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**DECOLONIZING AFRICAN DISCOURSE:
THE WORK OF CHINUA ACHEBE**

**POR
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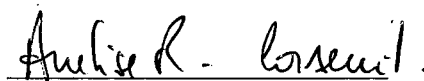


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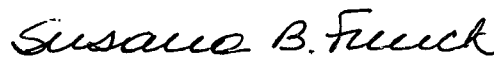
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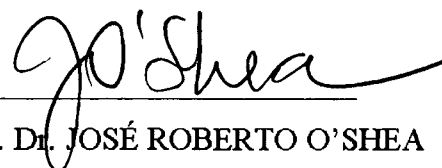
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To my nieces and nephews,
Andrezza, Wanessa, Luciana,
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and Mariana.

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ABSTRACT**DECOLONIZING AFRICAN DISCOURSE:
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CÉLIA REGINA DOS SANTOS

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
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By analyzing the novels of African writer Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (1958) and No Longer at Ease (1960), in the light of post-colonial theory, this dissertation aims at investigating how these texts constitute a counter-discourse to the colonial production of *otherness*. The novels are analyzed with the purpose of revealing the African writer's attempt to decolonize African writing by deconstructing the colonial discourse which portrayed Africa as a primitive place bound to domination. Although both novels end in a tone of defeat and decay, by retelling history from the point-of-view of the colonized, they have become a discourse of resistance to oppression.

RESUMO

DESCOLONIZANDO O DISCURSO AFRICANO ATRAVÉS DAS OBRAS DE CHINUA ACHEBE

Ao analisar as obras Things Fall Apart (1958) e No Longer at Ease (1960) do escritor africano Chinua Achebe à luz da teoria pós-colonialista, esta dissertação tem como objetivo investigar como estes textos constituem um discurso de oposição à produção de *diferenciações*. As novelas são analisadas com o propósito de revelar a tentativa do escritor africano de descolonizar a literatura africana ao desconstruir o discurso colonialista que construiu a imagem da África como um lugar primitivo e apto para ser dominado. Apesar dos romances terminarem com um tom de derrota e decadência, ao recontar a história do ponto-de-vista do colonizado, elas se tornam um discurso de resistência à opressão.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims at analyzing post-colonial texts produced by a writer from a formerly colonized country, who has attempted to resist Imperial ideology about colonization by creating a new discourse which questions, dismantles and reverses biased assumptions about the Other. The discussion will focus on the ways in which Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's main novels Things Fall Apart (1958) and No Longer At Ease (1960)¹ constitute a counter-narrative by reflecting British colonized Nigeria in its two important political instances, that is, the moment of the encounter between the Nigerian native and the Western colonizer, and the moment after independence from Imperial colonialism has been achieved. These novels, which stand as a "third-world" novelist's attempt to deal with the process of decolonization in his country, will be close-read in the light of post-colonial theories.

The issue of tradition versus change will be brought into discussion through the narrative of Things Fall Apart, when the moment of the European encounter with *otherness* marks the contact of the African with the western ideology of conquest, marked by religious and political manipulation. This historical event is described in fiction as a moment of disruption of tribal culture and indigenous/individual identity. This notion is consolidated in the plot of No Longer at Ease, which deals with the influence of European ideology on the cultural life of post-independent Nigeria and the problem of neo-colonialism. In both novels, Achebe creates a political narrative which sets out to question and disrupt European assumptions of power, but most important, rescues a forgotten past and moulds through its tradition, values, and honor a present Nigerian history and identity.

To make relevant the issues raised by Achebe in his novels, it is necessary to say that one of the many results of the European "scramble for Africa", that is, Africa's first division into territories under European rule in the nineteenth

century, was that it secured Britain “the control of the great, populous, and varied territory that now constitutes the nation called Nigeria” (Wren 39). To understand Achebe’s West African world, it becomes important to focus on some information which reveals features of a pluralistic culture struggling to maintain its tradition in face of the new ideology of civilization implanted by colonialism.

Nigeria, Achebe’s homeland, is composed of about 250 different ethnic groups and about a hundred linguistic communities, yet one large group may have as many as 200 dialects. The largest of these groups are those of the Fulani and Hausa-speaking peoples of the northern regions. The Yoruba of the southwest make up the second largest group, and third in numbers are the Igbo² of the southeast. Other small groups are the Edo, Ibibio, Nupe, Tiv, Chamba, Ekoi and Ijaw. Achebe’s community, the Igbo people, are not homogeneous, although colonization, education and other forces have blended out the differences, leading to what may become a unified Igbo language. Still, the dialects, cultures, and political systems of Igbo east of the great Niger River are unlike those of the Igbo on the western side, and their language and culture is quite different from the Yorubas and Halsas. In colonialist discourse, the Igbo were regarded as more primitive than other groups because of their isolation in the woods and lack of a single government. Achebe attempts to reverse this denigrating image, thus offering a contribution to Africa’s decolonization.

The process of decolonization, which will be discussed throughout this dissertation, needs further definition before it is analysed in the close reading of the novels. Thus Chapter One will deal with the formation of post-colonial discourses as counter arguments to colonial ideologies. In the context of nationalism Frantz Fanon held that decolonization was a “historical process” which called for the questioning of the colonial situation where two opposing forces, that of the native and the settler, meet. This encounter, marked by violence and exploitation, characterizes the dichotomy which separates people into good and evil, black and white, free and slaves. The first step towards a

rupture of this situation is to regain political control of the invaded land through the unification of the colonized. He says that decolonization

transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. (Wretched 28)

The term, however, has raised questions related to achievements beyond the political sphere. The writers of The Empire Writes Back (1989) say that while for some critics "full independence of culture and political organization" is impossible; others, like Nigerian critic Jemie Chinweizu, favor the idea of the need to "recuperate pre-colonial languages" as crucial in the process to achieve the real Nigerian identity (30, 31). Chinweizu, however, is aware of the problematizing of the attempt to recover a pre-colonial purity due to African colonial experience and its results, such as hybridization. According to Hellen Tiffin, for the literary field decolonization is a continuous process which, in a broad sense, involves a reading and rereading of European historical and fictional records about the encounter on the colonial frontier (18). By doing this the post-colonial writer interrogates European discourse, which portrays the colonized as the inferior, primitive and uncivilized "Other", and creates a counter-narrative to these assumptions.

Chapter Two discusses the struggle of the African writer towards African literary decolonization. The problem of writing in an alien language, English, is discussed by Achebe and Ngugi, whose points-of-view converge since their ideas about colonialism are similar in that they have as objective the "destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture...religions, history...education, orature and literature" (Williams 442). However, their ideals for communication diverge since Achebe has opted to write in English to convey his post-colonial message, while Ngugi has returned to his pre-colonial language, Gikuyu, as a way to resist any form of colonialism.

Relying on the notions about decolonization and based on the historical process of colonization initiated by European imperial administration in Africa in the 1880's, the narrative of Things Fall Apart, analyzed in Chapter Three, stands as a post-colonial genre in which Achebe makes his anti-imperialist political claim of resistance against the Eurocolonial power in a very subtle way. He tells the story of the discovery-conquest-colonization process from the native's point-of-view. Emphasizing values and customs of pre-colonial Igbo culture, he denounces European blindness and incomprehension of African aesthetics and their refusal in accepting the legitimacy of pre-colonial culture. This writing produces a shocking revelation of how the lack of interaction between colonizer and native on a fair level generated the violence of imperialist rule in Nigeria. His politics reflects a desire to let his audience see how the colonizer manipulated knowledge for the Empire's benefit and made use of military power to subdue the native after religion had opened the way through the institution of Christianity. Achebe's discourse is based on a desire to make clear that Africa was not discovered by Europe since it already had a long cultural history preceding the encounter which attempted to conceal it.

On the other hand, in Chapter Four, the narrative of No Longer at Ease is written in a post-colonial moment and set in an "independent" Nigeria. However, as in other post-colonial worlds, the plot of the novel reveals a country living under a "phony" independence (Fanon 1963:9). Although Nigeria had the land back to national control, the marks of colonization and the western capitalist influence are still present in the protagonist's struggles between his desire to stand up for his community's expectations -- valuing tradition -- and the desire to experience the new cultural values he has acquired through European influence. The problem, however, is that he finds himself impotent to fight against the assimilation of the Western ideology he has been exposed to and succumbs to bribery. The question of whether corruption is an effect of the results of colonialism, or a feature inherent to third world nations, as some colonialist discourses still assume, will be discussed.

Through Achebe's narrative, it is possible to observe Africa's encounter with the Western World, or vice-versa, and the pervasive process of Eurocentric domination from the moment when *otherness* is recognized to the moment when the colonized finds him/herself politically "free" from the Imperial power. This is the first moment of decolonization. Although disrupting political ideologies, it will be observed how Achebe's recovery of pre-colonial aesthetics, such as Igbo telling of folktales, active proverbial language, and songs, asserts African differences in face of a westernized world, thus making up for their displaced cultural identity. By reading Achebe's narratives as real national accounts which attempt to question and reverse the "discourse that effaces the European and displaces the African" (Pratt "Scratches" 125), I see his novels as a starting point to discuss the controversial positive and negative impact and consequences of colonization.

NOTES

- ¹ . These novels will sometimes be cited as TFA and NLE.
- ² . The word Igbo will sometimes be referred as the original *Ibo*.

CHAPTER ONE

COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS : THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

Achebe's novels are the literary product of a political period between the late 18th century, when colonialism had its start, and the 1960s, when many African countries regained political freedom from the European rule of countries such as Belgium, Holland, France, Portugal and England. As his narrative touches the significant issue of the colonial era within the wider context of African history, we will be able to observe how nearly a hundred years -- a brief span of time, indeed -- of European domination caused such an impact not only in the History of Africa but also in the history of the whole world. Although the main focus of this dissertation is Nigeria, the so called Post-colonial Movement, born out of a desire from third-world writers to disrupt the European imperialistic hegemony, will be discussed in an African time and space, and in its discursive and political form as literature produced by formerly colonized African countries.

In order to understand the Post-colonial Movement -- what it is, when it started, who is involved in it, and what it means for the study of minorities and the interpretation of Achebe's works -- it is important, however, to have a full comprehension of colonial discourse, which post-colonial studies have attempted to question, decentralize and dismantle. Using Foucault to theorize 'discourse,' Stephen Slemon says that colonial discourse is "the name for that language by which dominant groups within society constitute the field of "truth" through the imposition of specific knowledges, disciplines and values." According to Foucault, discourse is

"a violence we do to things," and a "diffuse and hidden conglomerate of power" (Young 48,67). As Slemon puts it, discourse works to constitute reality

Not only for the objects it appears passively to represent but also for the subjects who form the coherent interpretive community upon which it depends. (6)

This system of representation, which Gayatri Spivak calls "othering", is a process which involves the "projection of one's own systemic codes" onto the empty space where the Other lies. According to a court ruling of 1854, the Others of Empire were "people whom nature has marked out as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or development beyond a certain point ...[people upon] whom nature has placed an impassable difference".¹ In a system of power and self-constitution, as the one produced by colonial discourse, the Others are "elements somewhere 'out there' beyond the circle, awaiting discovery, conquest, appropriation, and interpretation" (Slemon 7).

So, the "discourse of colonialism", as Peter Hulme has identified it, is the name for the

System of signifying practices whose work it is to produce and naturalize the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilize those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships. (Colonial Encounters 2)

1. DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES: MANIPULATING THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER

I start to analyze the history of imperialist domain in Africa through the discourse produced by the colonizer during the period of invasion and exploration. This is a discourse motivated by the "desire to impose oneself on the Other" and produced out of the encounter between Self and Other on the colonial frontier. Responsible for the images the western world would have and still has of Africa and its inhabitants, this discourse varies significantly. The variation of images about the native ranges from manipulation of very contradictory written and oral information produced by early observers in their reports addressed to a European audience to manipulation of political and religious power by settlers, missionaries, military forces, explorers and historians dealing with the colonized country.

Some early accounts produced by the first colonizers abound with neutral and positive descriptions concerning the natives. The very first historical accounts about the encounter with the inhabitants of Africa, for instance, are reported as not violent, but very amiable (although not interactive). However, when the slave trade starts, the image of the native, produced by colonialist discourse, changes and Africans are "newly characterized as the epitome of evil and barbarity", thus beginning to be regarded as the "beasts of the colonies" (Janmohamed 61). This was the product of a desire to justify their exploitation of the land resources as well as their control of the natives -- at this frontier of good versus evil and light versus darkness, the idea of European superiority over the Native's inferiority begins to take a provisional and comfortable place for the former.

In order to represent the native for the European audience, the colonialist writer uses the strategy of differentiation, to set him, the writer, apart from his object of representation. Mary Louise Pratt has held the position that to be othered in literature the native needs to be "homogenized into a collective *they* which then becomes an *iconic he* or the *standardized adult male specimen*" ("Scratches" 120;

my emphasis). This seemingly pragmatic generalization of the African destitutes him from cultural, territorial and historical characteristics, thus facilitating the writer's work to manipulate the manners and customs of the Other. This "normalization" fixes the Other in a "timeless present where all his actions and reactions are repetitions of his normal habits" (ibid). Fixing the image of the native as unalterable favors the colonizer's representation of the native's identity as destituted of originality and creativity, history and culture.

The normalizing discourse that portrays the manners and customs of the other also codifies difference, fixes positions, and defines ideology. As Catherine Belsey observed, the function of ideology is "to present the position of the subject as fixed and unchangeable...and to show possible action as an endless repetition of 'normal familiar action'" ("Scratches" 121). Pratt says, however, that these notions of normal, familiar actions are harassed in the imperialist frontier because of the confrontation with unfamiliar Others and Selves.

Normalization is thus a negative characteristic of travel and exploration writings. It is an ideological project to mediate the shock of contact on the frontier -- a strategy that gives authority to the act of colonization. As Pratt says,

The self-effacement in this literature is that it is possible to narrate the journey and "to other" the Other while maintaining silence about the actual, specific contacts going on between the European travelers and the indigenous peoples they encounter. No conventional textual space calls on the Europeans to portray their interactions, recount their dialogues, report the Other's voices, or display the concrete working out of relations on the spot. ("Scratches" 127)

Since the target audience (the European reader) is not in contact with the object of representation of colonialist fiction (the native) and the latter is unable to interact and have access to the former, or to the literature produced about him, the colonialist discourse, as Janmohamed says, "commodifies the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a resource for colonialist fiction." This commodification of the native involves a denial of his individuality and subjectivity so that he, as a resource, can become a "generic being" reduced to an exchange-

value accepted in the colonialist system. Since "all the natives look alike and act alike," European use and manipulation of them in colonialist discourse operates as a disguise for the purpose of exploration and invents Africa for the domestic subjects of Empire (63, 64).

It is important to understand that the position of the audience can be ambiguous because at the same time that they can be viewed as also passive in the process of colonization, colonialist fiction is produced out of "exigencies and ideological imperatives of domestic politics and culture" (Janmohamed 63). So ideas such as African cannibalism or the African's intellectual and racial inferiority expressed in colonial discourse reveal the audience's desire to dominate the Other.

This ideological aspect of colonial fiction can be viewed as what Janmohamed calls the dominant phase of colonialism. This phase covers the period from the "earliest European conquest to the moment at which a colony is granted 'independence'." At this period, however, European colonizers continue to exert direct and continuous bureaucratic control and military oppression of the natives. The natives are described as very cooperative and their "consent" is passive and indirect. However, Janmohamed claims that this phase of colonialist discursive practices imposed on the native does not in fact subordinate him nor destroys completely his culture (61).

The second period of colonialist fiction is called by Janmohamed hegemonic phase (or neocolonialist period) in which "the natives accept a version of the colonizer's entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production" (62). Again the colonized's "consent" is present in this fiction. These two phases will be better discussed in the following chapters when Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease are analyzed in detail.

In these writing periods, the discursive practice which "effaces the European and displaces the African" is full of contradictions between what Janmohamed calls "covert and overt aspects of colonialism". Their function is to "justify imperial occupation and exploration" to their supporters back home. More specifically, the covert aspect has the purpose of exploiting the colony's resources, and in the overt

aspect the aim is "to civilize the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of western culture" (62). If we were to link these aspects to the two different phases of colonialist fiction, we could say that both are operative in the two periods since exploiting and civilizing the native walk hand in hand in colonial writing. For instance, although the overt aspect of colonialist fiction has the aim of "bringing light" to the savage by exposing him to European culture, what is actually emphasized is the savagery and the evilness of the Other.

For Bhabha, the "civilizing mission", is a "violent subjugating force" because the colonial frontier becomes a perfect place for the western culture to reveal its "difference," its "limit-text" (DDDC 148)². To civilize and subjugate the Other, the authority of the colonizer manifests itself in strategies of discrimination. One of these strategies of differentiation involves the authoritative position of the colonizer as representative of the colonized -- the part representing the whole (Bhabha, "Signs" 153).

After spending some years in Nigeria trying to "civilize" the natives, Joyce Cary says that "an overcrowded raft manned by children who had never seen the sea would have a better chance in a typhoon" than the Africans if independence was granted to them (Janmohamed 73)³. This mode of colonialist representation reveals the ambivalence or contradiction of its own authority. This contradiction is mostly revealed when the dominant discourse produces fiction which is full of anxiety in its objective of defining the Other (the colonized body or nation), as drastically different from the Self (the colonizer or the mother country), but still struggles to maintain sufficient identity with this Other to valorize its control over it. However, how can the part represent the whole if, as Pratt says, the imperialist eye/I makes no contact with what it/he sees?

2 - CONFRONTING SELF AND OTHER: THE PRODUCTION OF DENIGRATING "IMAGES"

Although Africa was exposed to different kinds of European rule, such as English and French, the "dominant model of power-and-interest relations" used by the colonialist writer to represent the difference between colonizer and colonized relied on manichean oppositions such as white and black, master and slave, good and evil, self and other. Slavery, especially, helped assert Europeans of their putative superiority and the native's supposed inferiority. European assumed superiority was thus not only the result of military power but also the product of a colonialist discourse which created fetishistic and stereotypical images of Africans and allowed the colonialist's identity "to become deeply dependent on his position as a master" (Janmohamed 63, 66).

In Pratt's Imperial Eyes (1992), the exploration and colonizing travel writing is viewed as a disguise to mediate the shock of contact on the frontier. The disguising descriptive narrative used by early colonial writers acts, as mentioned above, as a normalizing discourse which eventually dehumanizes the culture and tradition of the "Other". These early travel writings were and still are the cause for the distorted vision, propagated worldwide in the name of culture, about what has been labeled "underdeveloped" or "third-world". Africa is inserted in this category and has been regarded as "the dark continent".

Pratt explains this distorted vision of the Other through the symbol of the "eye" functioning as the Self, or the I. For Pratt, the ideology embedded in colonial reports functions as the eye or the Self-I which sees and passes onto the world the writer's own vision of darkness. Therefore, this imperialistic eye rejects all interaction with the native, and what it sees is a fiction produced by Western perspectives about the Other, which omit the presence and the voice of the native. Of this encounter or confrontation Janmohamed says that

Genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture...[However] the colonizer's invariable assumption about his moral superiority means that he will rarely question the validity of either his own or his society's formation and that he will not be inclined to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized. (64)

So, in order to define the representational image of the native, the colonizer produces a fetishization of the Other by "substituting natural or generic categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined." For example, the conception that the evil and pagan characteristic of the native, produced by the colonialist interpretation of African culture, is inherent in his race, in his blood. In Janmohamed's words,

The fetishizing strategy and the allegorical mechanism not only permit a rapid exchange of denigrating images which can be used to maintain a sense of moral difference; they also allow the writer to transfer social and historical dissimilarities into universal, metaphysical differences. If...African natives can be collapsed into African animals and mystified still further as some magical essence of the continent, then... [there will be] no meeting ground, no identity, between the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity of the Calibans and Ariels of Africa. (67, 68)

Thus, the fetishistic or stereotypical discourse, inscribes on the Other a "range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory, and 'mythical'". These ideologies were unfortunately widely accepted.

While Pratt exposes in European colonial literature the colonizer's strategy to portray the native as absent and thus not able to object against invasion, exploration and his own fetishization in the colonial frontier, Homi Bhabha sees the silencing of the native on a different basis. Like Pratt he seems to agree that the objective of colonial discourse is

To construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. (DDDC 154)

However, for Bhabha the power the colonizer has to dominate and silence the native is ambiguous. If "by silencing the Other's voice the colonizer's discourse promotes the stereotype of his superiority," the stereotype of the inferior native is reversed through hybridization, which permits the native to talk back, question and dismantle the colonizer's assumptions about him. Colonial discourse, then, as Bhabha puts it, "seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated" (DDDC 154).

As discussed above, to portray the native as the Other requires a great amount of authority. How this authority is exercised in the margin is a matter of production of differentiations, which in its turn is produced through the strategy of "disavowal":

the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not represented but repeated as something different--a mutation, a hybrid. (Bhabhas 153)

For Bhabha, the effect of colonization is the production of hybridization (through the learning of the English language and assimilation of western culture), and this represents a "silent repression of native traditions" (154). However, hybridization is also ambivalent because it produces a colonial mimicry, which "reverses the effects of the colonialist rejection, so that other denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (156). This subverted effect of colonial power is discussed below as one of the many models of post-colonial subversion in the sense that, when the "native begins to question this authority, which is based on a political intent, there is a disturbance of the images and presences of authority" (155). Then mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience which are imposed by the "discipline of civility" of the colonizer, and this for Bhabha is a sign of "spectacular resistance" (162).

3 - RELIGION IN THE COLONIAL SITE: CHRISTIANITY versus BARBARISM

As mentioned above, Things Fall Apart describes the early moments of contact between the African people, or the "natives", and the European man -- the very encounter with "Otherness". This encounter first happens with the coming of white missionaries to the igbo region of southeast Nigeria. These men are immediately followed by others whose "mission" is to take over the land and "civilize" the native by replacing their culture with "universal" British knowledge -- a knowledge which tends to naturalize and normalize constructed ideas and beliefs for the benefit of the one who holds control over it.

While for Pratt travel writing reveals that the ideology hidden behind its fiction "works through proliferation as well as containment of meaning", thus contributing for the bleaching out of "irregularity ... instability and violence" in the colonial margin, thus suppressing the natives's voice, Bhabha discusses other forms of ambivalent manipulation -- such as Christianity -- as part of this process of colonization. In "Signs Taken for Wonder", Bhabha defines the act of colonization as a sign for "displacement, distortion, dislocation and repetition," or an *Entstellung* (150).

The colonizer's plan of education for instruction of the native in the English language is a disguise of colonial power and authority, the idea of the "civilizing mission" a disguise for British imperialism". The English "Bible-in-disguise", as Bhabha calls it, conceals the colonial aim to prepare natives to destroy native culture and religion through eager conversion, Christian gatherings, abandoning idols, leaving behind pagan customs (159). Again he points out the ambivalence of this exercise in colonialist authority. In requiring the production of differentiation, individuation and discrimination, be it cultural, racial or religious, the manipulation of Christian knowledge denied the colonized a stable unitary assurance coming from

cultural and regional collectiveness (153). However, the manipulation of Christianity as a hybrid religious form is a colonial strategy that, only in part, disarms the discursive forces coming from the natives.

Between the Emancipation Act of 1833 and the violent results of the Berlin Conference of 1884, the production of colonialist writing about Africa as well as the image created about its people changed considerably, again revealing its imperialistic intents. Although the Emancipation Act was the result of the work of some anti-slavery Europeans, it did not refrain others from using abolition for their own benefit as well as for the Victorian crown. Forgetting that they themselves had taught Africans how to trade human lives, European colonizers began regarding themselves as potential saviors for Africa, considering both emancipated and non-emancipated territories as the right site for the propagation of another English form of power -- religion. This was the right moment to attack slavery by introducing "Christianity" and "legitimate commerce" as it was proposed in the book The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy (1840), written by Thomas Fowell Buxton, an European leader of the antislavery movement in Africa (Brantlinger 173-174).

One may ask what commerce and politics have in common with the religious issue in colonial discourse. My answer is that religion has always been a part of the imperialist enterprise. However, the answer might come straight from books such as Buxton's and missionary writings. In order to raise money and obtain support from people back home, Buxton, as the part, represents ambivalent descriptions about the natives -- such as cannibalism -- as the whole essence of African culture. These descriptions, probably extracted from writings produced by early colonial observers, become amazingly ambiguous along his text. At the same time that Africans are described as savages who are "bound in the chains of the grossest ignorance," and "prey to the most savage superstitions" (10-11), he portrays Africa as a territory "teeming with inhabitants who admire, and are desirous of possessing" British manufactures (324). Thus, he encourages the introduction of Christianity so that Africans can be saved from the "kingdom of darkness" and Europe can continue controlling the officially "emancipated" country.

For most English people at home as well as for abolitionists or missionaries, like Livingstone, the African should be saved from slavery, but this desire did not come from an European ideal for equality. It was based on the feeling that the African was to be pitied because of his savage state and pagan ways, because of his darkness. Victorian writers, such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Carlyle, however, disapproved of philanthropists, abolitionists and missionaries because they thought Africa should be left in its darkness and more attention and money should be spent with "the poor at home but not with the *exploited* abroad" (*my emphasis*). Dickens, on the other hand, seemed to like Livingstone in special, saying he carried "into desert places the water of light" (Brantlinger 174, 176).

Livingston -- the famous missionary whose book Missionary Travels (1857) sold seventy thousand copies and made its author a wealthy man -- was regarded as a "saint of light". It is in his writings, however, that we can see clear examples of how humanitarianism could contribute to imperialist expansion. Although he believed Africa could be saved from darkness, he said it could not achieve it by itself because Africans were "inured to bloodshed and murder, and care(d) for no god except being bewitched". In the same line, however, he says that "without commerce and Christianity, the prospects for these dark regions are not bright" (Brantlinger 178). This exaggerated form of representing the Other in his "savagery" and "darkness" is clearly also a strategy used by colonial (and neo-colonial) missionaries to win support from mission societies at home. So, by the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884, Africa was seen by the British as a place of evil possessed by "demonic darkness" and barbarism, and it was their duty to exorcise and save Africa. We can then conclude that the institution of the Word in the wilderness is also an *Entstellung*, an ambivalent process of displacement, distortion, dislocation.

In most African countries, the English language was introduced to the natives through the teaching of the Bible. There is thus a strong association between Christianity and education. In fact, many schools were also churches in certain parts

of Africa. Their importance to the missionaries is expressed by Elias Shrenk as follows:

If we had a nation with formal education, able to read and write (the English language, of course) my plans for mission work would be different. But now I am convinced that the opening of schools is our main task...The smallest schoolchild is a missionary and establishes a relationship with the grown-ups, which would not exist without a school. (Opoku 527)

In writing about the introduction of Christianity in India, Bhabha cites part of a letter written by missionary Thomas Macaulay entitled "Minutes on Education", where he says that the central aim of the educational plan for instruction of the natives in the English language is

to form a body of well instructed laborers, competent in their proficiency in English to act as Teachers, Translators, and Compilers of useful works for the masses of the people. ("Signs" 148)

The teaching method used to achieve this aim, however, was a "lifeless repetition of chapter and verse." Likewise, Africans were taught to mimic the European language from the beginning. What Europeans did not count on, however, was that mimicry and hybridization were going to be used by the native to talk back to their teachers.

Another example offered by Bhabha to support his point about how Christianity was used to reinforce English authority after abolition is a letter written by a correspondent of the Church Missionary Society to describe the method of English education. It is worth citing this excerpt from the letter in full since it reveals very clearly the overt aspect of religious manipulation and its desire of neo-colonial dominance:

The principal method of teaching them (the natives) the English language would be by giving them English phrases and sentences, with a translation for them to commit to memory. These sentences might be so arranged as to teach them whatever sentiments the instructor should choose. They would become, in short, attached to the Mission ... should any of them be converted, accustomed as they

are to the language, manners and climate of the country, they might soon be prepared for a great usefulness in the cause of religion...In this way the Heathens themselves might be made the *instruments* of pulling down their own religion, and of erecting in its ruins the standards of the Cross. (*my emphasis*; "Signs" 148)

Missionaries, as well as explorers and settlers, believed they possessed the only Truth, thus assuming a negative attitude towards African religion and culture. Their preaching centralized on God, as revealed in the Bible, and therefore all other gods were mere illusions. This preaching was a form of stamping out all traditional practices such as the pouring of libation, drumming and dancing, ceremonies of rites of passage, and customs associated with deaths and burials. These were regarded as pagan customs which needed to be replaced by pure ones (Opoku 526). Indeed, missionaries gained African converts, formed catechists and ministers who zealously spread Christianity among their people. Achebe himself was the son of a true convert, Isaiah Achebe, who was educated by a missionary named G. T. Basden who inspired Achebe's creation of Mr. Brown in Things Fall Apart. However, the method of teaching the native, as mentioned above, would appear to have been effective if it wasn't for the pluralistic view of the supernatural in African's understanding of the universe and the nature of human beings; and the nature of God, who was known by different names in different places.

In writing about African religious life, K. A. Opoku says:

There was a hierarchy of spirits. Below God were the ancestral spirits, which were always treated with reverence and with awe, and then there were also the deities of gods who were believed to have the power of rewarding human beings or punishing them with misfortune, disease or even death. The divinities had their cults, priests and shrines. (Included in these were agents of witchcraft, magic and sorcery). (509)

Also, regarding man's relation to society, in African culture being human meant belonging to a community and that involved participating in its beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals because

African traditional religion was not only pervasive, it also bound men to the unseen powers and helped them to form correct relations with the non-human powers. (ibid)

Although there are similarities between the African religious system and the Christian organization, missionaries tried to dissolve the "indigenous" way of interpreting God, which when applied to the natives' beliefs was represented with a minor "g" or regarded as a pagan evil spirit. This was not only due to the idea of paganism connected to the image created about the native, but also, and especially, because for Africans religion acted as the cement which held societies together, and which provided them with support and stability. Thus the European great struggle and desire to break violently through this cement. However, the pluralistic features of African religious and cultural life was responsible for African resistance in keeping traditional beliefs even though Christianity has been adopted by many.

4 - MOVING TOWARDS RESISTANCE: DARING TO WRITE BACK

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama the nigger's going to eat me up.

From Frantz Fanon's Black Skins White Masks, 1980:80.

Revolutions, crisis, uprisings, revolts, anticolonial movements. In the twentieth century, the years between the late fifties to the early seventies are marked in history by what Caribbean and African scholars called "a pervasive mood of optimistic outrage" (Nixon 557). This is the period in which most of the colonies in Africa and the West Indies won their "independence", a moment when the subjugated native appropriated his master's language in order to talk back to the

empire and attempts to dismantle its power. This attempt consists of questionings of colonial discourses which created images of the colonized such as the little black cannibal described by Fanon. What is being questioned is the "mode of representation of otherness" (Bhabha, "Signs" 151), and the processes of subjugation inflicted upon the colonized through power and discourse.

Post-colonial literature was born along with these revolutionary movements, out of a desire to reverse the depicted image of the Other and restore identity to cultures dehistoricized and dehumanized by colonialism. Since then post-colonial writers and theorists like Edward Said have raised the issue of "Orientalism", and others, like Bhabha, have problematized "the politics of the colonial stereotyping." In the introduction of Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition, Linda Hutcheon says that

Postcolonial criticism has positioned itself as a broad anti-imperialist emancipatory project and has thereby added a more overtly politicized dimension to related work in the field of Commonwealth studies, as well as in various national-language literary disciplines. (8)

The Empire Writes Back (1989) by Aschcroft et al (hereafter referred to as EWB), for instance, helps us to understand post-colonialism because it treats the development of literature produced by "natives" from colonized countries in the language of their respective colonizing Empire. It explains the different models of post-colonial literatures and discusses the theorists that emerged from the attempt to deconstruct European power and discourse. According to the authors, the concept of "post-colonial" can be understood in terms of a "new cross-cultural criticism," that is, "cultural critiques"⁴ produced not only by third world countries such as Africa, India, East and West Asia, and the Caribbean Islands, but also colonizing/settler societies such as Canada or Australia and New Zealand -- countries whose cultural, political and historical life was somehow "affected by the imperial process" of colonization. As we see in the EWB, what makes these literatures common to each other is the fact that they

emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. (2)

The discourses of these minority groups, produced out of the testimony and experience of colonialism, intervene in ideological discourses that tend to normalize "the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples". In a sense, post-colonial writers

formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the "rationalizations" of modernity. (Bhabha 1992:437)

In a critical reading of the EWB, Mishra and Hodge say that coming out of the jeopardized term "Commonwealth Literature"⁵, the field of colonial study

foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery. It has helped to destabilize the barriers around 'English Literature' that protected the primacy of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards. (276)

Although the term has drawn different and sometimes oppositional positions related to meanings, postcolonialism may be linked to other "new cultural politics of difference", such as the postmodern, feminist, Marxist and gay theoretical perspectives. However, homogenizing these theories into the same literary category may conceal the particularities of the experiences and complexities of each field (Hutcheon 10). Post-colonial feminism, for instance, is in itself "an oppositional system, within an overall colonized framework" (Mishra 284). Thus, the purpose of the present dissertation is to analyze Things Fall Apart as a "post colonial" text and No Longer at Ease as a "new colonial" novel in the context of Post-colonialism as a form of resistance to imperialism.

4.1 - DECONSTRUCTING COLONIAL DISCOURSE: REREADING CANONS

Anti-colonial literary writing uses specific techniques and strategies in order to construct a text which questions and disrupts the authorized imperialist version of the colonial encounter. The first post-colonial actions to resist imperialism began with "colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial interrogations of western canons" (Parry 27). Regarding the latter, by rereading and rewriting English "canonical" texts, post-colonial writers such as Wilson Harris, Margaret Atwood, Jean Rhys and Chinua Achebe interrogate the "philosophical assumptions" on which western hierarchical order of dominated and dominating societies was based (Aschcroft 33). The act of "writing back" to the Empire was a challenge against European concepts of universality and metaphysics, and the manichean division responsible for the colonial condition.

If hybridity is "the primary characteristic of all post-colonial texts," as EWB declares, then, as a result, "post colonial literatures are constituted in counter-discursive...practices" (185, 196). This "hybrid moment", in which the native rewrites the colonial narrative, is not the moment of a copy or a mere mimic form of the colonialist original but a

qualitatively different thing-in-itself, where mis-readings and incongruities expose the uncertainties and ambivalence of the colonialist text and deny it its authorizing presence. (Parry 40)

Although this form of the native's appropriation of the colonial scenario to perform his resistance to imperialist assumptions does not endow him with colonial power, his deconstruction of the colonialist text, "by rearticulating it in broken English,

perverts the meaning and message of the English book" and tends to prevent the imperialist exercise of power. As Bhabha puts it,

if the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridisation rather than the hegemonic command of colonial authority in the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourse and enables a form of subversion founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. ("Signs" 97)

The strategy of subversion or intervention of the European discourse called "canonical counter-discourse" has as its main project the purpose "to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment" (Tiffin 22). Shakespeare's usage of history, tradition and ideology to create the characters who represent the Other in The Tempest, for instance, is surrounded by mythical images of the Caribbean native. In Colonial Encounters, Peter Hulme discusses the dualism of this kind of narrative, which describes the native sometimes as "noble savage", sometimes as "fierce cannibal", thus giving to the image of the native that mythical face of the unknowable. Hulme says that this strategy, which in colonial times was used to raise support from the audience back in Europe, makes it tempting for post-colonial critics "to see the whole intricate web of colonial discourse as weaving itself in its own separate space."(47).

According to Patrick Taylor this kind of narrative is susceptible to "ideological appropriation" by post-colonial writers because this "mythical narrative", as he calls it, is used to defend or justify an "oppressive status quo" or the "agent of domination" (170). Thus, the rewriting of canonical English works into novels like Marina Warner's Indigo, Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea, or Achebe's Things Fall Apart⁶, produce a "liberating narrative". This form of counter-narrative "grounds itself in the history of lived freedom, in the story of individuals and groups." They question the imperial formations of "mythical narratives". Taylor says that liberating narratives reveal

the history of the thoughts and actions of ordinary people...attack mythical and ideological categories for sustaining oppressive situations which restrict and hide the reality of human freedom. (17)

Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist theory helps to understand counter-discourse as a process of resistance, which undergoes the crucial stage of bringing low what was high. As Parry points out,

Both the reversal of the authentic/inauthentic opposition...and the subversion of authenticity itself...are different aspects of overturning in Derrida's sense. (530)

Yet, as colonial discourse is based on allegory, which is also a mode of representing the Other, or "a way of subordinating the colonised...through the politics of representation" (Slemon 8), the post-colonial subversion of the "original" text into a new form of appropriation and interpretation of the colonial situation is also loaded with allegory. In the post-colonial text, however, allegory becomes the field of representation of the strategies of colonialism, it becomes the "figurative opposition or textual counter-discourse" through which post-colonial writers contest and subvert the sovereign domain of the discourse of colonialism (ibid 11,12)⁷. Then, as Richard Terdiman observes, counter-discourses "read what is unable to read them" (ibid 13).

It is important to remember, however, that the rewriting of canons is not simply "writing back" to an English canonical text, but to the "whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds" (Tiffin 23). It is both a "form of acquiescence" (Ashcroft 84), and a protest against the literary universality created by imperialism, a form to unmask the traditional structure of European canon and society. As post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a "mapping" of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and therefore a dismantling of these assumptions, they contest European sovereignty over people, places, culture and language (Tiffin 23). However, this form of post-colonial novel, or counter-discursive narrative, does not seem to seek to subvert the dominant with a view of

taking its place but to "evolve textual strategies which continually consume their own biases at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse" (ibid 18).

According to Parry, deconstructing colonial discourse tends to "erase the voice of the native", or limit "native resistance to devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority" (34). So, critics engaged in producing a counter-discourse which displaces "imperialism's dominative system of knowledge" (46) and whose grounds refuse the authority of official western accounts about history have to be aware that only deconstructing the colonialist text without producing a new "account of change" may risk both conflictual representations (those from the colonizer and the post-colonized) of being homogenized. The risk is that this homogenized discourse might constitute itself in another form of colonial discourse (32).

Of course, post-colonial appropriations effected by post-colonial critics in a contemporary time and space are only made possible because of early anti-colonialist readings and interrogations of the master-discourse made by colonial natives in their own accents -- appropriated from their respective colonizing languages. As Bhabha has said, "the subaltern has spoken," and his readings of the colonialist text have recovered a native voice (Parry 40). In this context and according to Janmohamed's post-colonial theory, the ideological mission of African writing is

to retrieve the value and dignity of a past insulted by Europeans representation, and to counter the eternal verities and universalities of a liberal criticism which either deforms colonial difference to make it conform with western notions of intelligibility, or reproves it as deviant ... For colonized and post-colonial cultures traumatized by imperialism ... a fiction that recuperates Africa's autonomous resources and re-constitutes the fragmented colonial subject makes an active contribution to the collective aspiration of regaining a sense of direction and identity. (Parry 34,46,32)

This "collective aspiration", as Parry describes post-colonial fiction, has its roots in the early movements towards decolonization. It is this political moment that

has produced strong anti-colonial and nationalist novels and criticism whose aim is to legitimize nationalism as well as authorize a return to traditions (Appiah 349). However, before discussing Achebe's novels as exemplary contributions for the post-colonial literary movement which emerged in the 1960s, the following chapter will deal with the history of African literature as a preparation for a fuller comprehension of Achebe's attempt to provide the African character with a history.

NOTES

¹. Europe and Its Others, Vol.1, p.43 in Slemon's "Monuments of Empire", p.7.

². For Bhabha the *limit-text* is the western *differance* revealed in the colonial margin, as

its practice of authority displays an ambivalence that is one of the most significant and discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power -- whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan. (DDDC 148)

³. The African Witch. London 1949:12 in Janmohamed's "Manichean Allegory", p. 73.

⁴. In "Monuments of Empire", Stephen Slemon says that:

Post-colonial writing ... can be read not only as literature, but also, as a form of cultural criticism and cultural critique: a mode of disidentifying whole societies from the sovereign codes of cultural organisation, and an inherently dialectical intervention in the hegemonic production of cultural meaning. (14)

⁵. As Mishra and Hodge say, the term Commonwealth Literature -- a new project created on the margins of English Departments -- "did not include the literature of the centre, which acted as the impossible absent standard by which it should be judged". In "What is Post(-)Colonialism?". *Textual Practice*, 5,3, 1991:276.

⁶. Warner's novel is a rereading of Shakespeare's The Tempest; Rhys's novel is a rereading of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre -- the history of Bertha, the Caribbean mad woman in the attic. Achebe's TFA is, in what will be analyzed below, an attempt to rewrite official reports written about the encounter in the colonial frontier and the image created about the inhabitants of Nigeria or Africa in a whole.

- ⁷ . Slemon discusses post-colonial allegorical counter-discursive texts into categories such as those which:
1. seek to question "notions of history which colonialism leaves in its wake by reiterating them on an allegorical level of signification (Naipaul's Guerrillas, Ngugi's Devil on the Cross);
 2. expose the "investment of allegory in the colonizing project" and "identify modes of cognition as the enemy of cultural decolonisation" (Lamming's Natives of My Person);
 3. "employ excessive quality of allegorical figuration ... to replace monolithic traditions with the plural typologies which inevitably inhere in cross-cultural situations" (Swan's The Biggest Modern Woman of the World).

In a broad sense, these are texts which "seek to establish the presence of cultural heterogeneity and difference against a dominant discourse" (13).

CHAPTER TWO

BROAD PERSPECTIVES ON WEST AFRICAN LITERATURE THE NATURE OF ACHEBE'S WRITINGS

INTRODUCTION

Although African Literature in English is a creation of the twentieth century, the root of its artistic features lies in a pre-colonial oral aesthetics which makes it different from English Literature. In the attempt to clarify this difference, this chapter will first deal with a broad perspective of African Literature, then narrow down to the specific contributions of West African writers, who are mostly Nigerians, and finally focus on Achebe's world -- the Igbo society of TFA and the neo-colonial situation experienced by this same society in NLE. It will provide elements for the comprehension of the issues raised by Achebe's novels. This general overview of Achebe's writings should favor the understanding of both the values and the vulnerabilities in his society, the latter having, of course, facilitated the invasion of the European colonizer and its continuing influence on post-colonial Nigeria. Thus, issues such as the appropriation of the English language, the development of African Literature, the violence of colonialism, the role of the individual in Igbo community, and the always-present struggle of African writers towards decolonization will be discussed below.

1 - SHAPING AFRICAN LITERATURE: ACHEBE'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Although Achebe began writing during an important period for Nigeria as a nation, which started with the movements towards decolonization at the end of the 1950s, it is important to recall that earlier in the 1920s there were already movements towards a literature of resistance, as in the case of "Negritude". Developed by the Martinican Aime Cesaire and the Senegalese Leopold Senghor, the concept was much criticized in its beginning. Contemporary theorists have enlarged its main ideals and transformed it into a strong post-colonial claim.

At a first instance, Negritude's replicatory and derivative structure was seen as asserting not the difference of Black writing but "its dependence on the categories and features of the colonizing culture" (Ashcroft 124). It was accordingly rejected by many scholars. However, although it constructed Black Writing as an antithesis to European Literature, thus creating a "new universal paradigm" which inevitably would embrace "the essential binary nature of the western philosophical tradition" and somehow enforce racist stereotyping ideals, Negritude did assert "the distinctive qualities of Black culture and identity" (21) -- qualities which were suppressed and denied by colonization.

In the late fifties and early sixties, while Fanon's approach "stressed the common political, social, and psychological terrain through which all the colonized people had to pass" (Ashcroft 124), African writers were more concerned with the "social role" of art. This and "the denial of the European preoccupation with individual experience" and expression has been one of the most distinctive features in recovering a unique African aesthetics (125). As Achebe has made clear in his own works, the African artists of this early period of national decolonization

created their myths and legends, and told their stories for a human purpose ... They moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society. (Ashcroft 126)

Achebe's novels, as a whole, attempt to "recreate the dynamic spirit of a living community" (Ngugi 7). Even though recreating in TFA the past of a specific group, the Ibos of southeastern Nigeria, and the quest of the post-colonial man in NLE, the main objective of this attempt is to counterargue the assumptions of colonial discourse which depicted Africa as "unpossessed" and "unhistoricized" (Pratt, Imperial Eyes 51). Because he thinks that literature is a form of communication in which the author tells his readers about his experiences, in the essay "The Novelist as Teacher" he explains why his writings try to recover the importance of the African culture to his people. He says that his role as a writer is

... to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement...I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past -- with all its imperfections -- was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God's behalf delivered them. (Morning 44-45)

This emphasis on the social context of African culture is due to the fact that, having grown out of a western tradition, modern African literature was at first directed at a foreign audience who criticized it from the outside without taking into consideration its social and cultural aspect. Like Achebe, Abiola Irele also emphasizes the need to pursue a "sociological approach"

which attempts to correlate the work to the social background to see how the author's intention and attitude issue out of the wider social context of his art in the first place and, more important, to get to an understanding of the way each writer or each group of writer captures a moment of the historical consciousness of the society. (Irele 16)

This sociological concern generated resistance from western stylistic criticism applied to African works as well as from the concepts of universalism when used, as Achebe says, as "a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe" (Ashcroft 127). The validity or authenticity of a post-colonial text, it was claimed, should be

the strategic value of its content and the effectiveness of its intervention in the struggle to liberate African societies from economic injustice, social backwardness, and political reaction. (ibid 130)

Criticism of African writing should thus stress various ideas, such as the need to place the writer's work in context, the traditional element in modern literature, and the question of style in a language which is not one's own (Bown 33).

It is important to say that, in rewriting African history from the point-of-view of African culture, the writer had to bear in mind the concern to show his fellow-Africans "what happened to them, what they lost" (Achebe 1973:8). Thus African writing proceeded to reconstruct its own dignity and history through the recovery of a forgotten past. A historical review was then necessary, and it comprised three phases: 1. the actual conquest, when through violence Africans were introduced to a new form of administration, education and religion, and consequently taught to despise their own culture; 2. the period of resistance, and African attempt to "shake off the imperialist yoke"; 3. the present post-colonial Africa and its attempt to reconstruct things a certain Africanness (Palmer 64).

2 - THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE: REPRESENTING AFRICA IN ENGLISH

The resistance to western standards of literary criticism gave way to the need to recover an African oral art which until then was negatively regarded as "traditional" or "primitive" (Ashcroft 127), and present the aesthetics of its folklore, oral conversations, and ancient history. This return to the pre-colonial was problematic in many ways. In the first place a return to African traditional aesthetics had to "ride over the inescapable political and cultural legacies of the colonial period and its continuing neo-colonial presence in contemporary Africa" (130). It would also imply a rejection of any form of standard English which evoked the power of colonialism. Thus the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo, for example, rejected African writing in English and began to write in Gikuyu or Ki-Swahili, since for him the former is "part of a distinctive 'Afro-European' literature, characteristic of the period of transition between colonization and full independence" (131). Ngugi's is a political attitude because, for him, the use of English implies "a control of production, distribution, and readership" of African literature by Europeans (131).

As I pointed in Chapter One, the study of the English language in the colonial world was a strategy to maintain "control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education." It is important to remember that this strategy, developed along with the growth of the Empire, reveals the ideological purpose of perpetuating the "naturalizing of constructed values" such as civilization, humanity and universality (Ashcroft 3). The assess to English Literature functioned, at a first instance, to assess the native's way out of a marginal and peripheral position into the privileged center. However, when the colonized began to master their colonizing language, they immersed "in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become 'more English than the English'" (4). This fact generated the anxiety which

led the African intellectual to "escape into abstract universalism." In the words of Achebe,

Africa has had such a fate in the world that the very adjective African can call up hideous fears of rejection. Better, then, to cut all the links with this homeland...and become in one giant leap the universal man. Indeed I understand this anxiety. But running away from oneself seems to me a very inadequate way of dealing with an anxiety. And if writers should opt for such escapism, who is to meet the challenge? ("The African Writer and the English Language" 452)

The authors of the EWB say that the imposition of English as a national language in Indian and African countries worked as a division to facilitate exploitation (27). It also helped to produce the problems that are often treated in Nigerian texts, which are: dispossession, cultural fragmentation, colonial and post-colonial domination and corruption (27). This can be seen in NLE, which stresses the influence of a dominating foreign culture "on the life of contemporary post-colonial societies" (28).

However, although the civilizing mission manipulates the teaching of English as a way to perpetuate a "hierarchical structure of power" and to destroy the power of one's own language, the appropriation of English by colonized peoples has "transformed and subverted" it into several different *englishes*, which in their early mimetic form attempted to question the colonial situation from within the master's language itself (Ashcroft 7,8). At this point it is important to cite the example of Amos Tutuola, the Nigerian author of The Palm-Wine Drinkard (1952), who besides being the first African writer to have his work published and recognized, saw that it was possible for African mythology to be translated into English (Dathorne 94). His telling of stories as a folktale narrator has been regarded as a "literary paradox" because at the same time that he relies on the folkloric traditions of the Yoruba people (an Igbo neighbor culture), he is able to make them modern and very imaginative (ibid). The problem is that, as he was writing at a period when writers were attempting to reproduce the English language without flaws, Tutuola was criticized for writing "wrong English".

As language is the most important feature in his success towards the "modernizing of folklore" (Dathorne 98), those who accused him of producing an English which was not recognized by the European academy forgot to take two facts into consideration. As Dathorne explains in African Literature in the Twentieth Century,

The story, written in the first person, concerns a palm-wine drinker and palm-wine in West Africa is to a large extent the drink of the working class. If the narrator were to speak standard English, anyone acquainted with the realities of West African speech would find the results ludicrous. Secondly, his English is a sensible compromise between raw pidgin (which would not be intelligible to European readers) and standard English". (98)

Another Nigerian writer, Gabriel Okara, has positioned himself on the issue by saying that:

Some may regard this way of writing English as a desecration of the language. This is of course not true. Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian ... versions of English ...[which] add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective culture. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way? (Williams 436)

In order to deal with the "imposed gap resulting from the linguistic displacement of the pre-colonial language by English" (Ashcroft 10), which is linked to "oppressive political and cultural assertion of metropolitan dominance of centre over margin" (11) Achebe, for instance, needed to transform the language to make it 'bear the burden' of colonial experience (10), to seize the language of the center and re-place it with "a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (38). Although the writers in Nigeria were not displaced but invaded, thus not suffering from the difference of landscape, they had their own ancient values violently substituted by the new ones brought by the imposition of English.

The writer's burden to express his experience in an imported language (Ashcroft 25) is inseparable from the problem of translation. The African writer had and has to struggle to express the vivid images of African ideas, philosophy and

folklore into an alien language in which symbols and signs do not have the same values. This has generated two groups of African writers: those who have chosen to remain writing in their mother tongue, like Ngugi, and those who have overcome the stage of imitating the colonizer's language, which did not reflect African experience, and learned how to transform it for their purposes of either enriching or challenging this language. Achebe believes that writing in a world language has its advantages, even though this language "was forced down [their] throats." For him, writing asserts his "Africanness" by transforming and expanding the English language. In Achebe's theory on the burden of writing in an alien language, the writer has two ways out:

He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas. The first method produced competent, uninspired and rather flat work. The second method can produce something new and valuable to the English language as well as to the material he is trying to put over ... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence. (Cook 75)

However, this "new English" will have to be "in full communion with its ancestral's home to suit new African surroundings" ("The African Writer" 434).

Commenting on Brazilian Jorge Amado's English translation of Gabriela in "The African Writer and the English Language", Achebe says that he was "able to glimpse something of the exciting Afro-Latin culture which is the pride of Brazil and is quite unlike any other culture" (431). However, he goes on to say, the work of other excellent writers Brazil has produced will be "closed to the rest of the world," because they belong to the first group of writers whose works exist in Portuguese only. On the other hand, Achebe forgets that Jorge Amado had some of his works translated as a result of what might be called the central culture's desire for exoticism.

Achebe attempted to counter-argue European assumptions about Africa and its people as a result of his early readings of texts such as Joseph Conrad's Heart of

Darkness and Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson, and of texts such as the "sedate prose of the district-officer-government anthropologist" (Morning 5). These texts contained prejudicial assumptions that he felt had to be deconstructed by the production of a new narrative. He thus adopted strategies which could question colonialist misrepresentation of Africa. One of these strategies, applied to TFA, involved linguistic techniques such as the

use of African syntactical structures, turns of phrase, and metaphors; use of proverbs, verbal constructs typical to Igbo society; emphasis on the igbo regard for the art of conversation and on conversation in the novel; and use of the linguistic-narrative resources of the African song, folktale, and myth traditions. (Aizemberg 88-89)

Achebe thus conveys the "importance of words in pre-colonial Africa" and succeeds in rewriting the caricature created by the colonialist linguistic denigration" of the African such as Conrad's "Mistah Kurtz, he dead!" and Cary's "Oh, Mister Rudbeck is jess the fines' man in the worl'" (ibid 88).

On the other hand, Ngugi's reason for his option to write in his Kenyan mother tongue -- Gykuyu -- has its merits. Although this time writing in English, in his article "The Language of African Literature", also published in Williams and strategically arranged after Achebe's article mentioned above, Ngugi draws a parallel between language and culture in which his main claim is that the language of colonialism did no more than alienate the "mental universe of the colonised" (442). For him the "point of view of alienation" sees oneself "from outside oneself as if one was another self" (443). This happens because the imposition of the colonial language and literature takes the Africans further from themselves and from their world into the "great humanist tradition of the best in Shakespeare, Goethe...Dickens" -- a world in which the native's language is associated with "low status, humiliation...downright stupidity...and barbarism" (ibid). So his aim in writing in Gykuyu is to see Kenyan children learn about their own values and be able to "transcend colonial alienation" (451). Ngugi defends the fact that although language is both a "means of communication and a carrier of culture" (439),

a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. (441)

Although Ngugi praises Achebe and other writers such as Wole Soyinka, whose fertile imaginations have "illuminated important aspects of the African being in its continuous struggle against the political and economic consequences" of colonialism, he does criticize them for creating an Afro-European literature whose target audience is the European reader and the "petty-bourgeois" African society in which he somehow inserts Achebe¹. Ngugi seems to believe that this kind of literature is "another hybrid tradition" which will last "for as long as Africa is under [the] rule of European capital in a neo-colonial set-up" (450). This assumption derives from his idea that if African countries truly want to break free from oppressive imperialistic institutions, which still shape neo-colonial states, African writers will have to embrace African languages and enrich them so that they can carry

the content of our people's anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control; the content of the need for unity among the workers and peasants of all the nationalities in their struggles to control the wealth they produce and to free it from internal and external parasites. (452)

African writers, in other words, should do for their African language what writers like Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English (ibid).

Although Ngugi is right about Achebe's privileged social position, in his criticism of Achebe's appropriation of the English language Ngugi forgets an important point which has made Achebe's works significant in the attempt towards the shaping of an African identity. Although Achebe writes in English, he has not affiliated himself with the colonizer in the sense that, thematically at least, he brings to the surface the honor of an exploited people. His appropriation of "english" has made possible for people from different parts of the world to relate to his stories and characters and question imperialism. It is worth recalling at this point that Achebe

gave up his plans to study medicine and turned his attention to English because he wanted to become an African writer who could represent his people as different from the way they had been represented in colonial texts (Gikandi 28). Achebe knew that in order to produce a counter-narrative which could subvert the colonial discourse, his reading of the European texts had to be different. As he says in an interview with Bill Moyers,

In the university I suddenly saw that these books had to be read in a different light. Reading Heart of Darkness...I realized that I was one of those savages jumping up and down on the beach. Once that kind of enlightenment comes to you, you realize that someone has to write a different story. (ibid 29)

3 - THE NATURE OF ACHEBE'S WORKS: THE IGBO SOCIETY

Achebe's concern with the creation of a new African literature shows his "dual capacity to worship the past" and to "assimilate new value forms" which not only enrich but enlarge his writing style. His novels deal with the problematic relationship between Africa and Europe, and with the "man divided between past and present." Worshipping the past, with all its problems and imperfections, he "attempts to reconcile [these] conflicting forces in the present," but aiming at the Africa of the future (Dathorne 67).

Coming from a family which "lived at the crossroads of culture" (although Achebe was the son of a Christian convert, Isaac Achebe, he was brought up by his grandfather, who was an important man in Igbo traditional culture), he could experience the contrast between "colonial education and the oral tradition" of this society (Gikandi 28). This facilitated his recreation of the past and the depiction of Igbo society from anthropological and historical texts written during colonialism, as well as from stories told by the elders of his community. Therefore, Achebe's writings can be inserted between traditional and modern categories of African literature. The former exists in African indigenous languages and brings forth the cultural aspects of pre-colonial societies, while the latter grows out of the rupture created by the colonial situation within African indigenous history and its way of life. While traditional literature praises the oral features of African languages, modern literature is mainly expressed in the language of the former colonial rulers (Irele 9). Although they relate to different phases and moments in the "collective experience and consciousness" of the African people, these separate categories give them a certain "historical and sociological significance," as Abiola Irele says in "The Criticism of Modern African Literature". Therefore, as modern literature borrows from traditional literature and uses it as its point of reference, the latter

loses its static temporal aspect and can be regarded as contemporary (18). This constitutes the challenge of the skillful writer.

In reading Achebe's works it is possible to see the author's need to defend African culture and open the way to a national consciousness about it. Discussing the writer's role in a new nation, for example, Achebe says that he began to write because he wanted "to validate African culture in the face of colonial historiography". Therefore, a study of Achebe's novels should focus on two basic points. The first is his attempt to "change the existing perception of African culture and people" (Bown 47) in order to dismantle the myth that culture was brought to Africa by Europeans. Eustace Palmer comments on the elaborate religious, social and administrative Igbo system which ensured "decency, justice and stability." He says that

The various social and administrative units -- the family, the lineage groups, the age groups, the council of the elders and the chief priests - - played their own roles, where appropriate, in resolving disputes and dispensing justice. (66)

The second point involves Achebe's counter-argument to the colonial "misconception that all African cultures are alike" (Bown 45). His main claim is that African societies were not inferior and "had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty" (Gikandi 28)². This resulted in Achebe's recreation of the Igbo as "a distinct African society" (Izevbaye, "The Igbo Exceptional Colonial Subjects" 48), as we see in TFA, NLE, Arrow of God and A Man of the People.

Therefore, Achebe's narratives act as a response to the colonialist discourse because, in attempting to recreate a lost African past through the history of Igbo society, Achebe unveils in his novels the western ideology of progress and civilization responsible for the myths of primitive savagery and isolation of the peoples of southern Nigeria. In TFA, Achebe explores the myth of Ibo isolation but rejects the assumption that their primitiveness was due to this isolation. Since, for the British, civilization meant a "hierarchy of authority, a centralized system of rule" (Izevbaye 46) based on the norms of western theory of civilization and "intercultural

contact", the prejudice toward southern Nigerian political systems exposed in Frederick Lugard's "Report on the Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria, 1912-1919"³ is significant:

The Southern Provinces were (mostly) populated by tribes in the lowest stage of primitive savagery, without any central organization.... A great part of the North, on the other hand, had come under the influence of Islam, and ... had an elaborate administrative machinery. (ibid)

So, in attempting to govern the whole of Nigerian different ethnic groups as a single unity, the British hurt those, like the Igbo, who had no centralized government, forcing them to "create warrant chiefs to make the policy work" (Izevbaye 46). This caused a transformation in Igbo society because, while it left the monarchical system of most neighboring societies intact (especially the northern Halsu-Fulani society), it dismantled the Igbo political and social system which at the time had no single chief and allowed the whole community to participate in the process of decision making.

On the other hand, texts like Achebe's and Margaret Green's "Ibo Village Affairs" show

how the Igbo differed from other ethnic groups in Nigeria and how these differences in customs and culture made the colonial government more difficult for the British to administer. (Lindfors 17)

Green describes the Igbo as a people who lived under no "central authority but co-existed, scattered through the forest lands of Eastern Nigeria, in isolated independent clusters". Although admiring the "involvement of the whole community in all aspects of government" (Sparrow 167), Green, like Achebe, recognized the weaknesses of this "fragmented and democratic society" in their contact with British rule. Aware of the dangers of fragmentation, Green says that the Igbo "had adopted certain unifying measures, such as shared markets and exogamy." As mentioned above, at a first instance the Igbo offered considerable resistance to British invasion

and imposition of their "system of courts and government-appointed chiefs" (ibid 168).

However, Achebe does not romanticize the characterization of his people. In portraying Igbo society he tells the reader about the beauty of this culture as well as its problems. He is not afraid of raising polemical issues such as the Evil Forest in TFA, where twins were left to die, or the osu, in NLE, people dedicated to a god as a kind of living sacrifice. When asked who he blamed for the destruction of Igbo society Achebe replied:

The coming of the missionaries is very complex, and I cannot simply assign blame to this man or that. The society itself was already heading toward destruction... [although] Europe has a lot of blame....There were internal problems that made it possible for the Europeans to come in. Somebody showed them the way. A conflict between two brothers enables a stranger to reap their harvest. (Elder 58)

Despite showing that the Igbo posited resistance to colonial invasion, this could not prevent Igbo social institutions from falling apart under the foreign pressure. The Igbo society of NLE deserves a careful analysis since it portrays the effects of westernization on the identity of African people.

4 - GENERAL VIEWS ON THINGS FALL APART AND NO LONGER AT EASE

Since Achebe's works have broken the borders of African academy and become part of the Western syllabus, before his first two novels are discussed in depth, it becomes necessary to consider some relevant points about their writing. As already mentioned, Achebe's concern with documentation to create the atmosphere of his fiction provided him with a cultural and historical knowledge which was instrumental in his representations of an African civilization rooted in reality -- a reality disturbed by the clash between Africa and westernization.

When Achebe started to write his first novel in the late 1950s he intended to write one single novel which would tell a story covering three generations. He intended to start with Okwonkwo's family and then gradually show how Nigeria achieved national independence. Moreover his publishers convinced him to start with a short novel which would concentrate on the fate of a heroic figure. TFA came in 1958 but Achebe still intended to write two more novels to complete the trilogy. The second would focus on Okwonkwo's son's life as an Igbo Christian convert who experienced decolonization, and then the third volume would be the story of Okwonkwo's grandson's life in a neo-colonial Nigeria. The latter was published in as No Longer at Ease in 1960, on the verge of independence, but the second volume was never written. In 1964 Achebe wrote Arrow of God, which seems an attempt to fill in the gap of the intended trilogy, but whose characters are not connected to Okwonkwo. Arrow of God is the story of the conflict between an Igbo priest and the new religion. It is, in a sense, the materialization of Okwonkwo's dream of his son's rebellion against the imported culture.

Far from being mere accounts of cultural contacts, however, novels such as Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God examine the problem of African tradition and its place in the context of the disruption of change brought by colonization. The injection of cultural and historical information and explanation we find in Achebe's

novels is enough to make the reader rethink the colonialist ideology of conquest. It also helps to question western views of Africa as well as the neo-colonial situation presented in No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People (1966) through the themes of corruption and greed in an independent Nigeria. The myth of the man of two worlds, or the "real displaced man", as defined in Dathorne, is present in these novels as the quest for African identity.

Walsh has said that the world of Chinua Achebe's work is "masculine, coherent, and in a curious way classical" (30). Achebe's characterization of his protagonists provide insight for Walsh's first adjective. The masculine characteristic of Achebe's novels make an explanation about his white and female characters necessary. In his discussion of the presence of the white characters in Achebe's works, for example, Dathorne emphasizes their flatness. They are not given importance and act as "symbolic forces" that the protagonist reacts against or at least attempts to. In TFA, for example, we see little difference between Rev. Brown and Rev. Smith. In NLE, Mr. Green, Obi's boss, weakly evokes the image of the old colonialist. Although this may unveil Achebe's claim against the colonizer as a way to reveal their insignificance to his own people, he has been criticized for creating characters who are more typical than real. Dathorne argues that his "Black and White characters are portrayed as mere prototypes...who appear and disappear without making much impact" (71,72). In NLE, for example, Clara simply disappears from the book after her abortion.

The status of women, especially in TFA, needs further consideration since in the following chapters, where the focus of analysis will be Okwonkwo and Obi, they will not receive much significant critical attention. As a rule, the novels' representation of Igbo women follows the same superficial pattern, be it personal, within the familiar relationship, or political, within the social community. Few critics have considered this issue in Achebe's writings. Some, however, have complained that his novels are sexist -- a view that is perhaps based on Okwonkwo's apparent "misogynistic" feature and on the fact that in the Igbo society of TFA men

pay for their brides and practice polygamy (Elder 61), or still on Obi's cowardice in assuming his relationship with Clara, who was an *osu*.

In TFA we are told that Okwonkwo had four wives; however, we only come close to Ekwefi, since the eldest wife is simply referred to as "Nwoye's mother". Despite this polygamous fact, the text shows that in Igbo society women could divorce. Ekwefi, who runs away from her husband to live with Okwonkwo, is the mother of Ezinma, the daughter Okwonkwo wished to be a boy. The female-male relationship involving them is full of the passion and violence which, as Rhonda Cobham says, aims at showing that "these emotions existed in traditional Igbo society" (96). However, Okwonkwo's treatment of his wives and his rejection of weakness and vulnerability as feminine attributes give him his misogynistic criticism.

For Okwonkwo, to be a "real man" one has to be able to rule and dominate his children and especially his women. The novel portrays women inside the bonds of marriage as totally controlled by their husbands. We see that, although they help each other, women in Okwonkwo's household neither interact with each other nor with Okwonkwo on the same level as we see the Igbo men doing. Their main interaction is with their children and the care of their husband compound. On the matter of violence we see Okwonkwo beating one of his junior wives because she was not at home to prepare his food, and shooting at another wife because she mocks his poor marksmanship. Although Okwonkwo is warned by the elders against his behavior, at a first instance it sounds like in Igbo society wife beating is a "legitimate masculine privilege" (Cobham 93), since there are other accounts of battered women throughout the story.

Although Achebe in fact refers to accounts which show that in Igbo society violence against women is regarded as a serious matter, his narrative lacks some important information about women status in Igbo society. On the account of Uzowulu abusing of his wife, we are told that his case is brought to the clan to be solved since the man seems to be the kind who would not listen to any other judgment. However,

anthropological accounts indicate that, in a more likely scenario, the wives of the clan would have intervened and enforced their judgment by "sitting" on the man in question: that is, by shaming him publicly through rude songs and obscene gestures so that he would be forced to mend his ways. (Cobham 97)

Achebe's omission of these facts in the novel leaves us with no example of female authority in Igbo society, except for the priestess of Chielo. However, since anthropological studies prove the opposite, it becomes important to cite the example of the Women's War in Aba in 1929, so that we can observe that besides having a political system of their own, they also posited resistance to colonial authority. The revolt of Aba, organized by the *umuada*, motivated the British administration to propose anthropological studies about the Igbo. This resulted in reports like Lugard's, which are ironically depicted by Achebe in TFA as *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

In fact, Achebe does represent women's public roles. We are told that their political system was the *umuada*, the feminine council composed by the "daughters" of the Igbo clan. However, these groups are portrayed as simply responsible for finding stray animals, solemnizing "certain stages of marriage and betrothal rituals" and preserving "maternal lines of land entitlement" (Cobham 96). The women in the text are always described performing activities such as "cooking, plaiting their hair, decorating their bodies, dancing, running from *egwugwu*" (the spirit masquerader), or "being given in marriage" (ibid 97). Their opinion seems never to be requested in the cases judged by the clan. As Cobham goes on to say, Chielo, the priestess, is presented more as a witch than as a representative of authority. She is, in other words,

a force for good or evil who is separate from the regular women rather than part of a chain of ritual and social female authority. (97)

Therefore, historical attitudes such as the intervention of one *umuada* "to discipline corrupt politicians in the 1961 election" (Cobham 99) are omitted. They seem irrelevant for Achebe's portrayal of Igbo women of the turn of the century.

There is, however, an important representation Achebe applies to women in TFA -- that of storytellers. In chapter 11 we see Ekwefi telling her daughter a very important folktale about the Birds and Tortoise. For a moment we can identify women as the main storytellers of the novel who through this role gain voice and control language, an ability Okwonkwo does not master. Barbara Harlow suggests that this function

on the one hand, affirms women as the bearers and nurturers of African traditions but that, on the other hand, subjects that charge to a new interpretation when these very traditions are rewritten and given a vital assignment within the strategies of African liberation. (79)

Okwonkwo's view of women as having weak features that he, as a man, has to despise prevents him from observing their importance in Igbo society. In Chapter 8, Okwonkwo's view of strength and of a man's mastery over a woman is shown in the following passage, in which an old warrior, Ndulue, cannot be buried before his first wife, Ozoemena, who died after she had heard of Ndulue's passing away the night before.

"It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind," said Obierika. "I remember when I was a young boy there was a song about them. He could not do anything without telling her."

"I did not know that," said Okwonkwo. "I thought he was a strong man in his youth."

"He was indeed," said Ofoedu.

Okwonkwo shook his head doubtfully. (66)

Another example of Okwonkwo's insensibility to female values occurs when he is exiled from Umuofia and has to go back to Mbanta, his mother's homeland. After accidentally killing a boy, he is punished through exile by the earth goddess Ani, whom his "female crime of manslaughter" had offended (Cobham 98). While in his exile, Okwonkwo's limitation to understanding the Igbo system of values, which he paradoxically fights to keep when he is confronted with change, requires an admonishment from his uncle. Uchendu says:

It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme...If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has borne and thrown away. Have you not heard the song they sing when a woman dies?

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

There is no one for whom it is well. (125)

To affirm that Achebe is sexist in his portrayal of the status of women due to his characterization of Okwonkwo is to miss the post-colonial character of the novel as well, that is, its resistance against the empire. Of course, his narrative is a selective and gendered one, which limits our interpretation of women in Igbo society. Okwonkwo does fail to appreciate their traits. However, Achebe's attempt to present an "unbiased version of traditional life" raises the issue of the "conflict experienced by his generation between traditional and western notions of manhood, courage and the construction of communal values" (Cobham 91,99). To read the novel from a totally western perspective would then constitute another selective and gendered reading of history.

Divided in three parts, TFA depicts life in an Igbo community before and after the encounter with the European explorer. In parts one and two, Achebe didactically informs the reader about the uniqueness of a society which, though believed to be primitive and savage, actually proves to be composed by a "dignified clan of equals who meet...in an Athenian way to make critical communal decisions" (Walsh 30). We learn about wrestling matches, religious attitudes, superstitious beliefs, and the position of first wives. The narrative richly describes their impressive production of music, dance, decoration, and conversation since "proverbs are the palm oil with which the words are eaten" (10).

Abstracted in their own time and place, this harmony is disturbed by internal social problems provoked by the coming of the white men in part three. With them comes trade, government and religion. Of all these, religion seems to be the

protagonist's worst enemy: his son, Nwoye, adopts the new faith which at first attracted only the alienated, the misfits, and the outcasts of Igbo society. Okwonkwo's violent effort to make a man of the gentle and affectionate boy ends up making him "transfer his natural desire to please from his father to the white missionary Mr. Brown" (Moore 6).

Although the originally intended trilogy remains incomplete, Achebe is able to make Obi feel "closer to his grandfather than...to his parents" (Sparrow 174), who were to be represented in the middle missing volume. The book would deal with Okwonkwo's son's generation and portray the life of a Christian convert coming from a strong "traditional village upbringing." It is true there is a lack of interaction between Okwonkwo and Nwoye and consequently with Obi, but it is through Obi's questioning of the effects of his father's dedication to the church the missionaries had introduced but which no longer served, that he seems to try to restore communication with the lost past, even though this past is recalled in a present chaotic post-colonial world. The phony independent Nigeria Obi encounters after studying in England is a mixture of the traditional values and the new ideals of prosperity introduced by colonialism. Obi is the real displaced man who, like Okwonkwo, fights with his own individuality in a communal society. This prevents him from understanding the essence of his culture. Judged for bribery, his story raises the issue of the return of colonialism after independence.

Achebe not only saw his country go free from colonial rule but also go through internal wars such as the Biafran holocaust, in which the Igbo people, especially the children, were killed by the Halsas after being betrayed by the Yorubas. In the world of NLE, however, the conflict of a society between the old and the new culture seems to be the author's foreseeing of the destruction of a society affected by its own limitations as well as the ones imposed by a foreign culture. The following chapters will scrutinize the pre- and post-colonial worlds chebe has tried to deconstruct in his search to decolonize African literature.

NOTES

- ¹. For Ngugi, Afro-European Literature is that written by Africans in European languages in the era of imperialism, and which in a sense proliferates European power.
- ². Quoted from Killam G. D.(ed.), African Writers on African Writing. London:Heinemann, 1973.
- ³. Frederick Lugard was the British governor general in Nigeria from 1897 to 1919. Another report written by him in 1922 entitled *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* seems to provide the model for the way the District Commissioner treats the natives in TFA.

CHAPTER THREE

THINGS FALL APART DECOLONIZING AFRICAN HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

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 like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (TFA 162)

Modern African Literature began to be shaped in the 1950s as a response to the distressing effects of the impact of western capitalist colonialism upon African traditional values and institutions. Written in 1958, Things Fall Apart illustrates the modern African writer's need to confront the past in order to lead African people into a rediscovery of their cultural and historical identity. Symmetrically divided in three parts, the novel portrays a pre-colonial moment of Igbo society, which apparently dwells in harmony despite its internal flaws, but which no longer will be the same after it is confronted with colonization. In order to make the analysis of this first moment relevant in terms of the value of the African past, it is necessary to focus first on that second moment of the novel when the white colonizer penetrates Igbo culture.

I will discuss the implications of this encounter and how it marks the introduction of the problematic notion that it was the European duty to introduce commerce, administration and a new religion to a people regarded as uncivilized. Achebe's works constitute a counterhistory of the ideology of conquest by recreating through fiction the story of a Nigerian clan that in their own cultural way belonged to an ordered society whose communal social system could be comparable to the ones the colonizers thought they were introducing. In TFA we will find a society whose history, honor and culture is rescued in a narrative which tells the story of colonization from the point-of-view of the colonized.

Following Achebe's theme of tradition versus change (Palmer 64), TFA first introduces the reader to the beauty of African folklore, and to the power and validity of the traditional life of a community that lived in a fictitious town called Umuofia in the Igboland of southeastern Nigeria. At this moment, the world of the novel is seen as a well-ordered universe whose society enjoys a period of reasonable peace and stability. However, since all well-ordered universes have the "potentials of being easily disrupted", as Damian Opata puts it, the story is then literally broken in two, the presence of the white man being the source of disruption. Along with Opata's assumption, it is of paramount importance to observe at this point that Achebe's maturity as a writer makes him aware that internal problems in that society also contributed to the whole process of change brought by imperialism. This is revealed in his strong belief that the African writer should have "sufficient integrity to resist the temptation to gloss over inconvenient facts" (Palmer 67) and to come to terms with his past amidst its imperfections.

Despite Achebe's usage of sociological aspects of African culture and his gathering of historical documentation, which make his novels realistic and interesting, TFA is far from being an idealistic story or an accurate anthropological reproduction of Igbo life and history. No doubt the novel deploys imperialist violence, treachery and strategies of domination. However, at the same time, it suggests that, despite resistance by Igbo society, change was inevitable. This notion of the inevitability of change is provided by wise men like Obierika, whose words

are quoted above and who serves as the "center of consciousness" of the novel, as well as a "foil" to the hero protagonist, Okwonkwo (Obiechina 33). On the other hand, the notion of change, caused by the clash with westernization, is represented at a first instance by the contact with missionaries. It is through their religious ideology of civilization versus barbarism, and Christianity versus paganism that Achebe reveals the incongruities of the whole process of colonization in Nigeria, which is later enforced by English officers through violence.

The question that must be kept in mind while the novel is read is not mainly concerned with the responsibility for the results of colonialism in Africa. What must be questioned in this study of post-colonialism is how Achebe's artistic style in writing TFA as a tragedy conveys resistance to imperialism by deconstructing European discourse. Even though the novel is written from the point-of-view of the colonized, Achebe skillfully inserts colonialist ideology about the Other, providing enough insight for the reader to reach his own conclusions. As the events in the novel lead to the climax of Okwonkwo's suicide, Achebe's criticism to the colonizer's blindness about the Other is revealed through the English District Commissioner's interpretation of this act as a part of African primitiveness. Moreover, the paradox of the inevitable collapse of a culture in facing the power of imperialist Europe will be discussed as we observe how, even though historicity is respected, Achebe's writing techniques attempt to reverse the denigrating myths about Africa and its people. As Zohreh Sullivan has said,

Achebe's text is produced and created by a historically specific series of cultural and social formations and...the formal design of the novel, its events, language, character, and narrative are all part of the protean shape of history as Achebe...[shapes] our perception of Nigeria and therefore [helps to] create history...as it relates to the discourse of the novel...[in order to] oppose dominant imperial ideology. (104)

1 - STYLISTIC FEATURES OF ACHEBE'S COUNTER-NARRATIVE

I forgot to tell you another thing which the Oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and the first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. (128)

Attention was given to the matter of language in the previous chapter because of Achebe's concern with problems the African writer has had to face in order to convey in English the same poetry and rhythm of African languages. Of all anglophone writers, Achebe can be regarded as the one novelist who successfully appropriated English to transform it into an effective language capable of conveying in prose the rhythmic beauty of speech of the sophisticated and the "not-so-educated" African. His mastery in manipulating a grammatically correct standard English, transforming it "rhythmically and idiomatically," and then mixing it with Igbo oral language and its "speech pattern, idioms and...verbal nuances" (Palmer 76) without distorting neither of them is the great feature of *TFA*. The result is the genuine realist image of a black African rural community, whose narration is often centralized in the paradoxical characterization of Okwonkwo.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Achebe began writing driven by the desire to reassure dignity and self-respect to his Nigerian fellowmen who had suffered under British colonial administration. In attempting to write a different story about African history and culture, he felt the need to escape from "British stylistic clichés and mannerisms" (Cook 76). Although his novel is a mixture of African and Western values, Achebe produced a simple and strong prose which is "spare" and whose style is based on irony. The imagery is provided by his "constant narrative of rhetoric and oratory" (Lubiano 109) applied through Igbo tales, proverbs and songs. Achebe's skill in creating first the nature of Igbo society before its collapse is shown provides the reader with an image of a closely integrated society whose values such as honor, hospitality and religious tolerance prove to be meaningless in the confrontation with the military power and culture of the colonizers.

Although he does not omit the problems inside Igbo society, the facts he presents do not jeopardize the reader's sympathy for this community; on the contrary, Achebe richly describes the African values which colonial discourse attempted to conceal. By discussing sociological issues through events such as war, festivals, and ceremonies, he softens the ethnographic aspects, which could make the reading of fiction tedious for its many sociological informations, by manipulating their description and presenting them as part of the life and activity of human people linked to discussions of the human character. In presenting Okwonkwo as a flawed hero who threatens imperial power, for instance, Achebe succeeds in providing an "allegory of resistance", as Barbara Harlow calls it.

It is possible, according to Nichols, to make a connection between the "Igbo view of the human condition and traditional Western ideas about tragedy and suffering" (55). Although the novel follows the pattern of Greek tragedies in the sense that the story starts with harmony in an ordered society and ends in death and desperation after social life disintegrates as a result of confrontation with change, this parallel needs further discussion. Things Fall Apart has been described and compared to great works of western literature such as Homer's Odyssey and Virgil's Aeneid. Judith Gleason points out that the title of Achebe's novel was taken from "Yeats' cataclysmic vision" in the poem "The Second Coming" and adds that "the Irish poet would have appreciated the wild old Nigeria." However, aware that TFA is a classic of African writing or an "Igbo National Epic," as Charles Nnolim has argued (Traoré 67), before we analyze the novel as such it becomes important to ask what paradigms have been used to compare the aesthetics of both African and Western worlds.

Traoré provides a summary of what was argued in Chapter Two. He says that Achebe's work reflects his response to the readings of specific works such as Cary's and Conrad's, thus his choice of a style which mixes African and Western tradition and form becomes ideological (68). The assumption that the story resembles the Greek epic is based on the fact that in African oral epic tradition the emphasis is on "heroism, exile, destiny and encounters between cultures" (Sullivan 103). Although

Achebe himself is a construct of two different cultures, and this is proved in his "title's self-conscious allusion" (102), the intertextuality we find in his narrative does not make the novel a copy of Western modes of writing since true African features, as well as European's ones, are present in the textual structure. As Traoré puts it,

[t]he work is epic in that it celebrates the achievement of a heroic personage [Okwonkwo]...and through him embodies a people's conception of their past. (66)

Although the novel suggests connections to Western forms and images, it offers a "pluralistic understanding of the modern African novel, of the problems inherent in decolonized discourse, and of Achebe's world" (Sullivan 108). The following discussion is an attempt to discuss Achebe's ideological intention in portraying a pluralistic culture which many western colonizers were incapable of understanding and reproducing.

As the power of conversation is highly regarded in Igbo society, the most significant aspect of Achebe's language is the use of proverbs applied in extensive and interactive conversations or the telling of tales, to give a genuinely African flavor to the characters' speech. Proverbs were regarded as a sign of wisdom used in debates to expose either the speaker's skill of argumentation or his hollowness. The relevance of Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs is observed in the event of Okwonkwo's asking Nwakibie for four hundred seed yams. The old man produces a "proverbial lore", foreshadowing Okwonkwo's opposition to colonial rule and his suicide. After the ceremony of breaking the kola nut, Nwakibie says:

We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break. (22)

Although he meant that all men are equals and therefore should have the same rights, symbolically, Opatá suggests, Okwonkwo is the kite which has its wing

broken for not letting the colonial administration and the new converts to "perch" together (86).

Besides being simple stories passed from generation to generation, folktales are also used in the novel to convey allegories of resistance. However, the Igbo ability in using rhetoric proves unsuccessful against the colonizer since language is a barrier of communication between the two cultures. When Okwonkwo asks Obierika if the white men knew their custom about a piece of land under dispute the latter answers:

How can he when he does not even speak out tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. (162)

Although critics such as David Cook see no applicability to the embedding of folktales in the narrative of TFA, others have noted that Achebe's usage of the traditional fable of the tortoise and the birds to explain "why Tortoise's shell is not smooth", for example, represents much more than the recording of folklore. This animal tale reveals an anti-colonial message. The traditional tale, told by Ekwefi to her daughter Ezinma in Chapter 11, tells the story of a "cunning", "sweet-tongued" Tortoise who persuades the birds to provide feathers for him to go to a great feast which would be given to the birds in the sky. He tells the birds they should give themselves a new name by saying that their hosts in the sky would expect them to "honor this age-old custom" (92). By giving himself the name All of you, he eats all the food when the hosts say it had been prepared "for all of you," leaving the birds, the real guests, with only the scraps of the food. After discovering Tortoise's exploitation of their good will, the birds take revenge on him. They decide to claim their feathers back and leave him in the sky.

Dismayed at the idea of not being able to go back to the earth, he sends his wife a message -- she should bring all the soft things out of their house so that when he jumped from the sky he could land safely. The interesting feature of the story lies in the messenger, the Parrot, who gives Tortoise's wife a completely different message. Tortoise ends up landing on "hoes, machetes, spears, guns and even his

cannon" (94). Thus the Tortoise's shell is not smooth, because the village medicine man simply sticks the pieces of his shell back together.

As mentioned above, this tale does not only represent the wisdom of folktales, it represents Achebe's allegorical attempt to rewrite African history and create a discourse of resistance to colonial assumptions about it. If we analyze TFA in its time and place, we can easily connect its story to the fable of the Tortoise. Although the novel was written on the eve of Nigerian independence, the story is set in the beginning of the 1900s, when the British began to colonize West Africa.

In this context, the Parrot and the Tortoise represent the antagonical forces we find in the novel - the former, the colonized and the latter, the colonial power. Representing the birds, the Parrot has an important function in the story -- the subtle power reversal proposed by post-colonial writers. Since the Parrot is stereotypically the animal subject who simply repeats somebody else's words, he could be considered powerless in comparison to the sweet-tongued Tortoise. However, by learning how to use and manipulate language, his telling Tortoise's wife a different story reveals that "both rhetoric and armed struggle are crucial to an oppressed people's organized resistance to domination" (Harlow 75).

Drawing a parallel between this folktale and the final incidents of TFA, we can observe that besides positing resistance to the new colonial order, the Igbo were able to "participate in the historical process of change" (Harlow 78). The birds' giving of their feathers demonstrate the natives' capacity to welcome the new administrative and religious practices introduced by colonization. Their "repossessing" of the feathers expresses their refusal to submit to the real intents of the Empire in exploiting their lands, and their struggle for independence. In the novel, the Commissioner sends his "sweet-tongued messenger" to invite the leaders of Umuofia to a meeting in which they were to discuss some administrative points. However, the "discussion" is really a discussion based on law and force:

We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy....[But] we have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen....I have decided that you will pay a fine of two

hundred bags of cowries. You will be released as soon as you agree to this and undertake to collect that fine from your people. (178)

The leaders of Umuofia are then humiliated by having their hair all shaved off, being beaten and imprisoned. At this point they did not know that their fine of "fifty bags would go to the court messenger" (181); however, afterwards, they begin to understand they should never have believed the white man and permitted him to stay. In the events following this humiliation they start discussing strategies to resist the British. In the greatest meeting Umuofia had ever seen, after recalling the old values of Igbo society, one of the elders, Okika, says:

Our fathers never dreamed of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done. Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing and he replied: "Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I have learned to fly without perching on a twig." We must root out this evil. And if our brothers take the side of evil we must root them out too. And we must do it now. (187)

Okwonkwo's failure in using language culminates in his killing of the messenger and his tragic suicide. The Commissioner's failure in understanding the importance of language is clear in his thinking that "one of the most infuriating habits of [the Igbo] people was their love of superfluous words" (189). The other villagers, however, learn through history that, in addition to the use of force, they needed to learn how to appropriate the language of the oppressor as a way to subvert Western power, like the Parrot does in Ekwefi's tale. This narrative technique, called invented tradition, involves "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past" (Harlow 78).

TFA starts with a unique African narrative but ends with the threat of a foreign colonial one proposed by the Commissioner's book. However,

by historicizing and resetting the encounter in language from the other, [the novel] fictionally anticipates the Commissioner's determination to write his own story. The already told story, all that precedes his meditation on his future writing project, not only disrupts the attempt to domesticate a brutal takeover of the land, culture, and religion, it also deconstructs the Eurocentric gaze that defines the object, the other, as primitive. (Lubiano 110)

2 - THE PARADOX OF OKWONKWO'S CHARACTERIZATION

Okwonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan. He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look....When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody....But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. (7,8,16)

Things Fall Apart portrays the story of a clan which is threatened by disintegration as outside forces affect the new generation as well as its outcasts. However, the first information we have about this society is that it "thought like one, spoke like one, shared a common awareness and acted like one" (Cook 17). Achebe's dual view of the causes for the disruption in Igbo life is projected onto the characterization of his protagonist, Okwonkwo. As Arlene Elder explains, Okwonkwo becomes the "microcosm of the conflicting energies of Igboland, catalyzed by the antagonistic intrusion of the Europeans" (58). Despite the ambiguity of his actions and reactions, Okwonkwo plays a major role in all the significant events. Symbolically, he can be viewed as "the soul of the tribe" (Opata 82). Although change seems inevitable, Okwonkwo's death represents not only Igbo resistance to colonialism but especially the collapse of African tradition.

Although critics have different views of Okwonkwo's characterization, most of them seem to agree that he is a very individualistic and controversial character.

Elder, for example, says Okwonkwo seems to be the perfect expression of Igbo society because of the sociological characteristics he demonstrates: he is a man who comes from poverty to riches and becomes a wealthy but hard-working farmer who had three wives and eight children; he had earned two titles and become a representative of the clan's ancestors, an *egwugwu*; and he was also famed as a great wrestler among the villages and a great warrior who had brought home five heads from the conflicts with enemy tribes (59). On the other hand, David Cook believes that rather than being a typical figure of the Igbo man, Okwonkwo represents the tragic hero. He is tragic due to his 'inflexibility', his inability "to fully understand or resist a fore-ordained sequence of events," as in the Aristotelian view of tragedies. Okwonkwo is heroic because he shows an "exceptional bravery, firmness, even greatness of soul" (66), which makes it possible for his people to understand the conception of their past. Gikandi has suggested that this tragic feature is particularly visible in his exile and suicide, committed in "defense of Umuofia's 'masculine' values" (29) when he is confronted with the white man.

These arguments need further discussion. Okwonkwo's ambiguous cultural and social position in Igbo society may be better understood if we consider his individuality, the characteristic most critics seem to agree on. The paradox of Okwonkwo's individuality lies in the ambiguity of his respect for tradition and honor for his clan and its ancestors. Although he gives evidence of respecting the traditional values of his society, as when he unquestioningly accepts his banishment for accidentally killing a boy in the burial ceremony of his father (117), Okwonkwo's individualism leads him to disrespect even the gods during the Week of Peace by beating his youngest wife, Ojiugo, for he "was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (31).

In contrasting individuality to communal behavior, Achebe has observed that the concept of the worth of the individual is always limited by another concept, the concept of the voice of the community. For instance, Okwonkwo's extreme individualism leads to working against the will of the people and to self-destruction. And anybody who wanders off beyond what is accepted as appropriate for

the individual, or a person who sets himself in opposition, quite often is heading for destruction. (Elder 63).

Indeed the treatment of individuality in the communal society of TFA shows that it can bring tragic consequences not only to the individual but to the whole community. This is clearly evident in the passage of Okwonkwo's breaking the Week of Peace. The "cosmic implications" of Okwonkwo's violent action reveals how the society in TFA is closely unified, thus becoming susceptible to be disrupted by individuality (Opata 81). After Okwonkwo beats his wife, thus breaking the sacred week, he is told by Ezeani that his act has triggered a dimension that goes beyond his household. He has provoked the wrath of the earth goddess Ani not only upon him but upon the whole society of Umuofia. As Ezeani says,

The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall perish. (32)

In order to appease the goddess to "restore the ontological order" (Opata 82) and free the whole community from destruction, Okwonkwo has to "bring to the shrine of Ani...one she-goat, a hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries" (32). Elder says that although being an *egwugwu* himself, Okwonkwo's "insecurity and bad temper frequently lead him to act contrary to his society's values, even to the extent of endangering his people" (61).

The account of Okwonkwo's exile in Part Two is very meaningful. The 7-year exile in Mbanta, his mother's homeland, the narration seems to be a time Okwonkwo needed away from his community to rethink his values as a member of a communal society. Even though Okwonkwo's impulsiveness is still present when he returns, he becomes a "stumbling block" (Opata 86) to the new colonizing order. Although his return to Umuofia is ironically referred to as 'the warrior's return', the values about a warrior's qualities no longer have the same importance now that the white colonists have interfered in his culture. Their presence becomes indeed a promise of destruction of Igbo spiritual beliefs, unity, and tradition. After being

deceived and humiliated at the Commissioner's office along with other six elders of the clan (Chapter 23), Okwonkwo is the strongest opponent to the invaders. However, after his unsuccessful attempt to convince the clan to go against the missionaries, he decides to take individual action and, driven by impulse, murders one of the court messengers after the latter orders the clan's meeting to stop in the name of "the white man whose orders you know too well" (188). When Okwonkwo hears voices asking: "Why did he do it?", he understands he has been betrayed by his clansmen and concludes that he has failed because his values no longer have the same meaning. David Cook says that his suicide is "a physical expression of his knowledge that things have irrevocably fallen apart" (80).

The paradox of Okwonkwo's suicide at the end of the book takes us back to the introductory pages of the novel, when the narrator says that Okwonkwo "was ruled by one passion -- to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved" (17). Although among the Igbo "a man was judged according to his own worth and not according to the worth of his father" (11), Okwonkwo was "possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death" (21). This fear made him despise all kind of gentleness, weakness and idleness which reminded him of his father. Unoka had been a happy drinker and flute player who loved fellowship and who never honored his debts to other members of the community. For Okwonkwo, Unoka's life and death by swelling brought shame upon him. In Igbo culture to die of swelling was an abomination to the earth. Such a shameful death could not receive the traditional burial and the sick body had to be taken into the Evil Forest and left there until its death. Although Okwonkwo fights all his life to expel this shame "by thinking of his own strength and success", ironically, by killing himself, he commits another act of abomination. Okwonkwo's life struggle to change his own fate as Unoka's son proves to be what Okwonkwo feared most than the gods -- a failure.

Another paradox about Okwonkwo's suicide lies in Obierika's final comment to the white District Commissioner's. Here he provides the hero's epitaph:

That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog. (191)

Cook interprets Okwonkwo's lonely violent action against the messenger as a tragic attempt to keep the old values of his people. However, his clansmen do not support Okwonkwo when he takes a stand "in the name of the very tradition" which does not permit them to cut the rope and touch the body of a suicide (80). Now, the very same men responsible for his death will have to bury Umuofia's champion like any other man destituted of honor, because the clan's duty is to "make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land" (TFA 190). However, if Okwonkwo's killing of the messenger was not a "deliberate sacrifice with precisely the aim of cleansing" the land desecrated by the colonizer, Cook asks, "which is the real desecration -- Okwonkwo's stoic death, or the meek acceptance of humiliation at the hands of the white man?" (80)

Although Achebe's quotation above states that individuality in a communal society leads to almost irrevocable destruction, it is necessary to observe that individuals like Okwonkwo sometimes allow society to rethink its own values and tradition. Despite any plausible explanation and reason for Okwonkwo's suicide, such as that he does it because he "recognizes his failure," or that he cheats the whites for an "inevitable capture and punishment," or even that it is an action of mockery on the "debased values of his clan" (Elder 62), his impulsive actions motivate Obierika's careful analysis of Igbo society and of its collapse.

As mentioned above, Obierika is so different from Okwonkwo that he is almost his foil, a secondary center of consciousness and indeed the "most reliable guide in TFA" after the narrator. As Obiechina puts it,

as a philosophical, moral man whose views and comments always deserve respect, he provides the voice of reason and sobriety. Deeply exposed to the traditional life of Umuofia, Obierika understands it in great detail, in its triumphant and tragic aspects, in its strengths and weaknesses. (32)

After Okwonkwo goes into exile, Obierika's insightful perception of tradition is aroused, and he offers the reader a moment of questioning and understanding:

When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil, it soiled the others. (118)

Moreover, after Okwonkwo's return to Umuofia, it is Obierika who again provides the explanation to the changes that have taken place after the coming of the white man. He says:

It is already too late....Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger....How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever.... (161-62)

Following Obierika's line of thought, and looking back onto the assumption of Okwonkwo's heroic feature, I shall consider other points of his characterization which suggest his need for self-assurance as a man, and his failure as a result of his flouting of social norms. On the very first descriptive pages of the novel we are told that Okwonkwo's appearance was that of a hero. He was "tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look" and he "was clearly cut out for great things" (7, 11). Since among the Igbo "age was respected...but achievement was revered" (12), Okwonkwo becomes successful as he comes from extreme poverty to becoming respected by the clan when he was still young, thus succeeding in setting "his mark on the history of his clan" (Cook 69). Okwonkwo's courage in throwing Amalinze the Cat in the wrestling match affirms his social position as he wins the clan's respect as well as the love of a woman, Ekwefi (Chapter 1). This success, however, seems to function as a disguise to hide his fear of failure and his weakness.

Certainly Okwonkwo is far from being a coward. However, as a result of confusing manliness with bravery he becomes fierce and even violent in all his

actions. Since, for Okwonkwo, gentleness and weakness are associated with womanhood, due to his father having been described by the society as *agbala*, a word that could mean "a man who has taken no title" but that also meant "a woman", he represses everything that can be connected with gentleness. Having Unoka's idleness in mind, he spurns his eldest son, Nwoye, for not cutting yams properly, and tries to stamp out the "signs of laziness" he thought he had seen in him. As for Okwonkwo "yams stood for manliness," while cooking them was for women, he says:

Do you think you are cutting up yams for cooking?...If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw. You think you are still a child. I began to own a farm at your age. (34)

Since Okwonkwo's relationship to Unoka was deprived of the traditional bonds passed from father to son, such as the inheritance of land or junior wives, which a father generally provided for his son, he felt the lack of a strong male point of reference for his identity. Ashamed of his father, he feels he must create a "social context" for his own identity -- one that could be the opposite of all that his father had lived for, one that would make him accepted in his society. According to Cobban, he creates this social context

by isolating and responding to specific symbols of masculinity within his culture as if they, in the abstract, could constitute all that he needs to construct his social self. (Cobban 92)

Thus courage is one of the social values he values highly because he associates it with masculine attributes. Moreover, "prestige and manliness become synonymous with the ability to do difficult, even distasteful jobs without flinching" (Cobban 93). When, through the Great Oracle, the clan demands Ikemefuna's death, Okwonkwo, based on the social context of courage he had adopted to shape his own male identity and conceal his fear of failure, finds no system of values to guide him out of the terrible situation. So he opts for killing the child that called him father in order to keep his values of masculinity.

Since Ikemefuna's death is a turning point in the novel, it becomes necessary to discuss it in more detail so that Achebe's controlled presentation of Okwonkwo's actions and his inflexibility to changes can be better understood. Ikemefuna had been integrated in Okwonkwo's family for three years as an atonement for the murder of Udo's wife. Although he belongs to the clan, Okwonkwo is asked to be the boy's guardian. This proves to be Okwonkwo's rise to power since it shows the clan's confidence in him. In Chapter 7, we see the positive aspects of his presence in Okwonkwo's household. We are told that Okwonkwo knew Ikemefuna was responsible for Nwoye growing into a "tough young man" (51). The author informs us that Okwonkwo and Ikemefuna develop a strong bond of friendship and that

there was no doubt that he liked the boy. Sometimes when he went to big village meetings...he allowed Ikemefuna to accompany him, like a son, carrying his stool and goatskin. And, indeed, Ikemefuna called him father. (30)

However, despite his fondness of the boy, and despite being warned by Ezeudu, a respected elder in Umuofia, not to "bear a hand in his death" for the boy called him father (55), Okwonkwo cuts the boy down when Ikemefuna runs towards him for protection. The scene in Chapter Seven is highly dramatic and needs to be cited at length so that the analysis of Okwonkwo's participation can be understood:

Thus the men of Umuofia pursued their way, armed with sheathed machetes, and Ikemefuna, carrying a pot of palm wine on his head, walked in their midst. Although he had felt uneasy at first he was not afraid now. Okwonkwo walked behind him. He could hardly imagine that Okwonkwo was not his real father. He had never been fond of his real father, and at the end of three years he had become very distant indeed....

As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okwonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okwonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. (58-59)

Again, the paradoxical characterization of Okwonkwo makes us ask why he takes part in this killing. His explanation to Obierika is that he only carried out the earth-mother goddess's command. If we compare Obierika and Okwonkwo once again, we can observe the opposition between mind and force. Achebe's creation of Obierika as the consciousness of the novel, is observed in his disapproving of Okwonkwo's participation in Ikemefuna's killing, and proves to us how Okwonkwo's individuality differs him from the whole community. Through Obierika, the author "justifies the clan's action as following tradition" (Obiechina 35), but condemns Okwonkwo for refusing to listen to warnings. After Okwonkwo says: "the Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger" (64), Obierika replies:

That is true...But if the Oracle said that my son should be killed, I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it. (64-65)

However, the authorial narrator also provides an explanation for Okwonkwo's action: "He was afraid of being thought weak" (59). This and the idea about his honoring tradition are discussed below.

Damian Opata's reading of Okwonkwo's explanation for his action suggests that Okwonkwo is indeed a victim of fate who deserves sympathy instead of vilification. Opata's view probably refers to the insights provided by the narrator which underlines Ikemefuna's "judicial-sacrificial destiny." The text says that when the "ill-fated lad" came to live with Okwonkwo he was a "sacrificial victim given by his people to atone for his father's murder" of an Umuofian woman (Obiechina 34). Therefore, no matter how monstrous the order may sound, Okwonkwo had to comply with it. For Opata, Ikemefuna's death had already been decreed by the gods at the moment the boy was brought to Umuofia, and Okwonkwo just executed it. For Opata, Okwonkwo's

killing of Ikemefuna was not premeditated...he was not in control of the situation. Rather, the situation was controlling him and we should not apply the principles of morality to a situation in which he was inexorably led by uncanny fate. (q.t.d. in Iyasere 304)

On the other hand, Solomon Iyasere criticizes this point-of-view by harshly arguing that Okwonkwo "was free to choose not to participate in Ikemefuna's death" (305). Since Okwonkwo was an impulsive and violent man who even believed that when "a man says no strongly enough, his chi says no too", he could have said "no" to participating in the killing as he had been admonished by Ezeudu. However, Iyasere argues, for fear of being thought weak, he exceeds in obeying the gods' demand as a way to compete with their power and assert his manliness (307). In any event, Ikemefuna's execution triggers a lot of other violent acts committed by Okwonkwo. It is the turning point of the novel because at the same time that Ikemefuna brings honor to Okwonkwo, his death represents the beginning of his decline.

Okwonkwo's fear of being a failure seems to predispose him to react violently to situations where a different approach, such as dialogue, would prove effective. Achebe informs us that among the Igbo the art of conversation is highly regarded. Okwonkwo, however, abandons himself to his impulsiveness because of his "limited metacognitive power." That is, he is a man of "force without thought, action without regard for consequence" (Iyasere 310). Due to his limitation in using language, he needs to act through force. C.L. Innes adds that

His contribution to a discussion are generally short and commonplace....For Okwonkwo talking is never a prelude to action, it leads nowhere. (q.t.d. in Iyasere 311)

The narrator tells us that Okwonkwo dismisses the tale of the Tortoise and the Birds as unimportant because it is told by women. However, the text is clear in pointing the contrast between his successful physical strength and his failure with rhetoric. Besides his impatience with "unsuccessful men", Okwonkwo had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry, he would use his fists" (8). Wahneema Lubiano says that

[as] he can't speak well enough to disrupt others' narratives or to consistently construct his own counternarrative..., he is forced to unambiguous and often deadly action. (109)

The events preceding Okwonkwo's suicide show how his ineptitude to favor language over impulsive action is responsible for his tragic end. His relationship with his son Nwoye, for example, reveals his unwillingness to discuss problems. The boy seeks his father for love and understanding, but as Okwonkwo regards tenderness as unmanly, he responds violently against Nwoye when he tries to find help in the new religion, thus losing his son to Christianity.

The impatience which leads him to resort to force instead of dialogue is present in his encounter with the colonizers. When the elders of Umuofia gather at the market place to discuss collectively about what actions to take against the invaders who are responsible for the fragmentation their society is undergoing, they provide thoughtful argumentation about war which Okwonkwo seems incapable of understanding. About the clansmen who had joined the white men they say:

They have broken the clan and gone their several ways....Our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland. If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of our clansman.(186)

But, at the moment Okwonkwo saw the five messengers sent by the District Commissioner he

sprang to his feet...confronted the head messenger, trembling with hate, unable to utter a word...

In that brief moment the world seemed to stand still, waiting...

The spell was broken by the head messenger. "Let me pass!...*The white man whose power you know too well have ordered this meeting to stop.*"

In a flash Okwonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. [It] descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body...

Okwonkwo stood looking at the dead man.(*my emphasis* 188)

So far we have met the picture of a man who seems to be "doomed to fall, in spite of his great achievements" (Obiechina 33). The structure of incidents provided by the author and analyzed above leads to Okwonkwo's tragic end. However, as Nichols suggests, Okwonkwo's inability to appreciate his father's life and the weaknesses of his community can be compared to "the white colonizer's inability to appreciate that which is valuable in Igbo culture" (55). The difference, of course, is that Okwonkwo is fated to die.

On the other hand, we are told that "perhaps down in his heart Okwonkwo was not a cruel man" (16). His fear of weakness prevents him from showing any affection and from casting off all the positive attributes, such as love and compassion, which could make the reader sympathize with him. The author does not romanticize his characterization. Achebe's Okwonkwo, as discussed above, is many times represented as a dehumanized character who tries to repress any kind of softer emotions. However, we are allowed to observe that he is not a heartless man. It is in the privacy of darkness that remorse and anguish take over him. It is in the darkness of his room that he feels remorse for Ikemefuna's death (Chapter 7), and in the darkness of the night that he feels a deep "anguish in saving his dying daughter Enzinma from Chielo" (Chapter 11).

In short, the flawed hero of TFA in fact represents the psychological complexities of a society confronted with the danger of inside and outside fragmentation. His great achievements in Part 1, connected to the beauty and power of Igbo pre-colonial period, are contrasted to his collapse in Part 3, which can be connected to the inevitable disintegration caused by colonization. The irony on the reduction of the greatness of Okwonkwo's life in the District Commissioner's book, as well as the story of his community, is ambiguous in the sense that it not only reveals the blindness of the English officer to African culture, but also the dismantling of a society which apparently seems to conform to enemy forces.

The last paradox is left for the reader to respond to. We can either admire or despise Okwonkwo. If we are to approve his strong determination to "preserve the legacy of Umuofia's heroic tradition" (Iyasere 315), we will conclude that "no other

individual in the novel so mourns and laments his people's inability to act...against [the] new order". There is no reaction to the colonial invasion of Umuofia until Okwonkwo comes back from his exile in Part 2. Opata says that "if there were any 'soul that wept for a great evil that was coming,' that soul was Okwonkwo" (Opata 84). If we condemn him for his individuality and inflexibility, which led him to commit acts of violence and become quite inhuman in his relationships, we will conclude that Achebe's attempt to show that problems inside Igbo community facilitated colonization is very effective. All in all, Okwonkwo's refusal to learn and adhere to "the traditional logics of order" (Opata 86) and disorder, makes him a kind of tragic hero who becomes a "victim of the defects of his virtues" (Iyasere 315).

3 - CONFRONTING TRADITION WITH CHANGE

That night the Mother of the spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for the great evil that was coming -- its own death. (171-72)

The interesting structure of TFA lies in the pattern of order and disorder. Although the first two parts of the novel portray internal problems which disrupt the harmony of community life, the encounter with the explorers and colonizers sets the motion of the events out of control. At this moment the base of Igbo laws, tradition and the power of language, which are recreated as strong and logic in Chapters One and Two, seem ineffective when confronted with the new order of colonialism. Despite recreating reality through physical and metaphysical relations which involve not only the Igbo community and their neighbors but also "separate communal entities" such as the colonizers (Opata 76), the reality portrayed in the novel is the

result of merging historical facts with the skillful sensibility of an author who lived at the cross-roads of African and Western cultures.

The previous analysis of Okwonkwo's characterization introduces some of the concepts of the values of tradition in Igbo society, which may or may not have the appreciation of western critics, but which are of utmost relevance for the comprehension of the results of disruption. Following Damian Opata's insightful article "The Structure of Order and Disorder in Things Fall Apart", some considerations will be drawn on the techniques used in the novel to convey disruption.

Although Chapter One starts with the picture of a peaceful and ordered society which portrays the Igbo cultural life, its customs, such as the Wrestling Match, its characters, such as Okwonkwo and his worth for the community, there are several accounts of internal disorder in TFA.. The first account of disorder in the novel appears in Chapter Two when a woman from Umuofia is murdered by a man from the neighboring clan of Mbaino. The disruption is stylistically marked by a "graphonemic representation of the ogene" (Opata 78), a kind of gong which disrupts the still night to announce the urgent message. The passage is as follows:

Okwonkwo had just blown out the palm-oil lamp and stretched himself on his bamboo bed when he heard the ogene of the town crier piercing the still night air. *Gome, gome, gome, gome*, boomed the hollow metal. Then the crier gave his message...Every man of Umuofia was asked to gather at the market place tomorrow morning. Okwonkwo wondered what was amiss, for he knew certainly that something was amiss. He had discerned a clear overtone of tragedy in the crier's voice.... (*my emphasis* 13)

The events at the market place where about ten thousand men (14) were gathered show how active the society is in deciding to bring order, "peace, confidence and security" (Opata 78) back to the community. After declaring the war between Mbaino and Umuofia a *just war*, quick decisions are made and some days later Okwonkwo returns from Mbaino with Ikemefuna and a young virgin who would replace Udo's murdered wife. Rumors of war are dismissed since in Umuofia

determining whether a war is just has such significance that it is vested in the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves who, when necessary, forbids the people from going into a fight of blame. If the war is to be just, people must follow the proper conventions and first attempt to settle the issue amicably, such as by exacting a reparation. If peaceful methods fail, the society makes the formal declaration of war. (Obiechina 34)

Following the traditional process of discussing and negotiating problems, things return to their normal "state of equilibrium" (Opata 79) described in Chapter One.

Other incidents which provoke disorder are discussed above as most of them are connected to Okwonkwo, who metaphorically represents his community. The same pattern of order following disorder can be observed in the event of Okwonkwo's breaking the sacred Week of Peace and after his accidental killing of Ezeudu's son. In the former, peace is achieved not only in Okwonkwo's household, after he appeases the offended earth goddess, but also with the whole clan blessed with rain after a miserable draught. In the latter, the text says that after Okwonkwo leaves for his exile in Mbanta and the remaining of his belongings are burnt, people return to their normal daily activities. Palmer says that although Okwonkwo's seven-year exile sounds a "harsh penalty" for an accidental shooting, it was "the only sanction the society possessed as a deterrent from murders within the clan" (67). Achebe thus insists that laws are important to secure order.

However, the incidents generated by the presence of the colonizer trigger a series of disorders which threaten the unity and values of the Igbo to a seemingly irreversible extent. To make these instances more relevant it becomes necessary to pause for a moment and discuss how the plot of the novel and the historical accounts gathered by Achebe to create the reality of this fictional story meet. To do this means to recall that Achebe wanted to show that before this integrated society lost its integrity "civil order existed in a framework of tradition, political understanding, and faith" (Wren 38). This loss of integrity due to confusion and division brought by a European sense of individuality is clearly observed in the characterization of Okwonkwo. TFA assembles two stories in one. The first is the unfamiliar story of centuries of culture lived by the Igbo people of southern Nigeria;

the second is the story of the "scramble for Africa" in the 19th century, which is this time told from the perspective of the African. Historical reality is mixed with a fictitious African writing style in significant parallels structures.

The first parallel relates to the Abame massacre described in Part Two which matches reports of an actual town called Ahiara. As early as 1901 Ahiara was "punished" for resisting European invasion. These facts closely relate to Obierika's account of the reasons for the Abame massacre: the villagers had killed a white man, supposedly a missionary, who was traveling by bicycle (127-129), and were then wiped out by the troops who looked for him. The account is probably taken from another fact which accounts for the actual arrest and killing of J. F. Stewart in November of 1905, which resulted in the historical Bende-Onitsha Expedition in which "two groups of black soldiers (each probably with a white officer)...slaughtered many people in [the] villages" (Wren 40).

Second, Achebe's claim over internal problems lies also in real accounts of Africans who adhered to the British settlers against their own people. As Wren points out, while some converts devout to missionaries became "mission agents", others were "court messengers". The *kotmas*, as some were called, were "true individualists without loyalty to any people or principle save self-interest". They became "colonial police" who, as the novel shows, bring their own brothers to trial, "guard the prison, beat the prisoners, demand bribes from them, and force men of honor to do degrading work." Other kind of *kotmas* were the interpreters, who through bribery favored the colonial officers over the natives. As for the Igbo the power of conversation and following rules was very important in solving problems, much deception comes through the treachery arranged through these interpreters (Wren 41). An example is given when the elders and Okwonkwo are invited by the District Commissioner to a "palaver" and are later arrested and humiliated by the *kotmas* (178-79).

The third and most relevant parallel relates to faith. Missionaries such as G. T. Basden, who worked in the Ogidi area and was Achebe's father's mentor, pictured in TFA as Mr. Brown, interpreted the native's faith as pagan, primitive, and

superstitious. These interpretations were perhaps attributed to traditional customs such as the "bad bush", or the Evil Forest; sacrifices, such as Ikemefuna's, or the role of the Oracle, real facts portrayed in the novel and which missionaries identified as a "source of slaves" and barbarism. In Basden's anthropological studies about the oracle of Akwa, Achebe's mother's homeland, there are accounts in which people looking for the priests' "blessings and charms" inside the caves "were in fact killed" if found guilty of any crime or abomination. Wren points that the Akwa oracle, which was called Agbala, matches the name given by Achebe to the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves in the novel (Wren 43). However, how can cultural practice such as these and others (like Okwonkwo's bringing home five heads after a local war is won), be regarded as barbarious when British colonizers wiped out whole villages in Africa in the name of a civilizing mission?

In responding through historical fiction to "proimperialist" (Hawkins 81) assumptions about African primitivism and its black magic, Achebe calls on Igbo cosmology in an "attempt to make sense of the bewildering complexity of existence" (Morning 35). Critics have been keen to affirm that the Igbos were in fact a religious people, and TFA proves this. Every major action had to have the approval of the gods before it was undertaken. As Asare Opoku comments in Chapter One, the African hierarchy of gods and deities was very pluralistic. In Igbo religious system, the *chi*, for example, interpreted by Palmer as "a kind of guardian angel," was responsible for the "individual's protection and...in a way...for his destiny," like the spirits who besides acting as mediators between men and gods could make a man prosper or lose all he had. The Igbo deities were Idemili, Udo, Ogwugwu and Ulu; the major gods -- Amadioha, Ani, Ojukwu, Ifejioku, and their supreme god Chukwu (65).

Although understanding Christians would be skeptical to this assumption, Palmer compares the Igbo religious system to other religious beliefs since it was designed to explain the mysteries of a seemingly irrational and frightening world and to provide sanctions for good behaviour. Adherence to its dictates therefore

meant a stable society in which the norms were respected (65-66). Nichols follows Palmer and claims that

indeed the Igbo *chi* has "clear connections to Western concepts of destiny [and] fate". Yet, by keeping some words of the metaphysical world untranslated their concept "retains a sense of its uniquely African meaning." (54)

To this, Cobham has added that Achebe uses codes of African tradition "compatible with Judeo-Christian myth" to justify or at least explain the portrayal of human sacrifice in Igbo society. The structure of Ikemefuna's sacrifice, for example, resembles the biblical story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac in Genesis 22, in the sense that "both fathers act in strict obedience to their gods, and both contemplate the deed they must perform with horror as well as fortitude" (95). One may wonder if Okwonkwo would have spared Ikemefuna's life if a lamb had been provided for him as it was for Abraham. Another Judeo-Christian parallel could be drawn with God's sacrifice of his son Jesus, so that humankind could be saved from being destroyed. However, the important feature of Achebe's parallels is that although his narrative shows that such horrifying actions were already being questioned by natives, such as Obierika, they are symbols of devotion of a traditional and religious people like the missionaries regarded themselves.

However, due to the plurality of Igbo faith and devotion to their gods, they display a modern religious tolerance which allows the missionaries to settle among them. At a first instance the new religious ideology preached by the missionaries sounds harmless; however, as it is the case with the "whole history of the colonial exploitation of Africa, they are merely the advance guard paving the way" for a new institution -- government (Palmer 68). Like the new administration, the new religion causes deep disruptions in Igbo tradition since it cannot live peaceably with the indigenous faith and ways of worshipping, as the Igbo would with the new religion. Their strategies to convert the natives and substitute traditional beliefs and customs for Christianity, however, prove to be aggressive and disrespectful in that they

encourage the new converts to rebel against their families and their tradition, since, once divided, they could not resist.

TFA shows that the new religion attracted first the outcasts, "the osu, the mothers of abandoned twins, and those like Nwoye who knew they would never measure up to the harsh demands" of his traditional male society (Palmer 71). Since the new religion preached a more humane message, the "poetry of the new religion" seduces discontents like Nwoye for whom

the hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul -- the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna....He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. (137)

Confused, he succumbs to the attractiveness of being educated in the new faith and language when he is confronted with the harsh treatment of his father (141). For the Igbo, it is astonishing how the new religion spread dissension among families. The text says that when Nwoye leaves his father, "Mr. Kiaga's joy was very great. Blessed is he who forsakes his father and mother for my sake," the white missionary exclaimed quoting the Bible (142). Commenting on Mr. Brown's policy on the administration of his religious mission, the authorial narrator says:

He saw things as white and black. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. (169)

The last event which triggers the tragic final events of the novel is related to a great crime committed by a zealous new convert -- Enoch's unmasking of an *egwugwu* (171). To unmask such spirit meant to kill it and its ancestral; therefore, this irreverent act sets the rage of the whole community of Umuofia as well as their neighboring clans, and calls them for a meeting to solve this terrible problem. The text says that after Mother Spirit wept for her murdered son:

[on] the next day all the masked *egwugwu* of Umuofia assembled in the market-place. They came from all the quarters of the clan and even from the neighboring villages....It was a terrible gathering. The eerie voices of countless spirits, the bells that clattered behind some of them, and the clash of machetes as they ran forward and backwards and saluted one another, sent tremors of fear into every heart. (172)

The total state of disorder triggers reactions from the clan such as the destruction of Enoch's house and the burning of a church. However, while in the old order this problem would have been solved with these actions, this time, however, "the interests of the colonial administration have been touched" (Opata 85). Thus Enoch's action also triggers reactions from the colonizers. The events that occurred due to the white man's reactions are: the humiliation of the leaders of Umuofia, the charging of fines, Okwonkwo's killing of the messenger and his suicide, and "the eventual accommodation of the new order" (Opata 84). This new order proves to be a "dysfunctional force" (Opata 86) which the Igbo cannot fight against since the two concepts of justice are totally different. Although they try to resist, the power of guns and violence, as well as this society's susceptibility to change, are responsible for Igbo disintegration. In the old order a state of equilibrium was achieved after disorder due to their organized social structures of law and tradition. In the confrontation with colonialism, however, pacification becomes effective through disorder.

As mentioned above, Okwonkwo's death functions as a metaphor for the death of the traditional way of life of the people in Umuofia. After opposition to colonialism is no longer a threat, the Commissioner thinks of the book he intends to write:

In the many years in which he *had toiled to bring civilization* to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things ...Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph...There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. (*my emphasis* 191)

The title of the book would be The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. In this case, however, pacification was a synonym neither for peace nor for order, but for the imposition of the supreme authority of the British government. The still-to be-written narrative of the Commissioner's book has already been discussed in Chapter One in the context of post-colonial writers who have produced new counter-discourses which challenge colonial assumptions. As Lubiano says, although the

black African body marks for the Commissioner and the missionaries the worth of their Christian, technological, and administrative triumph...the narrative [of Things Fall Apart] disrupts those triumphs even as it accurately recounts another historical "reality". (110)

CHAPTER FOUR

NO LONGER AT EASE

The Problematic of the Man of Two Worlds

INTRODUCTION

No Longer at Ease attempts to portray the burden of a new Nigerian generation that after being exposed to English education based on western values, seems to lose its identity when exposed to the clash between old and new. Frequently shifting from present to past, the plot takes place in the 1950s, some years before Nigeria achieves independence from England. The author, however, does not concentrate as much on political issues as he does on social ones. Shifting from rural to urban environments, the novel raises the problems of the results of colonialism, along with the issues of immorality, corruption, and bribery. In this novel, Achebe captures the contradictory situation in which the young educated African finds himself in the attempt to fuse the acquired western sense of individuality to communal tradition and expectations, as well as his nationalistic ideals to a new order of political values.

This chapter will deal with the analysis of the protagonist's struggle to fuse the two worlds and the experiences he has from both. It will also deal with the problem of constituting identity within the self/other division imposed by imperialism. In NLE Achebe portrays the situation of post-colonial worlds, in which movements towards independence are complicated by contact with central cultures. Although these movements attempt to reverse the power positions, Achebe's fictional story shows that once the assimilation of a new ideology has reached the depth of changing one's culture, it becomes almost impossible to recover the original culture. This is because the ties which kept the sense of belonging and identity cease to exist when when it is confronted with European ideology of culture.

Achebe has been praised and criticized for his fictional realism. The questions he raises in NLE, which gave him a literary prize when he transported them to A Man of the People, “causes the reader to identify with the actions and reactions of the characters and make the same discoveries about the nature of things as the characters themselves” (Cook 93). Yet, this analysis will not attempt to compare both novels, since TFA as a national epic is concerned with the matter of how the impact of change influenced tradition, while NLE is the story of the results of these changes in a relatively modernized Africa. However, references to the former novel will often be necessary to be made, since NLE conveys a picture of the pervasive results of the violent interference of an imposed culture in Nigeria.

In NLE we encounter Okwonkwo’s son, Nwoye, whose Christian name has been given as Isaac, and we come to know the results of his leaving his father’s home to adopt Christianity and the new religious and cultural values which it preached. The representation of the new generation of educated Africans, however, focuses on Okwonkwo’s grandson, Obi, who after studying for about four years in London returns to Nigeria to fulfill the expectations of his family and the Igbo clan of Umuofia. The clan has paid Obi's expenses to get a degree in the white man’s language so that he could represent them among the members of the Progressive Union in Lagos. However, unlike his grandfather, Obi lacks the features that make Okwonkwo such a determined and heroic figure.

Palmer has said that while Okwonkwo fights to preserve his principles about tradition, Obi “betrays [his] with astonishing ease” (79). His lack of initiative, and of a solid base of distinction between African and European values prevent him from appreciating the good and the bad qualities of both worlds, and from resisting temptation and accepting bribery. Consequently, he is abducted, judged, and condemned. The interesting and arguable features of the novel are that they seem to develop around ambiguities which are quite different from the ones discussed in TFA. Okwonkwo’s grandson is caught between two desires: one is his idealistic feeling for everything that Nigeria and its tradition stand for; the other is the

selfishness which keeps him from transforming his initial pride and appreciation of his culture into any plausible good action for his people and for himself.

The first intent in creating a trilogy that could span three different eras of Nigerian history -- eras such as the pre-colonial time, the “mission-oriented” and the different era of an “emancipated and yet troubled” Nigeria (Sparrow 173) -- is, despite the middle missing volume and the weaknesses in style of the latter book itself, consolidated in the story of NLE. Whereas TFA prepares the reader with the presentation of a traditional society, NLE presents the contrasts inherent to a latter generation who has been educated by European views of civilization and modernism. Thus TFA presents accounts of traditional festivals, ceremonies, and rituals, while NLE deals with a fallen and displaced society. As Palmer defines it, NLE is a novel characterized by a “scintillating comedy, a sophisticated wit and subtlety of irony” (80). Palmer’s observation on the irony of the book applies especially to “Obi’s expense”, that is, Obi’s initial theory of the causes of bribery and corruption which turns against him at the end of the novel when he becomes like the uneducated old men he had condemned as responsible for corruption earlier in the novel.

Through *Obi* it is also possible to observe how the discourse of colonialism made the Africans despise and see as inferior their own traditional customs as well as their fellow men, exalting those who had been educated in the colonizer’s language and who had assimilated features of the new culture. The contradictory feelings emerging from *NLE* will find meaning in what Achebe said in an interview:

When two worlds meet, you would expect...we could pick out the best in the other and retain the best in our own....But this doesn’t happen often. What happens is that some of the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added on to them. (q.t.d. in Cook 88)

1. WHEN TWO WORLDS MEET: THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

Despite being an urban novel whose main plot develops in a semi-modernized Lagos, whose descriptions range from richness to poverty, from happiness to coldness, NLE seems to imply that the return to Umuofia is a return to the roots and the past, which is viewed as an origin eventually changed by the forces of imperialism. As in TFA, Umuofia stands for the source of tradition and communal life. It is there that Obi is reminded of the reasons why he went to England, where he looks for support but finds internal conflict when he sees that his individualistic decisions of going against tradition and marrying an *osu* are not accepted. In fact, it is Umuofia which is set in contrast to Lagos and England, as a representative of the old versus the new. It is also through Umuofia that the reader can make a link between the different eras that connect the two novels.

Even though the story of TFA is very complete in its objective of reversing colonial assumptions about imperialism in Africa, it does respect historical facts in describing how the Igbos are overtaken first by religion, then by the attractiveness of commerce and finally by military force. NLE deals with the failure of the Igbos in their attempt to retain tradition in face of a neo-colonial situation. While tradition is described as the bond that holds people together by giving them a sense of identity, in this novel the power of the imported religion, government, and its rhetoric affects negatively the original African culture.

The pressure Obi suffers in the novel, a pressure that he seems too weak to resist, comes from the people that gave money for his education abroad. However, what was originally a privilege becomes a burden. Obi was taken out of his homeland to be educated and introduced into a “highly competitive *élite*” which expects him to keep up with the social class he now belongs to. These expectations come not only from his boss and neighbors, but from his fellowmen who seem to externalize in Obi their own dreams of success. We see this very clearly at the

occasion of Obi's reception in Lagos. The Secretary of the Umuofia Progressive Union speaks about "the great honor Obi had brought to the ancient town of Umuofia...in their march towards political irredentism, social equality and economic emancipation" (28). In a sense Obi has been educated as an investment of the whole clan:

Our people have a saying: "Ours is ours, but mine is mine." Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that of which it can say: "This is mine." We are very happy today we have such an invaluable possession in the person of our illustrious son and guest of honour." (29)

In fact, the members of the Umuofian Union do not simply expect him to pay them back with the money he makes in his job in the senior civil service. They also expect him

to represent the group and raise its prestige by living like a European, driving a car and dressing well at the office, while at the same time providing for his brother's fees, repaying his loan and, of course, helping his brethren to get jobs. (Cook 84)

However, what they did not expect was that Obi's educational process would affect the structure of his personality and make "him see himself as an individual" (Cook 84), who wouldn't fight for their cause.

The contradiction between the community's expectations and Obi's response to them lies in the thin line between the old and the new traditions which seems to separate both worlds. As Chapter One clearly points out, the colonial ideology created the image of the African as one destituted of positive qualifications. Obi is an example of the power of this ideology. So is Obi's boss, Mr. Green. Although being a rather flat character in the novel, Mr. Green marks the presence of a neo-colonialism and proves how the colonizer's views of Africa have not changed on the verge of independence. He says to Obi:

'You will do well to remember...that at this time every year you will be called upon to cough up forty pounds for your insurance...It is, of

course, none of my business really. But in a country where even the educated have not reached the level of thinking about tomorrow, one has a clear duty.' He made the word 'educated' taste like vomit. (87)

On the matter of an independent government, Mr. Green's opinion echoes Achebe's reading of Joyce Cary's assumptions in Chapter One, that Nigerians were unable to control their country on their own. Mr. Green says that "there is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of the country" (139). However, despite Obi's dislike of the Englishman, Obi thought Mr. Green was an intriguing and interesting character. He invokes Conrad's Heart of Darkness to interpret him.

It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden-boy and steward-boy. He must have come originally with an ideal -- to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal head-hunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice?...In 1900 Mr. Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear. (96-97)

Ironically, Obi concludes his criticism of his boss by reversing the position with the Commissioner of TFA. Obi says he should "write a novel on the tragedy of the Greens of this century" (97).

However, the text proves that the tragedy is in fact of the African, for Mr. Green's criticism is one shared by westernized Africans as well, Africans such as Sam Okoli, Isaac Okwonkwo and Obi. When Obi asks Okoli, the Minister of State, if he has only one Assistant Secretary, the 'Honorable' answers:

'Yes, at present. I hope to get another one in April. I used to have a Nigerian as my A. S., but he was an idiot. His head was swollen like a soldier ant because he went to Ibadan University. Now I have a white man who went to Oxford and he says "sir" to me. Our people have a long way to go. (62)

Although Mr. Green feels a certain dismay at the “trend towards Africanization”, while Okoli is keen in wanting Nigerian decolonization, both share similar feelings towards Africans who, whether educated or not, as a whole are “useless and irresponsible” (Cook 81). However, as a political leader, who despite respecting the changes brought by the whites wants them to leave (61), Sam Okoli is a very strong representative of the controversies in third-world nations. His political stand is one of opposition to the oppression of colonialism; however, his social position complies with that of the capitalist world. According to Kwane Appiah, Okoli would be a commodified character, that is, a colonial intellectual produced by the West who cannot see his own situation. Appiah says:

...in Africa’s cultures, there are those who will not see themselves as Other. Despite the overwhelming reality of economic decline; despite unimaginable poverty; despite wars, malnutrition, disease, and political instability.... (356)

The problem of the westernized African's accommodation to western standards can be observed in Obi's description of his luxurious and expensive house built at the government expense (61), while in other passages we read about the poverty of the slums surrounding Lagos. The reality of the “two cities in one” which metaphorically reminds Obi of “twin kernels separated by a thin wall in a palm-nut shell. Sometimes one kernel...shiny-black and alive, the other powdery-white and dead” (16). Returning from Europe, Obi relates the social contradiction he faces to poems he had written about Nigeria while in England. When looking at a rotting dog on a street in Lagos he remembers the poem he had once written. His poem described he remembered, a country abounding in sweet tree shades, “flimsy butterflies” and tender fading suns. However, to contrast the country he had idealized with the one he faces now he appropriates the line “I have measured out my life with coffee spoons” from T. S. Eliot's poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (McMichael 1600) and says: “I have tasted putrid flesh in the spoon” (15). Here he compares Eliot's feeling of decay to the social situation he sees in his country. Although longing for home was “the great first thing England did for him”

(11), at his return he is shocked with the country he encounters, for behind the social imbalance, corruption and bribery have spread their roots.

The matter of education in the English language, introduced by the missionaries, is an interesting point of analysis for the comprehension of the importance of getting a degree in the white man's western educational system. It is said, and the text gives information about it, that during the years of the 1950s to the 1970s, a young Nigerian student coming from Europe would be given along with a position in a government office, a modern car as a form of appreciation for his high achievement. In NLE the position given to Obi is connected with the granting of educational scholarships, since instead of getting a degree in law, as initially expected, he had majored in English (6). His nationalistic ideals on his return to Nigeria are revealed in his opinion about the value of education. He says education must be used for "service, not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries" (29). However, throughout the events in the novel he learns that, despite being a "philosopher's stone", a university degree "raised a man from the masses to the élite whose small talk at the cocktail parties was: 'How's the car behaving?'"(84). This is the legacy of the introduction of the values of modernity which make money and social status a synonym for success. In analyzing the girl's 'offering herself' in order to get a scholarship, Obi concludes that the importance of a degree was that it

transmuted a third-class clerk on one hundred and fifty year into a senior Civil Servant on five hundred and seventy, with car and luxuriously furnished quarters at nominal rent. And the disparity in salary and amenities did not tell even half the story. To occupy a 'European post' was second only to actually being a European. (84)

The apparent failure of the Igbo's attempt to keep tradition amidst the changes introduced by European education and commerce seems to be the result of a typically western desire which in the colonial frontier produced the anxiety of leaving the margin and occupying a central social position. When applied to a society such as the Igbo's, this anxiety makes people reject the things that belong to the margin and therefore regard it as inferior, or as in Isaac Okwonkwo's case,

heathen. However, besides having adopted not only the new faith but also the western ideology about culture, like his son Obi, Isaac is caught between the values of the two worlds. During Obi's first visit to Umuofia, it is possible to observe the extent of the disruption that the colonial changes caused in Isaac's life. At the meeting in his house, one of the elders asks Isaac to bring kola nut to be broken for Obi's return. Isaac refuses vehemently by saying he wouldn't permit heathen sacrifice into his house, since in the ritual of breaking kola nut, it is originally thanked and offered to a god. On the significance of this ritual, Onuora Nzekwu offers an important description about kola nut in his novel Wand of Noble Wood (1961). He says:

Among us kola-nut is a highly valued and indispensable product. It commands our respect in a way no other product has done. Though it is one of the commonest vegetable products in Nigeria, it represents, in our society, a vital social and religious element. Kola-nut is a symbol of friendship, the proper offering at meetings and religious occasions. Its presentation to a guest surpasses any other sign of hospitality which any host among us can show.... (q.t.d. in Dathorne 89)

For the Igbo kola nut is a symbol of friendship and respect for the one to whom it is broken. However, this is one of the traditional customs which western religious ideology attempted to detach from the native's culture by regarding it a heathen costume. Another example of such colonial strategy to disrupt the native's sense of identity is connected with the replacing of names. In TFA we are informed that the new convert would be given a new name. This practice is observed today in Nigeria as most Igbos have two names, the first is generally a Christian one given through religious baptism while the second is a native name which generally has a meaning in their language. Obi's name, for instance, is Michael Obiajulu Okwonkwo, and he is called by the abbreviation of his native name which means 'the mind is at last at rest' (6). This re-naming strategy is responsible for the post-colonial search for a lost identity.

The tolerance with which the Igbos accepted western culture, also responsible for their present situation, can be observed in this scene at Isaac's house. Its interesting feature lies in the religious tolerance and reasoning of the elders who reverse the uncomfortable situation by applying Christian beliefs to the traditional breaking of the kola nut. After some protests to Isaac's position, one of the elders says: "This is not a day for quarrels...I shall bring kola nut...And we shall break it in the Christian way," and he ends his speech with a prayer (47), thus settling the matter by mixing both traditions -- that of breaking kola-nut, and praying before meals.

Here we observe that Isaac's extreme position is not shared by all the rest of the community in the same way. Despite knowing that old values no longer have the same importance, since "today greatness has changed its tune...[it] is now in the things of the white man" (49), the elders seem to have a very peculiar position. Odogwu says: "We have our faults, but we are not empty men who become white when they see white, and black when they see black" (48). This is probably an irony towards Isaac who has adopted the new culture at the point of rejecting his. The text says that Isaac "believed utterly and completely in the things of the white man", especially in the "mystery of the written word" (115). In contrasting the things of his own country to the ones brought by colonialism he says:

'Our women made black patterns on their bodies with the juice of the *uli* tree. It was beautiful, but it soon faded. If it lasted two market weeks it lasted a long time. But sometimes our elders spoke about *uli* that never faded, although no one had ever seen it. We see it today in the writing of the white man.' (115)

However, despite believing in the Bible's idea that "the people which sat in darkness" (7) were the "people of nothing" who should join the "people of the Church" (52) to move from the periphery to the center, Isaac Okwonkwo could not agree with Obi in his decision to marry Clara who was an *osu*. For the Igbo the *osu* were regarded as a "religious caste of slaves" dedicated to the service of a god. Then, as Margareth Green says,

intermarriage and sexual intercourse with an *osu* is not only *nso* [taboo] for a free-born, but the idea of it fills him with horror. And this is true, though unofficially, of Christians as well as of pagans.... [A] man in Owerri... admitted that *osu* status was incompatible with Christian principles and was not recognized by the Church. But he was emphatic that he would not contemplate a daughter of his marrying an *osu*. (q.t.d. in Sparrow 171-172)

This notion makes us understand the pressure brought onto Obi not only by his father but also by his best friend Joseph. When the latter says that “Obi’s mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country” (64-65), since Obi knew books but not tradition, Obi feels hurt and defends his position by saying that

it was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning his descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of Time. (65)

When arguing with his father about the issue, however, he leaves this rhetoric aside and calls on Christian values by recalling the change the new faith had made in their ways of thinking. He says:

‘Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man *osu*, a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast....But have we not seen the light of the Gospel?’ (120)

Even though Isaac Okwonkwo had also felt like the first outcasts who joined the missionaries’ church in Umuofia, and thus knowing their struggle to destroy the dehumanizing tradition about the *osu*, he keeps his position of respect to tradition and discourages Obi’s intentions about Clara. He concludes their conversation by saying:

‘*Osu* is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you

do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory....Whose daughters will your sons marry?...We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters.'(121)

However, the blindness of a cultural commodification prevents Mr. Okwonkwo from seeing the contradiction of the attempt of assembling these two cultures into one as well as the exploitation he had suffered. Obi feels sorry for his father who "after nearly thirty years' service in the church...should retire on salary of two pounds a month, a good slice of which went back to the same church by way of class fees and other contributions." (50).

2. NEOCOLONIALISM: CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

Achebe's characterization of Obi shows very clearly the changes the individual exposed to the violent cultural change goes through. We are told at the very beginning of the novel that Obi had principles and a great pride for all his country stood for. This pride is firstly exposed through the importance he gives to his own language as when he remembers the pleasure he felt when he had an opportunity of speaking Igbo with another student while in London. He thought that it was humiliating to have to speak to one's countryman in the colonizer's language in front of the proud owners of that language. However, when he goes to Umuofia and listens to his countrymen talking in a rich language of their own, he proudly exalts it. Obi says:

Let them come to Umuofia now and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live. (45)

However, how different his discourse becomes when other Umuofians in Lagos try to persuade him not to marry an *osu*. In this particular situation, he claims western values of individuality and rejects their words as an improper interference in his life (75). This is something he would attempt unsuccessfully to avoid. However, even though he seems determined to go against the Union, he ends up by walking out on Clara, for whom he had broken with his community. His indecision is clear when he sees Clara being taken away by the doctor who is going to perform her abortion. He feels like stopping them. However, he does not do it, and neither does he marry Clara, whose personality is more graceful, tactful and stronger than Obi's.

The idealistic young man we see at the beginning of the novel gives way to an intemperate, high minded Obi, who sometimes assumes the position of the old colonizer who, to give reasons for his rebellious actions, thinks he is like a pioneer who has to show his uncivilized people the right way. In doing this he is fighting against Joseph's saying about the "unfortunate child who grows his first tooth and grows a decayed one" (68), as an allusion to the Umuofian people who had put their hopes on Obi and were now let down. The uncertainty of his actions becomes very clear. As Abiola Irele says:

Obi's dilemma is contained in the conflict between his developed intellectual insight and his lack of moral strength to sustain it....His weakness of character is reflected in his inept handling of his human relationships and of his material problems; he is an individual with no sense of order....Obi is never really prepared to engage in any sort of sustained effort, with the result that he flounders through his life. (q.t.d. in Cook 86)

Obi's naivety in interpreting corruption prepares the reader for his abandoning Clara as well as his moral principles at the end of the novel. His blaming the old men in power as responsible for the situation of bribery in the country is set in contrast to his view that the young educated men can be more virtuous, a theory he himself proves to be wrong. As his conceptions of education change throughout the novel, so do his non-factual assumptions about bribery. However, Obi does not succumb to bribery because of greed, as most people seem to. He is aware of its meaning, that is, "the use of improper influence" (110), and of its consequences for the country. Obi himself raises the problematic of bribery after Mr. Mark, an Igbo fellowman, asks Obi to help his sister get a scholarship through unconventional ways. After refusing it he feels "like a tiger" even though everybody said "it was impossible to win" (80).

His first attempts to stand by his principles against Mr. Mark's suggestion of bribery, however, have the disapproval of his own friend Joseph, who, perhaps unconsciously, expected him to help his countrymen, interpreting this as human solidarity. The ironic controversial point is that when he accepts bribery and is

arrested, his people judge him not for the act of bribery itself but for the ordinary quantity of twenty pounds he was being condemned for. Here they base their judgment on the saying that “if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one”. In reading the novel in the models of right or wrong, the reader participates at this point like a lawyer trying to find proofs of Obi’s guilt or innocence.

Before any more comments are drawn towards the conclusion of Obi’s action, we will return to the issue of the neo-colonial situation which NLE raises in the form of a society’s downfall. The phony independence Jean-Paul Sartre alludes to in Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth explains the political problem of decolonized countries that, despite independence, continue under the political, cultural and financial influence of their formerly colonizer country. The neo-colonial situation created by Achebe in the 1960s, and which somehow acts as a prophecy to the present situation of the Nigerian country of the 1990s, is one in which the traditional cement of the natives’ culture has been replaced by another which could not furnish the empty space with a sedimented feeling of identity. Obi’s confusion in trying to fuse the best he knows from both worlds proves impossible of being accomplished. He is caught in a tragic whirlpool of distressing events from which his western anxiety to assert his rights is stronger than his feelings of responsibility with his family, community, and the woman he loved. As Cook observes:

[r]eal tragedy is never resolved. It goes on hopelessly for ever. We sympathise with Obi because we see the causes of his confusion in the divergent modes of lives which he must attempt to co-ordinate, but we still observe his complete failure to make any effective contribution towards establishing a new harmony. (92)

Obi’s rejection of corruption throughout the novel changes as he begins to behave as an outsider among his own people, and not surprisingly, due to his weak-willed reactions and anxiety to impress people, succumbs to cheap bribery since he finds no way to absorb the principles of both worlds into one. Achebe’s novel offers

no solution to the problem of neo-colonialism since at the same time that all are guilty of Obi's destruction, they are found innocent due to the disordered process of colonization. As in TFA, NLE goes further than the study of an isolated character. It hints at the problem of the man of two worlds, or the displaced man who finds himself in the dividing line between European culture and the divisions this culture has created inside the social cultures of Africa. Okwonkwo's horrifying thoughts regarding the future of his clan and, by implication, of his nation, have finally become real:

Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okwonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospects, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children praying to the white man's god. (142)

CONCLUSION

When post-colonial writers began to produce fiction as a way to re-create their own history, and consequently recover a lost identity, they discovered that resistance to imperialist hegemony was possible. Following the process of decolonization, post-colonial literature has transformed itself from a “nauseating mimicry” (Fanon 1967:9), into a mature narrative seeking liberty from denigrating assumptions found in the colonial context of domination. In this process, “the peoples of the oppressed regions, forced-fed for so long on foreign values,” no longer able to “stomach” (Nixon 559) the peripheral position imposed on them by colonization, began to question cultural values through “transgressive appropriations” (ibid 558). This has generated works such as Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease, whose themes retrieve suppressed traditions and invent, through the practice of hybridity, new forms of reading and questioning the colonial situation and its political and cultural legacy.

The post-colonial questioning of the images and presences of a foreign authority, discussed in this dissertation through Achebe’s novels, displays the “deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (Bhabha 1985:154) of the colonial discourse. As the analysis of the plot of TFA attempted to show, the colonial authority based on what was made believe to be universal, empirical and uncanny, besides introducing cultural differentiations, deployed the natives to destroy their own culture and religion. The power of colonial strategies of domination through education is ironically criticized in NLE, which portrays the chaotic cultural and political situation of most African countries after the shadow of colonialism is pushed aside by movements towards decolonization. Although both novels end in a quite pessimistic tone of defeat which may suggest an impossibility in reversing power relations, the feeling of decay of Achebe’s works motivate his audience to rethink the biases, ideologies, and theoretical paradigms that can make cross-cultural encounters so difficult.

As I argue in Chapter One, this process of dismantling colonial discourse by questioning cultural denigration, that is, “the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model” (Ashcroft 9) results at least in part from hybridity. As Bhabha puts it, in a first moment hybridity was the “sign of the productivity of colonial power” (“Signs” 154), whose aim was regarded as achieved when the colonized seemed to have assimilated the ideologies, language, religion and administration of the Empire. However, the ambivalence of this process proved to be able to reverse this machine of colonial productivity, since by appropriating and transforming the assimilated values the colonized became an uncontainable hybrid that “breaks down the symmetry and duality” of the Self/Other dichotomy (Bhabha 158). This happens when marginality becomes, as Ashcroft says, “an unprecedented source of creative energy” (EWB 12).

This creative energy characterizes Achebe’s works. By telling the story of a specific people he has reached out to portray the story of Africa, thus demystifying the process of domination which created the image of a people presumably associated with primitiveness and darkness. In attempting to construct a future, Achebe searched into the history of his own Igbo community to find where things began to go wrong, and how the history of conquest and annihilation had shaped the chaotic African present. Achebe’s attempt is shared by all postcolonial writers in search of their real identity. This search has produced Ngugi’s and Chinweizu’s attempts at cultural purity away from colonial influences. Hybridity, however, despite its positive results for decolonization, has posited barriers to this process. In the case of Ngugi, the distinctive act of post-colonial texts has been towards the construction of consolidated differences which make different cultures so peculiar and important in cross-cultural relations.

The counter-discourse Achebe attempted to produce is an example of this search for identity. His role as a teacher and interpreter “caught in the conflict between destruction and creativity” and between two discourses is described by him as a “multiple-headed” danger which all post-colonial writers have to face (Ashcroft

80). The transitional movement from periphery to margin has resulted in a writing style which is a form of resistance to oppression. By keeping the African feature instead of succumbing to western demands for a universal literature, African writers have created a literature which is rich in its portrayal of “the unique characteristics and function of art in Africa” (Ashcroft 126). Moreover, Achebe’s works are the result of an African writing style which

attempted to ‘define the proper constituency of African literature’, recover the tradition into which it should insert itself, and identify some of the norms which could be transferred from traditional African orature to contemporary literature. (ibid 128)

This attempt has proved that African decolonization is not an independent political process. Its aesthetic manifestations through an ever changing modern literature has been crucial to the shaping of new post-colonial nations.

By defining Achebe’s novels as literature of resistance, I discuss in Chapter Two Achebe’s claims against colonialist discourse. In doing this, I conclude that both novels analyzed in this dissertation aimed at responding to the conventional European ideology about African art and its people. By reading Achebe’s texts, one has a panoramic image of how the Other of the Empire was created, but also of how this same other has subverted this subject position by recovering a suppressed voice through the appropriation of language. The assumptions that Africans are “the negative of the positive concept of the civilized, the Black Other to the white norm, the demonic opposite to the angels of reason and culture” (Ashcroft 159) can no longer hold its hegemonic central position. In deconstructing these determined structures of power, the post-colonized will realize that the sense of identity will be achieved not by simply reversing the binary positions of power but, as Edward Said has said, by realizing that

[t]hey are constituted by their difference from the metropolitan and it is in this relationship that identity both as a distancing from the centre and as a means of self-assertion comes into being. (Ashcroft 167)

To create this sense of identity in his novels Achebe began by restoring the traditional pre-colonial past of the Nigerian Igbos before contrasting it to his post-colonial portrayal of the legacy of the disrupting influence of imperialism. To write half of his first book based on a pre-colonial moment was a daring attitude, since although primarily having his own people in mind when he wrote Things Fall Apart, the European audience would inevitably have access to it. However, the success of the book throughout the world has proved that not only post-colonized and “third-world” people can relate to the situation of the colonial frontier, but all those who somehow have experienced power struggles. As Achebe said in an interview, through the responses he has got from his readers, he can observe that despite portraying fictitious situations and characters such as Okwonkwo and Obi, people related to his novels because they seem to help them “discover a new way of looking at themselves and at the world, of perceiving and thinking about identity.”

The conclusion of the intended trilogy with the quest of the man of two worlds in No Longer at Ease reveals Achebe’s realist view of his own situation. The image of decay he creates posits a criticism to the results of a hybridized society that is left in disorder when the explorer leaves the central position of power. Although based on a much thinner ground than TFA, the central theme of corruption in a country on the edge of independence is very applicable to the present situation in most “third-world” countries. Though they do not present any solution to the problems he himself raises, Achebe’s latter texts are clear in pointing to the matter of leadership as responsible for the way out of Africa’s present situation. Through the characterization of his protagonists as priests he alludes to the problem of leadership in African countries. Again religion and politics meet on the colonial frontier.

Although Achebe’s works contribute to the process of decolonization, they are witnesses to the fact that this process is still being constructed. Historically, independence was granted to Nigeria in October 1960 by what was then regarded as the “benevolence” of the English. Independence, however, is not granted, but

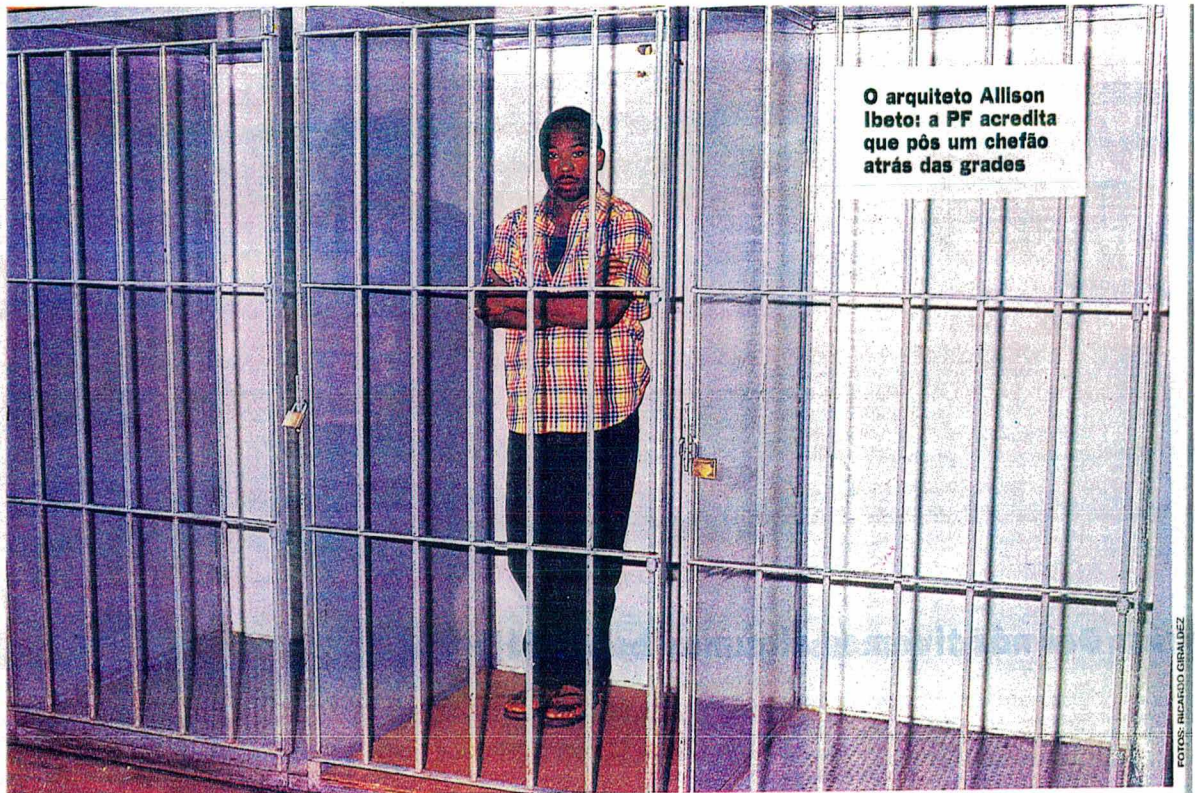
conquered through a process of conscious choice of individual values and through the construction of human worth. As Satya Mohanty explains,

The fullest account of decolonization should include a vision of the possibilities that human agents have for living their lives according to principles and values that they choose through rational deliberation and can thus call their “own.” This capacity for rational agency, which all humans share, provides the grounds for what has been called the “dignity” or “intrinsic worth” of every human individual. Perhaps the most powerful philosophical ally of modern anticolonial struggles of all kinds is this universalist view that individual human worth is absolute: it cannot be traded away, and it does not exist in degrees. And “human worth” in this sense has nothing whatsoever to do with “merit,” since these claims about an individual’s intrinsic value (and the rights that accrue to him or her from it) do not depend on the individual’s achievements or even on the extent to which he or she has exercised and developed the capacity for rational agency. These claims are also the strongest basis for the multiculturalist belief that other cultures need to be approached with the presumption of equal worth. Beyond this starting hypothesis lies the difficult but necessary job of specifying commonalities and articulating disagreements and of learning from one another. (Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition 116)

Achebe’s work is certainly an example of this construction of “human worth.”

The appendixes below are illustrative examples of how contemporary texts still keep biased conceptions about Africa and its people.

APPENDIX I



O arquiteto Allison Ibeta: a PF acredita que pôs um chefão atrás das grades

NARCOTRÁFICO

Operação Nigéria

ISTOÉ revela tudo sobre a máfia nigeriana, a maior quadrilha estrangeira que opera hoje no Brasil

JAYME BRENER E PAULO CÉSAR TEIXEIRA

“**N**ão sei por que vocês me prenderam! Sou arquiteto, casado com uma brasileira, tenho um filho nascido aqui e vivo do meu trabalho.” Allison Ibeta Ugoagwu, 35 anos, corpulento e falando um português pausado – mas firme – com o sotaque forte que os nigerianos nunca perdem, repetia as duas frases para cada agente que passava por sua cela, na sede da Polícia Federal em São Paulo. Afinal, quando os policiais invadiram seu confortável apartamento no bairro paulistano da Mooca, na terça-feira 4, não encontraram um grama de cocaína, armas ou sinal de nenhuma outra droga. A falta do flagrante, porém, apenas reforçou a suspeita da PF: Allison Ibeta, arquiteto formado pela Universidade de São Paulo (USP), não é um traficante de drogas qual-

quer, como a maioria dos cerca de 100 nigerianos que estão presos no Brasil. Ibeta já não põe a mão na massa, ou melhor, no pó branco. Ele é acusado de ser um dos chefões da máfia nigeriana, um conjunto de clãs que agrega mais de 1,5 mil pessoas no Brasil, formando a mais numerosa quadrilha estrangeira no País. “Foi o golpe mais duro que já demos contra eles”, garante o titular da Delegacia de Repressão a Entorpecentes da PF, Roberto Precioso. A polícia avalia que os criminosos nigerianos usam o território brasileiro como plataforma de exportação de pelo menos dez toneladas anuais de cocaína, rumo aos Estados Unidos e à Europa. Se a metade disso chegasse, digamos, às ruas de Londres, renderia aos traficantes

US\$ 250 milhões. Na África do Sul, o lucro seria três vezes maior. Desde 1994, já foram apreendidos 508 quilos de cocaína em mãos de nigerianos, mais da metade no aeroporto de Cumbica (SP).

Os mafiosos que vêm da África também estão se sofisticando. Durante quase uma década, dependiam de “mulas” que rezavam para não cair nas mãos da polícia, nos vôos que saíam do aeroporto de Cumbica. Agora os traficantes apelam para sofisticadas operações de exportação de eletrodomésticos, peças de automóveis e, principalmente, de sapatos produzidos em Franca (SP). A cidade, aliás, conta com importante colônia de comerciantes nigerianos. Era lá que, segundo a PF, Ibeta operava como uma espécie de cicerone de quadrilhas estrangeiras. Sua especialidade era oferecer rotas de contrabando para a cocaína trazida da Bolívia e Colômbia, em geral em vôos comerciais. Embora o trajeto até a África – e só então rumo aos EUA e Europa – seja longo, a convivência das autoridades nigerianas torna a rota bastante segura.

Allison Ibeta seria o segundo grande operador nigeriano detido no Brasil. Em outubro, a PF prendeu no centro de São Paulo, após uma “campanha” de três me-

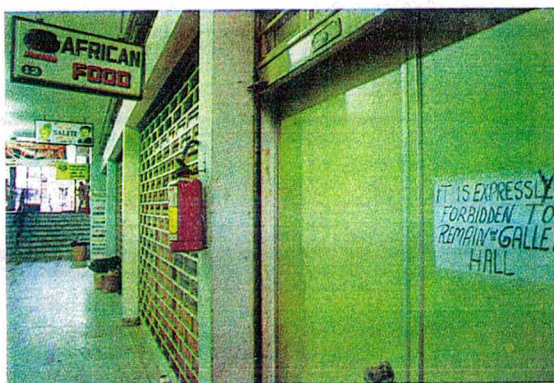
ISTOÉ
EXCLUSIVO

Quanto ao dinheiro, as "mulas" que levam a droga trazem as verdinhas na sacola. Isso deu origem, em São Paulo e no Rio, a quadrilhas de policiais civis especializadas em depenar nigerianos, no trajeto entre o aeroporto e o centro da cidade. Em março de 1994, uma equipe de policiais deteve quatro africanos e um brasileiro, no centro de São Paulo, com US\$ 80 mil. Eles se recusaram a entregar o dinheiro e foram parar na cadeia. A acusação – posse de dinheiro falso – nunca foi comprovada.

Apesar de o narcotráfico africano buscar a modernidade, ainda conserva práticas tradicionais. No Brasil, parece não existir um só comando. As quadrilhas seguem a organização tribal – as etnias ibo, iorubá e haussa-fulani são as mais numerosas. As operações ocorrem quase sempre em pequena escala, aproveitando as inúmeras "mulas" disponíveis. Impressiona também uma certa ingenuidade. Nenhum traficante preso assume o crime, apesar das evidências. Um agente da PF conta que, ao deter uma "mula" com 2,5 quilos de pó escondidos em cada sola do tênis, o rapaz se declarou inocente. "Eu só peguei o tênis emprestado de um amigo e vou entregá-lo a outro nigeriano no Rio", afirmava.

Os nomes dos traficantes são uma fonte constante de dores de cabeça para a polícia. Seguindo um costume tribal, muitos trocam de nome de tempos a tempos. Infiltração nas quadrilhas? Nem pensar. O único informante africano da Polícia Civil paulista morreu no ano passado, ao cair (ou ser jogado) do décimo andar de um prédio. A maior parte dos passaportes também é falsa, como aconteceu com Julia Matthews Puseletso, detida no Recife com uma bolsa cheia de cocaína. A Justiça aceitou a justificativa da moça, de que carregara a droga para um amigo. Mas ela ainda tem que explicar o que fazia com um passaporte nigeriano falso, em nome de Ganyane Damaris. "Isso é comum em meu país, porque os trâmites legais são muito caros e burocráticos", disse Julia a ISTOÉ.

Ingenuidade à parte, o fato é que as quadrilhas nigerianas ocupam um papel cada vez mais destacado no narcotráfico internacional. A DEA (organismo antidrogas dos EUA) está treinando uma unidade especial apenas para o combate ao tráfico made in Nigéria. A Casa Branca acusa abertamente o ditador nigeriano, Sani Abacha, de acobertar o tráfico de drogas. Pa-



Restaurante African Food: ponto de encontro em SP

rece haver uma "divisão de trabalho" entre as três grandes tribos. Os ibos, tradicionais comerciantes, garantem as rotas para o pó. Os iorubás, que têm uma presença forte na administração pública, agilizam os canais burocráticos. E os haussa-fulani, os mais ricos, financiam as operações. Sobra dinheiro para todos.

Nos últimos dois anos, um agente da DEA e outro do serviço antidrogas italiano sofreram atentados quando participavam de investigações na Nigéria. A polícia da Itália, inclusive, estabeleceu um curioso método de detecção de suspeitos. Agentes especiais fiscalizam, em alguns vôos Lagos-Roma, os passageiros que não comem nem bebem. Essa é uma indicação de que eles podem levar "ovinhos" cheios de cocaína no estômago.

O avanço dos traficantes africanos no

Julia Puseletso convenceu a Justiça de sua inocência. Mas o advogado Peruccini denuncia a discriminação



RICARDO GIRALDEZ

RICARDO GIRALDEZ

mercado internacional transformou o passaporte nigeriano em um documento visto – de cara – com desconfiança. "Vivemos no Brasil em comunidade e, quando a polícia prende um nigeriano, leva os outros junto", reclama Joseph James Ezekwerili, que cumpre pena na Casa de Detenção, em São Paulo. Embora ele não tenha sido preso em flagrante, é acusado de ser um "relações-públicas" dos mafiosos, providenciando casa e transporte aos "negociantes" africanos.

"Os policiais inventaram tudo. No meu país, a polícia é civilizada e respeita os direitos do cidadão", resmungava Joseph James. O advogado paulista Ronaldo Peruccini, que vem se especializando na defesa de nigerianos, também vê sinais de discriminação, quando a Justiça trata de suspeitos africanos. "As penas atribuídas a eles são desproporcionais, bem maiores do que as reservadas aos brancos", diz.

E por temer as ultrapolicamente corretas acusações de racismo que o embaixador do Brasil na Nigéria, Geraldo Nuzzi, reconhece que a legação fornece 90% dos vistos solicitados, em uma média de cinco a dez por dia. "Se negarmos o visto, criamos uma situação desagradável. Pode dar a impressão de que estamos cometendo injustiças", diz o embaixador. Duro é convencer disso os brasileiros que já passaram por

maus bocados ao tentar fazer negócios com supostos empresários nigerianos. Essa é uma atividade complementar dos narcotraficantes. Desde 1991, circulares postadas em Lagos vêm pousando nas mesas de centenas de empresários do Amazonas ao Rio Grande do Sul, com uma oferta apetitosa. O autor, que se intitula "um alto funcionário estatal perseguido", oferece 30% de uma bolada de cinco, dez ou mesmo 30 milhões de dólares (depende do modelo da circular), ao brasileiro que aceitar um depósito de dinheiro suspeito em sua conta. A única exigência é que o cândido candidato faça uma viagemzinha à Nigéria para selar o acordo. O passeio já terminou em terror e prejuízo para dezenas de brasileiros. "Sempre aparece alguém aqui só com a roupa do corpo, às vezes espancado ou mesmo violentado", comenta um funcionário da Embaixada do Brasil.

Colaboraram: Hélio Contreiras (Rio de Janeiro), Eduardo Hollanda (Brasília), Lianka Azulay (Recife) e Osmar Freitas Jr. (Nova York)

APPENDIX II

WORLD AFFAIRS

'People Can Get Away With Anything'

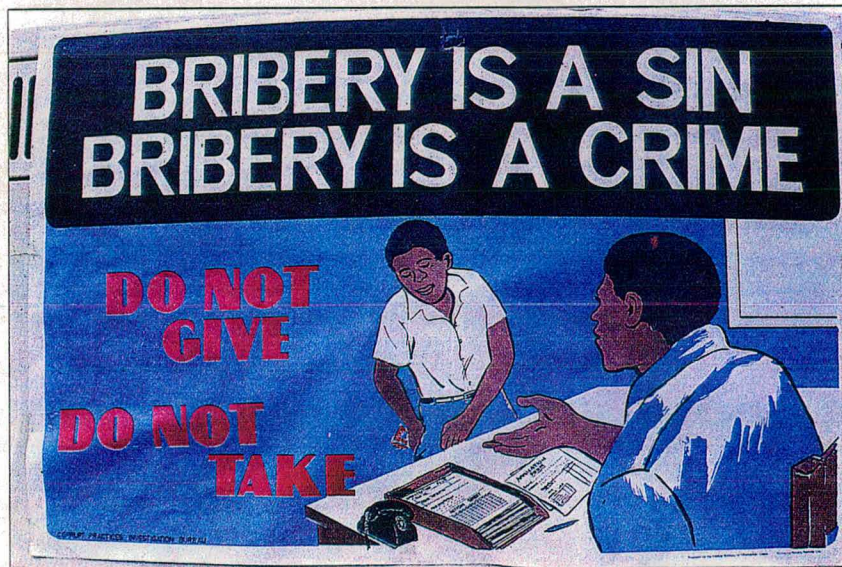
DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING for our drinks?" The question came just as I was extricating my passport from the immigration desk at Lagos's Murtala Muhammad International Airport. The supplicant was a middle-aged security guard with thick sideburns and even thicker glasses, an expectant smile playing on his lips. This was a first: in 11 years of

accept bribes. Resourceful con men bilk unsuspecting foreigners of six- and seven-figure sums through elaborate advance-fee fraud schemes. Billions of dollars in oil revenues go unaccounted for. "It's a totally corrupted system, and people see they can get away with anything," fumes Lagos attorney John Adeleke. "There is absolute lawlessness in the higher

1973 oil embargo sent petroleum prices soaring. Almost overnight Nigeria was flooded with petrodollars, and the men in uniform who controlled the purse strings were accountable to no one but themselves.

That was a potent recipe for unbridled thieving, as officials of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) soon learned. The financial

pantry. Court documents claimed a year ago that senior army officers and cabinet ministers had been given privately owned beachfront property in Lagos at sharply discounted prices under a retroactive decree issued in July 1993. The list of beneficiaries read like a Who's Who of the power elite. It featured current strongman Gen. Sani Abacha, then the defense minister; the chief of the general staff, Gen. Oladipo Diya; the ministers of justice, information and foreign affairs, and the leader of the Nigerian Labor Congress. Around that time, the head of the state-owned oil company and six other senior officials were charged with stealing \$41 million in connection with a shady fuel-storage contract. The seven defendants were later released, and the prosecution was quietly shelved.



Nigerian poster: Wiping out graft will require stronger institutions and tougher enforcement of the law

dealing with officialdom in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, I had met my share of mendacious lowlifes—but no Medellín cop or Angolan customs inspector had ever asked me for a donation to his liquor cabinet. But this, after all, was Nigeria.

Africa's most populous country is the Third World's kleptocracy central. The pervasive stench of corruption assaults the senses the moment a visitor enters the disarmingly neat and smart-looking airport terminal—and it is truly ubiquitous, reaching into the private sector as well as the bureaucracy. Doctors prescribe drugs for nonexistent ailments. Judges

ranks of society, and it stems from the people we have in government."

It wasn't always that way. When Nigeria became independent from Britain in 1960, it boasted an efficient civil service that was clearly separate from the business community and accounted for every penny of government revenue and expenditure. But by the mid-1970s, government had become a thriving enterprise unto itself as oil exports came to account for 90 percent of the country's foreign-exchange earnings. Two important changes had taken place in the intervening time: a coup d'état in 1966 ushered in 13 years of military rule, and the

house of choice for drug lords, money launderers and arms smugglers in the 1980s, BCCI made a killing in Nigeria by adapting quickly to local customs. Bank officials abetted over-invoicing scams involving commodity exports that robbed the Nigerian treasury of untold millions. Government officials used BCCI to move vast sums into personal bank accounts offshore. Senior civil servants received handsome "commissions" for services rendered to the bank. "Commission means kickback," BCCI manager Nazir Chinoy told a U.S. Senate subcommittee in 1991.

BCCI was closed down in 1991, but graft remains ram-

CAN NIGERIA'S PLAGUE ever be stamped out? One former head of state thinks so. Olusegun Obasanjo ruled the country from 1976 to 1979 and secured his place in history by becoming the first (and thus far only) Nigerian general to fulfill a promise to restore civilian rule. Obasanjo was perhaps the most prominent African to lend his name and stature to the anti-corruption group Transparency International when it was launched last year, and he sees the introduction of democracy as an essential precondition for a successful war against corruption. "The average African is not by nature more corrupt than the European or anyone else," he argued recently. "But others have institutions, laws, conventions and practices which effectively discourage and punish corruption." Nigeria does not—and acquiring them will entail years of concerted effort and rigorous law enforcement. Until then the corrupt generals, drug traffickers and enterprising fraudsters will continue to define Nigeria's reputation.

JOSEPH CONTRERAS and
PAUL ADAMS in Lagos

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