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### Achebe's Work, Postcoloniality, and Human Rights

Eric Sipyinyu Njeng  
*University of Burundi*

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**Volume 15 Issue 1 (March 2013) Article 16**  
**Eric Sipyinyu Njeng,**  
**"Achebe's Work, Postcoloniality, and Human Rights"**  
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**Abstract:** In his article "Achebe's Work, Postcoloniality, and Human Rights" Eric Sipyinyu Njeng argues that Chinua Achebe exposes failings in the fabric of African society and engages with violations of human rights. Achebe is careful not to hurt the pride of Africans who in the *Zeitgeist* of the nationalist ferment of the 1950s were wary of European powers. Achebe does not "write back" to the empire: he writes the empire in and he lays bare the weaknesses in African culture grounded in the father-son-grandson trajectory he narrates. Achebe presents what may be termed a cultural dialectics: the thesis (flawed African customs represented in violations of human rights) collides with its antithesis (colonialism and Christianity) leading to a synthesis (a recognition of colonial agency and appropriation of values).

## Eric Sipyinyu NJENG

### Achebe's Work, Postcoloniality, and Human Rights

I counter criticism of Achebe that places his works as deconstructive of Western narratives by inscribing an African culture that resisted and probably even could substitute Western narratives and argue that Achebe's response to colonial narratives is seen in his avowal of Christianity and Western education set against his disavowal of traditional beliefs and practices harboring on acts of inhumanity. Further, I submit that this reading of Achebe's work is something most scholars and critics have failed to realize. Neil Lazarus posits Achebe as a leading author who resists Western representations of Africa and its cultures: "Among the best known instances of such resistance are those offered by Chinua Achebe in his auto-ethnographic novel, *Things Fall Apart*" (7). This is corroborated by John Marx who uses Simon Gikandi's claim that *Things Fall Apart* serves as a counterpoint to representations of African life provided by major figures in British literature such as Haggard, Kipling, Conrad, and Greene (92). I posit that a look at Achebe's engagement with human rights in *Things Fall Apart* suggest the contrary.

Other scholars have shown the same tendency of presenting Achebe as counterpoint to European ideologies. Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe reveal this misconception in their review of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* when they state that "by foregrounding the rituals and institutions for ordering the pre-colonial universe, the novels seek to rescue the people's history from the denigrating historiography by which the colonial enterprise had been rationalized" (3). Such a critique overlooks the authorial advocacy of Western ideologies as a counterpoint disestablishing African traditional practices akin to cannibalism and inhumanity. The centrifugal characterization in *Things Fall Apart* suggest that Achebe is willing to do away with the protagonist who stands against the immanent will and advent of an ostensibly humanitarian hegemony supplanting the inequalities pervasive of former times. Curiously it is the protagonist, initially portrayed in a sympathetic light as the custodian of African values, who must be removed in order that the society may adapt to a new era. Okonkwo embodies most of the failings of his society although we may suspect that he is merely a servant at the whims and caprices of a disintegrating culture. His attitude towards women, children, and men of little accomplishment may be said to emanate from his culture, but are given an exaggerated dimension by his personal ambitions. Other practices to which he gives voice are collective, but even here he shows little flexibility unlike his peers who sometimes take recourse to common sense instead of strict adherence to the society's sometimes controversial decisions.

Achebe's engagement with human rights begins with his advocacy for the rights of women. The narrative is anchored on a dialectics involving gender roles and the tussle involves and exposes failings in the character of the protagonist who is forced to accept the power of the feminine (on women's rights and Black Africa, see, e.g., Olatunji <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss1/9>>). In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe exposes the problem of the rights of woman. Women are presented as property which a man can dispense of on the one hand and powerful spiritual forces maintaining a balance between the conflicting forces, on the other. Achebe pits an aggressive masculine world against its feminine counterpart, but plots his narrative such that the feminine prevails. However, this is often ignored in criticism of the novel so far. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, is a woman *agbala* because he takes no title. Okonkwo's son Nwoye is far from masculine and for this he is disowned by his father and Okonkwo must be exiled because he commits "female murder" (meaning manslaughter: "female murder" denotes inadvertent murder, premeditated murder is masculine) and must take refuge in his mother's homeland. Thus, Achebe is suggesting that the masculine and the feminine must go hand in hand and as such chastises African societies' disregard of women. Okonkwo's suicide results from his incapacity to accept defeat which he considers effeminate although the odds against him are too strong to be resisted. While he is given multiple occasions to right his wrongs, Okonkwo is adamant. His exile — which is the catalyst for his destruction — is born of his disregard for the feminine. He violates peace by flogging his wife who neglects duty intentionally, dares him to exercise his masochistic temper and thus invites the wrath of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. During this period no act of violence is permitted and thus he is punished by the priestess for desecrating the holy week and triggers the beginning of his ostracism

from a society that is already learning to change and adapt to change. His next act of manslaughter will be met with the wrath of the Earth Goddess, suggesting a domineering matriarchate embedded within the surface patriarchy. This is evident in Okonkwo's family: his daughter and his wife's rebellion against his authority. Achebe's advocacy for gender equality in the novel is further seen when he gives Okonkwo an effeminate son and a masculine daughter, suggesting that gender is not biological but the hero is inflexibly macho, blinded by fear that he may succumb finally to his father's fate which is of course inevitable: "Okonkwo was very lucky in his daughters. He never stopped regretting that Ezinma was a girl. Of all his children she alone understood his mood" (124). Achebe is similar to Judith Butler when she exposes the cultural misconceptions of gender as consequent on anatomy: "If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured" (503). Masculinity is presented to accentuate Okonkwo's incapacity to comprehend the complexity of life and foresee the advent of a new dawn in which, Achebe suggests, flexibility and probably even surrender in order to conquer necessitates qualities that are basically feminine.

Achebe's advocacy of women's rights is unparalleled in *Things Fall Apart* although several scholars have argued against the marginal position of women in the novel overlooking the central place they play in the narrative. Article 14 of "The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" stipulates that "women's rights are human rights" (522). The narrative in *Things Fall Apart* engages with the feminine principle involved in adversity with the masculine principle and the nexus in the conflict involves not biological gender differentiation but gender ascriptions arising from the culture's definition of gender roles. Therefore, most of the men in the plot are feminized and many among the women are masculinized. The feminized agents in the narrative demonstrate intellectual traits of flexibility and adaptation which help them survive the conflict and triumph in later narratives. For example, Unoka and Nwoye survive and so does society as a whole when they realize the liberating nature of the new culture. Given that those who join colonial institutions are considered women, the exponential amount of decampment to Western values shows that society as a whole has become voluntarily "effeminate" in its surrender and appropriation of what is ostensibly an egalitarian society. Since no men are left, the only man must kill himself. Even Okonkwo's closest friend, Obierika, becomes a woman as he considers the flaws in culture and embraces the new dawn. Achebe demonstrates this attachment to daughters betraying his avowal of a matriarchy when he states that "my wife and I have four children — two daughters and two sons, a lovely balance further enhanced by the symmetry of their arrivals: girl, boy, boy, girl. Thus the girls had taken strategic positions in the family" (*The Education* 68-69). This is evident in the constellation of feminine figures in league against masochistic tendencies of the protagonist. We observe a strong bond around Chielo, Ezinma, and Ekwefi, Ezinma's mother: Chielo shares a common shed with Ezinma's mother in the market, but also doubles as the priestess of the oracle. The trio is yoked together intentionally to suggest both solidarity and power: Chielo is a priestess, Ezinma is an *obanje* (a child that is born again repeatedly), and Ekwefi is an assertive woman who fled her first husband for Okonkwo. This is seen in her audacity to challenge his mastery over the gun he pretends to carry with skill. My view is that Achebe put these women together to signal women's centrality and that Okonkwo is unable to perceive the wisdom in the power these three have over him leads to his destruction.

Okonkwo's demise commences when he beats his third wife during a ritual week of peace and is punished by Chielo. His next act of folly is when he shoots at his second wife, Ekwefi, and misses because she challenges his mastery of the gun. Chielo's concern for this incident is suggestive of a certain complicity building against the unsuspecting hero. These acts against women are crowned when he mishandles his gun during the funeral of a dignitary and kills the son of the deceased. For this act he is exiled by the Earth Goddess, Ezeani, for seven years. One wonders whether the incidents involving the gun are not related; he shoots at his wife at close range and misses only to kill a lad later. Some consider his exile as emanating from an accident and not carelessness or lack of mastery: "about to fulfill his final dreams by taking the highest titles his society can bestow upon him, he is brought down by the accidental murder of a young boy" (Larson 29). My view is that the murder is prefigured in his careless manipulation of the gun which he does not master and that Okonkwo's poor mastery of the gun is responsible for his ostensibly inadvertent murder of the boy. His wife's

challenge comes true when he misses his aim at close range and then gets his target when he is unwilling. Connections can therefore be made in the trajectory that runs from his brutal disrespect for the week of peace to the shooting of his wife and ultimately to the manslaughter he commits.

One of the most appalling scenes in the novel is the slaughter of Ikemefuna, a boy who is handed over to Okonkwo and who eventually becomes like his son. Recourse to the plot will shed light on this. An Indigene of Umoufia, Ogbuefi Udo's wife is killed in a neighboring village, Mbiano. Okonkwo leads a delegation demanding not the murderer but a virgin and a boy as atonement. The virgin is to replace the murdered woman and while the boy's fate is not clear at that moment, he is a prerequisite for peace. No mitigating circumstances for the murder are examined and no one demands that the murderer pay for his crime himself. Okonkwo is thereafter given custody of the boy who lives with him for three years and becomes closer to him than his own son, Nwoye suggesting that a family is not necessarily based on bloodline. Okonkwo is invited to learn from this experience, but he is blinded by the culture's dominant machochist tendencies he is unable to learn. The earth goddess then demands that the boy be killed (in my reading killed and not sacrificed). Achebe does not use the word sacrifice intentionally and friends of Okonkwo caution him not to have a hand in his death. Driven by fear to be labeled effeminate, he disregards their counsel and takes part in the slaughter that ensues. When the boy runs to him crying, Okonkwo cuts him down in cold blood. Thus, defining the action as infanticide and not sacrifice. The murder of Ikemefuna is portrayed graphically as brutal and thus Achebe is refusing the notion that communal ritual elation that accompanies the sacrifice of a neophyte would be necessary to the wellbeing of a community. Okonkwo feels not exaltation, but remorse and depression after performing an act of duty to his people: "he did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried the more he thought about him. Once he got up from his bed and walked about his compound. But he was so weak that his legs could hardly carry him. He felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito. Now and then a shiver descended on his head and spread down his body" (45).

Even his trusted friend is against his part in the murder: "if I were you I would have stayed at home. What you did will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families" (47). We are witness to a contradiction in duty: Okonkwo obeys the goddess in killing Ikemefuna as ordained, but will meet with the disapproval of his friends, family, and even the goddess herself. Okonkwo's crime of manslaughter results in his exile from the village for seven years: seven years which witness the installation of colonial regents and ultimately convert his whole family to Christianity. The fact of throwing away twins in the evil forest also chronicles the abuse of children's and women's rights suggested by the emotional disruption between mothers and children torn apart by the doings of men. Most of the twins are the newborn babies of mothers who have undergone the torments of lactation and childbirth only to have their children torn away from them. Achebe gives no cultural rationale behind this act, hardly veiling his condemnation. Victims of this practice are among the first converts to Christianity which offers them a haven free of the yoke of custom. Nwoye, the protagonist's unbecoming son, learns of the slaughter of his "adopted brother" and withdraws from his father and the values he tries to nurture in him. This is exacerbated when he is petrified by the wailing infant twins thrown away in the forest and Christianity draws him further away from the aggressive teachings of a father who is losing grounds rapidly in the face of the impending change. These two experiences convince him of the necessity for a new value system which Christianity brings offering sanctity to all (43-44). Achebe makes sure that society is more than willing to receive the new set of values seen clearly in the decampment of several Natives and later dignitaries. Okonkwo dies alone, society moves ahead while he retrogresses and is alienated. Chika Onyeani underscores this ability to appropriate Western culture when he states of the Igbo that "they are the first major group in Africa who have abandoned any semblance of having a culture or language, having abandoned the African culture for the English culture in a vain attempt to ape the English way of life" (139). Achebe reinforces this when he writes that "the Igbo insist that any presence which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgement and celebration can become a focus for anxiety and disruption" (110). No wonder, then, that people are willing to accommodate the new ideologies especially as its humanizing nature becomes evident.

Achebe's advocacy of Christianity and his condemnation of traditional religion is evident. Thus, Ikemefuna is to be sacrificed not murdered but Achebe makes the act assume dimensions of

infanticide. Of course, the marked disparity in representational sophistication in the two religions is perceived given the parallels which can be drawn between the two religions. The killing of Ikemefuna ordained by the goddess of the earth is analogous to the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. Christianity takes upper hand because it is wise not to allow Abraham carry the deed through and giving the audience both the satisfaction of Abraham's steadfast loyalty to his god and saving them the appalling depiction of infanticide. However, paganism as a rudimentary stage of development allows despicable acts of cruelty in the name of gods and goddesses: the sight of an innocent boy running to his father for protection and butchered down in cold blood takes the breath and soul out of any would be believer. Jesus's crucifixion goes with the collective bliss of purification because he is an adult who willingly surrenders himself to the duty he must perform. His immaculate birth and miraculous powers probably even allow his followers to accept his capacity to overcome pain, suffering, and death: Christianity will allow the slaughter of innocent souls only as a form of condemnation and not celebration. In Achebe's work instances of violations of children's rights are connected with violations of women's rights and thus there is an inseparable link between children's and women's rights. Okonkwo epitomizes more than any other character what can be termed a cultural fundamentalist and Achebe connects all the violations to the judgment of the earth goddess who removes systematically Okonkwo from the center and ultimately drowns him in disgrace: "clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true — that if a man said yea his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his affirmation" (94). His weaknesses are all connected to the feminine: because he is afraid of the feminine in his father, mother, son, and within his own heart, he destroys himself and saves society the trouble of stagnation.

Although he is ostensibly a great warrior initially, we soon begin to doubt his courage: Okonkwo is unable to manipulate firearms and when his wife insults him about his poor manipulation of the gun he shoots at her at close range and misses, thus reinforcing his incompetence. By Okonkwo shooting at his wife, Achebe prepares the reader for the protagonist's next act involving the gun when he inadvertently kills another boy. Symbolically, this is the son to Ogbuefi Ezeudu who had earlier cautioned him not to bear a hand in the death of Ikemefuna: "that boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (40). This makes the two incidents connected as catalysts and that enable Achebe's centrifugal aesthetics decenter the protagonist. He disregards the counsel of the old sage in killing Ikemefuna and later kills the old man's son inadvertently leading to his exile. Are these killings mistakes or acts of foolhardiness? We have seen his unskilled employment of the gun before and can be allowed to argue that he kills the boy because he cannot handle the gun that is eventually seized by the colonial regents again signaling his emasculation. His last act of deviance is the cowardly decapitation of a defenseless messenger. While in exile, Christianity puts end to a caste system by admitting Osus into the body of the church as equals. Osus are people dedicated to the gods, but instead of being held sacred are systematically marginalized. Of the Osu, we are told that "he was a person dedicated to the gods, a thing set apart — a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by a free-born" (113). How can a people dedicated to the gods be objects of shame and even dread? What society will put servants of the gods at the bottom of society? Achebe here once more exposes the failings of society most scholars argue he defends. The Osus can be compared to the monks in Christian and Buddhist religions who are most often revered by worshippers. We are therefore given one of the clearest demonstrations of the loophole that invited Christianity into parts of Africa. Achebe's concern for the fate of this caste is given a modern dimension in his *No Longer at Ease* where Obi, Nwoye's son and Okonkwo's grandson, insists on marrying an Osu in his attempt to put an end to this despicable practice.

Closely connected to the inhumane treatment of the Osus is the cruelty tradition held towards certain diseases, pointing once more to gross violations of human rights: a patient's right to be loved and catered for by family and friends and when dead, given an honorable burial. Unoka, who I argue is a misplaced artist, is sick of a disease believed to be an abomination. He like other victims is seized and left to perish in the evil forest. This disease is neither contagious nor incurable. No clinical explanation is given, no diagnosis is attempted. This is analogous to attitudes towards AIDS patients and homosexuals in Africa today and the stigma they suffer. Such attitudes, Achebe suggests, were based on superstitious beliefs which are outdated but continue to resonate among some Africans. By



being left in the forest to die, society is not trying to quarantine him in order to save the rest from the disease: he is sentenced to death for an offence for which he is guiltless. He must be tortured by isolation, hunger, thirst, and exposure to predators. This evidences violations of human rights as an innocent and ailing man is abandoned to die for a purely natural illness. James Rachels considers all punishment as evil: "by this he meant to point out that punishment always involves treating people badly, whether by taking away their freedom (imprisonment), their property (fines), or even their life (capital punishment). Since these things are all evil, they require justification. Why is it right to treat people like this?" (135). Achebe makes no attempt to argue for the cultural justification for Unoka's ostracism except that his disease was an abomination. In order to underscore Christianity's important place as a civilizing institution, Achebe allows them to build their temples where some of the most heinous atrocities are committed. The people collectively want to mislead the Christians to slaughter and it turns out that instead of destroying Christianity, the rudimentary beliefs of society are laid bare and its culturally obsolete practices are abandoned. The forest then becomes symbolic in the narrative: Unoka, father to Okonkwo is left to perish taking along his flute. Nwoye hears the screams of twin babies cast away to perish. Ikemefuna is murdered in cold blood. Nwoye comes fleeing from his father, drawn by the poetry in the Christian hymns and like his grandfather connecting with all that suffer from the high handedness of a disintegrating culture.

An often overlooked but probably the most horrid image in the novel bears a curious resemblance to an episode in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Much has been said of Achebe's scathing attack on Conrad's portraiture of Africans, but I see a dubious complicity in Achebe's parody of Conrad in *Things Fall Apart* (see, e.g., Njeng <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss1/3/>>). As Marlow sails up the Congo River into the heart of Africa, he comes across several horrid images but the most shocking is when through a binocular he perceives two decapitated heads hung to a post: most readers will not imagine Natives doing this to their kin. However in *Things Fall Apart* we are presented a similar situation involving the decapitation of skulls and their employment as signs of conquest and superiority in war. Achebe goes much further than Conrad: he does not stop at representing beheaded skulls as trophies of war, but exposes the cannibalistic character of the Ibo in what suggests a ritual consumption of humans. Okonkwo is seen drinking from a human skull chiseled as a ceremonial drinking cup, the head of his first war victim. This represents a complete disregard for victims of war and proves that it does not just suffice to kill your enemy: you must also deny him the right of a decent burial by his kin by dismembering the corpse and "eating" it up. Achebe's implicit denunciation of this practice is accentuated again by pitting the protagonist against his father: "unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head and he was not an old man yet. On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank palm-wine from his first human head" (8). Alex Shoumatoff documents these perceptions of cannibalism in *African Madness* linking Jean-Bedel Bokassa to the practice of eating human flesh. In his documentation of the rise and fall of Bokassa of the Central African Republic, Shoumatoff shows the link between power and cannibalism. Among the M'Baka, Bokassa's tribe, the ritual eating of prisoners of war is said to empower the captors: "war or battles often broke out among the M'Baka and their neighbours for petty reasons, and the battles were often violent. Victims were heartlessly killed and the dead and wounded enemies were eaten by the victorious tribe. Dr. Poutrin attributes this custom to the scarcity of other meat, concluding (he was probably wrong on this, unaware of the reasoning behind revenge cannibalism) that it was a matter of necessity rather than a savage cult or a morbid ritual. ... but despite [or why not because of?] their barbaric eating habits, Poutrin concludes, the M'Baka were considered more courageous, cunning, intelligent, and physically stronger than other, non-cannibalistic tribes" (111-12).

It is possible to consider Shoumatoff's testimony as Western misconceptions of African customs. When one considers Achebe's account of what comes close to cannibalism, it is hard to shake off accounts like Shoumatoff's. Drinking from the skull of a war victim is not far from the eating of the flesh of war victims. One may ask where the remains of the body must have gone, if not eaten. Achebe's condemnation of this act is seen in his centrifugal characterization as he decenters Okonkwo and ultimately reduces him to ignominy. Like with the case of twins and Ozus, we are given no cultural justification for this act of drinking out of the skull of war victims. One may only intimate that this was the reason behind the respect and awe that neighboring tribes had for the Umuofia. A people can kill

an enemy and parade his corpse for their people to see but to keep the corpse to rot and then drink from the skull is something which is attributed to savages and often in nineteenth-century discourses on Africans and Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* comes to mind. Achebe's attack on such acts is evident in the structure of the plot as the protagonist is decentered and his counterpoint, Christianity, takes center stage. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* stops short at displaying the heads of his victims to ward off any form of opposition, but Okonkwo "eats up" his victims. Cannibalism can be culturally sanctioned by arguing for its social relevance and communal import as long as society is united and empowered through ritual consumption of human flesh, literally or metaphorically, and then the act is free of any kind of negative cast. Rabelais gives thought to this when he cites the case of the Callatians who eat their fathers and suggests that although such an idea may be repugnant to some it may have cultural significance to others. Stephen Greenblatt suggests instances which parody Okonkwo's in the narrative when he states that "the oscillation intensifies in the remarkable description, based on Odoric, of burial customs. When a man's father dies, Mandeville writes, his son invites his kin and friends to a ceremony. Together with priests and minstrels, they carry the corpse to a hill; there the chief cuts off the head and the hews the body into small pieces which are fed to ravenous birds" (45). The son of the deceased then takes the head and makes a cup from which he drinks in remembrance of his father. Greenblatt argues that although such a practice may seem repugnant to the European, "this difference is collapsed in the explicit acknowledgement of liturgical parallels and the tacit acknowledgement of structural parallels with the Christian practice of transforming parts of saintly bodies into artifacts, with pious rituals of remembrance, and with the Eucharistic piety that ardently celebrated the eating of the sacred flesh and the drinking of the sacred blood" (45). My caveat is that since Achebe makes no effort to show the cultural relativism in these practices, he condemns them and invites the West to supplant them. Okonkwo's last act of defiance against the already installed hegemony is the slaughter of a colonial messenger sent to call off a meeting. Used to beheading people, Okonkwo's machete descends twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body. Okonkwo gets another cup to drink from, but this time he has lost the support of his clan who have realized that change is inevitable and adjusted. In total Okonkwo kills eight humans: five in battle, two children in cold blood, and a defenseless messenger and he must therefore pay the penalty by taking his own life and descending even lower into the abyss of ignominy.

Achebe posits Christianity and Western education as central issues in ridding Africa of violations of human rights. He suggests this through a dialectics engaging Indigenous religion and Christianity, with the former losing ground to the latter. Christianity first appeals to the marginalized — the Osus, bereaved mothers of cast off twins, cultural misfits like Nwoye — and then extends to dignitaries and men of title (128). In *Marvelous Possessions* Greenblatt argues that Christianity spread rapidly probably because of Christians' conviction that they possessed an absolute and exclusive religious truth and that this must have played a major part in virtually all of their encounters. On many occasions, this conviction was bound up with what Samuel Purchas in the early seventeenth century called the Europeans' "literall advantage" — the advantage, that is, of writing (9). One only has to examine the rate of conversion from African traditions to Christianity to agree, at least in part, with Frantz Fanon that "Not all peoples can be colonized; only those who experience this need ... Whenever Europeans have founded colonies of the type we are considering, it can safely be said that their coming was unconsciously expected — even desired — by the future subject people" (79). Christianity seemed to respond to people's need for an egalitarian society and therefore making its advent not wholly undesired. Greenblatt also shows how the confrontation between Cortes and Montezuma gave the former the upper hand partly "by assuming initially that Cortes was somewhat linked to the culture-hero Quetzalcoatl" (12). Achebe's sympathy with the colonial establishment, especially in what Said terms "civil society" is demonstrated in the successful acculturation of dignitaries and subjects alike as the advantages of colonization become apparent: "Mr Brown's school produced quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers; and from Umuofia labourers went forth into the Lord's vineyard. New churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them. From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand" (130). This welcome attitude to colonialism is couched no better than in Achebe's remark that "an orphan child born in adversity, heir to commotions, barbarities, rampant upheavals of a continent in disarray: was it all surprising that he



would eagerly welcome the explanation and remedy proffered by diviners and interpreters of a new word?" (*The Education* 37).

Achebe is not defending cultural relativism and makes no attempt to legitimize these acts by offering an argument for their cultural relevance. There is hardly any justification for these despicable acts of cruelty meted out on the victims: if the Osus are actually a caste dedicated to the work of gods, we are not made privy to their function. Neither are they ready to stay in their station because they suffer complete exclusion and denigration. Achebe gives no convincing justification for the killing of Ikemefuna and the sexual enslavement of a virgin. Instead of holding the perpetrator of the crime responsible, we see a complete disregard for children and women and this suggests grievous failings in the African cultural fabric reminding us of racist conceptions that Africans do not suffer from separation from kin. Greenblatt sees this absence in paternal affection for children as one of the curious distinctions explorers noticed in the colonized: "they flee at the approach of the Spaniards, Columbus explains, even a father not waiting for his son" (68). Slavery, Achebe cautions us, must have its roots in such practices and calls attention to the failings in African cultures by showing this lack of human impulse to defend offspring. In "Martin Luther King and Africa" he blames the West for the slave trade overlooking the fact that the slave trade had its roots in the cultural failings in African cultures reflected today in the tragic failure of leadership in most African states. In a rather simple handed way Achebe questions the comments of a certain professor of history who holds that Africans sold their own people and retorts: "He didn't say what whites were doing on the coast of Africa thousands of miles from their homes. Perhaps we are to believe that the whites were holidaying on Africa's sunny beaches!" (*The Education* 133).

In conclusion, Achebe does not "write back" to the empire as the saying goes: he writes the empire in. He lays bare the weaknesses in African culture inviting the civilizer and this is grounded in the father-son-grandson trajectory he narrates. Achebe presents what may be termed a cultural dialectics: the thesis (flawed African customs represented in violations of human rights) collides with its antithesis (colonialism and Christianity) leading to a synthesis (a recognition of colonial agency and appropriation of values).

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Author's profile: Eric Sipyinyu Njeng teaches US-American literature at the University of Burundi. His interests in research include African literatures, feminism, cultural studies, and queer theory. His recent publications include "Archetypes of the Artist in Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle' and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* (2012) and "Achebe, Conrad and the Postcolonial Strain," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (2008) and E-mail: <[njengeric@yahoo.fr](mailto:njengeric@yahoo.fr)>.