

Achebe's Literature, A Mirror of the Continent's Social Struggles

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Abstract: *Chinua Achebe, an illustrious son of Africa, is the father of modern African literature. Achebe, like most writers, writes in line with the African experience. This research analyses his novels, Things Fall Apart, A Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah, as a mirror of the continent's social struggles. These struggles have been identified, paying attention to their genesis – whether they began with the invasion of the white man, the changes in the forms of the struggle over time, and the reaction of Africans to the various situations. The selected texts are an excellent and apt data resource because they were each published within a considerable time span of the other and are thus better placed to reflect truly the social struggles and changes that have occurred over a span of about thirty years.*

Keywords: *Colonizer, crises, nationhood, victimization, patriotic, alienation, stratification, tribalism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature can be narrowly defined as an artistic record of life and the recorder is the literary artist. NgugiWaThiong'o, one of Africa's most prolific "recorders", as part of his authorial comments in *Homecoming* states that, "literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum: it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society." Consequently, the relationship between literature and the above - mentioned forces cannot be ignored.

The human race has been and will continue to be inundated with challenges which have to be overcome. These struggles vary from the seemingly mundane (such as keeping the stomach full) to the complex, such as fighting for freedom from a tyrannical ruler. The African race is no exception; it has had to deal with one of humanity's most traumatic experiences – colonialism.

Rightly, humanity has kept records of these and other experiences as far back as can be recollected. Some have been verbally handed down from generation to generation and others have come to us through writings. These records serve as reminders and guides to future generations. Chinua Achebe, a seasoned African writer, in the preface to his collection of essays *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, writes: "I believe that if we are to survive as a nation we need to grasp the meaning of our tragedy. One way to do it is to remind ourselves constantly of the things that happened and how we felt when they were happening. "The African novel is thus, among other things, a record of the traumatic consequences of the abiding impact of western colonialism on the African.

Although the struggles of the continent of Africa can be technically grouped into social, political and economic, they are intricately interwoven. For the purpose of this study, however, an attempt will be made to focus on the social aspects of the African struggle.

2. BACKGROUND TO SELECTED TEXTS

Chinua Achebe is one of Africa's classic authors with writings spanning decades, making them an important source of data. His novels, *Things Fall Apart*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, will be used for this paper. The selected works will be studied and analyzed as a mirror of the continent's social struggles. These struggles will be identified, paying attention to their genesis – whether they began with the invasion of the white man, the changes in the forms of the struggle over time, and the reaction of Africans to the various situations. What makes these selected novels an excellent and apt data source is that, they were each published within a considerable time span of one another; therefore they are better placed to reflect any changes that occurred over the years.

According to Palmer, an English professor and author of *The Growth of the African Novel*,

The history of the colonialist impact on Africa proceeded in three phases. Stage of actual conquest when the white man, by sheer force of arms, introduced to Africans an alien form of administration, education, and religion, and taught the African to look down on his own indigenous systems; the period of resistance when the now-awakened masses struggled to shake off the imperialist yoke; and the present post-independence stage with African society seeking to re-order itself, having thrown off imperialist oppression.

More often than not, the oppression begins on a subtle note of the indoctrination of the colonized people by the colonialists. Teaching Christian religious beliefs, obviously involves a calculated spreading of new socio-cultural ideas to the indigenous population, which is eventually followed by the imposition of administrative representatives of the colonizer and the usurpation of traditional authority.

At the first stage then, the natives' struggle is with this newly arrived culture with all of its beliefs, values, habits and traditions that have now become entwined with theirs. They must assess which part of that change brings, for example, education and which part is harmful (loss of traditional culture, beliefs, and values). At second stage, there is a fight for freedom from the colonizer which, when eventually granted, though paramount, is ironically not the end of the struggle. Instead, it is the genesis of class stratification, tribalism and behaviour such as sycophancy and hooliganism, which erodes dignity. These persist in the third stage as well.

Achebe's work most representative of the advent of colonialism is *Things Fall Apart*. It is set in the 1890s, in Umuofia – an independent, stable and thriving society before the invasion of the white. It depicts the life of determined and powerful Okonkwo; a leader of an Igbo community. Okonkwo's life is good: his compound is large; he has three wives, a yam farm, and the respect and admiration of all. When Okonkwo accidentally kills a clansman, he is banished from the village for seven years. However, what causes his downfall is his rejection of the change in circumstances – the missionary church, which brings with it the power of the British District Commissioner. In an attempt to fight colonialism alone, he gets killed.

A Man of the People reflects the second stage discussed by Palmer. Though this novel does not depict the actual struggle for independence, it begins the point where independence has been granted them. Here, Achebe focuses on the mess that African politicians make of nationhood once political authority is bestowed on them. Abuse of power, corruption, political hooliganism, and electoral malpractice become the bane of the day. The central characters are the Minister of Culture, Nanga, the man of the people, and a teacher, Odili, who tells the story. Odili stands against the government, but not solely for ideological reasons. He has personal interests: Nanga has seduced his girlfriend. Their political confrontation becomes violent; Nanga's hooligans inflict havoc and chaos. In the end it is private armies such as Nanga's, who had tasted power during the election that topple the government.

In his 1987 novel *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe examines a network of close relationships surrounding the fall of a dictator in a fictional African nation. The novel ends in an indistinct chaos and foreshadows the coming of yet another similar military ruler, rather than the installation of a new kind of government-one that is more accountable to the needs of the nation's people. The colonial legacy lingers on.

The reaction of the African to the colonial experience, as reflected in these works of fiction, has been a complex one. It would be easier to view those who replaced the colonialists as voracious people who wanted what their masters had, but it goes beyond that. It is a tale of a people battered into a state of worthlessness, scrounging for some shred of identity to hold on to. This and the previously mentioned issues are the focus of this discussion.

In his article *Rodney, Cabral and Ngugi as Guides to African Postcolonial Literature*, Omoregie of the University of Botswana states that the 1950s was the decade of hope, mainly because most African countries gained independence from colonial rule. He further explains that African writers who emerged at this time had a hopeful mood, which explains the self-confident nature of the writings of this period. Colonialism had tried to excuse its oppression and exploitation by resorting to claims of racial superiority. The African writer of this decade therefore, countered such claims with the production of literary works that showed that Africa had its own history, culture, and civilization. While attempting to reshape Africa's distorted history, writers of the negritude movement such as Senghor, Diop and others see no ill in the African culture. Unlike these writers however, Achebe does not view the African and his way of life through rose-tinted glasses. He shows that African societies had their own contradictions and spiritual crises before the intrusion of colonialism.

A fairly large number of people are said to constitute a society when they live in the same territory, are relatively independent of people outside their area, and participate in a common culture living in groups learn, create, and share. (Schaefer, 2003)

It is a group's culture that distinguishes them from others. A people's culture includes their values, customs, art, language, beliefs and rituals, as well as political and economic systems, among others.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* commences on an enumerative note of some Umuofia values. These include wives (not only because they contribute to the formation of the family unit but also because they produce children who help in agricultural production), children, material wealth, titles, hard work. Their idea of a successful man is Okoye; he has a large barn full of yams, has three wives and is working at taking the Idemili title, which is third highest in the land. To project this value, Okoye is juxtaposed against Unoka, the father of the protagonist Okonkwo, who is so poor that his wife (not wives) and children barely have enough to eat. He is lazy, improvident and always in debt which made him a laughing stock. In jest, he was called *agbala*, which means a woman and a "titleless" man.

Other values include respect for the laws of the land, for justice and for custom, just to mention a few. Umuofia has laws for every facets of life. There are even laws that govern even the eating of yams; old yams are discarded when the new is harvested. A transgression of any of the laws results in penalties that have far reaching consequences for the victim, his family and sometimes the entire village. As far as Okonkwo is concerned the laws of the land must simply be obeyed.

The need for justice in Umuofia is also very important, not only because it helps in social cohesion, but because for Umuofia, it is linked to their religious beliefs. There is the need for the endorsement of the gods before they go to war, or in any such dispensation of justice, for it is only then that victory is assured. So when a tribeswoman gets murdered by a man from a neighbouring village, a delegation comprising village elders is sent to the defaulting clan for an initial peaceful settlement. The defaulting clan is given the option of giving a replacement for the dead woman or for war.

Umuofia, being a traditional African setting, has a lot of customs and rituals. There are set ways for celebrating the various rites of passage. The birth of a child is a woman's crowning glory in Umuofia and babies are named after seven market days. Young men from rich backgrounds are initiated into the *ozo* society on the way to becoming respectable people in society and marriages serve as unifiers; different households and lineages are brought together. The process of contracting a marriage therefore is a serious affair. It begins with a visit from the prospective family-in-law to the prospective bride's family. The negotiation for the bride-price is done through the use of a bundle of short broomsticks. The number of broomsticks settled on is the number of bags of cowries that would be paid for the bride. Then a date is set for the actual ceremony. Which ceremony is celebrated with lots of palm wine and pounded yam (*foo-foo*) and hot soup amid drumming and dancing. Drumming and dancing is an integral part of all social gatherings- initiation ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, funerals, etc.

Like most early societies, certain phenomena are viewed as enigmas and therefore evil. In as much as children are cherished in Umuofia, some children are not welcomed. These include twins and *Ogbanje*. Twins are left in the forest to die while the *Ogbanje* (children believed to be wicked because they were the incarnate of previously dead children) are not given proper burial. The corpse of such a

child is mutilated with a sharp razor, held by the ankle and drugged on the ground to be buried in the evil forest. This ritual is performed in the hope that after such ill-treatment, it will not be re-born. The mother undergoing such a misfortune stops sleeping in her hut when she conceives again, so as to elude “her wicked tormentor and break its evil cycle of births and deaths.” (p. 55) After a child born to such a woman lives beyond a certain age, its *iyi-uwa*, a special stone that forms the link between an *ogbanje* and the spirit world, has to be discovered and destroyed to prevent the child’s death.

A society’s culture embraces not just its values and customs, but also its art. “Among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. (p. 5) Discourse in Umuofia is not a mere stringing together of words; it is an art. A conversation begins on a mundane level and it is only when all the niceties have been exhausted that the actual conversation (the purpose of the visit) begins. The extensive use of proverbs is particularly visible in the speech of the older people. To support a point or expose the shortfalls in an opponent’s argument, one has to exhibit a skill in the successive and apt use of proverbs. When Okoye goes to collect his money from Unoka, after speaking plainly for a while on ordinary issues, he follows it up with a half dozen proverbs which indirectly refer to the reason for the visit, before stating his message in ordinary terms. Another instance is when Okonkwo attempts to absolve himself from the responsibility for participating in the murder of Ikemefuna. He says to Obierika, “the earth cannot punish me for obeying her message.” (p. 47)

This skill is also exhibited during formal occasions such as village gatherings. Not everyone is allowed to speak. When a meeting is called at the village square to discuss the murder of Ogbuefi Udo’s wife, it is OgbuefiEzeugo who speaks, because of his dramatic and powerful oratorical skills. He stops talking at timely intervals, to make the listeners ponder on his message, thus evoking the desired response.

The African is believed to be intrinsically religious, and the people of Umuofia are no different. Religious beliefs and practices in Umuofia are prominent. In fact, they are so intricately woven into all aspects of life that no major enterprise is undertaken without consulting the gods to find out their will. They consult as individuals and as a clan.

Individuals consult oracles when misfortunes dog their steps or when they want to know what the future holds. Still others visit the shrine to consult their dead relations. Mention is made of Obiako the palm-wine tapper, who gives up his job of palm-wine tapping because the oracle says he will fall to his death if he ever climbed a palm tree. As a clan, they consult the gods before embarking on any major activity such as war. We see the powerful belief that the clan should not go to war unless its case is clear and just, for it is the only reason for which they can count on the support of the deity.

Umuofia is polytheistic. Their gods, they believe, exist in a hierarchical order; from the personal god (*chi*), through ancestral spirits to clan deities and then the supreme God, *Chukwu*. In his essay *Chi in Igbo Cosmology*, Achebe states that, “...we may visualize a person’s *chi* as his other identity in spiritland- his *spirit being* complementing his terrestrial *human being*;...” One’s *chi* could be good or bad and is responsible for his destiny. A good *chi*, such as Okonkwo’s, agrees with the man when he says yes- meaning they are united. This results in good fortune. Unlike Okonkwo, Unoka his father has a bad *chi*, resulting in constant misfortune.

The ancestral spirits who are higher than the *chi*, serve as mediators between men and the gods; they also sometimes have a hand in a person’s destiny, for they can send prosperity or misfortune to man. Each family has a shrine where they keep the wooden symbols of their personal gods and of their ancestral spirits. They sacrifice kola nuts, food, and palm-wine as a form of worship while offering prayers to them on behalf of their families.

Higher up on the rank of scale, are the clan gods. The clan gods include *Ani*, the owner of the land and the ultimate judge of morality and conduct, *Amadioha*, god of thunder, and *Ifejioku*, god of yams. There is also *Agadinwanyi*, Umuofia’s most potent war medicine which is believed to be embodied in a one-legged woman.

Certain occurrences and acts are an abomination to the gods. The god of the land detests the corpse of one who has died out of a swollen stomach and limbs. People who die under these conditions are left in the forest to die; they are not buried. A transgression against any of these deities, even if committed by an individual, could result in consequences for the entire clan. When Okonkwo beat his wife during the Week of Peace (the season where they live in peace with their neighbours, in honour and

for the blessing of the earth goddess) he is made to pacify the gods with a she-goat, a hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. Failure on the part of Okonkwo to do this would have resulted in the ruin of Umuofia. Like all other religions, this elaborate religious system is designed to explain the mysteries of an apparently illogical world and to provide sanctions for good behavior. The fear of the gods, then, helps to sanction bad conduct on both the individual and clan levels.

The elaborate religious order allied with an equally elaborate administrative system ensured decency, justice and stability. Governance in Umuofia before the white man's arrival was indeed democratic. When a daughter of the land gets murdered by a man from a neighbouring clan, all the men gather at the village market place, deliberate on the issue and come up with a resolution. Some of these men are sent as emissaries to the defaulting community, to inform them of their resolve. The outcome of the mission is put to before the council of elders. The secret society (*egwugwu*), made up of nine elders, one each from all the nine Umuofia clans, is also a judicial arm of the society. Amidst drumming, dancing, flute playing, raffia clothes and wooden masks, the *egwugwu* who are believed to represent the ancestors, sit in judgment for instance on a marriage situation.

In presenting the nature of the society, it is inevitable that a lot of attention is paid to the sociological aspect. These are however not relayed in isolation but are presented as a part of life and activity of the people, or to some aspect of human character. In chapter one for example, when Achebe refers to the most important values of Umuofia society, he skillfully juxtaposes two characters who are replicas of what is valued in a man and what is not.

Also, most are linked with the protagonist Okonkwo. For instance, *The Week of Peace* is marred by Okonkwo's beating of Ojiugo, his youngest wife. In discussing the leniency of the punishment meted out on Okonkwo, Ezeudu, the oldest man of the clan, narrates a story told to him by his father, about the kinds of punishment people who broke the peace in previous years received. In putting the story in Ezeudu's mouth, he is portrayed as a repository of history. His death marks the end of an era, not just for his family and maybe the village, but most especially for Okonkwo, because it is at his funeral that Okonkwo mistakenly kills a clansman and flees to his motherland, losing all that he had built.

Drawing from the African setting, Achebe uses similes and images that are very strong and apt. he writes:

Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed the floor. (p. 44)

Also, his dramatic description of village life and events are so clear, the reader is virtually transported to the scene.

And then quite suddenly a shadow fell on the world, and the sun seemed hidden behind a thick cloud. Okonkwo looked up from his work and wondered if it was going to rain at such an unlikely time of the year. But almost immediately a shout of joy brokeout in all directions, and Umuofia, which had dozed in the noon day haze, broke into life and activity. (p. 38)

He sometimes makes use of some typically African onomatopoeic words such as *gome, gome, gome*, which is the sound of the town crier's metal hit before and after delivery of a message, and *diim, diim, diim* to illustrate the sound of the cannon announcing the death of an eminent person.

These then are some of the literary devices Achebe uses to paint the picture of traditional society. The beauty and independence of traditional African society changes with the visit of the white missionaries. This is not to say that prior to the white missionaries' visit, Africa was free of the progression of historical events. In fact, the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms throughout the centuries, movements and communication between different peoples, economic and social changes, wars, and so on, are all catalysts for change. It would therefore be absurd to assume that Africa had remained static in her way of life until the advent of colonialism. Societies existing before western colonization then had the security and stability of their society, as priority. They also had the task of preserving their cultural identity. Change came, and would have come albeit at a slower and more tolerable pace; at which pace, the social cohesion would have remained and people would have adjusted better. When Ogbuefi Ezeudu talks about the sanctions meted out to previous violators of the rules governing the *Week of Peace*, it is to point out the laxity in penalties in recent times, thus implying that the society was changing.

In contrast, change as inflicted by the man is swift, ruthless and disruptive. It brings with it a new religion, education, commerce and administration, displacing a time-tested social structure, and replacing it with another that is not perfect either. The African's religious beliefs are challenged in a way they could never have imagined. The missionaries told them their gods are no gods at all and their ability to inhabit the *Evil Forest* was not lost on the villagers, winning the missionaries their first three converts. According to Okonkwo, "To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens is the very depth of abomination." (p. 108) In addition, the missionaries accept the village outcasts (the twins and *osus*), yet none of the penalties from the gods for such an act materialized. This clash of beliefs was no mean challenge since every aspect of traditional life is an integral part of traditional religion.

New systems of education and trade are introduced. The indigenes that enroll in their schools are taught to read and write and are exposed to the missionaries' religion. This replaces the traditional form where the family has the duty of educating the young ones. A trading store is built where palm-oil and kernel were sold, allowing much money into Umuofia. Consequently, the natives are in a dilemma. They have to admit there is some good in the white man, and sift these good aspects, from the bad. How then do the indigenes respond to these challenges?

As a clan, Umuofia is confounded. Initially, they believe the white man is being foolish. When the missionaries say their gods are no gods, Umuofia makes fun of them. To test the power of the white man's God, the natives give them the Evil Forest to build their church. In the end, the white man's God proves stronger. This shakes the clan; yet the straw that breaks the camel's back is the abomination committed by their kin who join the white man's religion. This act leaves the clan paralyzed- war against the white man, will mean war against their kin. This is how Obierika expresses the entire situation:

...and our own brothers who have taken up his (white man's) religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (p. 124)

As individuals, their responses are as varied as their temperaments. There is on one hand, Okonkwo who cannot tolerate the denigration of everything he and his own stand for, and on the other hand, there is Obierika. Although unhappy with the situation, he is prepared to flow with the tide. There are still others like Nwoye (Okonkwo's son) and Ogbuefi Ugonna (a rich and respectable man with three titles) who find the changes so welcoming, they become members of the white man's church.

Okonkwo, a strong individual and a clan hero, struggles to maintain the cultural integrity of his people against the overwhelming power of colonial rule. As far as he is concerned, the men who sat idle while the intruders invaded their way of life have been foolish. They should have gone to war. He is unable to adapt to the changes that accompany colonialism. In the end, in frustration, he kills an African in the service of the colonizers and then commits suicide, a transgression against the very same tradition he lived for. Okonkwo's failure is predictable because colonial rule has destabilized the values and institution he lived for.

For Obierika, a close foil friend of Okonkwo, some of their customs are unnecessary. He specifically mentions the inabilities of titleholders to climb tall palm trees to tap their own palm-wine and killing of Ikemefuna.

Nwoye, (Okonkwo's son) like Obierika, had also begun questioning in his young mind the fairness of the tradition of killing the innocent. These individuals have their personal struggles which eventually make it easier for them to accept the new way of life.

In the end, there is a clash of cultures and the stronger wins; this victory is not long lived though. The African soon wakes up from his reverie and fights for independence, but colonialism and exposure to Western culture cause so many changes in African societies. People are thrust into new experiences which they cannot comprehend. The formerly colonized is now in a position of power; how does he use? What kind of people has the colonial cultural infiltration created? What is to be the nature of this new society after colonialism? What kind of struggles would the people face and what would be their response to these struggles?

Palmer (1979), records that Achebe in his autobiographical note in *Contemporary Novelists*, describes the quick passing from one era in Nigerian history to the next, linking it to the resultant shift of emphasis in Nigerian novels: "Europe conceded independence to us and we promptly began to misuse it, or rather those leaders to whom we entrusted the wielding of our new power and opportunity [misused it]. So we got mad and came out brandishing novels of disenchantment." Achebe's *A Man of the People* and AyiKweiArmah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* are the novels most representative of this period. These are artistic works expressing disillusionment with postcolonial African society. The feeling of despair pervades these works, portraying the oppressed as trapped and helpless.

The problems portrayed in *A Man of the People* such as bribery, corruption, class stratification, and tribalism are experiences of many West African nations in the neo-colonial era. In fact, because Nigeria had not experienced a coup when Achebe wrote *A Man of the People*, his model for the novel's events must have been military coups in other African nations, thus reflecting the African situation. Furthermore, whereas *Things Fall Apart* is clearly set in Igbo villages in Nigeria, *A Man of the People*, is set in a fictional African country.

A Man of the People commences at a point where politics is high on the agenda of the nation's calendar. Looking at the social aspect, however, it is obvious that the change in circumstances has led to a changed people with struggles different from those of the traditional era. In place of autonomous ethnic groups, there now exists a nation. Some of the previous cultural groupings such as the women's and hunters' groups have metamorphosed into entertainment groups. The women, who previously mobilized themselves to help one another on occasions, are now seen in the first chapter entertaining a crowd gathered at a political rally with songs. The hunters' group now has meetings when one of theirs dies, or on occasions like this (political rallies) just to display their skill in musketry, as a form of entertainment.

Another change is in era of economics. Because the people were initially farmers, food was not a problem. With the introduction of a nation and the resultant system of trade where money plays a vital role, problems of inflation have cropped up, which according to Odili, have caused the price of goods to double ever so often.

This, nonetheless, is not to say that everything African is lost in transition. In fact, some traditional beliefs and values still remain even among the educated. An instance is seen in Odili's account of his childhood. He writes that one of his playmates called him "bad child that crunched his mother's skull," (p. 32) because his mother died during his delivery. The belief is that, it is better for a child to die instead of the mother because she could always have others. Since he did not die and his mother did, he is an unlucky if not evil child.

Secondly, the white man's religion is unable to erase the belief in traditional medicine. Odili recounts, "We grew up knowing that the world was full of enemies. Our father had protective medicine located at crucial points in our house and compound." (p. 32) In another instance, Odili explains that Chief M. A. Nanga's charisma on the day of the rally at Anata is such that a superstitious person would believe that he had made a potent charm called "sweet face".

Large families and the use of proverbs remain values among both the educated and the illiterate; men largely are still polygamous, with numerous children. Odili's father has five wives and thirty-five children. Chief M. A. Nanga M.P. is also grooming a young girl to fit the role of parlour wife, not to mention the concubines. He has seven children.

Proverbs did not lose their place in daily discourse. "If Alligator comes out of the water one morning and tells you that crocodile is sick, can you doubt it"; and "our people have a saying that when one slave sees another cast into a shallow grave he should know that when the time comes he will go the same way," are two such proverbs found in *A Man of the People*. The first is said by Odili's father when he learns that Odili's friend, Max, has taken money from the rival political party. Odili is in denial but this proverb is to emphasize that his father's source is close to the action. The second proverb by Chief Nanga is said in banter with Chief Koko, a colleague M.P., after he supposedly almost dies from drinking locally processed coffee.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the society is stratified like most societies. This stratification is based on the individual's capabilities; in other words, one has to earn it. The age of independence, however witnesses the emergence of social classes, marked by a person's level of colonial education, which is in turn linked to material gain.

There are those who acquired their education in the West; these come next to the white man on the social ladder. They are the educated elite- what the Prime Minister calls “the hybrid class of Western-educated and snobbish intellectuals.” (p. 6) Interestingly though, they are not at the top of leadership. Actually, they are detested by those educated locally. This is what the incensed Prime Minister says about this class:

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 intext-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 our people. (p. 4)

The next on the rank scale are those to whom Alexander Pope, an English poet, would have had this to say, “a little learning is dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.” Chief the Honourable Nanga and his colleague politicians who have some level of education (acquired locally) fall within this group. They are the ruling class and even though they detest the western educated class, they paradoxically aspire to be like them. Chief Nanga informs his audience at a rally that the education he received at standard six, in his days, is better than Cambridge’s today. Shortly after he makes that statement, he informs the same audience of impending honorary doctoral degree in law, which he would be receiving from a university in the West. The most comic example of this group is Chief Koko. Chief Koko drinks hot tea and coffee on a hot afternoon; and he is not alone in this kind of behaviour. Indeed, Odili states that it is not uncommon. As a mark of class, an unidentified man attends an exhibition by the Writers’ Society in an expensive looking European woolen robe. The absurdity could have been excused but for the “100% WOOL: MADE IN ENGLAND”, printed at the borders of the cloth by the manufacturer. He kept hitching his sleeves so often, so the quality would not go unnoticed. In other words, the closer one’s eating, clothing and other habits resembled those of the expelled colonial masters, the more classy and respectable one is.

Other traits of this class are their desire for women, money and landed property; to them, these indicate that one is leading “the good life”. Though married and preparing to take a second wife Chief Nanga, does not hesitate to have an affair when Barrister Mrs. Akilo visits. Like the other ministers, Chief Nanga lives in a house with seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms, one for each day of the week, and is chauffeured in a Cadillac. Even his house in the village is four storied.

The “non-western” educated class does not only detest the western educated class as previously stated, they had very little regard for the ordinary people as well. One gets a glimpse of this in Odili’s narration of the sequence of events at Chief Nanga’s political rally. He calls the people “silly, ignorant villagers” and “poor contemptible people”, just because they are in a festive and expectant mood while awaiting their M.P’s visit.

These “poor contemptible people” are the last group on the ladder. They are the least educated and it is among them that one sees the vestiges of the traditional way of life. Visitors are made welcomed by serving kola, instead of iced-water, tea or whiskey. Good speech is still that which has a good dose of proverbs.

These are those who do not fit into any of the set classes. They have very little education, speak pidgin, feel superior to the locals, and yet, do not belong to any of the higher classes. They have been exposed to the lifestyle of the affluent and some end up doing the dirty work of the politicians. These are the thugs and personal military groups used by the politicians to intimidate the populace.

These class groupings meant that those within a higher group were better than those on the lower strata, mainly because through education, they now are more like their colonial masters. One feature common to these classes-the elite, the ruling class, and the traditional-however, are the Christian names that they bear.

It can be deduced from the above that the struggle is for an identity. These Africans are neither white nor black. Whereas they reject what the white man stands for, it is what they aspire to. This identity problem is not only with those of the higher classes, but can also be found amidst the ordinary folks as well. When the Nangas decide that their children must spend some time in the village, Chief Nanga decides he needs a cook. The gentleman who comes to interview for the position, can cook no local dish. His specialty is continental dishes.

Another struggle that emerges at this stage is tribalism. Hitherto, tribalism is an unknown phenomenon because the various social groups are sovereign. The elimination of this sovereignty and the creation of nationhood, led to tribalism. Now members of a particular tribe seek their well-being to the detriment of others. Those who do not support or vote for a particular political figure, have no developmental projects in their village. During his campaign, Chief Nanga invites Odili to the capital to take up a post in the civil service because as he puts it, "the highland tribes were taking up all the post and our people must press for their share of the national cake." (p. 13)

This situation also gave rise to nepotism. Only those who know people in power, get the good jobs which come with all the trappings- car, free housing, etc. Odili, who is an idealistic young graduate, is not prepared to "lick any Big Man's boots", and thus, has to settle for a teaching job in a private school in Anata village. Even Chief Nanga has a difficult time getting the road between Giligili and Anata completed because it is not in the constituency of the Minister of Public Construction.

In response to this situation, a majority of the population have become cynical. The people are no longer open to suggestions that vilified the leadership. The cynicism is not only on the part of the ordinary people but with the leadership as well.

The people themselves, as we have seen, had become even more cynical than their leaders and were apathetic into the bargain. 'Let them eat' was the people's opinion, '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? ...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 will bring home your share. (p. 161)

Edna's father is one such person who believes that it is his turn to eat his share, and his daughter Edna was the medium through which this would be achieved. Accordingly, Edna is first betrothed to Chief Nanga because he is in government and has money. When the chief falls into misfortune, Edna is given to Odili in marriage because his future looks more promising.

Some others are so disillusioned with the current situation that they believe expelling the white man, was unwise. Hezekiah Samalu, Odili's father, is one such person. Another person with the same point of view is Chief Nanga. He states that he preferred working with the whites than his own kind because the whites are trustworthy. This is understandable, especially on Chief Nanga's part, since he obtained a loan on a "never-never arrangement" basis from British Amalgamated, so he can purchase ten luxurious buses.

A Man of the People has the strongest satirical streak of Achebe's early novels. Employing irony, he, through humour, exposed the wickedness and folly found in the post-colonial African situation. One such humorous yet ironic situation is the Chief Koko incident. The government, to which Chief Koko belongs, has mounted a nationwide campaign to promote the consumption of locally manufactured products. This campaign is in the newspapers, on radio and television urging all patriotic citizens to patronize homemade products. Cars equipped with loud speakers advertise these homemade goods. The government says it is the key to economic emancipation without which their political freedom will be an illusion. Ironically, the Chief's preference is for Nescafe from abroad. When his cook serves him with some homemade coffee, Chief jumps up as though stung by a scorpion, breathing hard and loud, rolling his eyes and screaming, "They have killed me." Herein lies the irony; the citizenry should drink the poisonous substance manufactured locally, while they, the promoters, drink imported Nescafe. Secondly, the citizenry should buy these products as their patriotic duty and their contribution to the economic emancipation, while those who lead them remain unpatriotic. Unfortunately, the same song and dance persists in most African countries.

The character Nanga is an irony. Chief Nanga has his motto, "Do the right and shame the devil," yet, he does not hesitate to instigate acts that will please the devil. As a politician, his reign is marked by selfishness and vindictiveness. Anything Chief Nanga does, has to bring him some personal returns. Even his being 'a man of the people' is because he needs the people's votes. His insistence on the tarring of the roads in his constituency is to facilitate his transport business. When the people of Anata support their own in election, he withdraws pipes which were brought for a potable water project. He orders that Odili, who attempts to stand for M.P. on the ticket of the opposing party in the election, be subjected to serve beating that earns him a broken skull. As a husband, his intention to marry a

second wife is to have a parlour wife instead of the traditional one he already has. As a father, his communication with his children in English is ironic, especially when you consider his position as Minister of Culture, and as Minister of Culture, he has never heard of his country's most famous novel.

In addition to irony, Achebe uses flashback. Flashback is a technique where the narrator returns to earlier events, out of chronological order, to fill in information or explain something in the plot of a story in that the reader is kept in suspense till a later time. It also adds some authenticity and naturalness to the story. In our ordinary day to day narration of events, the narrator is more likely to skip some details and return to them later.

For example, in the novel, the reader is first introduced to Edna in chapter two when Odili explains that she is the other reason for his impending visit to the city. Nothing is heard of her till the sixth chapter when he pays her a visit at the hospital. Another instance where flashback is used by the narrator is when Odili talks about his father's working days and the enemies he made in the course of his duty. He recounts an event which occurred in his secondary school days when he visits a classmate's house during vacation and is turned away because his friend's father finds out who his father is.

Also, the author's skillful description of people and events creates good visual imagery. For instance, in describing the non-conformist Mr. Jalio, the President of the Writers' Society, this is what the narrator had to say:

...he had become so non-conformist that he designed his own clothes. Judging by his appearance I should say he also tailored them. He had on a white and blue squarish gown with a round neck and no buttons, over brown striped, baggy trousers made from the kind of light linen material we sometimes called obey the wind. (p. 69)

Jalio's choice of apparel is to make a statement; it is a statement of defiance against all that colonialism stands for. These are early days of post-colonialism and such an act may have lost its significance to humour. But what difference will two decades after this make? Two decades into the post-independence (post-colonial) era, the African still has to deal with the unconscious and lasting effects the colonizer imposes upon a people by his mere presence. An example is what Omoregie attributes to Walter Rodney, the author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, that the colonial machinery fashioned a military elite that later became military dictators in the post-independence era. A good example is Sam, the military dictator in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Anthills of the Savannah, details life under military dictatorship and its resulting tensions. In the novel, Ikem laments the "leaders who openly looted our treasury, whose effrontery soiled our national soul" (p. 39). His reference is not to the colonizers, but to African rulers whose policies are similar to those of colonial oppression. One would have thought that the elite coming to power would mean good governance; at least better governance than that of the locally educated leaders previously discussed.

In contrast, however, not much systemic change can be seen- the struggles are the same: social classes, tribalism, victimization, looting of national coffers. Things actually look worse because the middle class is now participating in the plundering of the nation. That is what Ikem, one of the three main characters, talks about in his speech to the university students:

Let's take Electricity Corporation of Kangan as one example. What do we see? 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 other petty and serious crimes... (p. 147)

Instead of fighting for better conditions of service while working hard, the middle class' response to the prevailing conditions is to help loot the state. They go on strike when privileges such as motor vehicle advances and allowances are threatened, while their leaders, can barely account for million they compulsorily collect from workers. To quote Ikem, "For they are the very comrades who preside over the sabotage of the nation by their unproductivity and fraud, and that way ensure that the benefits of modern life will ever remain outside the dreams of the real victims of exploitation in rural villages."

The "rural villages," thus, remains a victim of his own kind and has only managed to save himself from total dejection, by making fun of his situation. In the words of Ikem: "he [the poor man] has managed to squeeze every drop of enjoyment he can out of his stony luck." (p. 37) this attitude manifests itself strongly at the public execution of some convicted criminals. The spectators, majority of who are poor, turn the occasion into an entertainment. They are prepared to stand in the scouring sun for hours, just to behold this glory spectacle. It does not appear to them as anything disquieting; rather it serves as a distraction from their personal woes.

Also, superficially, it is as if the poor have shelved their dignity in order to survive; whereas in actuality, it is a self-preserving tactic. The military is in power and you dare not go against them. At the Gelegele Market, a second hand clothes dealer is almost run over by a soldier. When the victim asks if the soldier wants to kill him, he answers vehemently, "If I kill you I kill dog?" Although the import of these words is not lost on him and onlookers, the victim's reaction is incredible. He makes a joke of the situation by pretending he does not understand those words. He even wishes the young soldier well. This diffuses what could have easily been a fight; a fight the trader would never have won because the military are in power.

The visit to the presidential residence by the leaders of Abazon is another instance where the plight of the poor is highlighted. Unlike the idealist Odili, who will not stoop to lick any Big Man's boots in exchange for anything, the elders of Abazon have come to terms with the reality of the political situation. As a result of their not voting for a life-tenure for the sitting president, the people of Abazon are being penalized. Boreholes under construction in their villages have been halted, depriving them of potable water. Hence, their journey to the capital, to pledge their allegiance to the president in the hope that things might get better. The wise elder of Abazon had this analogy: "... We did not know that before but we know now that yes does not cause trouble." (p. 116) They believe they have no choice because their livelihood and very existence depends on the leadership. For the leaders hold both "the yam and the knife."

The poor have come to accept their plight. They have developed what Ikem describes as an "atavistic tolerance" for the elite and their lifestyle. Their psyches have changed to the extent that, they actually expect an opulent lifestyle from any one in authority. According to the taxi driver who pays Ikem a visit, "He (Ikem) na big man. ... So he fit stay for him house, chop him oyibo chop, drink him cold beer, put him air conditioner and forget we." As a result of this mind set, Ikem's modest lifestyle is misconstrued as meanness. The driver cannot comprehend Ikem's use of an old vehicle. Instead of driving himself around in an old Datsun, the taxi driver expects him to be driving a chauffeured Mercedes. He believes Ikem's driving himself is depriving a needy person of a job as chauffeur.

This outlook of the oppressed towards the oppressor, from Ikem's perspective, is unacceptable. Ikem, a newspaper editor and advocate for the nation, sounds like the biblical John the Baptist – a lone voice, crying in the desert (Isaiah 40:4). He is disturbed by the apathy and loss of will to fight. As far as he is concerned, this goes beyond the systemic failure he initially assumed was the problem. Instead, it is a human failure that can only be alleviated by "a good spread of general political experience, slow of growth and obstinately patient..." This is what he sets out to do in the national gazette and later in his speech to the university students, where he urges them to "develop the habit of skepticism, not swallow every piece of superstition you are told by the witch doctors and professors.... When you rid yourself of these things your potentiality for assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled." (p. 148)

Furthermore, he sees the prime failure of the government, as the lack of links between the rulers and the poor. Thus, using *National Gazette*, for which he is editor, as a medium of advocating for change, Ikem is able to affect some changes in the nation, and in the lives of individuals. His article on the public executions for example, gets His Excellency to scrape the death penalty from the statute books. The media, especially the print, at this stage is flourishing and making enormous impact on society. Even those who cannot read are paying attention to what is written, by listening to their literate friends. In the old man from Abazon's speech, he recounts why they did not vote "yes", in order that the president may have a life-tenure in office. He says, "Osodi will come or will write in his paper and our sons will read it and know that it is true. But he did not come to tell us and he did not write in his paper. So we knew that cunning had entered that talk." In another instance, the member of the Central Committee of Taxi Driver Union, when he visits Ikem, confirms that the taxi drivers also pay attention to the papers. He narrates at least one incident where an article in the *National Gazette*,

forces the authorities to clean the filth at the Central Taxi Park. Ikem (the media) being the voice for the voiceless makes him an enemy of the powers that be, who conspire and gets him “fatally wounded.” His death gives the needed drive for an already tense situation, to degenerate into a revolt which topples the sitting regime. This, unfortunately, does not mark an end to military dictatorship.

Even though this research has as its focus the social aspects of the African struggle, Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* is largely political. This is not out of place because it is a reflection of the situation on ground. It depicts a typical post-colonial era African country. Politics, gradually, has come to dominate all other areas of life. Whereas in *Things Fall Apart*, life is essentially social, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, life is political. In other words, in *Things Fall Apart*, all aspects of life, including leadership, are dominated by the social element. Decisions are taken by the community for the common good. The society is structured in such a way that, those in leadership earn their authority either through old age and the wisdom that comes with it, as well as hard work. The family setting is central, with men as head of the family, followed by women and then children. This ensures order in the family, which extends to the community. An individual’s allegiance is to his family and to his society, which in turn, gives the individual his identity. This system does not alienate the majority. Conversely, there is a shift in favour of the minority in *A Man of the People*.

In *A Man of the People*, social classes have replaced the existing social unit. The criterion for belonging to a particular class is now determined by one’s level of colonial education, which only a few are able to access. The educated are the most maladjusted in the society; they have no identity because they aspire to be like the colonial masters – the same people and systems they fought against. Everything African is inferior and the more European one lives, the more respect one receives. In the end, they are neither whites nor blacks. Additionally, politics is foremost and with it, the problems of tribalism, nepotism, sycophancy, bribery and corruption. Allegiances are now to individuals and their close family and to the society, if there is some benefit to the individuals concerned. These persist in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Although two decades have elapsed since *Anthill of the Savannah* was first published, things have not changed much. Politics still overshadows most aspects of life. In Ghana for example, the airwaves are filled every morning with more political discourse than any other. Everything that can be twisted around for political gain is not spared. Even the game of football has political undertones.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the African novel though comparatively young, is not removed from the author’s environment. The African writer has matched each level of the continent’s growth and related struggles with corresponding writings. It is apparent from the discourse above that, like all societies, Africa is not exempt from change. One causative factor of change is the challenges that societies face, how they fight and emerge from them at the end. It is also obvious that before colonialism, African societies were changing; however, it is the traumatic and disruptive nature of colonialism that overshadows previous societal changing events, hence the colonial themes in novels. For instance, in these works of Achebe, all the shaping forces such as the invasion- the resistance to colonialism and post colonialism- which combined to inspire the growth of modern African literature visible. Consequently, the African novel is a response to and a record of the harrowing repercussions of brunt of colonialism on the traditional values and institutions of the African peoples.

The African novelist cannot afford the art for art’s sake ideology. Like the African scientist whose duty it is to solve the scientific problems in Africa, the African novelist must engage in the service of educating the African. According to Achebe, the writer must be at the fore of the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. He cannot expect to be excused. He states in his article, *The Novelist as Teacher*: “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.” (p. 45) This perspective is shared by other prominent African writers besides Achebe.

One such prominent African writer is Wole Soyinka. According to Palmer, (1979) Soyinka delivered a lecture at the Scandinavian African Writers’ Conference, held in Stockholm in 1967, where he urged his fellow African Writers to focus their attention on the forces which threaten the disintegration of African society. Soyinka, according to Palmer, in that lecture advocates that the African writer, being among the sensitive minds in society, should alert society to the debasement of values in their community, to the pervasiveness of corruption, incompetence, nepotism, social inequality, among others.

Also NgugiWaThiong'o in his article *The Writer And His Past*, writes:

...What has been...is of grave import to the poet and the novelist. For what has been, especially for the vast majority of submerged, exploited masses in Africa, Asia and black America, is intimately bound up with what might be: our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life and human potential, has roots in our experience of the past. (p. 39)

It is therefore important that the recording of the story continues because in words of the old man from Abazon:

...it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is 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. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. (p. 113)

Africa is a continent in transition. African societies must look inward to find remnants of colonialism which continue to harm their nations, and perhaps, find those which are advantageous in the new world they have been thrust into, then, create an identity that suits the new African around which other aspects of life can be built.

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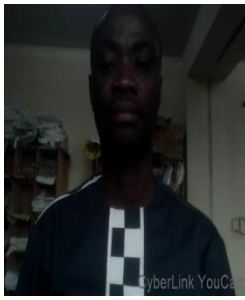
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