitment to their traditional values and their sensitivity to the aspirations of their people.

The liminal point at which the novel is set identifies the colonial experience as a phase of crisis, both for the protagonist as well as the nation, due to the conflicting value systems it engenders. The personal crisis of Obi Okonkwo raises questions on how western education altered the values of an individual, and the crisis at the level of the nation. The novel reveals the extent of corruption in society. The personal and national crises lead to the inevitable question which Achebe poses regarding Nigeria's readiness for independence. Though the novel does not anticipate a better future for the nation, yet it identifies the rays of hope that come from the still prevalent sense of the community.

Standing at the crossroads of cultural changes, Obi Okonkwo is caught between his inherent values and those he is exposed to because of his western education and "European post" (248). Obi is influenced by the traditional Igbo culture of Umuofia where he grew up, the Christian teachings of his father, the idealism of English literature which he studied in England, and the corrupt and yet sophisticated lifestyle of Lagos. But he is not at ease anywhere. Bonnie J Barthold says that Obi "...inherits a social limbo, "at ease" neither in Umuofia nor in money hungry Lagos, unable to live up to his own ideals and equally unable to conform happily to the materialistic view of those around him."⁴¹

As a school boy Obi had heard of the brightly lit Lagos but on his return from London, the sight of corruption had disillusioned him. His pastoral vision of Nigeria idealised in his poems, ironically enough are shattered. During his journey to his village he is shocked to see a policeman accept bribe from a lorry driver. At home he is pained to see his family's

condition even “after nearly thirty years’ service in the church”(219). The rejection of his marriage to Clara by his parents and his community’s interference in the matter because she is an *osu* alienates him from his family and the Umuofia Progressive Union. His job requires him to maintain a lavish lifestyle and this leads him to accept bribes resulting in his conviction. But it was he who had at first refused to resort to the practice of bribe-taking and even believed that the new generation of educated Nigerians would eradicate it.

G.D.Killam says that *No Longer at Ease* “shows the nature and extent of the changes wrought by colonial intervention in Nigeria as they are revealed in the career of Obi, a character intensely individualized yet nevertheless representative of the young and educated Nigerian.”⁴² As in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, here also Achebe shows the failure of his protagonist to exercise freedom and control over decisions during the changing times. Achebe could have presented his protagonist as a hope for the future of his nation, but instead shows his failure to deal with the challenges engendered by colonial rule. Eustace Palmer draws comparison between Obi and his grandfather Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*: “Where Okonkwo is an impressive tragic character, his grandson falls far short of tragic stature. He lacks independence of spirit and the solid core which should have enabled him to resist temptation when his financial troubles began; he lacks initiative, merely allowing events to overtake him and he is destroyed because he betrays his principles with astonishing ease, not, as in the case of his grandfather, because he champions them to the last.”⁴³

Achebe’s narration shows that even Nigerians felt that they were still not ready for independence - “Our people have a long way to go”(203). Even the common man could feel the wide gap that existed between them and the ruling class which on the eve of independence included a considerable number of Nigerians. This gap led the common man to believe that, “In Nigeria the government was ‘they’. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could

without getting into trouble”(200). The situation was made even worse by the rapid spread of corrupt practices. The offering of the kola nut to a visitor in the traditional society by now had been replaced by bribes to get things done. It is accepted as, “Our people say that if you pat homage to the man on top, others will pay homage to you when it is your turn to be on top”(189). Few people saw any virtue in those who refused to accept bribes.

They said a man expects you to accept ‘kola’ from him for services rendered, and until you do, his mind is never at rest....A man to whom you do a favour will not understand if you say nothing, make no noise, just walk away. You may cause more trouble by refusing a bribe than by accepting it. Had not a Minister of State said, albeit in an unguarded, alcoholic moment, that the trouble was not in receiving bribes, but in failing to do the thing for which the bribe was given? And if you refuse, how do you know that a ‘brother’ or a ‘friend’ is not receiving on your behalf. Having told everyone that he is your agent? (245)

The situation appeared as if all human relations and moral values were mediated by money.

But Obi Okonkwo had thought differently when he joined a government post. He refused bribes offered to him and had felt that his nation could not move ahead if it was caught in this system.

‘Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses?’ He shook his head. “Not a chance there. It would take centuries. A handful of men at the top. Or even one man with vision – an enlightened dictator. People are scared of the word nowadays. But what kind of democracy can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance? Perhaps a half-way house – a sort of compromise.’(210)

It is tragic that Obi succumbs to the same corruption he so much disliked; unable to find answers to his doubts and solutions to the dilemma. Ngugi says that Obi’s fall is due to “the pressures within and without.”⁴⁴

If Achebe in his writing held his people responsible for the prevailing conditions before independence, he also wrote about the coloniser who worked hard for the development of Nigeria through the character of Mr. Green. "Here was a man who did not believe in a country and yet worked so hard for it"(259).

It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden-boy and steward-boy. He must have come originally with an ideal - to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal head-hunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St. George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr. Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear.

With a flash of insight Obi remembered his Conrad which he had read for his degree. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.' That was Mr.Kurtz before the heart of darkness got him. Afterwards he had written: 'Exterminate all the brutes.' It was not a close analogy, of course. Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn. (259-260)

Achebe does not fail to imply that the strong feeling of racial consciousness and superiority was always present in whatever they did for the colonised. That is why when Obi's trial is going on, the judge says, " 'I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this'"(174). Mr. Green explains this as, " ' The African is corrupt through and through'"(175). He goes on to explain, " 'The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We

have brought him Western education. But what use is it for him?...”(175). He questions the benefits of education which does not reach the masses.

‘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 allowance and find him an easy, comfortable job at the end of his course, but also to pay his intended. It’s absolutely incredible. I think Government is making a terrible mistake in making it 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 countrymen who die everyday from hunger and disease.’(268)

He also has doubts about the ability of the Nigerians to govern themselves and he tells Obi, “‘It’s people like you who ought to make the Government decide. That is what I have always said. There is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interest of his country. From your ministers down to your most junior clerk. And you tell me you want to govern yourselves’”(298).

When Obi had set out for London, he was going to “the place where learning finally came to an end”(179). On his return he had spoken on the value of education: “‘Education for service, not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly’”(200). Obi had got an ‘European post’ without “*seeing* some of the men before hand”(200) and his work as Secretary to the Scholarship Board reveals the corruption prevalent even in education: “ ‘Ego make plenty money there. Every student who wan’ go England go do see am for house’”(236). Obi’s western education and European post was going to change his life, “A university degree was the philosopher’s stone. It transmuted a third-class clerk on one

hundred and fifty a year into a senior civil servant on five hundred and seventy, with car and luxuriously furnished quarters at nominal rent. And the disparity in salary and amenities did not even tell half the story. To occupy a 'European post' was second only to actually being a European. It raised a man from the masses to the elite whose small talk at cocktail parties was 'How's the car behaving?'"(248).

In spite of the prevailing gloom in Nigeria as narrated in *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe highlights the unity among the members of the Igbo community which symbolises hope for the future. The Umuofia Progressive Union is a continuation of the strong communal feelings seen in the Igbo village of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*.

Umuofia is an Ibo village in Eastern Nigeria and the home town of Obi Okonkwo. It is not a particularly big village but its inhabitants call it a town. They are very proud of its past when it was the terror of its neighbours, before the white man came and leveled everybody down. Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves) who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners...No matter where they are in Nigeria, they start a local branch of the Umuofia Progressive Union. (176)

They believe that, "...he who has people is richer than he who has money"(238). They feel proud when Obi returns after completing his studies.

...the great honour Obi had brought to the ancient town of Umuofia which could now join the comity of other towns in their march towards political irredentism, social equality and economic emancipation.

'The importance of having one of our sons in the vanguard of this march of progress is nothing short of axiomatic. Our people have a saying "Ours is ours, but mine is mine." Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that of which it can say: "This is mine." (199-200)

In their feeling of oneness there is also the underlying attitude of apartness from other communities which serves to show that the different tribes of Nigeria have not homogenised into one.

The community stands by Obi when his mother dies but is shocked when he does not attend the funeral. Obi does not lack his community's support when he is convicted for bribery though they are ashamed that a man like him should go to prison for twenty pounds. They are "against people reaping where they have not sown. But ...if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one" (177). They decide to stand by him because "...a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone" (176).

The communal feelings are strong not only in Lagos but in Umuofia as well. When Obi returned home, there was a grand welcome for him which made him reflect on the lives of his people, some aspects of which the colonisers would never understand.

Four years in England had filled Obi with a longing to be back in Umuofia. This feeling was sometimes so strong that he found himself feeling ashamed of studying English for his degree. He spoke Ibo whenever he had the least opportunity of doing so. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to find another Ibo-speaking student in a London bus. But when he had to speak in English with a Nigerian student from another tribe he lowered his voice. It was humiliating to have to speak to one's countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own. He wished they were here today to see. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live.(214)

An elder of the village, Odogwu had said: 'He is a son of Iguedo,...There are nine villages in Umuofia, but Iguedo is Iguedo. We have our faults, but we are not empty men who become white when they see white, and black when they see black'(217). He had gone on to say that Ogbuefi Okonkwo "who faced the white man single-handed and died in the fight" (217) had come back as Obi and had compared him to the great men of the clan.

'Iguedo breeds great men,...when I was young I knew of them – Okonkwo, Ezeudu, Obierika, Okolo, Nwosu.' He counted them off with his right fingers against the left. 'And many others, as many as grains of sand. Among their fathers we hear of Ndu, Nuosisi, Ikedi, Obika and his brother Iweka – all giants. These men were great in their day. Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large number of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune. We are the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land. Greatness has belonged to Iguedo from ancient times. It is not made by man. You cannot plant greatness as you plant yams or maize. Who ever planted an iroko tree – the greatest tree in the forest? You may collect all the iroko seeds in the world, open the soil and put them there. It will be in vain. The great tree chooses where to grow and we find it there, so it is with the greatness in men.'(217-218)

Their greatness is also mentioned many years later at the time when Ikemefuna's killing is remembered: "Even in those days some elders said it was a great wrong that a man should raise his hands against a child that called him father."(286)

The voice of the people in a unison 'Ya' to '*Umuofia Kwenu*' is mentioned in all the three novels. Through this group of choral characters Achebe tells the story of his people; since nations are made up of people and not states. The voices of the subaltern groups have to be

heard. Achebe shows how the colonial encounter changed the lives of his people, and how the strong bonds of kinship held his people together. M. M. Mahood says:

Achebe's recognition of the positive values that bind a society together counterbalances the individual disasters in all of Achebe's novels, much as it has prevented the communities of West Africa – in contrast to some in other parts of the continent – from falling totally apart under the pressure of colonial annexation.⁴⁵

The African Trilogy, as the three novels have been published together, narrate an era, recalling the story of a people and the universal truths of human nature as the characters react to changes with courage, honesty, generosity and with pessimism and cynicism. By representing unregistered voices and events, Achebe provides an alternative paradigm. The stories place general humanity above Africanness.

NOTES

[English (U.S) spellings have been used whenever they appear in citations.]

¹Chinua Achebe, *The African Trilogy - Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, Arrow of God* (London: Picador, 1988) 168. Print. [All further references to the three novels have been incorporated in the text.]

²Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments – Selected Essays* 1988 (New York: Anchor Books, 1990) 45. Print.

³G.D. Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969) 2. Print.

⁴Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 210. Print.

⁵Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 170. Print.

⁶Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 43. Print.

⁷Anuradha Ghosh, "The Notion of Identity Formation and the Paradigm of Cultural Resistance in the Novels of Chinua Achebe" *Chinua Achebe - An Anthology of Recent Criticism* ed., Mala Pandurang (New Delhi: Pencraft, 2006) 37. Print.

⁸Chinua Achebe, "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation" *African Writers on African Writing* ed., G.D. Killam (London: Heinemann, 1973) 9. Print.

⁹Victor C Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) 3. Print.

¹⁰M.A Onwuejeogwu, "The Igbo Culture Area" *Igbo Language and Culture* F.C. Ogbalu and E.N. Emenanjo (Ibadan: OUP, 1975) 1. Print.

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CHAPTER – IV

INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER: *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE* AND *ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH*

Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality; 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 within problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us.

- Chinua Achebe

Hopes and Impediments (1990, 170)

Nigeria attained its much awaited independence in 1960 but political freedom did not fulfil the long-standing promises that it held forth. Post-independence Nigeria witnessed squandering of the opportunities of freedom, rampant corruption, utter lawlessness, a near total absence of civilian rule and numerous military coups. Nigeria had become a free nation but the change was only a nominal one: it remained a victim of colonisation like many other Third World countries where colonialism did not end with independence but continued in other guises. Nigeria's case was complicated by the fact that its economy continued to be dependent on western countries and other foreign players. *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* universalise the new nation's troubles. The two novels are set during times of political, social and economic unrest. The prevailing mood of bitterness and

disappointment form the backdrop to the struggle of the characters for a cohesive identity as the destinies of postcolonial African societies are apportioned. Achebe's response to these events and changes are viewed by Kolawole Ogunbesan as "...the writer's search for an appropriate response to the political moment of his society."¹

The prevailing scenario made it easy, as Dr. Julius O Ihonvbere says, "...for the military to intervene on behalf of the dominant classes, to contain popular pressures and stabilise the system."² In the midst of political upheavals it was the common man who suffered the most in his attempt to preserve his self. The stories of the nation are the stories of those who survived the onslaught on the mind. Leonard Bloom describes such stories as those that show "...how individuals neutralise power emotionally so that the self is not defeated by the assaults endured from those with authority."³ Achebe's narration of each individual struggle against those in power has been explained by Onyemaechi Udumukwu in the following way:

The significance of Achebe's creativity manifests itself in his revelation of harrowing verities. Specifically he has revealed the lack of contact between the leaders and the ordinary people. He has also shown that this lack of contact has precipitated a condition of contrasts and an unevenness in development. In addition he has portrayed the nature of the security apparatus in Nigeria and has enabled us to re-examine the gains of military leadership.⁴

Chinua Achebe presents a view of a society riddled with greed, violence and ignorance from which there is no apparent escape. He paints a bleaker picture of African society in these novels than the earlier novels where the same society is depicted at the time of transition from colonial rule to independence, but never in such bleak terms.

Achebe takes the old symbols from the folk traditions and recontextualises them in the new political and cultural context of Nigeria, and engages with them to construct a political and cultural context. The problems are played out in dramatic and forceful terms so as to

draw attention to them. Achebe's narration of his nation after independence does not end at nation building but moves beyond to depict situations of unjust power relations, role of women and the press and freedom of expression. Achebe does not castigate colonisation and blame all ills on it. He highlights the faults and fissures within. The conflicts in the two novels may have resulted from colonisation which had engendered political and moral decay. Onyemaechi Udumukwu views this as the "negation of the hopes of independence"⁵ and says, "It is not as if history has remained immutable from the colonial era to the new dispensation. There has been a transition from one historical phase to another. But the irony is that even though the old colonial order has been replaced by the new, the nascent political system in Africa has proved incapable of guaranteeing the satisfaction of needs."⁶

Achebe's narratives enable one to see the conditions prevalent in post-independence Nigeria and in his role of the novelist as teacher he draws attention to the problems. This is why it is possible to contend that Achebe provides alternative ways of narrating the nation. The construction and contestation of the nation is a major concern with many writers of the Third World. Their idea of a nation was generated by the anti-imperialistic struggles. The nation for the postcolonial writer goes beyond the political to embrace the cultural construct, where it expresses other concerns also, such as ethnicity, race, religion, language, tribe, ancestors, region, imperialism and so on. The idea of the nation must be seen as a continuous narrative emerging out of the past. Hence, Achebe's narration of the nation in terms of people and not states calls for a closer look at the changing concepts of the nation.

To understand the concept of the nation in the African context, one has to begin with Negritude and Pan-Africanism. According to Ania Loomba,

In the writings of the Negritude movement, or of Pan-Africanism, 'nation' itself takes on another meaning, a sense of shared culture and subjectivity and divisions of nations as political entities...Both these movements articulated pan-national racial solidarity,

demanded an end to white supremacy and imperialist domination and positively celebrated blackness, and especially African blackness, as a distinct racial-cultural way of being.⁷

Négritude can be seen as a phase in the development of African consciousness. When it was started by African students in Paris in the 1930s, it was meant to assert their pride in African cultural values in order to contest the inferior status accorded to them in European colonial and cultural discourses. The movement was inspired by the Harlem Renaissance's efforts to promote the richness of African cultural identity. Pan-Africanism which is associated with the struggle for independence of sub-Saharan African nations stressed upon the unity of all Africans. It sought to unite Africa and underlined the need to promote co-operation among African nations.

Here it becomes necessary to take a look at Frantz Fanon's works which first set the stage for the development of political consciousness in colonised people. Fanon proposed a "national literature"⁸ engaged in the formation of national consciousness and committed to the struggle for national liberation, armed with the unconditional affirmation of African culture. The formation of a national consciousness began with the rediscovery of the rich African past. Fanon's critique, it is true, does not confine itself to Africa but seeks an international dimension. He writes, "National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension."⁹ Along with the rediscovery of Africa's history and culture to help form a national identity, Fanon discussed the role of the intelligentsia. This finds a resonance in Achebe's works. He views his role as not just that of a storyteller. He sees himself as a teacher also who not only tells stories but also instills a sense of pride in his people.

Another theorist, Homi K Bhabha, views the nation as an ambivalent construction, which, in his words:

...haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.¹⁰

He also adds that the "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the sign of a national culture."¹¹ The space of transformation between culture and historical periods is identified by him as the 'liminal' space. This leads one to re-think "the realm of beyond" that until now has been understood only in terms of the prefix "post: postmodernism, postcolonialism and postfeminism."¹² Such rethinking has been occasioned "...by the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion."¹³ The location from which Achebe writes, armed with the knowledge of his history and people, assumes a powerful voice that radiates universal truths. As his nation passes through phases of transition in its history, Achebe has been able to transcend the boundaries marked by the prefix 'post' and look beyond.

Benedict Anderson advances the view that nations are narrative constructs that evolved from the fictions of 'imagined communities'. His influential work *Imagined Communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* examines the creation and global spread of the imagined communities of nationality from a small beginning, where the idea of a nation grew when a significant number of people in a community considered or imagined themselves to have formed a nation. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined community because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹⁴

The nation is imagined as a community because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail...the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship...it is this fraternity that makes it possible...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings.”¹⁵ The Biafran War and the commitment of writers like Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, and John Pepper Clark to the cause of the Igbo struggle and to literature is a reflection of the community Anderson writes about.

Anderson writes that the imagined world is visible in everyday life where “fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.”¹⁶ He also adds that “print capitalism...made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”¹⁷ Anderson’s view of nations as communities and his understanding of the fact that print medium has the ability to reach out to the people are actually corroborated in the novels of Achebe. They are not just literary creations, but assume a greater role of actively engaging with his readers and making them aware of the times they are living in.

Achebe’s narration of the nation in terms of people and not states covers the entire period of Nigeria’s transition from colonisation to national independence. In his narrative of the times before the coming of the colonisers, he had used myths of creation, folktales and evoked the vibrant Igbo culture. After Nigeria’s independence there were numerous attacks on the Igbo community. Not only were they marginalised in politics but there were cases of ethnic killings to target them. Finally, they had to suffer the ravages of the Biafran war. Achebe’s novels not only trace their sufferings but also show how the Igbo community remained together through the turmoil. The sufferings of the ordinary Nigerians after independence are brought out by Achebe in poignant terms.

Achebe wrote from his “liminal” position, placed as he was between two different vantage points. As a writer from an erstwhile colony, independence brought up issues of nation building and generated utopian visions of the future, and they are the subjects on which Achebe focussed; but within the African tradition of storytelling Achebe chose to write stories of liminality. The traditional storyteller’s place is taken by a teacher in *A Man of the People* and by a journalist in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Achebe’s novels about his people under the military junta in Nigeria can be seen as a critique of the postcolonial construct which calls for a writing back to the empire, rewriting the past and thereby not letting go of the colonial hangover. Achebe’s works have intervened in the hegemonic misrepresentations of Africa in imperial discourses and also delved into the politics of knowledge. He uses his knowledge of his people and the times he is living in to seek out new ways of knowing and thus critiquing the Euro-centric methodology. Achebe offers an alternative function of storytelling. The telling of stories through different personal narratives in his novels are the means for gathering information and recording truths. The transformation of the story from its original purpose (an act of communication intended for pleasure) to a concrete call for popular action indicates that writing and reading serious literature cannot be a passive engagement.

A brief recapitulation of the history of Nigeria after independence would help to understand the unstable times in which the two novels, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, are set. It would also show how closely Achebe observed the political scenario of Nigeria and how truthfully he represented them. Finally, it would show how powerful stories might be, sometimes even prophetic of things to come like the coup immediately after the release of *A Man of the People*.

Nigeria became independent on the 1st of October, 1960 and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became the first prime minister. In 1961, the Cameroons territories were divided with

the northern part joining Nigeria and the Southern part joining the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Sir Abubakar served as Prime Minister upto 1966, his tenure marked by regional and ethnic tensions, trial and imprisonment of leading opposition politicians accused of treason and a violence-marred election in 1964. He was killed in a revolt by army officers in 1966 after which Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo and the Commander of the army emerged as the country's new leader. Achebe's *A Man of the People* ends with a military coup similar to the real-life coup of Ironsi that came shortly after the novel was published. Achebe's work appeared prophetic and military personnel suspected him of having foreknowledge of the coup.

Ironsi suspended the constitution and announced that many public services which were controlled by the regions would henceforth be controlled by the federal government. Ironsi was assassinated in a countercoup and replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon. The coup was followed by the massacre of thousands of Igbo in the northern region of Nigeria. In May 1967 Gowon announced the creation of a new twelve-state structure. The Igbo populated Eastern Region was to be divided into three states of which two were dominated by non-Igbo groups. The division was to sever the vast majority of Igbo from profitable coastal ports and oil rich fields in the Niger Delta. The government policies and the attacks on the Igbo were seen by leaders of the Eastern Region as official attempts to push the Igbo to the margins of Nigerian society and politics. The region's Igbo dominated assembly authorised Lieutenant Colonel Odemegwu Ojukwu to declare independence as the Republic of Biafra.

The Biafran Civil War was precipitated by the attempts of the government to lessen the political powers of the Igbo. The war devastated Biafra when Nigerian forces moved south and captured the university town of Nsukka. The bitter war was prolonged by France's military support for the Biafrans. The better equipped Nigerian army defeated the Biafran forces in 1970.

The restoration of peace and the reintegration of the Igbo into Nigerian life was remarkably rapid. The booming oil trade of the mid-1970s when Nigeria was the world's fifth largest producer of petroleum added to the nation's progress. But very soon the country faced problems of shortage of key commodities, congestion in the ports, high prices, growing corruption, the government's failure to address several ethnic issues and demands for redistribution of wealth. In spite of a national development plan, the bulk of Nigeria's income remained in the hands of a few. At such a time Gowon announced that the return to civilian rule would be postponed indefinitely. On the 29th of July, 1975, Brigadier Murtala Ramat Muhammed overthrew Gowon in a bloodless coup.

Muhammed moved quickly to address issues avoided by Gowon. He replaced corrupt state governors, removed incompetent and corrupt members of the public services and initiated the plan to move the national capital from the industrial, coastal Lagos to the neglected, interior Abuja. He declared that civilian rule would be restored in a five-stage process of transition by 1979. This extremely popular leader was assassinated in a coup attempt on the 13th of February, 1976, but his administration remained in power. His successor, Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo continued his reforms. He created seven new states to help in the redistribution of wealth and began a massive reform of local government.

In July 1979, elections were held for the Second Republic where most parties received votes along ethnic lines. The National People's Party (comprising mostly of Igbo) candidate Alhaji Shehu Shagari won the largest number of votes in the presidential elections. Though the results provoked a brief constitutional crisis, the federal election commission ruled in favour of Shagari. Ambitious programmes for the development of the weak economy were initiated but were riddled with corruption. When the oil market collapsed in 1982, Nigeria was unable to repay its short-term debts and import essential goods. In the 1983 elections, with widespread rigging, the National Party of Nigeria won a decisive victory.

Shagari's government was overthrown in a bloodless coup led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari on new year's eve 1983. Buhari's government enjoyed public support for its condemnation of economic mismanagement, corruption and the rigged elections. But this support waned as the government adopted a rigid plan of economic austerity and instituted repressive policies that included a sweeping campaign against indiscipline, a prohibition against discussing the country's political future and the detention of journalists and others who criticised the government. Public support withered and in August 1985 Major General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew him. Babangida initiated a public debate on the state of the economy and set the stage for negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for aid and better relations with the country's creditors and achieved some measure of economic recovery. He suppressed coup attempts in 1986 and 1990. His favouring the interests of the northern elites led to severe religious riots between Christians and Muslims in the states of Kaduna, Kastina and Kano in the early 1990s.

A new constitution was introduced with minor changes to the 1979 constitution to prepare for the transfer to democracy. In late 1993 General Sani Abacha, the powerful secretary of defence overthrew Babangida's government in another military coup and assumed control. Abacha's first decision was the termination of all political activities. Abacha proved to be perhaps Nigeria's most brutal ruler and used violence on a wide scale to suppress the continuing civilian unrest. The regime came to an end with his death in 1998, yielding an opportunity for the return to civilian rule.

Nigeria achieved democracy again in 1999 when it elected Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba and former military head of state, as the President ending almost thirty years of military rule (1966-1999). Nigeria has shown marked improvements in attempts to tackle corruption and to hasten development. While Obasanjo showed willingness to fight corruption, he was accused by others of the same. In the general elections of 2007, Umaru Yar' Adua of the

People's Democratic Party came to power. It was an election that was witnessed and condemned by the international community as being massively flawed. David Carroll says, "The political history of Nigeria...has been far from settled."¹⁸ These disturbed conditions have prevailed since Nigeria's independence and the current issues in the country are ethnic violence over the oil producing Niger Delta and inadequate infrastructure.

A Man of the People has been viewed in two ways. While Achebe says that he prefers "to see it as a novel of political corruption"¹⁹ Olalere Oladitan says that the novel is "a prophecy which finds immediate fulfilment."²⁰ The novel narrates Nigeria's crises as it goes through an election process which is followed by an army coup. The situation is presented through the eyes of a teacher Odili Samalu. Kofi Owusu says, "Achebe substitutes the omniscient third person narrator of the preceding novel with the limited point of view of a youthful and fallible narrator."²¹ Achebe's direct intervention in the post-independence politics and the ongoing affairs of Nigeria is fully appreciated by Onyemaechi Udumukwu when he writes: "Achebe's creative endeavours in post independence reveal a specific consciousness oriented toward an attempt to inspire a genuine form of leadership and political activism for his country."²²

The central concern in the novel is to depict the cynicism of both the politicians and the people with regard to the electoral process which eventually invites army intervention. In the novel Chief M.A. Nanga and Odili contest to be "man of the people" while an army coup changes the history of the nation. As individuals like Odili and Max try to make a difference without any popular support, those in power appropriate the wealth of the nation and things fall apart. Achebe examines the underlying structural weaknesses of the new society which cannot stand the political changes, and renders a true picture of the cruel reality as a truthful witness. He interprets the present in satirical terms. He begins thus:

Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people.²³

He is also described as the politician “who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation” (2). He “don’t care two hoots about the outside world. He is concerned with the inside world, with how to retain his hold on his constituency and there he is adept ...” (23). He is a “born politician ...could get away with almost anything he said or did. And as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the Chief Nangas of this world will continue to get away with anything” (66). And this is what he does when he as the Minister of Culture announces in public that he has never heard of his country’s famous novel and prophesies that his country would produce great writers: “He had that rare gift of making people feel – even while he was saying harsh things to them – that there was not a drop of ill will in his entire frame” (66).

The country is in the hands of politicians like Nanga whose lives of great luxury is shown to be in sharp contrast to the lives of the masses. “The surprises and contrasts in our great country were simply inexhaustible. Here was I in our capital city, reading about pails of excrement from the cosy comfort of a princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming silent action, water-closets!” (41) Politicians like him are part of the government which is out of step with the aspirations of the people, who in order to reign over the country engage in political activities which create unrest. The unstable government disturbed the stability of the whole nation.

The country was on the verge of chaos. The Trade Unions and the Civil Service Union made loud noises and gave notice of nation-wide strikes. The shops closed for fear of looting. The Governor-General according to rumour called on the Prime Minister to resign which he finally got round to doing three weeks later. (101)

With lawlessness and corruption having spread everywhere, Achebe shows how far it had reached through the example of a local councilor.

He was at the moment very much involved in supplying stones for our village pipe-borne water scheme and was widely accused (in whispers) of selling one heap of stones in the morning, carrying it away at night and selling it again the next day; and repeating the cycle as long as he liked. (124-125)

The effect of such incidents of corruption on the masses was that they appeared bewildered by the events and resigned to their fate, “They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you ... if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth” (2-3). They also know that by bribing they can get things done, “If our people understand nothing else they know that a man who takes money from another in return for service must render that service or remain vulnerable to that man’s just revenge. Neither God nor juju would save him” (127).

This was one side of the blighted new nation that Achebe wrote about. The other side of the story has the Students’ Union raising its voice against the traitors of democracy, the writings in newspaper editorials and the attempts of individuals like Odili and Max to fight against the prevailing disorder. Their first step is to launch a new political party, “Max and some of his friends having watched with deepening disillusion the use to which our hard-won freedom was being put by corrupt, mediocre politicians had decided to come together and launch the Common People’s Convention” (78). Max tells the story of a hunter and the vultures to his supporters during his election campaign perhaps because he knows the power of the story in shaping people’s lives. Max’s story of how a hunter shot two vultures who were fighting over the carcass of what he had killed is told to inspire the voters to “wipe out the dirty thieves fighting over another man’s inheritance” (126). The “dirty thieves”

according to Max are the political parties “P.OP and P.A.P” (126). Odili interpreted the trouble with the nation as,

A man who has come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation ... was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say “To hell with it.” We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in.

(37)

Achebe views this as, “Nigerians are what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be.”²⁴

The leaders proclaim: “We must watch and guard our hard- won freedom jealously. Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of Western-educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage”(6). But the common saying after independence was, “...it didn’t matter *what* you knew but *who* you knew” (17) because the country lacked dynamic leaders.

Achebe also brings up issues like ethnicism, neo-colonialism and the threats to the continuation of traditional ways in his narrative. In a country consisting of many ethnic groups, independence opened up job opportunities which everyone wanted to avail. And as each group wanted someone of their own in important positions, it gave rise to feelings of ethnocentrism. Chief Nanga tells Odili, “I want you to come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service. We shouldn’t leave everything to the highland tribes. My secretary is from there; our people must press for their share of the national cake” (12). This feeling is also seen during the elections as the village of Urua decides whom to vote for: “the village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No

man in Urua will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very back yard are we not saved the journey?" (127)

In the events that follow, it is in a quick flash that the inevitable changes take place. The rigged elections, thugs disguised as police who kill Max, and his wife Eunice firing at Chief Koko are the events which, we are told "lit the tinder of discontent in the land" (144). A reign of terror begins with rampaging of markets by bands of marauders even as the government said that it was "as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar" (144) and that the country had "never been more united or more stable than it was today" (144). The people watched helplessly and seemed reconciled to the things:

Let them eat, ... after all when white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide? Of course not. And where is the all-powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around. The important thing then is to stay alive; if you do you will outlive your present annoyance. The great thing, as the old people have told us, is reminiscence; and only those who survive can have it. Besides, if you survive, who knows? It may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share. (145)

As they tried to suit the old wisdom to the changed times and watched the mayhem, an army coup changed the course of the nation's history.

...the army obliged us by staging a coup at that point and locking up every member of the Government. The rampaging bands of election thugs had caused so much unrest and dislocation that our young Army officers seized the opportunity to take over. (147-148)

Max is made a hero of the revolution and Eunice is released from prison. There is a flicker of hope even though the future is uncertain. Odili's marriage to Edna typifies this hope just as Max's life is an inspiration to the momentary patriotic phase.

The reaction of the people to these changes is described as:

Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government: newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants – everybody said what a terrible lot; and it became public opinion the next morning. And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise-singers followed with song and talking-drum wherever they went. Chief Koko in particular became a thief and a murderer, while the people who had led him on – in my opinion the real culprits – took the legendary bath of the Hornbill and donned innocence. (149)

The nation's affairs remain mired in trouble. This first novel of Achebe on post-independence Nigeria paints a picture of how things stand, without attempting to gloss over the harsh realities. There are no attempts made to show that having received power in their hands, the Nigerians were capable of transforming the conditions of their country and people. Achebe appears to have moved beyond the stage of blaming all ills on colonisation. Instead, he looks within his own people and shows that power can be misused by anyone and the oppression by those in power is more difficult to withstand and to oppose. Achebe also discovers in fellow humans the ability to adapt to changes, in spite of continuous sufferings, either on account of alien rule or misrule by fellow Nigerians. In their ability to accept things which they cannot change, Achebe shows the resilience of his people to also indicate that stories are told of those who oppose injustice and attempt to bring about changes.

Anthills of the Savannah takes up the story from where it ended in *A Man of the People*. It is written after a gap of twenty-one years during which Nigeria had witnessed political instability, ethnic violence and the Biafran War. The story is set in a new nation, Kangan, which is ruled by a military government and is a backward West African state. Many years after shaking off the shackles of colonial rule, its progress is still hindered by factors like

unequal development, students' unrest and gagged press. Achebe once again gives the storyteller a major role to play. His story goes beyond ideologies of the African experiences and politics to unravel a deeper core of wisdom.

Anthills of the Savannah keeps its pace with the unfolding of events in Nigeria's troubled history. The novel includes various modes of narration, ranging from autobiographical accounts, poems, graffiti, folktales, lectures, cryptic sign writing on buses and communiqués. All these forms of expression show the actual social predicament in Kangan. The need to tell a story in order to be reminded of the past and to cope with the pressures of the present is similar to the "anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year's bush fires."²⁵ Storytelling here is thus not a mere creative exercise but assumes greater significance. Achebe is the artist who is also an activist under a repressive regime, as he assumes the traditional role of the storyteller but in a new and a far more subversive way challenges and exposes the new ruling cliques.

Achebe's narrative bares the politics of knowledge – gathering information and recording truths, as the three narrators, Chris, Ikem and Beatrice interpret the times they are living in. Achebe's focus is on people. He connects the political changes with economic and social changes because according to him, "Ideas cannot live outside people" (207). Though the novel deals with the experiences of the people of Kangan after their independence from colonial rule and depicts a postcolonial era, yet it is not restricted within the limits of the 'postcolonial framework.' The people's struggles narrated here are not directed against the colonial regime but is one against the Africans themselves. In order to make sense of the chaotic situation, identify the root of problems and to seek a solution to them our readings cannot be confined to the coloniser-colonised binary. Such a reading would be a very narrow one.

In the novel Kangan is ruled by a politician who is “only a simple soldier” (5) and rules over a nation in which people look upon him with fear and respect: “Your Excellency is not only our leader but also our Teacher. We are always ready to learn”(17). Though the ordinary people have learned to reconcile themselves to their condition, the oppressors always develop new ways to test their endurance. The Presidential Retreat with its artificial lake and bright lights is a symbol of the oppression. It was built by the civilian government, and after it was overthrown in a coup the retreat was refurbished at the cost of forty-five millions. The narrator, Ikem therefore asks:

“Retreat from what? From whom? ... “From the people and their basic needs of water which is free from Guinea worm, of simple shelter and food. That’s what you are retreating from. You retreat up the hill and commune with your cronies and forget the very people who legitimize your authority.” (67)

Chris, another narrator, further accuses the offenders:

Nations ...were fostered as much by structures as by laws and revolutions. These structures where they exist now are the pride of their nations. But everyone 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. Our present rulers in Africa are in every sense late-flowering medieval monarchs, even the Marxists among them. (67-68)

They are the “Mercedes-Benz- driving, private-jet-flying, luxury-yacht-cruising oppressor” (127) who live in “the mist of unreality and floating above and away from the lives and concerns of ninety-nine percent of the population”(130). They “cannot give satisfactory account of millions” (145) and even “ensure that the benefits of modern life will ever remain

outside the dreams of the real victims of exploitation in rural villages”(146). That the exploitation is rampant can be seen from Ikem’s remark in course of the narrative:

Chaotic billing procedures deliberately done to cover their massive fraud; illegal connections carried out or condoned by their own staff; theft of meters and a host of petty and serious crimes including, if you please, the readiness at the end of the day to burn down the entire Accounts and Audit Departments if an enquiry should ever be mooted. (147)

Politicians with their “Eight ocean liners,...two or three private jets; a private jetty” (107) and “fifty odd companies, including a bank” (107) are the new oppressors. Knowledge is seen as the only weapon that the civil society has to fight injustice and corruption since there is no valid excuse for “political inactivity or apathy” (91). Achebe writes:

Indeed to understand it is an absolute necessity for meaningful action, the knowledge of it being the only protective inoculation we have against false hopes and virulent epidemics of gullibility. (91)

Achebe moves beyond the Nigerian situation to indicate just how widespread the condition is in lines such as these:

There are others – rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialized countries, Black people everywhere including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries. The most obvious practical difficulty is the magnitude and heterogeneity of the problem. There is no universal conglomerate of the oppressed. Free people may be alike everywhere in their freedom but the oppressed inhabit each their own particular hell. (90)

The Nigerian condition calls attention to the universal condition. Achebe also says that though every “genuine artist feels it in his bones” (90) all ways of “deliverance are futile” (90) because “Man will surprise by his capacity for nobility as well as for villainy. No system

can change that. It is built into the core of man's free spirit" (90). He sees no immediate succour for the people:

The sweeping, majestic visions of people rising victorious like a tidal wave against their oppressors and transforming their world with theories and slogans into a new heaven and a new earth of brotherhood, justice and freedom are at best grand illusions. The rising, conquering tide, yes; but the millennium afterwards, no! New oppressors will have been readying themselves secretly in the undertow long before the tidal wave got really going. (90)

The predicament of Kangan is shared not only by erstwhile colonies but other nations as well in varying degrees. According to Achebe, colonial rule is only a phase in the long saga of oppression the ordinary man has suffered. A proverb exemplifies how one can understand the root cause of a problem – "...our ancestors made a fantastic proverb on remote and immediate causes. If you want to get at the root of murder, they said, you have to look for the blacksmith who made the matchet" (146). Ikem in his speech at the university says, "I do not deny that external factors are still at the root of many of our problems. But I maintain that even if external factors were to be at the root of *all* our problems we still must be ready to distinguish for practical purposes between remote and immediate causes, as our history teachers used to say" (146).

In this search for the remote and the immediate causes, Achebe feels that the British did much harm but they are no longer the ones that menace others as new oppressors have replaced them:

It does not seem to me that the English can do much harm to anybody today. After a long career of subduing savages in distant lands they discovered the most dangerous savage of all just across the English Channel and took him on and brought him to heel. But the effort proved too great and the cost too high, and although they acquitted

themselves with honour they made sure that they would not be called upon to do it again. And so they anointed the hero of their dazzling feat the greatest Englishman who ever lived, dumped him at the polls and voted Clement Attlee in. Whatever fear the ghost of British imperial vocation may still hold over the world's little people was finally removed when a renegade Englishman and his little band of thugs seized Her Majesty's colony in Rhodesia and held it for thirteen years. No, the English have, for all practical purposes, ceased to menace the world. 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. (47)

This also opens up new readings of Achebe, not just within the canon of postcolonial literature. So long Achebe has been read as an African writer responding to his country's colonial encounter and its aftermath. He has been seen as one who was interested in recreating Africa's rich past with details of its festivals, beliefs, stories and proverbs. He narrates how the British administration disrupted the traditional way of life and generated conflicting value-systems. Achebe also unbares corruption in all spheres and discusses the uncertain future of Nigeria. By the time he wrote *Anthills of the Savannah*, his stories have moved away from the Igbo village of Umuofia to locate themselves in the vast expanse of the Savannah. This space extends even further to a world beyond Africa which is still not free from hunger, injustice and misery.

Achebe's stories not only establish him as a great storyteller but also highlight the manner in which he perpetuates the tradition of storytelling to reach out to readers who can enrich their lives with the simple stories containing ancient wisdom. Achebe writes in *Anthills of the Savannah*, "We are all connected. You cannot tell the story of any one of us without implicating the others"(60). Though in the novel this refers to Ikem, Chris and Sam, one can

understand how stories connect one with unknown and even unheard of places and people. The same novel also mentions that “the best English these days is written either by Africans or Indians. And that the Japanese and the Chinese may not be too far behind” (57). The power of the story written in a language understood by many across the world today cannot be confined to the limits of a theory which relies so much on an event in history, though one cannot overlook or even dismiss the influence of the colonial period and its legacy. Achebe contends in the novel that “Writers in the Third World context must not stop at the stage of documenting social problems but move to the higher responsibilities of proffering prescriptions” (148). Achebe views storytelling as a divine ordination:

To some of us the Owner of the World has apportioned the gift to tell their fellows that the time to get up has finally come. To others He gives the eagerness to rise when they hear the call; to rise with racing blood and put on their garbs of war and go to the boundary of their town to engage the invading enemy boldly in battle. And then there are those others whose part is to wait and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount its story. (113)

The timeless value of stories is further explained as:

The sounding of the battle drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards – each is important in its own way. I tell you there is not one of them we could do without. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story...Because it is only the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. (113-114)

How the story can serve to prevent future generations from repeating the mistakes of the past can be seen in Achebe’s earlier novels. As an example one can cite the story of Ikemefuna

which is retold for a cautionary purpose. Similarly, the story of Okonkwo is recapitulated to remind people of the great men of yesteryears in *No Longer at Ease*. The story thus becomes a guiding force, a transmitter of wisdom even as it is told in many different ways to different audience at different times.

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. (114)

The story of the tortoise and the leopard is told to bring home the fact that even in an uneven fight, it is not wise to give up without struggling so that those who come later will say, "*True, our fathers were defeated but they tried*" (118).

Once upon a time the leopard who had been trying for a long time to catch the tortoise finally chanced upon him on a solitary road. 'Aha', he said; '*at long last! Prepare to die.*' And the tortoise said: '*Can I ask one favour before you kill me?*' The leopard saw no harm in that and agreed. '*Give me a few moments to prepare my mind,*' the tortoise said. Again the leopard saw no harm and granted it. But instead of standing still as the leopard had expected the tortoise went into strange action on the road, scratching with hands and feet and throwing sand furiously in all directions. '*Why are you doing that?*' asked the puzzled leopard. The tortoise replied: '*Because even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here.*' (117)

While speaking to the students at the University of Bassa, Ikem calls his lecture "The Tortoise and the Leopard – a political mediation on the imperative of struggle" (141) to draw attention of the students to the fact that the old man from Abazon who had told him the story of the tortoise and the leopard was being held in solitary confinement at the Bassa Maximum Security Prison. He tells the story again to let them know that the political scenario of Kangan was very disturbing and any criticism of the regime would invite harsh punishment.

This was how the ruling clique stifled all protests and modern day storytellers are the journalists like Ikem who exposed the corrupt regimes.

Because storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right to freedom of the human spirit – in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever. That’s why. (141)

Postcolonial writers have rewritten realities which had been distorted in imperial constructs. They have narrated stories of those who live in the margins of their own societies and whose voices had never been heard. But Achebe retells the old folk tales, already known to his people, and places them in the present day context. The stories are not reworked to tell the empire of Africa’s rich culture but to instill hope in a people and ignite their pride in their past.

Anthills of the Savannah also deals with issues such as freedom of the press, tribalism, students’ unrest and the position of women. In Kangan the press is used by the government to gain popularity. Ikem’s editorial in the *National Gazette* is an attack on the regime and so he is killed. This tragedy is based on the real life murder of Newswatch editor Dele Gwia in 1986. Ikem’s death is announced by a “Special Announcement” (155) on the radio with the Directorate of State Research Council announcing that he “was fatally wounded by gunshot” (156) while trying to escape after being arrested. Ikem is accused of being a “key link between the plotters in Kangan and their foreign collaborators” (155) and the “lynchpin between the plotters in Bassa and a group of disgruntled and unpatriotic chiefs in the Province of Abazon” (155) and “inciting the students of the University to disaffection and rebellion against the government and the life of His Excellency the President and the peace and security of the State” (155).

Curtailed freedom of the press and expression is a part of the story of Kangan’s regime. The regime’s efforts to contain Ikem’s voice are countered by his thought-provoking

editprians and his speech. When he dies there are those who say, “The ideas in one lecture by Ikem changed my entire life from a parrot to a man” (207). Beatrice adds to this:

It wasn't Ikem the man who changed me. I hardly knew him. It was his ideas set down on paper. One idea in particular: that we may accept a limitation on our actions but never, under no circumstances, must we accept restriction on our thinking. (207)

This refusal to accept any restriction on thinking by Chris, Ikem and Beatrice resulted in the death of the former two and Beatrice being left alone to struggle alone. Like the protagonists in his trilogy, here too Chris and Ikem meet a brutal end. Achebe does not create great heroes out of them in the tradition of western literature, but it is his way of telling the world that history is made up of ordinary people, whose voices and stories go unregistered. If the life of Okonkwo could be reduced to a paragraph by the British District Commissioner, the voice of Ikem could be silenced by the military junta.

Ikem's speech at the university as followed by the reaction of the students against the government. Ikem had told them:

Are you, as you should be, more competent than those of our countrymen and women not nearly as lucky as yourselves on whom we have squandered our meager educational resources? ... Do you not form tribal pressure groups to secure lower admission requirement instead of striving to equal or excel any student from anywhere? Yes, you prefer academic tariff walls behind which you can potter around in mediocrity. And you are asking me to agree to hand over my life to a democratic dictatorship of mediocrity? (147-148)

This was followed by Ikem telling them about their role in “assisting and directing the nation” (148):

I have no desire to belittle your role in putting this nation finally on the road to self-redemption. But you cannot do that unless you first set about to purge yourselves, to

clean up your act. You must learn for a start to hold your own student leaders to responsible performance; only after you have done that can you have the moral authority to lecture the national leadership. (148)

The reaction of the students at Ikem's death was that they burnt copies of the "cruel regicide story of *National Gazette*" (158), demanded a judicial inquiry and the dismissal of the murderer Colonel Ossai and his prosecution. The government hit back at the students with all force at its command and the university was closed down indefinitely.

Achebe focuses on every section of society including students to highlight how they all tell their story of the nation. The world has been a witness to students' movements being crushed brutally. Achebe's writing on this subject is a bold attempt taken up by a writer who has the courage to present the true picture, as student unrest has been a common phenomenon in Nigerian universities, particularly since the country's independence.

Another problem which poses serious threats to the development of Nigeria is tribalism, which is examined in the novel. Tribalism in many African countries is a dominant political force and along with poverty, exploitation and genocide, stands in the way of the region's development. Tribal warfare had been waged across Africa long before the colonisers arrived and the situation continues even today. The colonisers came and redrew the existing regional boundaries and manipulated the development of the continent through tribal rivalries. After independence governments were formed primarily based on historic tribal allegiances and antipathies and not in the line of democracies of the western type. And with no group willing to forsake its tribal allegiances or political quest, tribalism still retards Nigeria's development.

The theme of tribalism is present in all the five novels – the pride with which Umuofians held themselves is shown in *Things Fall Apart*; the unity of the six villages under their common deity, Ulu, occupies much importance in *Arrow of God*; the pride of the Umuofians in Obi when he joins a European post in *No Longer at Ease*; hailing Chief Nanga as the man

of the people by his village in *A Man of the People* and the meeting between Ikem and the elders of Abazon in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

The arbitrary manner in which boundaries are drawn is a knowledge that is oddly disturbing for Chris. He wonders during his journey to Abazon “how provincial boundaries drawn by all accounts quite arbitrarily by the British fifty years ago and more sometimes coincided so completely with reality. Beyond the dried up river there was hardly a yard of transition; you drove straight into scrubland which two years without rain had virtually turned to desert” (193). When the leaders of Abazon visit the capital to draw the attention of the government to the drought, Achebe revives the old communal feeling that is featured so well in the earlier novels set before independence. The elders are proud of the Abazon people in Bassa and of Ikem who is their “distinguished son” (111). They are proud of, “...what he is doing for Abazon and the whole of Kangan; the cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household but his voice is the property of the neighbourhood. You should be proud that this bright cockerel that wakes the whole village comes from your compound” (112). Ikem like Obi in *No Longer at Ease* is not seen in the meetings of the Abazons, but the elders feel that he should be left alone to write. To them a “handful of words can save us from the ache of four hundred handshakes and the headache of remembering a like multitude praise-names” (113). The arrival of the leaders sets in motion the chain of events leading to the coup.

Women in Achebe’s novels who had sat on the fringes of village gatherings in *Things Fall Apart*, have come a long way in *Anthills of the Savannah*. In Beatrice we see how women, having transcended the marginalised position and patriarchal barriers, earn respect from their male counterparts and join the emerging movement against oppression. Beatrice moves from a world of her mother’s sufferings for there “was enough male chauvinism in my father’s house to last me seven reincarnations” (81), to a world which believes that it has “no clear role for women in ..political thinking” (83) and finally to the “world of women” (88).

Beatrice, in other words is in a new social world empowered by her western education and eagerness to work. Yet she still remains a part of the world where “women are...the biggest single group of oppressed people” (90).

Beatrice assumes the role of the storyteller (in the absence of men, after the death of Chris and Ikem) as she feels that someone has to take over and recount the story. She also names Ikem’s child, breaking the tradition of the father doing it. “In our traditional society...the father named the child” (206), suggesting a new beginning, which subverts not only the western tradition, but the African as well. After the naming ceremony, as they pray “May her path be straight” (211) which is replied by “*Ise*” (211) in a chorus, one is reminded of the great village gatherings in *Things Fall Apart* where in a loud voice the community replied “*kenew*” to “*Umuofia kenew.*” Nowhere in the narration does Achebe write about Beatrice as a black woman. He gives her more space in the narration than any other women characters in his novels.

The changes that take place in Kangan after the coup are not much different from that in *A Man of the People*. “His Excellency was kidnapped last night and the Chief of Staff has sworn to find him but has meanwhile taken over the reins of government” (198). A state funeral for Chris is ordered even as the new leader “pledge to the nation to bring the perpetrators of this heinous crime quickly to book” (202-203). The novel ends on a note of hope in the naming ceremony of Ikem’s daughter. She is named Amaechina, which means “May- the- path- never-close” (206) suggesting the survival of nations in spite of impediments, as Chris had said, “This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented” (215).

What lives on is the story as the nation rises to meet the new challenges. The role of the writer\storyteller is emphasised upon again when Ikem says:

“As a writer I aspire only to widen the scope of ... self-examination. I don't want to foreclose it with a catchy half-baked orthodoxy. My critics say: there is no time for your beautiful educational programme; the masses are ready and will be enlightened in the course of the struggle. And they quote Fanon on the sin of betraying the revolution. They do not realize that revolutions are betrayed just as much by stupidity, incompetence, impatience and precipitate action as by doing nothing at all.” (146)

Earlier he had also said that, “...a novelist must listen to his characters who after all are created to wear the shoe and point the writer where it pinches” (88).

Achebe's close identification with the story as a writer\teacher\storyteller is to provide an alternative way of looking at the human predicament. He says:

It is not a question of protest against Europe or simply protest against local condition. It is protest against the way we are handling human society in view of the possibilities for greatness and the better alternatives which the artist sees.²⁶

NOTES

[English (U.S) spellings have been used whenever they appear in citations.]

¹Kolawole Ogunbesan, ed., *New West African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1979) vii. Print.

²Dr. Julius O Ihonvbere, "Are Things Falling Apart? The Military and the Crisis of Democratisation in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol 34 No 2 (June 1996)194. Print.

³Leonard Bloom, *Identity and Ethnic Relations in Africa* (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998) xii. Print.

⁴Onyemaechi Udumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence," *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol 37 No 3 (Autumn 1991) 372. Print.

⁵Udumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence," *Modern Fiction Studies* 472. Print.

⁶Udumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence," *Modern Fiction Studies* 473. Print.

⁷Ania Loomba, *Colonialism-Postcolonialism – The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge,1998) 211. Print.

⁸Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* Trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 223. Print.

⁹Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 247. Print.

¹⁰Homi K Bhabha, "Introduction: narrating the nation" *Narration and Narration* 1990 (London: Routledge,2006) 1. Print.

¹¹Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation" *Narration and Narration* 297. Print.

¹²Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 1. Print.

- ¹³Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 1. Print.
- ¹⁴Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities- Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 1983 (London: Verso, 1991) 6. Print.
- ¹⁵Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 7. Print.
- ¹⁶Anderson, "Cultural Roots" *Imagined Communities* 36. Print
- ¹⁷Anderson, "Cultural Roots" *Imagined Communities* 36. Print.
- ¹⁸David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe – Novelist, Poet, Critic* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) 20. Print.
- ¹⁹Chinua Achebe quoted in Olalere Oladitan, "The Nigerian Crisis in the Nigerian Novel," Kolawole Ogunbesan, ed., *New West African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1979)11. Print.
- ²⁰Olalere Oladitan, "The Nigerian Crisis in the Nigerian Novel," Kolawole Ogunbesan, ed., *New West African Literature* 11. Print.
- ²¹Kofi Owusu, "The Politics of Interpretation: The Novels of Chinua Achebe," *Modern Fiction Studies* Special Issue (Post Colonial African Fiction) Vol 37 No 3 (Autumn 1991) 463. Print.
- ²²Onyemaechi Udumukwu, "Achebe and the Negation of Independence," *Modern Fiction Studies* 473. Print.
- ²³Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* 1966 (New York: Anchor Books,1989) 1. Print. (All further references to the novel have been incorporated in the text.)
- ²⁴Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria* (New York: Anchor Books, 1984) 70. Print.
- ²⁵Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* 1987 (New York: Anchor Books,1988) 28. Print. (All further references to the novel have been incorporated in the text.)
- ²⁶Chinua Achebe quoted in John Clement Ball, *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel – V S Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie* (London: Routledge, 2003) 109. Print.

CHAPTER – V

CONCLUSION

The fiction which imaginative literature offers us ... does not enslave; it liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the canons of an orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and human conscience.

- Chinua Achebe

Hopes and Impediments (1990, 153)

This study had posited certain questions at the outset about the legitimacy of critiquing the postcolonial construct through a re-reading of Chinua Achebe's novels. In the subsequent chapters the answers to the questions have been detailed. The answers pave the way for a new reading of texts by writers who have so long been placed within the postcolonial canon. Today postcolonialism and postcolonial methods of reading appear to be out of step in a world where divisions are based on powers which control transnational transactions. Those who have access to information are also hopelessly compromised by what is known as the "digital divide." The term digital divide is identical with the meaning knowledge divide which refers to the gap between people with access to digital and information technology and those with very limited or no access at all. The dividing line is very often determined by location, income and gender etc. In this changed scenario one cannot continue to hold on to the political history of colonisation. Ania Loomba, et al., are of the view that "...the term postcolonial studies has outlived its utility."¹ This holds true in today's context which has seen a widening of historical scope, expansion of subject matter and an adoption of new

analytical methods of study which no longer allow one to limit reading within the 'postcolonial' paradigm.

The questions raised concerning the relevance of the term and its use in literature have become even more relevant today with well known writers like Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie expressing their unease with terms like 'Commonwealth Literature.' Salman Rushdie in his essay "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" says that Commonwealth Literature has been "created solely by critics and academics."² He adds that this is "partly as a result of the physical colonisation of a quarter of the globe by the British"³ but "its present-day pre-eminence is not solely – perhaps not even primarily – the result of the British legacy. It is also the effect of the primacy of the United States of America in the affairs of the world."⁴ Achebe also agrees with the view when he writes in *Anthills of the Savannah*, "It does not seem to me that the English can do much harm to anybody today... The real danger today is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America..."⁵

Amitav Ghosh in his letter to the Commonwealth Foundation withdrawing his novel *The Glass Palace* (2000), from the Commonwealth Prize wrote that the phrase "commonwealth", ...anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past.⁶ His refusal to place his writing within the limits imposed by the term shows that he considers it a restrictive appellation. Though history may intrude on the present, today's situation demands that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations to move beyond the stereotypes of postcolonial discourse, as the present-day realities do not allow literature to be confined within the restraints imposed by terms like 'Commonwealth Literature' or 'Postcolonial Literature.'

The Commonwealth of Nations was formed as a voluntary organisation of former British colonies where all territories shared a history of cultural colonialism. Their shared history

included the imposition of the English language and British educational, political and religious institutions, and economic systems. The writings in English from Commonwealth countries evoke new forms of expression as a counter discourse to the coloniser's version. However, such writings also have their limitations as they also signify a response of sorts to the event of colonisation.

More than half a century has gone by since the writing of *Things Fall Apart*, but even now the novel remains as historically significant as ever. Achebe's novels no longer require to be placed only within the canon of postcolonial literature, just as he cannot be viewed only as a Commonwealth writer since to do that would mean to gloss over the universal vision embodied in his writings. Achebe interpretes the present with reference to the humane qualities of his community and uses the powerful tool of storytelling to expose and attack all forms of injustice. The stories are peppered with current social, political and cultural vignettes without much reference to history. This asserts the validity of the African world view and cultural context in opposition to the Eurocentric claims of imperial powers.

A re-reading of Chinua Achebe's novels corroborates Foucault central claim that knowledge is power.⁷ This is to say that literary texts have a central role to play in the construction of culture and knowledge. There is an increasing tendency among writers of today to see literature as a space and a medium to voice, account for, express and demonstrate narratives of prejudice, oppression, sufferings and survival, resulting from specific social and political dynamics of societies. Today when Foucault's statement appears more relevant than ever before with writers all over the world seeking knowledge from various sources to possess power and assume control over far-reaching changes, Achebe's works stand out from the rest. They are unique because they speak of the freedom of the human spirit which refuses to be crushed by any form of oppression, perpetuated either by the colonisers or the enemies

from within. This makes it viable to theorise the commonalities shared by writers who write against oppression and deprivation, for they are the new voices in world literature.

In course of re-reading the five novels, written by Achebe, he comes across as one of the foremost theoreticians of African literary criticism as well as a significant novelist. No syllabus or course on Postcolonial Literature/ Commonwealth Literature/ New Literatures in English is complete without a text from Achebe's repertory. The presence of Achebe's works in academic curricula highlights the relevance of his stories which are centered on contemporary social and political realities. This leads one to suggest a new paradigm on the way his works are to be read.

Achebe's novels are often read against Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939) and Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948). All of his novels are also viewed as postcolonial texts narrating the story of his people and his nation through the various stages of colonisation – beginning with the arrival of the first Europeans in *Things Fall Apart*; the presence of well-established religious and administrative institutions in *Arrow of God*; Nigeria on the eve of independence in *No Longer at Ease*; the prevailing corruption after independence in *A Man of the People* and in *Anthills of the Savannah*. These readings have placed Achebe within the canon of Postcolonial Literature and today he is considered to be one of the major writers within this canon. Such a limited reading through the postcolonial lens does not seem relevant anymore. They may have been relevant at the time they were written or when comparative studies of texts by Conrad, Cary and Greene had been made. But one cannot continue to limit one's readings and ideally should look out for new ways of reading.

Achebe who was critical of Conrad's picture of Africa as "grossly inadequate"⁸ says, "Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the

peculiar gift of his own mind to bear on it.”⁹ Achebe’s novels show that the world has “to rid its mind of old prejudices” and “look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications but quite simply as a continent of people - not angels, but not rudimentary souls either – just people, often highly gifted people and often strikingly successful in their enterprise with life and society.”¹⁰ Achebe accumulates the spiritual experience of his people to draw the exact picture of his own time and nation in his writings. His stories are not of great heroes but of ordinary people and are a sensitive record of the predicaments faced by them. He points out the mistakes in human history and as a writer identifies himself with the social and political movements that typify the aspirations of the African people in their fight for freedom and human rights.

This celebration of the power of literature, imagination and the significance of African culture in Achebe’s works also serves to indicate that the present generation of Nigerians no longer view the engagement with the colonial as absolutely necessary. Since the empire no longer exists, writers do not need to write back to the centre or resist imperial constructs. As Achebe says, “The time has come once more for us, artists and writers of today, to take up the good work and by doing it to enrich not only our own lives but the life of the world.”¹¹ In his latest work *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (2010), Achebe offers reflections on personal and collective identity on home and family, on literature, language and politics, on his life-long attempt to reclaim the definition of Africa for its own authorship. There was a time when he had held a passport which defined him as a “British Protected Person” and today his passport calls him a “Citizen of Nigeria.” This change has been due to historical and political causes about which he says, “My transition from British Protected Person to Nigerian citizen is one man’s participation in a monumental ritual by millions and millions to appease a long and troubled history of dispossession and bitterness.”¹² This vexed and bitter

history is viewed by Achebe as a “chance encounter”¹³ with Europe and not as the beginning of his people’s history as he refuses to privilege that one event in history.

Not attaching too much of an importance to the period of colonial history also means that the ‘post’ situation also needs to come to an end. This period after the independence of the erstwhile colonies cannot remain an unmarked and endless period and thereby limit our reading of texts through the parameters of postcolonial theory. The engagement with theory should be an ongoing process and must allow the reader to read a text beyond the parameters suggested by one theory or the other. One may recollect what Jonathan Culler says about theory not leading to “harmonious solutions.”¹⁴ He says that theory “... offers not a set of solutions but the prospect for further thought. It calls for commitment to the work of reading, of challenging presuppositions, of questioning the assumptions on which you can proceed.”¹⁵ This study shows how Achebe’s novels offer a critique of the postcolonial construct. It refers to critics from Africa like Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Leopold Senghor besides others like Simon Gikandi, Chidi Okonkwo and Emmanuel Chukwudi who through their well-informed writings of the African experience enrich our reading. Their works help us to look beyond western criticism of literature from Africa.

Africa, a vast, intimidating continent, where humanity was born, colonised and brutalised for centuries by western powers, crushed by the inhuman system of apartheid has great stories to tell about the triumph of the human spirit. The continent has been a witness to the horror and pain of the transatlantic slave trade, racism and partition ordered by the Berlin Conference. The ‘scramble for Africa’ by European powers not only divided people along boundary lines but also drained the continent’s rich natural resources. Hence, the shared history of India and African countries go beyond the colonial encounter.

Writing specifically about Nigeria, one can say that both India and Nigeria share a rich tradition of storytelling, everyday rituals, festivals and respect for communal harmony. Both

nations have a rich oral tradition and boast of equally great writers. This is something that even Achebe acknowledges when he writes in *Anthills of the Savannah*, "...the best English these days is written either by Africans or Indians" (57). Along with our connection with the written word which helps us to transcend borders to reach out and touch the finer sensibilities, our relations with Nigeria are worth a brief examination.

India and Nigeria were colonies of the British empire. India supported the independence movements of different African countries and had even set up its diplomatic mission in 1958, two years before Nigeria gained independence. Since the restoration of democracy in 1998, Nigeria like India has become the largest democracy in Africa. The two countries have a diverse religious and ethnic population, possess natural and economic resources and are the largest economies in their regions. Bilateral relations between the Republic of India and the Federal Republic of Nigeria have considerably expanded in recent years with both nations building strategic and commercial ties. Both countries are members of the Commonwealth of Nations, G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement.

M.K. Gandhi had once said, "The commerce between India and Africa will be of ideas and services, not of the manufactured goods against raw materials after the fashion of the Western exploiters."¹⁶ Achebe's works have served as an introduction to African literature for Indian readers, as his contribution to the exchange of ideas is the most significant among African writers. His works have been translated into many Indian languages. Indian readers have been drawn to African literature because it reflects their own aspirations. The uniqueness of the African world and its universality which bridges all impediments is explained by Soyinka as:

Man exists ... in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context the African world, like nay other 'world' is unique. It possesses, however in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity.¹⁷

M.M.Mahood adds that, "A recognition of the positive values that bind a society together ... has prevented the communities of West Africa – in contrast to some in the other parts of the continent – from falling totally apart."¹⁸ These positive values can be found in Achebe's novels and they serve to counter the failures of protagonists. The failure of individuals does upset the order, but the strong presence of the community does not allow it to fall apart.

Another aspect of African literature which draws one's attention is the protest articulated by writers against issues which are both practical and urgent. Soyinka says, "Our function is primarily to project those voices that, despite massive repression, continue to place their government on notice."¹⁹ Today, African writers write against the repressive policies of their own home-grown dictators. Writers in Africa no longer view colonialism as the only fountainhead of oppression. This is why Ngugi says that, "...scholars of economics and politics have recognised imperialism as a social force in Africa but literary scholars are suspicious of it."²⁰ Many years after freedom from colonial rule, writers now focus on the present realities. Ngugi writes, "Literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and values governing human relationships."²¹

It is this concern with human relationships that prompts Achebe to look inwards and draw more deeply from indigenous resources, resurrecting folktales and myths to creatively interpret his world. He seems to believe that even as the world strives for economic growth it must be accompanied by a search for abiding values sustained by the creative energy of stories which offer a constructive means to cope with threats and are also the harbingers of reform and change. Achebe's novels transform the purpose of the story, weaning it away from the aesthetic ends to consecrate it to the more concrete goal of ushering in a social change.

On being asked by Simon Gikandi as to how he imagined that telling a story could change the way Africa had been represented and what made him have so much faith in the idea of the storyteller or storytelling, Achebe replied:

...stories were very powerful because they moved me ...they were not stories of war, ...great kingdoms, they were folktales, stories about the tortoise and so on. I was moved by those. I was fascinated. I was drawn to them.²²

This powerful tool of storytelling helps Achebe to explore the unique ability that stories have to connect people and universalise human experiences. It is not just in Achebe's works but also in the writings of the Nigerian novelists – Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ben Okri, Gabriel Okara, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that one comes across a wealth of stories. Their stories embrace all the varied themes such as the decadence of modern Africa, imaginative journeys to the world of spirits, travails of the soul, the sufferings of women and the Biafran War.

If one is to read them only as postcolonial texts, such readings would not yield much that would be new. These works defy the “empire writes back” model. The issue of colonialism is not relevant as far as these writings are concerned and they write about other aspects of their history like the Biafran War. Their writings cannot simply be viewed as oppositional to the imperial construct but as literature from a nation which express the aspirations, fears, longings and values of their people. Their works celebrate the power of literature, the power of imagination and the power of culture and tradition of Nigeria and Africa. As Nigerian writers, they write within a particular national context and not just within the ambit of either Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature. This group of writers are involved in the task of presenting the spiritual experience of their race through the long years of struggle for survival. The ‘post’ situation appears to have ended for them as they have moved on to

themes like the notion of paradise in our modern civilisation (Ben Okri's *In Arcadia*) which has no bearing on a colonial past.

The second chapter, "Storyteller\Writer as Mediator," focuses on the role of writers in bringing about paradigmatic shifts in thinking and more particularly Achebe's role as a writer. He uses the traditional African art of storytelling to mediate on the debate on location. Achebe's cultural inheritance enables him to foreground the life history and sensibilities of his people. The theoretical self-sufficiency of African knowledge systems helps him to seek out an integrated form of knowledge of the past where to know is to possess power. The power to write the story of his people cannot be viewed as the postcolonial norm of rewriting but has to be seen as emanating from a felt need to tell a story that needs to be told, of representing unregistered voices and events and even foregrounding them.

One is tempted to observe that the power of the story and the storyteller's role can best be studied in the African context since storytelling is an integral part of the African oral tradition. From the traditional storytellers or the *griots* to the modern day writers, the story has remained a part of African life. The importance of the story is also significant because stories from Africa have been misrepresented and distorted by outsiders who wrote them with a myopic view and a limited understanding of the African way of life. There is also the issue which Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie refers to – "...a strongly felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa."²³

In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe writes, "There is no story that is not true."²⁴ And in *Anthills of the Savannah* he writes, "...storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit" (141). Both these statements express Achebe's views on the story and the storyteller as he places great responsibilities on modern storytellers. Achebe fictionalises the condition of writers, artists

and activists under the repressive Nigerian regime. He also articulates the concern of writers from the Third World in *Anthills of the Savannah*:

...writers in the Third World context must not stop at the stage of documenting social problems but move to the higher responsibility of proffering prescriptions. (148)

There is no mention of rewriting or reasserting their past or writing back to the centre of an empire which does not exist anymore. Instead there is a suggestion of moving ahead and writing on new themes that can alter accepted views.

The five novels studied here show the close relation that Achebe has with his people as he creates a new world of experience, transcending boundaries and the limits imposed by theory. Even as he represents his nation's realities his novels forward messages of universal wisdom. He affirms the educational function of literature and establishes a human context for understanding Nigeria. Achebe's novels insistently connect to specific political situations. His works have kept pace with the unfolding developments of his nation's history as he believes, "...literature must, in other words, speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destinies of its people."²⁵ Achebe strives to communicate the human complexity of Nigerian existence, to establish the independence of African literature and to demonstrate the values of traditional Igbo culture. In the third chapter, Achebe's well articulated views on the precolonial African past have already been highlighted. Through his novels Achebe attempts to restore the sense of dignity and self-respect in his people. C.L Innes and Bernth Lindfors say that the "...apparent simplicity of Achebe's novels is deceptive and ...the discerning reader may discover beneath their surface a complex and subtle interplay of values and attitudes."²⁶

As literature is subjected to strategies of appropriation, manipulation, oppression and marginalisation, Achebe contests and intervenes in the hegemonic misrepresentation of Africa by setting up alternative images and accounts of Africa, its people and their culture.

His representation is both sympathetic and realistic. He makes a strenuous effort to reclaim the embedded history of his people. He depicts a world where his people move between allegiances to traditional beliefs and values and the values introduced by colonialism and derives an immanent African epistemological order from it. Achebe's fictional world that highlights his nation's past (its traditional culture, practices, religion, beliefs) and also visits the present (its corruption, ethnic clashes and political instability) provides an alternative epistemology. Achebe uses the knowledge of his people to seek out another way of knowing, which is outside the restrictive system of western methodology. He bares the politics of knowledge thus critiquing the Euro-centric position.

Things Fall Apart reflects the human condition in a situation ruined by internal factors against the background of great historical change. Achebe depicts the history of his people, not only through the tragedy of Okonkwo but also through his many images of man's helplessness in the face of historical upheavals which alter human lives. The theme of colonialism is introduced only towards the end of the novel. Achebe's narration implies that the District Commissioner will represent very little of Okonkwo's life in his book and overlook his heroic life. Achebe subtly reveals how the coloniser's view of Africa and Africans ran contrary to what he had narrated earlier about the Igbo community, the village of Umuofia and the lives of Okonkwo and other great men of the clan. What prevents *Things Fall Apart* from being cast as a novel that 'writes back' is that in this novel Achebe has narrated a story that goes back to a time long before the coming of the coloniser. It is a story complete in itself if one were to view it as the story of Okonkwo whose death would have ended the story. But the telling gesture of placing the coloniser's version of Okonkwo's life within the space of a paragraph, triggers a movement back to the story as if to highlight the nature of subversion in the colonialist's version.

Achebe narrates the story of a people and their world, their social and religious structures along with their faults and weaknesses as humans. In their world there is a precarious balance effected between the spiritual and the material. There are also dark social practices such as discarding twins at birth and human sacrifice that are referred to. Through the depiction of incidents like the killing of Ikemefuna and the helplessness of the people, Achebe admits before the world that Africans themselves have the courage to know and acknowledge the scourges within their society and as for the writers, there is a willingness to write about them. Achebe does not shy away from depicting the imperfections and injustices of his society which prevailed prior to the coming of the colonisers. The traditional society with all its glory and strength had disintegrated under the formidable external force of imperialism and the self-destructive impulse of the individual from within. Achebe's refusal to blame only the colonial rule and his recognition of the failures of his own people forces one to reconsider the postcolonial position.

Achebe's recreation of the past presents the socio-historical crises which existed even before the arrival of the coloniser. The past is shown as neither a savage condition nor an ideal era. He does not make any attempt to present his society as conforming to the standards set by the colonisers. This sets Achebe apart from other postcolonial writers who have ended up writing hagiographies.

Okonkwo's saga brings alive the story of a hero's failure which is rarely found in "anti-colonial" fiction. Okonkwo like the other protagonists in Achebe's novels does not emerge victorious. He stands revealed as someone weak and unwilling to accept changes. He is also guilty of homicide and stands strongly condemned. The incident of Okonkwo having a hand in Ikemefuna's killing calls our attention to the dark side of Africa's precolonial history. Ikemefuna's killing is to be read not as a representation of Africa's failure (as seen through the eyes of the west) but as the personal failure of Okonkwo. Achebe narrates how even at

such critical moments there are people who feel that the oracle's verdict to kill Ikemefuna was wrong. They had warned Okonkwo not to participate in Ikemefuna's killing. The seriousness of Okonkwo's offence is discussed many years after the happening in *No Longer at Ease*.

Thus in *Things Fall Apart* Achebe has narrated the story of a community through its years of peace and turmoil, its festivals and village meetings, through ceremonies deciding on the bride price and funerals. Through everyday activities of the people he has shown how there are destructive impulses within the members of his community which along with the inimical external forces lead them to chaos. While the majority of the community accept changes, there are a few who rebel and met their sad ends. This is the sad saga of human society.

Arrow of God offers a glimpse of the harmony in Igbo culture. The twin festivals of the Pumpkin Leaves and the New Yam characterise the interaction between the individual and the community. Achebe gives a powerful description of the historical condition that prevailed during the early period of colonisation to represent the power relations which marked the transitional period in colonial history. Power exercised as this novel shows is both religious and administrative in its orientation.. Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, the village deity of Umuaro holds traditional authority not only in religious matters but also in secular affairs. At the same time he is open to change and sends one of his sons to be educated by the missionaries. He spends long hours discussing his religion and Christianity and even challenges his own community on occasions. Though he welcomes positive changes like education and development brought about by the British, he draws a line between his relation with them and his role as a priest.

Through Ezeulu's refusal to eat the sacred yam (based on a real incident) Achebe delineates the spread of Christianity and the problems engendered by the colonial policies. The spread of Christianity in Nigeria has been attributed to missionary activities which were

encouraged by the colonisers. In their search for “gold, glory and God” they often indulged in forced conversions. But Achebe highlights that there were internal factors also at work which caused people to abandon their old ways of worship and embrace the new religion. Old practices like the *osu*, the throwing away of twins at birth had led individuals (for example, Okonkwo’s son Nwoye and Nneka in *Things Fall Apart*) to embrace the new religion. The priests like Ezeulu who abandoned their people at critical moments willy-nilly caused them to look to members of the new faith for succour. One can even link this to social practices in India like the caste system and untouchability which also helped in the spread of Christianity. While recognising the internal factors, Achebe does not fail to mention the incentives offered by the church such as education, monetary benefits and the promise of jobs in the British administration that also induced people to accept the new faith. *Arrow of God* reveals a view of how Christianity spread in colonies and presents the strengths and weaknesses of both Igbo traditional beliefs and of Christianity.

Achebe also narrates how the British administration used Igbo practices to make inroads into the traditional order. By imposing indirect rule in Nigeria, the British ruled over a people who were already familiar with democratic ways. There are administrators like Captain Winterbottom who live up to the white man’s burden theory and work for the development of the district, whereas the new officers do not make any effort to understand the people. There are also the warrant chiefs and the local supervisors who turn corrupt and exploit their own people. Achebe narrates how internal forces aided colonial oppression.

In *Arrow of God* Achebe depicts how colonial rule encouraged the spread of education and development and at the same time sowed the seeds of corruption. Achebe’s critique of the coloniser’s deployment of religion, education and development to further the achievement of certain goals reveal the problems within the colonial policies and also the corruption and changing values of the Nigerian people. A microscopic group of people were the

beneficiaries of foreign rule and their misappropriation of the benefits led to serious consequences even after independence. *No Longer at Ease* narrates how converting to Christianity or receiving missionary education and even western education does not change or improve the conditions of Obi's family. It does not change the state of Ezeulu's household either though he too had sent his son to receive missionary education.

Arrow of God focuses on the aspects of religion, education and development through the story of Ezeulu. A postcolonial reading would limit a reading of the novel to a study of how the British made inroads into Igbo territory. But Achebe offers another view of this stage of colonisation. He presents a view of a society which had its own god Ulu to protect the clan, was self-sufficient in its knowledge systems (the chief priest had his own ways of calculating the days of the year and days marking festivals) and was prosperous. Like all other human societies, the village of Umuaro also had people who misused power, whether religious or administrative. Ezeulu's pride in his priesthood and his refusal to eat the sacred yams has far-reaching consequences for himself and his community.

It is this human side of the story that does not allow one to read *Arrow of God* as only a narration of the colonial era. Achebe does not write about any protest against the British or any struggle for freedom, but narrates the lives of ordinary people which are altered by the changing power equations. Unlike Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* Ezeulu is willing to accept change; yet he fails because of his pride. And like Okonkwo's suicide, Ezeulu's madness marks the end of another story depicting the hero's failure.

No Longer at Ease, set in Nigeria at the threshold of independence, raises questions about its readiness for freedom from foreign rule. Achebe mentions Nigeria for the first time in this novel and shows its transition from the village communities to a coherent national identity. The story represents the economic and ideological nature of the transition and not the political changes. The widespread corruption in Nigeria is identified as the central problem in

course of the narrative. Corruption is seen as the fundamental hindrance to Nigeria's development. Along with the question of Nigeria's readiness for independence, Achebe also discusses the corruption among the educated elite and how they in turn threaten the traditional bonds of community.

Achebe's view of Nigeria on the eve of independence is not a hopeful one. The impending crisis is felt by both the nation as well as by Obi causing the readers to wonder at the sense of commitment of the leaders and their sensitivity to the aspirations of the people. Even British officers like Mr. Green are skeptical about allowing Nigerians to rule themselves. This is what Achebe suggests – "Our people have a long way to go" (203). Even as he holds his own people responsible for the prevailing conditions, he does not fail to appreciate the role of those British officers who worked hard for the development of Nigeria. At the same time he also mentions the feeling of racial superiority in some of them. The novel shows how the only hope for deliverance lay in the sense of community symbolised by the Umuofia Progressive Union. As Achebe wonders about the fate of his nation, he makes a shift from the parameters of postcolonial discourse. He neither presents heroes who would lead the nation to independence nor does he present a united nation, for tribalism had begun to divide people on ethnic lines. Achebe's commitment as a writer is to show the real state of things and not create an ideal world.

No Longer at Ease, Achebe's first novel set in an urban locale is primarily read as a sequel to *Things Fall Apart*, as a continuation of the story from Okonkwo to his grandson Obi. There is a long gap in the sequence of events from the days before the coming of the colonisers in *Things Fall Apart* to the years before Nigeria's independence in *No Longer at Ease*. The novel narrates an individual's failure in his professional and personal life. Obi's efforts to rise above the average corrupt Nigerian ironically lands him in the quagmire of corruption. His desire for individual freedom (symbolised by his relationship with Clara)

alienates him from his family and his community. Obi's personal crisis is narrated against the backdrop of the nation's crises. And as the title suggests, a sense of restlessness prevails in the life of the protagonist and in the nation.

A re-reading of *No Longer at Ease* enables one to move beyond the historical frame of its setting in the pre-independence years and view it as a modern novel that uses modern narrative techniques to deal with the themes of disillusionment, restlessness and failure of relationships. The novel is set at various international settings as Obi moves from Lagos to London and back through Liverpool, Madeira, Freetown and Iquedo. Achebe also mentions Obi's visit to the market town of Onitsha. There are references to texts from English Literature which Obi has studied and loves to read. But all these do not establish him as a hero. Instead he is shown as a symbol of the failure of Nigeria's educated youth who are unable to offer any hope for the future. Obi's conviction brings an end to what could have been a promising life for a young man.

Through Obi's failure Achebe presents stories of man's struggle against difficult situations. Individual failures during times of historical changes often go unregistered. Even though the story of Obi's failure is not one generally told when stories of a new nation are being written, yet Achebe chose to write about Obi. He wrote it from the liminal position of a writer who is not at ease with the prevailing situation of corruption and loss of values.

A Man of the People examines Achebe's perspective on the future and meaning of the Nigerian nation and how the novel becomes a space to initiate debates on the success and failure of nations. The themes of corruption, electoral violence and coups make the novel contemporary. The coup described in the novel turned out to be not only accurate but prophetic as well. By a strange coincidence, Major General Ironsi's coup took place soon after the publication of the novel and forced Achebe and his family to stay in hiding. The persecution of writers and the threat to their lives under repressive regimes is one of the

themes of *Anthills of the Savannah*. The situation described in the novel has been witnessed by many newly independent African nations in the 1960s.

A Man of the People gives us Achebe's political critique on Nigeria and its future and also reaffirms his commitment to write for a cause. Jago Morrison says,

In addressing the aftermath of independence in his fourth novel, the author captures an authentic sense of desperation at the failure of the nation to live up to its own hopes, including its failure to decisively slough off the negative effects of foreign domination.²⁷

As the Director of External Broadcasting for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation Achebe occupied the position of a professional observer of the Nigerian political scene and this enabled him to gather material for his novels. Armed with this knowledge and his commitment, Achebe began his representation of Nigeria's public life. He could write about "the seven bathroom mansions" as well as "the night soil men" equally well. There are no revolutionary leaders in this novel. Even characters like Odili and Max are not shown as intellectuals who can find solutions to the state of affairs or even inspire the people. The novel does not show any political upheaval and depicts military intervention as a temporary solution to a vexed problem. The novel ends with a coup that ends the violence and the prevailing disorder.

A Man of the People creates a space for a debate on the issues faced by the nation. More than the failure of the new leaders, the novel reflects the cynicism of the intellectuals and the common man. The novel raises the question whether military rule can help in the major post-independence task of nation building. Achebe's contention seems to be that power can corrupt anyone.

In *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe mentions the term "post-colonial" when he writes that it was an "...absurd raffle-draw that apportioned the destinies of post-colonial African

societies” (168). He also mentions a few times that Kangan is a “West African state” (151) and a “negritude country”(52). Achebe narrates the African conundrum where the continuity of history is determined by the political positioning of the narrators. Even in the “failure of ... rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed” (130-131) there exists “a stubborn sense of community” (131). Stories of the nation are narrated through various techniques to make space for narrators like Chris, Ikem and Beatrice. Stories are told of Braimoh, Aina and Emmanuel who help Chris and Beatrice, and in turn participate in their nation’s change of guard. They are the community Benedict Anderson wrote about, ordinary people willing to make sacrifices for their nation. Even though Chris and Ikem die, their story lives on “like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year’s bush fires” (28). Storytellers in their turn continue to remain a threat as they “threaten all champions of control...” (141).

The art of storytelling has been used as a powerful tool to mediate changes in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Achebe stands out in his role of the “novelist as teacher” because his stories empower the people, legitimise their fight against injustice and even depict their triumph. Achebe does not engage with the politics of rancour but looks within to reveal widespread condition of the suffering of his people. This is how the narrative transcends its historical context and takes a fresh look at the nation and its problems.

Anthills of the Savannah is also the novel where Achebe portrays a dictator, Sam. Though he is the dictatorial head of the state of Kangan, Sam has his own fears, doubts and a feeling of helplessness. He is tortured to death after a coup. Sam’s lack of contact with the people of Kangan, his refusal to meet the leaders from Abazon reveals the callous attitude of the government that does not meet the aspirations of the people. This failure of the state is counter balanced by the deep sense of community in the people of Abazon. This sense of the community is also symbolised by the small gathering at the end of the novel to name Ikem

and Elewa's child. As they gather at Beatrice's house and pray for the baby and the "life of Kangan" (212), Achebe mentions the white man. He writes, "We have seen too much trouble in Kangan since the white man left because those who make plans make plans for themselves only and their families" (212). This refusal to censure the colonial rule is an indication that writers such as Achebe have taken their writings beyond the conventional limits of protest literature.

In his novels set during colonial rule, Achebe did not write about any armed struggle or freedom movement, but in this novel, set many years after independence, there are stories of bloodshed and sacrifice – Ikem's death as a victim of the military junta and Chris's death while trying to save Adamma from being raped by a soldier. These deaths are actually the sacrifices they make to rid the nation of its internal troubles. These troubles are the offshoots of the prevailing state of indiscipline and lawlessness.

Anthills of the Savannah deals most extensively with the issue of gender. Beatrice and Elewa represent the traditional African community, while the men – Chris, Ikem and Sam who succumb to the power relations are no longer capable of sharing the same feeling of brotherhood. Even women like Agatha who are not so quick in adapting to new ways, finally begin to share the joy of belonging to a community. Achebe does not try to create woman characters who embody feminist positions. Instead they are shown as participating in the universal saga of human suffering. Beatrice's senior position in the government and her academic excellence at the University of London where she "beat the English to their game" (68) is the closest Achebe gets to describing her as a symbol of the modern Nigerian woman, "one of the most brilliant daughters of this country" (68).

Beatrice and Elewa belong to different sections of society but the wide gap in their status and education do not prevent them from looking forward to a common future. This female bonding is not based on the lines of colour but on their ability to overcome the grief of losing

the men they love and sharing the responsibility of bringing up Elewa's daughter. They share the universal experience of women left alone to survive. Achebe does not present them as helpless women, but as women who are financially independent, emotionally stable, who can stand by the decisions they make about their lives. They are capable of mourning their loss even while they are proud of the sacrifices made by Chris and Ikem. After the death of Chris and Ikem when it is left to Beatrice to take the story over, it is as though Achebe is empowering women. But this is not something that is new to his people who named their daughters Nkolika, which means "Recalling-Is-Greatest" (114).

In *Anthills of the Savannah* one is captivated by the innovative narrative techniques used by Achebe and the gripping stories he narrates of his own race. Through the simple act of telling stories, Achebe delves into serious and contemporary themes like tribalism, students' unrest, regionalism, freedom of expression and the role of the press.

The academic world continues to attach much importance to the dismantling of the colonial apparatus and the legacy left behind. The aftermath has stretched to a long period and the 'post' situation continues and postcolonial studies is widening its field of study to include anthropology, art history, culture studies, historiography, history of law, political economy, philosophy and psychoanalysis to offer a specific critique of the imperialist subject. Though Achebe occupies a prominent position in the postcolonial canon, his writings speak out his concern for his people. Achebe's remark about being satisfied if his novels taught his readers to respect their lives even with all its imperfections is well-known. This statement clearly suggests that he writes for his people and not "back" to the imperialist project.

Achebe also says, "Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct and pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive."²⁸ This defines his role as a novelist who is also a teacher and a

critic. Achebe also categorises the act of writing and storytelling as a gift ordained by the gods. He writes in *Anthills of the Savannah*,

“To some of us the Owner of the World has apportioned the gift...to wait...and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount its story.” (113)

It is this gift which helps him to transcend all frontiers marked by politics and history.

For the general readers, Achebe has this to say in *Anthills of the Savannah* through the voice of Ikem:

No I cannot give you the answers you are clamouring for. Go home and think! I cannot decree your pet, text-book revolution. I want instead to excite general enlightenment by forcing all the people to examine the condition of their lives because, as the saying goes, the unexamined life is not worth living ... As a writer I aspire only to widen the scope of that self-examination. (145-146)

The writer widens the scope to enable us to move beyond the postcolonial conundrum.

There are certain aspects of Achebe's writings which need to be explored further. While these strictly speaking do not fall within the scope of this study but they need to be mentioned here to indicate further directions of research and study. One such study could be on Achebe's poems on the Biafran war which describe the impact of the war on people. Since Achebe did not write about Nigeria's civil war in his novels, a reading of his poems may reveal several telling points. Another study could be carried out on storytellers from different parts of the world since there are very few of them left today and this dying art needs to be preserved. They are the *Griots* from Mali, Ghana, Guinea and Gambia; the *Ashiks* who are the singing storytellers from Turkey and Azerbaijan; and the *Halaka* from Morocco. One could also make a study of the storytelling traditions in India like the *Pandvani*, *Harikatha*, the *Villu-Pattu*, *Burra Katha*, *Powada*, the *Baul* and the *Rathva* communities.

These possibilities for further studies draw inspiration from Achebe's novels, which have thrown up new stories about the human race in its journey through the tribulations of modern life. It is this recognition that inspires one to read and re-read Achebe's novels. They uphold values regulating the ties of kinship and community which more than material wealth account for greater human happiness. He belongs to a rich and dynamic universal literary tradition which inspires readers all over the world. It must be admitted at this stage that Achebe belongs to a vital universal tradition that refuses to be categorised or boxed in. Hence he is not just of Nigeria, or Africa; he belongs to the world. It is this universal quality in his work that enables him to vault over the postcolonial stand point and address larger human concerns.

Literature is a strong moral force that is capable of bringing about change. It helps one to think of the world as human rather than material. Although we belong to the same human race, yet history and politics affect us differently. It is literature that connects us, preserves the wisdom of world cultures and helps to explain our world and our place in it. It kindles in us the ability to think and learn creatively through the shared experiences which provide spiritual insights. Chinua Achebe's novels recreate the sense of the community, they teach and inspire.

NOTES

[English (U.S) spellings have been used whenever they appear in citations.]

¹Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty, eds., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2006) 3. Print.

²Salman Rushdie, “‘Commonwealth literature’ Does Not Exist” *Imaginary Homelands – Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991) 62. Print

³Salman Rushdie, “‘Commonwealth literature’ Does Not Exist” *Imaginary Homelands* 64. Print.

⁴Salman Rushdie, “‘Commonwealth literature’ Does Not Exist” *Imaginary Homelands* 64. Print.

⁵Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* 1987 (New York: Anchor Books, 1988) 47. Print. (All further references to the novel have been incorporated in the text.)

⁶Amitav Ghosh, letter, *Doon Online* 18 March 2001, Web. 3 May 2009. <<http://www.doonline.net/aghosh/letter.htm>>.

⁷Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) 27. Print.

⁸Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa” *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* 1988 (New York: Anchor Books, 1990)16. Print.

⁹Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa” *Hopes and Impediments* 17. Print.

¹⁰Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa” *Hopes and impediments* 18. Print.

¹¹Chinua Achebe, “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation” *African Writers on African Writing* ed., G.D.Killam (London: Heinemann, 1973) 13. Print.

¹²Chinua Achebe, “Today, the Balance of Stories” *Home and Exile* 2000 (New York: Anchor Books, 2001) 104. Print.

¹³Chinua Achebe quoted in G.D.Killam *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969) 2. Print.

¹⁴Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory – A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 1997) 119. Print.

¹⁵Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory* 120. Print.

¹⁶M.K.Gandhi quoted in Reema Kansal and Amit Sarwal “Okonkwo’s Sacrifice: Through Indian Eyes” Mala Pandurang , ed., *Chinua Achebe – An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006) 97. Print.

¹⁷Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976) xiii. Print.

¹⁸M.M.Mahood, *The Colonial Encounter – A Reading of Six Novels* (London: Rex Collings, 1977) 175. Print.

¹⁹Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent* (Oxford: OUP, 1996) 134. Print.

²⁰Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993) 83. Print.

²¹Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972) xvi. Print.

²²Chinua Achebe, interview, *Wasafiri Online n.d*, Web.19 December 2009 <<http://www.wasafiri.org/pages/content/index.html/>>.

²³Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, interview, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Website n.d.*, Web. 21 November 2007. <http://www.halfofayellowsun.com/html>.

²⁴Chinua Achebe, *The African Trilogy – Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, Arrow of God* (London: Picador, 1988) 117. Print. (All further references to the three novels have been incorporated in the text.)

²⁵Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975) 7. Print.

²⁶C L Innes and Bernth Lindfors, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1978) 7. Print.

²⁷Jago Morisson, *The Fiction of Chinua Achebe* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 124. Print.

²⁸Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" *Hopes and Impediments* 45. Print.

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APPENDIX A**Particulars of the Research Scholar**

Name of the Research Scholar: Ms. Ranjana Das

Degree: PhD

Title of Dissertation: Critiquing the Postcolonial Construct: A Re-reading of
Chinua Achebe's Major Novels

Date of Admission: 16th of September, 2005

Approval of Research Proposal:

 1. BPGS: 15th of September, 2006

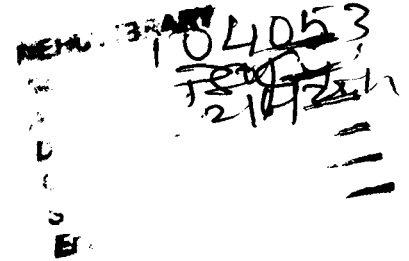
 2. School Board: 16th of October, 2006

Registration No & Date: 1079 of 16-10-2006

Extension (If any): Nil

APPENDIX B

Brief Bio-Data



1. Name: Ms. Ranjana Das
2. Educational Qualification: M.A. M Phil
- HSLC St. John's School, Tuensang, Nagaland.
- Higher Secondary Cotton College, Guwahati, Assam.
- B.A. Jyoti Nivas College, Bangalore, Karnataka.
- M.A. Bangalore University, Bangalore, Karnataka.
- M.Phil Dissertation Title – Contesting History: A Re-reading of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987) and *Paradise* (1998).
Assam University, Silchar, Assam.
3. Present Occupation: Lecturer, Dept. of English, Lumding College, Lumding, Assam. Affiliated to Gauhati University.