

## REPRESENTATION OF THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF COLONIZATION IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD* AND *NO LONGER AT EASE*

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### Abstract

*Nigeria is one of the most populated countries in the world and is the largest democracy in Africa. Now the country is heading towards disintegration and a possible split in the name of religion is awaiting the land in the near future. Africans who lived in Nigeria never encountered these kinds of issues before though there were trivial internal conflicts between villages and clans. But they were settled sooner rather than later. Spread of Christianity and the loss of power of Hausa-Fulani ethnic group must have stirred such a violent scenario to occur. How the natives ended up in this turmoil? What other socio-cultural issues have colonization brought to this land? To find answers of these questions I am analyzing Chinua Achebe's two novels, *Arrow of God* set in 1920's during the most significant time in the history of Nigeria's colonial confrontation and *No Longer at Ease* set in 1960's when Nigeria was on the threshold of independence. This paper investigates the cultural impact of colonization giving emphasis to the issues of religion and formation of a generation which believes in mimicry and assimilation. The analysis reveals that the cunning divisive and diplomatic tactics used by the colonial masters were the real reasons behind the formation of this 'hybrid' generation which is culturally devoid of a unifying philosophy, thus trapped in rootlessness*

Many of the best known African writers in English are from Nigeria, and the most prominent among them all, is Chinua Achebe, who died quite recently. He was the golden feather on the crown of African literature. During his life time he grabbed almost all the prestigious awards in his country and his continent. In 2003, he was awarded with the Man Booker Prize. He broke into the scene with his landmark debut novel – *Things Fall Apart* (1958). This was not just a milestone in Nigerian literature, but also in the entire world of African literature. Though Amos Tutola, the author of the well read novel *The Palm wine Drinkard*, wrote in English, Achebe was the first to achieve world wide acclaim.

Chinua Achebe was born in 1930 at the village of Ogidi in the then Eastern region of Nigeria belonged to the Igbos of this region. Being the son of a Christian catechist, Achebe

was given a strict Christian upbringing, but most of the other people around him lived a traditional life. They performed all of their traditional and ethnic rituals and sang hymns in their prayer. The colonial situation of Africa had a great influence upon the lives and education of most of the African writers like Achebe, and it became a subject matter of their novels too. This state of cultural dilemma does get a prominent place in Achebe's fiction.

The Igbos of the South-Eastern Nigeria were of two hundred and fifty or more tribes. These many diverse clans had their own dialects, culture, political systems etc... These southern people did not succumb easily to their colonial masters. They were rebellious and many revolts against imperial powers took place in these regions. They were suppressed by the use of brute power. The novel *Arrow of God*, written by Nigeria's foremost literary figure, Chinua Achebe, is set in these southern areas of Igbo population. The conflicts and oppressions do get a mention in the novel when the native characters talk about what the white men did to the village of Abame.

To attain more co-operations from the natives, the colonial masters tried to implement a different style of governance known as Indirect Rule. The monarch will appoint paramount chiefs or priests to act on behalf of the colonial authority. This was a diplomatic measure adopted to woo the natives as well as to overcome the linguistic and cultural barrier. So the duty of these 'puppet' priests in each districts were to function as mediators between the whites and the natives. But what would be implemented is always the white man's agenda.

In the nove *Arrow of God*, we see such attempts being made by Captain Winterbottom and Toni Clarke. But like Ezeulu who rejects the offer in the novel, many southern villagers refused to endorse this scheme of plan. So the white man employed another trick. They brought the Fulani-Islam traders from the Northern part of Nigeria and made them the paramount chiefs in the South. But these Muslim rulers started to implement shariah rules which were not acceptable for those who followed the indigenous religions. There begins the unending saga of religious unrest between these two groups. Though the appointment of the Fulanis is not mentioned in the novel Achebe realistically portrays how difficult it was for the colonial rulers to get their support and how the indirect rule policy eventually backfired.

Christianity was slow to spread in the Igboland. Earlier attempts suffered huge setbacks and it even prompted the missionaries to drop the plan altogether. One such setback is represented in *Arrow of God*.

*"A young energetic ordinand had led his people on a shrine burning adventure and had killed a royal python in the process, whereupon the villagers chased out all the Christians among them and burnt their houses. Things might have got out of hand had the administration not stepped in with troops for a show of force. After this the Lieutenant Governor had written a sharp letter to the Bishop to apply the reigns on his boys"(Achebe, Arrow of God 60)*

In *Arrow of God*, we can see that even after serious works from the part of its catechist John Jaja Goodcountry, the St. Mark's church in Umuaro could get only a few converts. He managed to increase the number of students in the catechism class from a mere fourteen to thirty – with one baptism there and three in the parish church at Okperi. They failed to field any candidates for confirmation. But it was hardly surprising considering the special nature of the Igboland. The church tried all sorts of things to woo the natives to the new religion. But most of the people turned a blind eye towards these advancements.

But when a crisis strikes the people of Umuaro, catechist Goodcountry and others in the church found it a blessing and opportunity sent by the 'true god' in disguise.

Nwafo came back to the obi and asked his father whether he knew what the bell [of the Christian church] was saying. Ezeulu shook his head.

"It is saying: Leave your yam, leaving your cocoyam and come to church. That is what Oduche says."

"Yes," said Ezeulu thoughtfully. "It tells them to leave their yam and their cocoyam, does it? Then it is singing the song of extermination." (Achebe, *Arrow of God* 31).

The natives then called the new religion "the seed of foolishness" (p.105). But during the crisis time, church men changed their stand upside down. Mr. Goodcountry plans it to perfection. He arranges his church's harvest service on a Sunday; whoever made his thank offering to the real God could harvest his crops without the fear of Ulu. He goes on to tell his followers;

*Let them bring as many yams as they wish according to the benefits they received this year from God. And not only yams, any crop whatsoever or livestock or money.* (Achebe, *Arrow of God* 269)

Moses Unachukwu justifies this by saying; "if Ulu, who is a false God can eat one yam, the living God who owns the whole world should be entitled to eat more than one". (p.270) Achebe skilfully represents the tactful and opportunist move from the part of the missionaries which led to mass conversion into Christianity in a place like Igboland.

The cultural impact is ever visible. What such moves do is simply creating several hybrids who belong neither to the indigenous religions nor to the Christian religion. A sect of society which is native in blood but western and Christian in learning, thinking and reasoning. But at times even after conversion and learning the Bible, though they condemn some of the traditional native rituals and conventions – certain beliefs, values and practices that were passed on from generations to generations prevail in their mental make-up. When

matters regarding such beliefs and values rise up, their spirit in native 'blood' also rises up. And eventually they belong to 'No God's Land'.

In the novel *Arrow of God* we have several examples of such hybridized behaviour on part of the natives. The so called pillar of strength of the Umuaro church, Moses Unachukwu, argues and declares revolt against Mr. Goodcountry. He opposes the catechist's suggestion that Christians should kill the royal python. He asks Mr. Goodcountry to leave the pythons alone.

Oduche, though resolves to kill a python, decides against it later on out of fear and puts it in a box. When the Bishop decides to support Moses on the issue of pythons – Moses' reputation rises among the natives. He becomes a man of respect ever since. Ezeulu wanted his son, Oduche to gain such glories even though he is the chief priest of the native God Ulu. He asks Oduche to learn the white man's wisdom. When he comes across a white man writing with his left hand, he admires that as a great skill and asks Oduche to learn how to write using the left hand. Natives who were closer to the white man tried to mimic the western manners and by doing so, considered themselves as superior to the other natives.

Ezeulu upon seeing a show by the court messenger asks him – "are you the White man yourself?" (p.173). But in fact he is proud to address himself as a friend of Captain Winterbottom. But sometimes helplessness leads to assimilation. In *Arrow of God*, Moses, John Nwodika – have all seen the white man's power and they realize that there is no point in waiting but join those who assimilate whatever is western. This is a result of the knowledge that there is no way out of this conquest.

Towards the end of *Arrow of God*, people were incited to take liberties. The Christian harvest took place a few days after the death of Obika. It witnessed more participation than John Jaja Goodcountry and the rest belonging to the church ever dreamed. Those reluctant to accept it altogether sent one of their sons with a yam or two to offer to the God of this new religion. Thereafter any yam that was harvested in man's field was harvested in the name of the Son.

They have accepted Christianity and western culture and started to deviate from the indigenous traditions, but some inherited character trait which is the after-effects of a pre-colonial culture lingers on and they cannot define where they are and what they are. This is an extreme case of cultural hybridity which started with the spreading of missionary teachings and conversion. The term 'hybrid' refers to the concept of hybridity, an important concept in post-colonial theory, referring to the integration (or, mingling) of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures; "integration" may be too orderly a word to represent the variety of stratagems, desperate or cunning or good-willed, by which people adapt themselves to the necessities and the opportunities of more or less oppressive or invasive cultural impositions, live into alien cultural patterns through their own structures of understanding, thus producing something familiar but new. The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic, as well as as oppressive. "Hybridity" is also a useful concept for

helping to break down the false sense that colonized cultures - or colonizing cultures for that matter - are monolithic, or have essential, unchanging features.

The representation of these uneven and often hybrid, polyglot, multivalent cultural sites (reclaimed or discovered colonized cultures searching for identity and meaning in a complex and partially alien past) may not look very much like the representations of bourgeois culture in western art, ideologically shaped as western art is to represent its own truths about itself.

The early forms of hybridity as well as assimilation and mimicry did not seem as complicated since the Christian religion was a new one even then. But during the 1950's and 60's when Christianity is well established, such issues persisted in the cultural context of Nigeria, the story of Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of the old hero Okonkwo in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is a brilliant example of this. Like Achebe, Obi lived on the "cross-roads" of culture. And a cultural identity was difficult to attain. When he returns from England, Isaac Okonkwo (Nwoye) asks him if he had time to read Bible when he was in England. Obi lies that he did it occasionally, but he actually wanted to say aloud to his father that he did not believe in his God, i.e. Christ. But it is interesting to see that how they change their stances when a matter regarding their personal lives turns up.

In *No Longer at Ease* the protagonist Obi fell in love with Clara, and he enjoyed a passionate affair with her. He was damn confident that he was going to marry her; it was just a matter of telling his parents and getting their consent. But Clara was an Osu. Those who belong to Osu were considered as outcasts by the Ibos. But Christianity embraced even Osus and tried to bring them into the front line. Isaac Okonkwo, being a devout Christian and catechist is very much experienced and well versed in the doctrines of the new religion. He talks so highly of the principles of Christianity when he is with other non-Christian Ibos. He refuses the prospect of breaking kola nut as a sacrifice to the deity on the occasion of Obi's return from England. But when it comes down to his son marrying an Osu girl, he changes all his theories and takes a stand which is deep rooted in Igbo indigenous culture. An Osu is someone dedicated to the worship of a single deity other than Chukwu, the supreme God of the Igbos. So from time immemorial, the Igbos relegated the Osus as people of a dubious origin; outcasts. This attitude is showing when Isaac Okonkwo and his wife talks firmly against Obi's decision to marry Clara. Joseph and the president of the Umuofia Progressive Union feel the same spirit. Obi on the other hand was against Christianity. But when his plan of marrying an Osu girl was mercilessly rejected by the Ibo parents, he defends his case using the terms like "the light of civilization" that Christianity brought to Nigeria etc... He claims that the new religion and civilization had rescued Africans from utter darkness. This kind of a complex lack of identity as well as hybrid culture has thrown the new generation of Nigerian in a serious mental and cultural turmoil.

A new generation thus turned their back towards native cultural systems and endorsed the new religion. Nigerians who still possess the indigenous clan oriented division are either Christians or Muslims – but at heart neither of these – 'spiritually cut off' from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy set in a materialist society – mere Hybrids.

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