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***TRADITION REGENERATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CHINUA
ACHEBE'S POST-COLONIAL NOVELS: NO LONGER AT EASE, A MAN OF
THE PEOPLE, ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH***

Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctorate
in English (Option Literature / Civilization)

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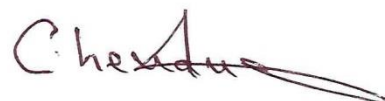
DECLARATION :

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessarily, to the work of other researchers.

I am duly informed that any person practicing plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary sanctions issued by university authorities under the rules and regulations in force.

March, 2024.

Hizia Chenane

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Hizia Chenane', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the post-colonial issue of cultural identity in the last three novels of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. His novels convey forcefully his apprehension of the problematic relation between the individual and his community, given the complexity of the cultural condition arising out of the African's absorption of Western values and behaviors. In Achebe's novels, the aesthetic devices and the mode of expression are themselves the manifestation of the social and historical experiences which they narrate. This connection between text and context is most explicitly highlighted in Achebe's novels. The artistic elements of his novels, such as characterization, themes, and narrative structure, all reflect his thematic orientations and the socio-cultural consciousness he is drawing from. Along the stories of his Europeanized, sometimes alienated-intellectuals, the writer portrays the state of incoherence and ambivalence prevailing in the socio-cultural values of independent Nigeria.

In his three post-independence novels, Achebe genuinely writes from within the stories of his community, drawing on individual and collective memories to both revive and revise his nation's past. He transposes the issues of cultural tensions into the medium of the imaginary and metaphorical. Achebe demonstrates the aesthetic possibilities in which his message of cultural reclamation can be related to the hybrid structures of the text. Stories and myths of the writer's culture are brought to the novel form and give it a significant literary rhetoric, embroidering and transforming its narrative structure and making it an important medium for exploring social and cultural themes. The employment of oral narratives, basically stories and myths, is shown not only as a determinant aspect of indigenous culture in Achebe's novels but also as a particular and deliberate one that conveys useful directions to the writer's aesthetic and ideological experience. Through this artful interplay between the oral arts and the novel genre, the writer strives to handle the problematic of post-colonial cultural hybridity at the level of the literary, and makes us read his novels as both a social and an aesthetic medium of communication.

Key Words: Cultural Identity; Chinua Achebe; *No Longer at Ease*; *A Man of the People* ; *Anthills of the Savannah*; Post-colonial Literature.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus on social representation in African literature over the last few decades has led theorists and analysts to study the relationship between the writers and their post-colonial societies. It is indeed important to examine the author's conception of the symbiotic relationship that exists between fiction, the society represented and the author. In his / her endeavor to address the flaws and dysfunctions within society, the author is keen to provide a vision of what this society ought to be. African novelists have attempted to present an insider's view of their people and their culture. The tendency in their literature is to urge the people to break away from the imperial cultural paradigms and contribute to the restoration of their communal culture, fully grounded on their past traditions and present realities. This thematic orientation has constituted the basis of the novels of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) who uses narrative to bring into the surface the complex conflict between the community's traditional dispensation and the emergent values which are inherited from the colonizer's different institutions and systems of thought. In this thesis, I intend to examine the African post-colonial problematic of cultural identity and its relationship to the past and to traditions, as they can be traced in Achebe's novels, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. The central issue pervading all the three novels is that the transitional conditions of the African post-colonial nations were determined by complex forms of cultural tensions which have instilled in the African psyche a distressing sense of social fragmentation and cultural incoherence. These novels present an extended account of the social and cultural issues which the writer has already dealt with in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*; they nevertheless proceed to offer a complex and subtle representation of the totality of the Nigerian community that is still going through disquieting cultural transformation. The main thesis of this study then is to examine how Achebe's novels reproduce the different epistemological conflicts of cultural oppositions and intellectual tendencies inherent in the new African community and present them both at the level of content and form.

Achebe's fiction is mostly given tribute for its insightful depiction of the various cultural conflicts arising out of the Africans' interaction with Western culture and institutions, either through colonialism or imperialism. He shows a strong commitment

to themes and issues that are essentially fundamental to the general order of his people's existence, such as the conflicts between cultural traditions and Western culture, the illiterate common people and the Western-educated intellectuals, the local idioms and the English language used by the highly-positioned elite, and so on. His resort to imaginative writings to express his unreserved rejections of the degrading discourses adopted by the Western writers in their fictional representation of the African individual indicates most lucidly the intellectual and thematic preoccupations that have oriented the development of African literature in the post-colonial condition. The imperative link between a repressive colonial past and the complex remnants of this historical experience impels the writer to deal with a complex discursive experience – historical and cultural encounter between two asymmetrical cultural world-views; African and European, which, in both conflicting and compromising situations, determine the formal and ideological orientation of the cultural discourse and expression in the African imagination. In registering the potent implications of this experience on the African societies and cultures, Achebe's works evoke the complex relation of African experience to the norms and values commonly associated with the imposed or adopted Western culture, and ultimately their far-reaching effects on the orientations of the African systems of thought and development of its imaginative expression. This explains the consistent preoccupation of the African writer with the complex issue of tradition and modernity which has led him/her sometimes to depict social experiences within a complex transitional relationship between the community's different historical periods and from the perspective of its various groups. This distressing condition points to the unsettling effects of Western culture and institutions which have given rise to a state of disintegration in the general socio-cultural patterns of African communities and, hence, engendered an exhausting state of confusion and pressure at the level of communal relationships (Gyekye,1997). At any rate, this emergent cultural condition in both its constructive and turbulent ramifications serves as a concomitant external material for Achebe's fictional and non-fictional writings. This writer finds always the necessary artistic tools to link the thematic orientations and formal procedures of his novels to the social and cultural changes that have marked the realities of his indigenous community.

Both at the critical and cultural levels, Achebe is considered as one of the most important writers and theorists of post-colonial studies who have used the different critical tools of non-fiction and imaginative expression to release the field of “cultural production and cultural politics” from the rigid racial ideas of “colonialist myths and their more neo-colonial re-codings”(Jeyifo,1991, p.66). In Achebe’s works, writing is turned into a substantive expressive device to refurbish the value of the community’s cultural identity and deconstruct the colonialists’ stereotyped representation of Africa that, as Achille Mbembe points out, is resolutely set up in the template of “a meta-text about the animal” with the determinant traits of “elementariness and primitiveness that make Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished”(Mbembe,2001,p.1). The direct upshot is that the cultural tensions and conflicts that mark the historical situation of African societies are transliterated into the committed narratives of African writers in terms of both theme and form.

The present study proposes to approach Achebe’s post-colonial novels in the light of post-colonial theories which are directly related to the critical issues of ideological and cultural consequences of the turbulent contact between the European colonizer and the African communities. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin use the term “post-colonial”, in its hyphenated form, to cover “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialism to the present day”, emphasizing in this way on the continuity of the effects of the period of European imperial domination on the formerly colonized societies. (Ashcroft et al.,1989,p.2) They also associate the term with “the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted”(1989,p.2). In the same vein, John Thieme associates the term “post-colonial” with writing and other forms of cultural production which “display an oppositional attitude towards colonialism, which are to a greater or lesser degree anti-colonial in orientation” (Thieme,1996,pp.1-2). In view of this, I will use the term “post-colonial” in this study in its hyphenated form to signify both the historical period after independence in the former African colonized communities, and the increasingly diverging set of thoughts, assumptions, and discourses presented or subverted in the academic space of post-colonial reading and writing.

As an intellectual discourse that includes different fields of knowledge, post-colonial theory has opened up alternative discursive perceptions to approach and understand the local history and cultures of the ex-colonized communities; it provides also a critical mode of addressing and reclaiming their cultural past by which any discriminative and stereotyped systems of thoughts predicated upon the discursive categories of gender, race, culture, and class can be defied and subverted. In general, post-colonial theorists attempt overtly to deal with the cultural tensions affecting the conditions of the post-colonial communities as an issue which is completely related to the subverting and unsettling politics of colonialism and imperialism. They view them as a complex institution of domination which calls to its support different systems of thoughts which include cultural expressive means such as the novel. And it is the imaginative narratives and their role in the production of established modes of cultural perception which have preoccupied the intellectual orientations of post-colonial theorists. The employment of narrative as a discursive means to accentuate a given orientation of racial and cultural convictions is the main concern of Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), a significant post-colonial text in which he highlights the role of the novel genre in providing an adequate expressive ground to sustain the biased racial ideas of the European colonizer. Our research concerns propel us, then, to ground our different arguments on the field of post-colonial studies, in particular theories which present profuse emphasis on the notions of cultural identity and past traditions as they are directly affected by the chaotic experience of colonialism.

In response to the new values and behaviors which begin to sweep almost all the different fields of these communities, there have been passionate efforts on the part of African intellectuals at returning to and coming to grips with the past vibrant order of their people by seeking appropriate expressive means to revive it and re-narrate its cultural repositories, frequently metaphorically by plainly subverting the discounting discourses of cultural imperialism. In the various genres of literary production related to this issue, the commitment with the past stories and legacies by post-colonial critics and writers takes the resolute tendency of accentuating the value of the traditional cultures and rewriting histories and realities that were deliberately distorted in the colonial writings. As a corollary, we find in the African literary production an

abundant focus on the old stories and myths of the traditional community in terms of both thematic orientation and expressive modes. They serve as a fundamental pattern of cultural discourse par excellence in the field of imaginative writing. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define post-colonial literature as a debate of “(...) resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe (...) and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being”(Ashcroft et al.,1989,p.2). Central to these significant intellectual concerns is an examination of the implicit ideological connotations which had been used to endorse the Westerner’s invented discourses about the continent and its people and an attempt to address the detrimental effects of such outright antipathy on the native cultures of the ex-colonized communities.

Following this essential cultural agenda, African writers have used the expressive power of the literary text for cultural identification on account of being propelled by a pressing need to subvert the asymmetrical categories of power relations between Western and African cultures. They demonstrate a strong preoccupation with the African indigenous existence and of the creation of a distinct literary tradition derived from the traditional verbal arts, along with the affirmation of an African mode of expression. From this intellectual preoccupation springs an alternative evaluation of the post-colonial discourse: the past represents a communal heritage which encompasses the cultural repositories of the African people, and not just some negligible residues whose historical value is absolutely limited to the traumatic experience of European colonization. This entails a diligent effort to seek out one’s own traditional culture to uncover stories which remained unblemished by the distorting clichés of colonial discourses. These stories find ample space in the African novels where the past is viewed as the key reference for the people’s contemporary existence. They assist in bringing forward important debates on the issue of cultural conflicts that turn out to be the main thematic concern of different literary genres. This explains why the African writer turns to the stories of his/her traditional culture to meet with the racial hostility and unsympathetic cultural representations carried both in the writings of the Western scholar and the colonizer’s language.

These issues of cultural reclamation and self-identification are given an abundant space in Achebe's fiction. For him, to retrieve the African traditional values and order within the new conditions of post-colonial period – which is one of his most persistent issues – the writer is required to confront the foreign institutions and systems of thoughts that the colonizer had instilled in the African communities; he is required to thwart the negative cultural claims of the colonial “vision” as Said calls it (1979), and the rational system of racial identification which was the normative reference for the colonizer in defining the Africans. In fact, Achebe is well sentient of the lingering unease caused by this unsettling encounter because of the prejudiced perceptions which the colonizer had used to firm up in the African psyche. At the level of individual self-respect and human /cultural dealings the colonial experience was “almost a complete disaster” for the African communities. It has stripped the African young individuals of the cultural values and religious practices of their ancestors. The quest for cultural revival with which the African writer is anxiously preoccupied, then, does not seem to be a simple task in an emerging community which is “re-created by white men in their own image”(Achebe,1975,p.15). Thus when Achebe deals with the African post-colonial condition, he does not contend that the different occurrences that mark its history and the transformations attending its traditional culture are independent of the colonial experience that affected all the different facets of life in the continent; hence, his writing is turned into a crucial expressive medium oriented towards the restoration of his people's culture from the distorting colonialist mode of knowledge about Africa. Thus, Achebe's rewriting of his people's past and present realities, apart from his literary intentions to create a constructive connection between the material truths and imaginative experience, is a quest to bring forward his people's authentic stories to dismantle the loathed history fabricated by the colonizer's agents. He is well aware that colonialism had given rise to a number of radical transformations that had affected the very historical directions of African communities, a view that one can find both in the past and the present African writings. For example, V.Y. Mudimbe, writes in *The Invention of Africa* (1988,p.1):

Although in African history the colonial experience represents but a brief moment from the perspective of today, this moment is still charged and controversial, since, to say least, it signified a new historical form and the possibility

of radically new types of discourses on African traditions and cultures.

And yet, it is within this prejudiced colonial system of cultural differentiation that a new form of socio-cultural relationships and different perspectives towards one's community and culture would be constructed. Achebe contends that the literary experience which he displays on behalf of his community's culture produces a form of counter narrative which works to debunk the racist and discounting beliefs advocated by the colonizer, and also to preserve the meaningful legacies of his people's history, so that these cannot be considered from biased systems of representation.

Under the exigencies of these intellectual orientations, narrative functions to provide a realistic representation of the community's culture and history, it is turned into an indispensable medium to reclaim the writer's cultural affiliations. Narrative manifests itself as a conscious paradigm of cultural discourse; it provides the author with a rhetorical means that defies the colonial discourses and presents an alternative mode of knowledge that is encompassed within the land's cultural repositories. At the beginning of his literary career, Achebe found himself impelled to be involved in the formation of a typically African mode of imaginative expression, a matter of literary and cultural affiliation which is propelled by the distorting representations of colonialist discourses on Africa. The urgent need to regenerate the indigenous dispensation and to create a new form of African narrative that may carry the different historical accumulations of one's own community was then a fundamental task in the whole process of writing back to this colonial discourse as a way to form a typically African approach of interpretation and representation. Simon Gikandi has succinctly explicated the import of this intellectual impulse in Achebe's writings:

There is certainly a sense in which Achebe's novels are concerned with the elaboration of a new knowledge on Africa, a knowledge which takes a dual path: first, it reconstructed from latent meanings recovered from what colonialism had repressed and from the historical conditions colonialism itself has created.(1991b,p.5)

Indeed, a minute examination of Achebe's novels points out a constant preoccupation with the different aspects of historical and cultural transition which had determined to a great extent the intellectual agenda of African literature. What the reader can discern in Achebe's texts, fictional or non-fictional, is a conscious and unreserved display of

the Western planned systems of thoughts that have projected African culture and history in totally inferior terms both during the colonial period and after it.

So, faithful to his constant cultural committed stance in writing, Achebe's post-colonial novels function as mediating narratives, placed in that epistemological space between the self-contained world of traditional culture and the new values of the developing community; they assume a greater role in understanding and approaching the ambiguous historical experiences which had engendered the different bifurcations of the post-colonial culture. In every novel Achebe has written, there is a profound analysis of the far-reaching effects of the colonizer's strategic mode of perception on the African psyche, and the internalization of the cultural inferiority complex that had been the inevitable corollary of this traumatic experience; a condition which has resulted in a distressing degeneration of communal and individual relations, and a disintegration of the community's traditional dispensation. Both in *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* Achebe is partly seeking to evoke the unsighted inclination of individuals in contemporary society to repudiate the traditional values of their ancestors and prioritize some shallow foreign practices which only serve to impede the general development of the individual and the community alike. Certainly, Achebe is well-aware of the detrimental effects of colonialism and the influence of its residual cultural values on the post-colonial community. Meanwhile, he is fully conscious of the critical and intellectual limitations of connecting the whole socio-cultural tensions and the moral ambiguities of his society with the colonial experience. He also focuses his unreserved criticism upon the rising African intellectuals who ostentatiously uphold the colonial mind-set in the new society and upon the different social groups that stand apathetic to the state of cultural disintegration attending their post-colonial society. His middle-class educational background and his high status during his time in the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation offered him better possibilities to delineate life-like characters and to bring forward the impediments to which they were exposed as a result of the disruptive impact of a powerful foreign culture on the indigenous values which were part of their early upbringing.

Achebe's constructive attachment to both Igbo culture and Western institutions, at the level of education and religion, stands as a vital factor in developing his manifestly

lucid account of the cultural confusion that plagues the lives of his fictional intellectuals. His ability to portray them and their distressing cultural conflicts convincingly and without any form of intellectual prejudices shows his intellectual objectivity, strengthened by his notable literary merits, which sustains him to make his fictional stories carry and reproduce the actual realities of his community's socio-cultural setting. In every novel, we find Achebe reminding his readers that the common perpetuation of European values and mode of conduct is carried on by the developing African intellectual. This elite class which purports to enlighten its people and lead them into better social and economic conditions has demonstrated in many occasions its wavering and uncertain position towards the traditional culture of its people. Achebe refers critically to such kind of alienated intellectuals who conceitedly adopt the Western culture through the characters of Obi in *No Longer at Ease* and Odili in *A Man of the People*. Both characters appear to be caught in a complex state of cultural confusion which stems from their shallow association with the culture of their communities and their sheer fascination with the Western values and mode of life developed by their liberal schooling. The writer constructs revealing situations which expose the profound schism that exists between these intellectuals' abstract Western system of thought and its inadequate relevance to the real context of their community. Achebe's objective criticism of the apathetic intellectuals in his fictional texts presents a crucial part of his deep analysis of the different factors behind the post-colonial cultural predicament.

Reproducing the cultural legacies of his people's past within the themes and aesthetics of his narratives, Achebe propels his main characters to revise and sometimes to refurbish the significant values of the past dispensation in order to find adequate orientations for the cultural convolutions of their present condition. Along the course of his literary career, Achebe has always presented the African writer as a zealous cultural nationalist in his society. His literary preoccupations are deeply related to the cultural issues of his community. He is an enthusiastic spokesperson of cultural revival in Nigerian literature, in his consistent sustaining of the human self-respect of the Nigerian people, and in his unwavering concern with the restoration of the African history and culture which had been completely distorted by European

writers. In examining both his fictional and non-fictional statements, one can be presented with a significant literary approach of how the narrative's import and aesthetics can be directly influenced by the writer's socio-cultural commitment. In his essay under the title "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation", Achebe emphasizes that the essential intellectual issue which has to preoccupy the literary orientations and affiliations of the African writer is the support of the status of the nation's culture which had been disrupted by the colonial fallacious logic of racial and cultural dichotomies. He views the African writer as an influential cultural nationalist who can inculcate self-esteem in his own people and transmit the high meanings of their cultural traditions to a largely foreign audiences and readers. In his words, "African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, (...) and, above all, they had dignity"(1973,p.8).

In his commitment to this consistent nationalist attitude, Achebe makes his texts contextualize the local setting and collective memories of his Igbo community in significant and remarkable aesthetic experiences. This presents a characteristic act of cultural involvement which expounds Achebe's perceptive view that in the condition of the rising community "the great danger lies not in remembering but in forgetting (...); and that Nigeria (...) stands in great need of reminders"(1975,p.xiii). This propels the writer to extend his literary affiliations to the stories and traditions of the Igbo existence in an attempt to "commemorate the African past" in general (Gikandi, 1991b,p.11). As we will delve in Achebe's texts, we will observe that the very act of writing is propelled by particular cultural impulses and socio-historical circumstances which inevitably determine the writer's choice of thematic material and aesthetic implications. Achebe makes a constant recourse to his Igbo worldview as both a central referential aesthetic and a determinant cultural corpus to uphold his intellectual and literary perspectives. For him, there are absolutely many significant things in "traditional African aesthetics (that) will fit (the) contemporary condition"(1975, p.21). Unequivocally, the writer's juxtaposition of the two statements 'traditional African aesthetics' and the 'contemporary condition' is intended to display a particular issue of discursive and cultural dialectic: the traditional culture, both in its determinant

system of truth and in regard to its forms of artistic expression, stand to embody what the past colonial politics had denigrated and repressed to give rise to distressing aspects of socio-cultural existence. This conscious conjunction between the traditional worldview of his Igbo people and the present realities of post-colonial Nigeria gives Achebe a possibility to deal with two of his primary thematic concerns – the impulse to regenerate and go over the past cultural legacies to deal with the complicated present cultural relations in his community, and his anxious need to surpass the “vicious cycle of history” to construct different directions of discursive adaptations that allow the African to defy what he views as the “frozen time” of colonial representations (Achebe in Moyers, 1989,p.338).

At this level, I deem it helpful to present working definitions of the term ‘tradition’ to provide a clear framework for other deliberations. By ‘tradition’ I mean those beliefs, principles, customs, or the like, which people in a particular community or group have used to adopt and live with. In the same sense, T.S. Eliot uses the term tradition to mean “all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger”(qtd in Obiechina,1976,p.31). Yet, my idea of tradition in this study will be considered within its non-stasis form since people’s traditions are always determined by a body of diachronically oriented discourses pertaining to continuous interplay of social relations of production and historical transitions. This idea is stressed by U.Y. Mudimbe who rejects the static binary opposition between tradition and modernity, for “tradition (*traditio*) means discontinuities through a dynamic continuation and possible conversion of *tradita* (legacies)”(1988,p.189). Following such reasoning, I will attempt in this study to show how Achebe’s narratives do not present a closed totality of his Nigerian community but rather foreshadow orders of local beliefs and ways of acting, religious practices and socio-cultural relations that he believes Western colonialism had changed and obliterated.

In fact, even though many of Achebe’s narratives are constructed around the stories and cultural legacies of the past, they do nevertheless avoid an essentialist view of the community’s traditional culture. In the cross-cultural communities of his post-colonial novels, one can glimpse at a critical look at some traditional customs, beliefs

and behaviors that seem to be incompatible with the exigencies of the new society. Achebe does not hesitate to examine some of the depressing and negative aspects of traditional life that are still preserved by his people. He shows through his objective portrayal of his people's traditions that the African individual is not as innocent and heroic as the noble black of the romantic postulations of the Negritude discourses, and he demonstrates through a realistic portrayal of the very local worldview of his direct indigenous region that even the most revered rituals and practices of traditional culture have also their negative aspects. His novels present an obvious way of intellectual criticism that places the question of traditional culture in a critical view, a more dialectical approach that identifies the imperatives of the historical transition as an inescapable situation for the innovative development of the nation's culture. Hence, Achebe's employment of the artistic oral forms of his Igbo people to write about the present occurrences of the new nation calls for a closer examination of the changing meanings and aspects of their culture. He draws on the traditional verbal arts (stories and myths) created by his ancestors, and carries their enlightening and vibrant truths into the political and cultural conditions of his contemporary Nigeria.

However, this issue of cultural identity and tradition retrieval in Achebe's post-colonial novels has not received enough interest among academic critics as an area of literary and discursive analysis. Many of Achebe's critics limit their readings to the close empathy between the writer's rural novels (*Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*) and Igbo oral discourses and order of truth without attempting to analyze the complex relationships which exist between his post-colonial novels' fundamental cultural orientations and the same framework of traditional discourse which they tend forcefully to represent and sustain. Achebe's early critics have focused their attention on the historical, political, social, and artistic dimensions of the novels, especially on Achebe's conscious use of the novel form as a means of social instruction and cultural identification. Broadly speaking, most critics seem to deal with Achebe's novels as unrelated narratives that reflect different historical and social experiences, overlooking hence the author's constant cultural preoccupations that can be grasped in the thematic and aesthetic fabric of every narrative.

In Omelo Ojinmah's *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives* (1991), for example, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is studied in terms of the issue of cultural disintegration. In this novel, argues Ojinmah, Achebe uses Obi's most confused position of cultural ambivalence and alienation to evince the dramatic cultural conflict between the adopted modern culture of the British ex-colonizer and the Nigerian traditional culture. In his lack of a genuine reflection of the implications of cultural belonging, as well as his determined failure to stand firm against the social evil of corruption, as Ojinmah argues, Obi is turned into an unpromising herald of the emerging Nigerian intellectuals. The critic's reading of the novel in these terms is certainly stimulating, but it could be more thorough and synthesizing if developed in relation to the issue of cultural transformations in Achebe's subsequent post-colonial novels. Ojinmah's critical readings of *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* are chiefly restricted to situate them within the pure context of political corruption and tensions.

For his part, David Carroll sees a weakness of character presentation right through *No Longer at Ease*, a weakness which has its negative effects on the novel's thematic and aesthetic implications. For him, neither the novel's concluding incident when Obi faces his trial for receiving bribes, nor the general fabric of the novel's events are persuasive. He opines that the different designed movement from one socio-cultural locale to another, the village and the city, and the different scenes which are used to bring forward the dilemma of cultural oscillation fail to build up a complete main character. Carroll sees Obi as an acquiescent individual whose decisions and actions are directly determined by the exigencies of his various predicaments. He comes to describe him as an example of "Achebe's minor characters (who are) simply the result of a cultural and hereditary dialectic" (1990,p.84). Similarly, in his book *Chinua Achebe*, Arthur Ravenscroft views the different cultural tensions experienced by Obi as "very banal" factors to drive him to malpractices. He believes that the different experiences which have compelled Obi to take bribes can be produced only if he is turned into a "naïve and self-deluded" person. And he adds that "his enmeshment happens too easily to win our sympathetic involvement" (1977,pp.19-20).

In fact, what appears for Carroll and Ravenscroft to be limitations of aesthetic unities at the level of events and characters development in Achebe's novel are

deemed by the writer as conscious devices intended to hone his thematic orientations. The novel's momentary states of space movement and lack of communication between the different social groups constitute an implied rhetorical device which serves precisely to bring to the surface the external background of the novel's major themes. *No Longer at Ease* has to be construed in terms of that implied correspondence between the fictional story of its protagonist and the actual conditions of the Nigerian community that the writer draws on. In this novel, Achebe attempts to portray objectively the experiences of a growing independent nation at the juncture of transition from a traditional mode of existence to new cultural values heavily influenced by the colonial experience and its cultural remnants. The writer's impulse to bring forward the depressing situation of cultural disintegration foreshadows his unreserved commentary on the failure of the developing intellectual class, and the people alike, to overcome the clashing socio-cultural worldviews that have generated a general condition of cultural obstruction. In many events, the writer calls our attention to observe the shallowness and insincerity of his character's intellectual reflection on his community's condition.

For *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* most critics focus on the close correspondence between the political developments in Nigeria and those depicted in the novels. Bernth Lindfors writes of *A Man of the People* as "Achebe's African Parable", in which he emphasizes Achebe's "proper sense of contemporary African history"(1979,p.254). For his part, Ngugi's essay "Chinua Achebe's A Man of the people" is concerned to read the novel in terms of its writer's limitations of social representation. In his critical reading of the novel's last events, Ngugi comments that the absence of any form of social resolution evinces the writer's complete failure to present a narrative of genuine political transformation. For what the writer "has done in (the novel)", according to Ngugi, "is to make it impossible or inexcusable for other African writers to do other than address themselves directly to their audiences in Africa (...) and tell them that such problems are their concern"(Ngugi in Innes and Lindfors,1979,pp.281-82). Ngugi's statements here concur with those critics who used to impose upon the writer to play the role of a sociologist who can invent idealistic resolutions to his society's problems, and not from the context of the writer's

intellectual and literary stand. Many of Achebe's critics comment on the unsatisfactory roles which he attributes to 'the people' in his fiction. According to them, Achebe's novels do not depict the people as real, developing and living persons who are put through substantial social experiences. For even though the writer's proclaimed intellectual intention is to write about the communal interests, the people's authentic life is not given an adequate space of representation in his novels; they are used essentially as a symbolic referential device for the artistic description of the community's socio-cultural ideals. Vindicating then Lukàcs' artistic view of the people's position and image in literature, those critics appear to argue that "the people provide simply a stage for the principal action, which takes place on a different plane, not directly connected with popular life." (Lukàcs,1969,p.341)

For example, Emmanuel Ngara criticizes Achebe for depicting his society in *Anthills of the Savannah* from the limited viewpoint of his intellectual characters. As a result, the ordinary people are presented to the reader only in their direct and superficial relationship with the novel's main protagonists. They are set in "the periphery or relegated to oblivion", as the critic states (Ngara in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991,p.122). Ode Ogede alike goes on to view Odili's indifference to his people's wretched conditions in *A Man of the People* as a direct indication of the writer's indifference towards the lives of the people in the real life when giving them an inconsequential role in the main events of the novel. (2001,p.78) David M. Brown's criticism of Achebe's last novel is not different from Ogede's. He argues that Achebe's populist tendency is subverted by the elevated logic of his intellectual characters whom he used as the novel's narrators, and through this mode of representation, Achebe seems to uphold not a communal existence but an "enlightened dictatorship by the elite"(Brown in Petersen & Rutherford,1991,p.147).

All these criticisms fail to grasp the main stand of Achebe's criticism of his contemporary society. For example, where Ngugi's criticism of Achebe's novel falls short is its heavy focus on the Marxist idea of the writer's ideological commitment which is not explicitly presented by Achebe's narratives. The novelist's role is to broaden the scope of self-examination, and not to proffer solutions, as Ikem argues in *Anthills of the Savannah*. In fact, the problem with Ngugi's and other critics' analysis

is that it seriously misconstrues the social and cultural implications of Achebe's narratives, overlooking the writer's abiding concern to present deep and objective accounts of his nation's realities. In depending on intellectual protagonists in his post-colonial novels, as the study will show, Achebe's main interest is to bring forward their search for cultural and social identification, a more inclusive community which brings together both the past traditions and the present cultural values.

To achieve this task Achebe would draw heavily upon the cultural repositories of his Igbo people to recover what the colonial phase has disrupted and to strengthen the narrative structure of the nation's culture. How the stories and myths of the land's past are transliterated into the novel form appears to be a crucial part in the writer's thematic orientations. This literary orientation towards the oral narratives of his people also leads some critics to look for literary limitations and intellectual inadequacy in Achebe's novels. Ogede, for instance, considers the principle of accurate historical representation as an important key in the critical task of evaluating the writer's socio-cultural commitment towards the different realities and truths presented in his / her works. Reading Achebe's novels under this notion, Ogede emphasizes Achebe's wavering intellectual attitudes towards his culture. He says that "readers can discern where Achebe decided to play the role of a simple native informant and then either resolved to recount historical and cultural events accurately or to repress and disfigure them"(2001,p.x). This statement reveals Ogede's blatant limitations in discerning Achebe's objective way in depicting his culture's different aspects. In fact, Achebe's texts transcend the straightforward informative mode of presentation which some writers employ mostly to shed light on their community's traditional aspects and cultural rituals; his restoration of Igbo traditional culture without seeking to grant it some romantic or idealistic view presents a typical pattern of Achebe's moderate way of intellectual analysis. In view of this dialectical mode of perception he explicitly declares that "the past with all its imperfections, never lacked dignity (...). We have to admit that like other people's past ours had its good as well as its bad sides"(1973,p.9).

For their part, Elleke Boehmer and David Brown comment on the 'insignificance' of using traditional culture as a solution to redeem society. Boehmer plainly argues that Achebe has consciously oriented the novel's events towards a determined

resolution when he relates the novel's complex events to mythical and metaphorical stories. She argues that Achebe's dependence on the imaginative mode of oral tradition can be deemed as "a displacement of the problem", and, hence, a failure at the level of his mode of presentation to evoke the contextual dimensions of the social realities (Boehmer in Petersen & Rutherford,1991,p.106). In the same terms, Brown argues that the writer's persistent attempt to associate realistic individuals with mythical figures has not achieved any kind of real resolution to the prevalent political upheaval that entails more concrete directions of intellectual analysis. For him, the mythical import attached to the novel's events does not present no form of "significant" resolution for the political turmoil besetting the new nation (Brown in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991,p.12).

In fact, both critics fall short to conceive the pattern of continuity with different genres of oral tradition in Achebe's novel, in which the mediation between content and form is acutely brought forward. The mode of drawing upon the oral material is not only a generic frame of literary reference for Achebe's writing but is rather a symptom of social and cultural consciousness generated by particular exigencies that have marked the history of African communities. Achebe's novels demonstrate that the vibrant socio-cultural practices and values that are conveyed through the imaginary events of the past stories are fundamentally a manifestation of the real world of Igbo community. So, in addition to its instructive and edifying function, stories and myths also constitute a high mode of thought based on the integral interplay of the symbolic ideal and the real world. In many statements, Achebe emphasizes the significance of mythic consciousness in understanding the different aspects of life in the Igbo community. He argues that his "ancestors created their different politics with myths embodying their varying perceptions of reality" (1988,p.168), and "anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way"(1975,p.94).

To this end, Achebe refurbishes the narrative mode of verbal arts as embodied in the past myths of his people. In drawing on this mode of imaginative expression, he suggests that myths are vital devices for defining and sustaining the cultural codes of his society. They perform the significant metaphoric function of working out the different tensions resulting from historical and cultural transitions. This explains that

the oral imaginative forms have to be viewed no more as a generic artistic style in Achebe's novels; they can be used as determinant cultural devices for his experimental use of the novel form. I will relate this distinctive interface of the oral and written imaginative expressions to what Abiola Irele calls "an aesthetic traditionalism" (2001,p.70); a typical aesthetic of "indigenism" that features the formal structure and thematic material of many African literary works. In effect, an important body of African writings depends on a totality of aesthetic features which brings together both the oral tradition and the Western literary tradition, an aesthetic experience which is consciously adapted to the peculiar conditions of cultural transformation attending the new African communities. "While in broad outline remaining faithful to the formal requirements of the novel in the matter of characterization, time and space, setting and language", writes Immanuel Obiechina, "the West African novelists have necessarily had to represent traditional as well as modern beliefs, attitudes and modes of expression which combine to inform and define the West African concept of reality"(1975,p.262). This statement advances the important idea that the use of the oral narrative in African literature, in both its high order of truth and aesthetic value, represents more than a conventional depiction of a particular cultural mode, for it is set to determine the artistic and discursive implications of the narrative.

In fact, as I will argue in this study, Achebe seems well-versed in this mode of literary interplay; oral and written, which has enabled him to create a wider scope of imaginative orientations to his narrative aesthetics and intellectual vision. This artistic aspect of employing different forms of oral narrative in African literature, in both its order of truth and aesthetic fabric, will be studied through the ideas of Eileen Julien who studies both the artistic and discursive implications of this form of literary interplay in her book *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (1992). Julien stresses that oral narrative must not be taken merely as specific codes which reflect a kind of correspondence between a literary text and the culture it makes reference to: instead the employment of oral narrative genres within the novel form supports the author's narrative scheme and thematic intentions (1992). The use of different forms of oral tradition then serves a set of structural and thematic purposes in the African novel. Achebe's employment of traditional myths in his last novel will be viewed as an

affirmation of his belief in the possibility of using past truths and meanings to figure out the different current issues of culture, both at the level of ideas and aesthetics.

As I will attempt to argue in the last chapter of this study, the aesthetic value and merits of Achebe's post-colonial novels, particularly *Anthills of the Savannah*, is mainly achieved by the conscious and apposite use of oral genre – story telling and myths – that seem to maintain the thematic and aesthetic orientation of the novel's main narrative, carrying the details of the ordinary story into the deep meanings of the metaphorical. When the novels are based on traditional Igbo stories and myths, there is obviously an intention to either revere one's own culture, as in Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1953) by evoking an idealistic order of the land's past, or to provide a basic narrative structure to hold down a complex and an objective account of the real world. And yet, within all these overlapping impulses, Achebe conceives myth not only as a cultural experience, but basically as a form of an "aesthetic activity", to use Richard Chase's words (1949, p.vii). For in addition to its embodiment of cultural and metaphysical issues, myth also appears as "a resolution of the possibilities of the subject matter into certain beautiful images"(Chase,1949,p.121). The mythic and metaphoric implication of Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, as I will argue in this study, is marked less in its aesthetic fabric than in its main events which, though they are given a metaphorical import, express tangible realities. In this novel, the thematic material of some events can be grasped only when being associated with Igbo myths of moral and spiritual redemption, its intellectual female protagonist who goes through metaphoric moments of incarnation turns into a symbol of redemptive cultural impulse for the whole community. The way the myth brings together hybrid generations and different historical periods, the way it carries the people's past memories, and how this imaginative mode of representation presents itself as a form of narrative that can encompass the complex stories of the present is a characteristic perspective in Achebe's concern with the cultural correspondence between the past and the present.

This act of employing literature as a means of social and cultural representation requires us to study Achebe's novels through the approach of Marxism which states that all artifacts are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real social tensions. Specifically, I will rely on Fredric Jameson's "doctrine of political unconscious"

which presents literary works as symbolic acts of representing and restructuring previous historical or social realities. Jameson contends that all literature is informed by the social meanings and discourses it draws on, and in this sense it should be understood as a mode of “symbolic meditation on the destiny of community”. This brings forward, as Jameson argues, the essential function of literary text in presenting “the cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts”(1981,pp.70-20). In this basic orientation towards social representation, the text presents itself as an act of restructuring a previous “historical subtext”(Jameson,1981,pp.82). The literary or aesthetic act then ‘entertains’ an active relationship with the external reality upon which it draws and rendered it an integral part in its dense texture. The writer in this way, as Jameson argues, attempts always to construct an active relationship between the text and its “historical subtext” by embedding the latter’s meanings into the general fabric of the text’s form, thereby creating a strong symbolic correspondence between the text’s import and the external world it depicts. The notions of this approach have been influential on developing an important debate on the relationship between the function of narrative and the nation’s culture in post-colonial literature, a mode of writing which maintains an active interplay between the text’s allegorical world and its actual context. JanMohammed uses Jameson’s theory of literature’s relationship to social and cultural experiences in his study of the rise of colonial literature and the development of the African novel (1983). He explains how the multi-stranded orientations of the colonial experience, both in relation to the uncontrolled state of its overwhelming socio-cultural changes and to its fluctuating policies of domination, presents a good pattern for studying the symbolic relation between an imaginary production and ideological discourses. The theoretical idea included in this link is that all the different discourses, cultural, political, and historical, that are associated with the development of the African communities’ histories are carried into the thematic materials as well as into the aesthetic totality of the narratives studied.

This integral interplay between text and subtext concurs with Edward Said’s notion of the ‘worldliness of texts’. For him the text does not exist outside the world, but is an integral part of the referential world of which it speaks, and this ‘worldliness’ is itself constructed within the text as a part of its formation. Said writes that “the worldliness

and circumstantiality” of the text manifests in “its capacity for conveying and producing meaning” and in its significance “as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency”(Said,1983,p.39). This amounts to considering that texts have various aspects of association with the world, and one of their functions as texts is to incorporate the explicit conditions of their concretely imagined situation. In the novels of Achebe, the worldliness of the text itself becomes most imperative and most explicit. In his novels, one can infer how the “designed interplay between speech and reception, between verbality and textuality, is the text’s situation, its placing of itself in the world”(Said,1983,p.40). In examining Achebe’s theoretical and ideological pronouncements in a variety of essays, lectures and interviews, one may discern a conscious attempt at appropriating the imaginative expression and literary theorization as a mode of translating intellectual thoughts into a constructive project, an idealistic mode of social criticism to an objective critique of the community’s changing conditions.

Following this line of socio-literary analysis dictates upon us to examine Achebe’s mode of character representation through Georg Lukàcs’ theory of ‘typicality’ and ‘totality’ in the realist novel. In his book *Theory of the Novel*, Lukàcs focuses on the idea that the novel’s complete artistic frame is oriented towards capturing humane life as a “totality” in spite of the general state of alienation which features the modern period (1971(1920),p.71). This idea emerges from the premise that art is a device to respond to the general conditions of social fragmentation by building up a symbiotic relationship between the individual’s private world and the public one essentially through the technique of “typicality”, that is by constructing the novel’s events around characters who are distinct individuals and typical representatives of larger social situations. Lukàcs’ argument is particularly relevant to the way in which Achebe carefully connects the different public events of his narratives with the private experiences of his characters. This idea is informed by the ambiguous artistic element of literary representation where we see Achebe’s characters as both memorable fictional constructs and typical figures designed for a given social experience with a clear referential relationship beyond the expressive aesthetic devices employed in the text – a character type, socio-cultural condition, intellectual discourse, or other levels

of representation. As fictional elements, Obi, Nanga, Odili, Ikem, Beatrice, the villagers, and other characters are involved in a set of events that variously determine and orient the course of their social relationships. But they are also presented as specific referential types by the writer to present a satiric account which is familiar to the real community it draws on, a post-colonial community whose general condition is marked with cultural dissolution and social fragmentation. In his essay “The Writer and His Community”, Achebe states that the intellectual intentions of the African writer do not concur with the liberal ideas advocated in the Western novels where we see the focus on the individual’s direct interests rather than the general concerns of the different social groups; in the Igbo cultural tradition, particularly, as he argues, the individual yields to the general order of his community. (1988,pp.37-39)

I will also consider the literary form and aesthetics of the novels under study by relying on Jameson’s support of form in Marxism, what he calls “the ideology of form”. For Jameson, the production of aesthetic forms is inherently related to ideological connotations, with the function of providing imaginary or formal resolutions to current social conflicts. His critique recognizes that formal categories are themselves based on the social and ideological intentions of those who develop them and the particular intellectual grounds of the current social setting in which they arise. As such, the interpretive operation of any text is related to a basic analytical principle: “the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (Jameson, 1981,p.77). This interpretive act is undertaken to show how the different social structures are expressed in and by, as well as subverted by aesthetic forms. In view of this, the study of “a text’s symbolic efficacy” must be understood through a good and pertinent description of the symbolic messages presented to us by the employment of different formal and stylistic features which stand in themselves as the active elements in the whole complex sequence of ‘the mode of production’. Here, the description of formal categories, as Jameson posits it, is in its own right an act of interpretation that can be realized through “construing purely formal patterns as a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic”(1981,p.77).

As such, this study will be carried out through a critical approach that will be related to studying both the content and the form of Achebe's narratives. On the one hand, the thematic approach is substantial in the general reading of Achebe's novels: while the developed ideas of all genres of literary writing serve to highlight the writer's intellectual intentions, the external references provide the fundamental sources of interpretation that presents viable possibilities for exploring the narrative's thoughts and aesthetics. However, it is necessary to indicate that a thematic approach does not entail a simple construal of the textual and aesthetic aspects evinced by the novels simply through historical and socio-cultural references. On the other hand, the study shows a great focus on elucidating the basic function of the texts' general structure in outlining the dimensions of representation fundamental to the writer's imaginative discourse and tradition of writing. In view of this, I will consider the necessity of dealing with form and content as interrelated elements in analyzing Achebe's narratives. For I contend that "the African novel", in general, cannot be interpreted "meaningfully and effectively without bringing content and form into play as elements of literature which are equally significant", since "these elements cannot be mutually exclusive"(Gikandi,1987,p.ix). In the study of Achebe's three post-colonial novels, I will endeavor to take full account of the literary aesthetics that the writer has skillfully resorted to in delineating his thematic material. As such, the critical task at this level does not only entail a mere exposition of some recurring themes, exploration of some particular incidents, and the pursuit of general readings and affirmations that can be posited in a brief way, but an understanding through form study of the intricate meanings of the referential experience which the literary text is reproducing. In this respect, I intend to focus on the content, deeming it is as a plain reflection of the social and cultural aspects which mark the era depicted in the texts. I will also consider the literary form of the novels to show how Achebe's subtle use of narrative strategies and flexible interplay of the novel form and traditional oral narratives successfully sustain the specific implications of his thematic orientations.

The study, then, will be structured along the lines of two critical approaches to Achebe's novels, that is, the one through the study of themes and the other through a critical analysis of the writer's appropriate use of formal aesthetics. This artistic

interplay between the narratives' thematic material and form is an intrinsic feature of imaginative expression in Achebe's tradition of literary writing. In view of this, I will assert that the study of Achebe's post-colonial novels must begin with aesthetics and form as a "mediatory mechanism" and as a designed body of "socio-symbolic message(s)", to use Jameson's terms (1981,p.141). So, I will focus on the writer's artful experimentation of narrative mode, and how this serves to evince the power of imaginative writing to re-enact history and to describe the determinate link shown between the possibilities of cultural representation and the intellectual act. Following this line of analysis, the critical task of studying the theme of cultural ambivalence and the African intellectual in *A Man of the People* will be carried out through considering the artistic interplay between the novel's narrative form and its thematic material. I will attempt to demonstrate how Achebe depends on the specific aspects of the unreliable narration to draw a useful link between the real experiences he endeavors to reproduce and the technical demands of aesthetic considerations, i.e. to create a link through narrative technique between reference and imagination, between reality and fiction. In this sense, I will emphasize how Achebe strengthens the thematic material of his novel through the use of the unreliable narration which is based on contrasts and ambiguities in the narrator's language and attitudes, presenting in this way a distorted fictional reality. Along the course of this analysis, I will rely on the ideas of Gérald Genette, Wayne C. Booth and Shlomith Rimón-Kinan who consider this mode of narration as an important structural device in the whole imaginary act of constructing the novel's 'meaning' or 'moral content'. Booth, for example, relates the strength of the novel's "didactic effects" with the ability of its author to make the reader identify himself with the moral dilemma of the unreliable narrator. (1991,p.293) This feature of 'narrative effects', as I will argue, stands in itself as an essential element in the whole complex sequence of artistic production in Achebe's *A Man of the People*, because it allows the writer to build up links outwards from the text to the literary and social reality on which it draws.

Following the same line of narrative analysis, I will illustrate how Achebe attempts to evoke the cultural multiplicities of the post-colonial condition in the general narrative structure of *Anthills of the Savannah*. In this hard-working narrative, Achebe

has relied on the artistic effects of narrative structure to realize specific literary and discursive intentions similar to those intended by his thematic orientations. At this level, the study will focus on the way the writer has shifted the abstract intellectual debate of post-colonial culture into the literary level by organizing the novel's narrative structure around multiple narrative voices, a complex narrative fiction which I will study through M. Bakhtin's notion of the "dialogic" mode of narration. It is helpful to mention here that Bakhtin's dialogism stands in opposition to the single-toned orientations of monological narratives, a feature which impedes the author from considering the intrinsically multi-stranded directions and inconsistencies of the social and cultural world as a whole. In this ground, Bakhtin makes a useful analogy between the heterogeneous pattern of social life and the multiple narrative voices that the novel may include. Keeping this literary aspect in mind, I deem it important to employ Bakhtin's notion of "dialogism" to discuss Achebe's use of multiple narrative voices as a stylistic device which allows him to develop his critical view of post-colonial culture in *Anthills of the Savannah*. The interaction among the novel's different narrative voices and consciousnesses will be considered as a key device in examining Achebe's discussion of culture, where the complete meaning of the novel's events can be grasped only when it is related to the different sub-narratives of the protagonists.

Along this two-fold critical approach, i.e. considering both the content and the form of Achebe's novels, the study seeks to attain certain specific critical objectives. Particularly, it aims to explore how the post-colonial cultural condition in both its constructive and wavering ideological implications serves as a concomitant external material for Achebe's literary and intellectual intentions. More specifically, this study seeks to show how Achebe's post-colonial novels can be said to have proposed different directions of critical analysis to deal with the African cultural experience and conferred a broader range of imaginary material to a distinctive mode of literary writing. It furthermore probes how these novels may present a significant body of imaginative discourse oriented towards both a painstaking evaluation of the community's cultural experiences and a determined commitment with fictional writing as a necessary mode of social expression and communication. Through a close reading of Achebe's theoretical reflections on the cultural and intellectual function of African

imagination in general and his own writings in particular, I shall contend that Achebe's leading position in the development of a new form of imaginative expression lies in his employment of the novel genre as an efficient aesthetic form to provide a realistic representation of his country's culture, especially in the intricate condition of historical transition from colonialism to the post-colonial situation. In his novels, the stories which are constructed around the ex-colonized African, and the quest for a new mode of African narrative and order of truth brings forward a moderate discourse which not only abrogates the realities fabricated by Western "grand narratives", but also functions to provide a realistic depiction of his people's culture. *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* (set shortly after the independence period) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (set in the era of the military regimes which are supported by imperialist powers) are written in different historical phases but constitute together a unified imaginative corpus which is intended to bear Achebe's consistent cultural concerns – to construct a coherent and collective cultural identity that is adapted to the exigencies of an embittered historical movement. In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe shows how the influence of Western culture on the native traditions changes people's lives and undermines their communal relationships. In this way, the impulsive confusion of African traditions and European values is viewed as the main cause of the different social problems which plague the new community. In *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe broadens the scope of social analysis and discusses his concern about tradition and cultural identity through illuminating incidents relating to socio-political tensions. As with highly-sophisticated fiction, the general structure of his narratives is related to his major thematic interests. His intellectual choice of narrative mode in both novels is generated by his anxious need to create a typically African mode of narrative that can carry within its basic fabric contextual dimensions of cultural representation and identification.

Through reference to many of his critical pronouncements in essays, lectures and interviews, this study will therefore outline the different ideological discourses and the intellectual contexts and implications that have contributed to the framing of Achebe's perspectives on the issue under study. Basic meanings and characteristics of post-colonial discourses are brought forward in an attempt to form a comprehensive

overview of the theoretical concepts (cultural identity, hybridity, African intellectual, colonial discourse, gender, among others) that will support our readings of Achebe's texts. This theoretical section of the study contains an analytical and an informative presentation of the body of thoughts and ideas endorsed by some of the most influential theorists within the field. Thus major ideas emerging from the works of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, P. Chatterjee, A. Loomba, Paul Gilroy, among others, are evoked to discuss useful notions which are related to the studies of post-colonial culture. At the same time, important literary-terms like narration, national allegory, unreliable narrative, dialogism, oral tradition, hybrid-text, myth and other ones, too, are to be employed to display their ample contribution to the development of the writer's thematic orientations. For this purpose, I shall refer to the ideas of Fredric Jameson, Wayne C. Booth, Gérald Genette, M. Bakhtin, Richard Priebe, Eileen Julien, Richard Chase, and others as well, to shed light on particular aspects of narrative structure in Achebe's post-colonial novels. The preoccupation of this study, therefore, is both to go over and to try to deal with these major questions: To what extent can the Achebean literary and intellectual perspective of cultural revival succeed in examining the post-colonial complex dualities of local and Western, past and present, and set forth the real causes behind the common clash between the national and ethnic interests? Does Achebe succeed in handling the weight of the post-colonial condition of cultural transition through his dependence on diverse modes of narratives, and make us read his novels as a cultural aesthetic construct? Does the writer's employment of the oral narrative in his novels carry out a formal value and a thematic function or a general adherence to the conventions of traditional arts and culture? And how does this oral-written interface function to strengthen Achebe's novels as messages of cultural defense against Western misrepresentation of African history and culture?

Those are the questions that will direct the four chapters composing this study. Chapter one, focusing on *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, will discuss the theme of cultural disintegration in post-colonial society. In both novels, Achebe presents his preoccupation with fictional representation to build up an objective delineation of his community as a counter-narrative to the fictionalized images of

African culture and history which have so long marked colonial and imperial discourses. In this regard, the chapter will show how the two novels present a vivid overview of the social and cultural transformations by which an ex-colonized society is beset by the Western cultural influence and stripped of its indigenous values. The second chapter, which deals with *A Man of the People*, brings to the fore the issue of cultural boundaries between the nation's classes. The focus here is on the cultural ambivalence of the emerging intellectual who is caught between the public and private interests. The makeup and conduct of this intellectual is less related to the traditional values of his /her people than to the individualistic values which are inherited from his /her Western learning. This state of confusion is manifest in the novel's narrative form. The third chapter will be devoted to discuss *Anthills of the Savannah* through the theme of cultural identity reconstruction in terms of social-class incorporation perspective. In this text, Achebe's cultural task is entrusted to more enlightened intellectuals who strive to keep a close contact and a harmonious link with the people at the level of cultural identification. Particularly, the writer's dialectical and critical perspective of a progressive national culture comes to the surface via the narrative structure, basically through the technique of multiple narratives. The fourth chapter, focusing also on Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, will particularly examine the theme of tradition regeneration through the traditional oral art of 'myth' as a cultural aesthetic. In these terms, the study will attempt to cover the significance of traditional culture through Achebe's retrieval of the past in search for certain system of belief which he deems has the driving force to reform the African post-colonial culture. In this chapter we will emphasize that the integration of oral narratives within the main narrative of the novel constructs a new aesthetic material that is intended to support the writer's belief in traditional culture as a living ethos. The writer purposely alters the thematic structures of his Igbo myths and incorporates them into his realistic narrative. I shall thus emphasize Achebe's literary contribution towards developing and expanding the African heritage of culture and literature through the fictional medium.

CHAPTER ONE

***CULTURAL DISLOCATION IN NO LONGER AT EASE
AND A MAN OF THE PEOPLE***

Chapter One: Cultural Dislocation in *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*

This chapter is framed within a problematic that relates Achebe's post-colonial texts, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, to complex issues resulting in Ibo cultural transformations. It attempts to investigate the meanings of cultural identity in Achebe's narratives, and to examine how the indigenous customs operate as a referent and as a conveyor of social and historical relations. This chapter, particularly, studies the implicit and designed interplay between the post-colonial condition and the fictional stories portrayed in his novels. The two novels under study portray a state of incoherence and confusion at the level of socio-cultural values and conduct which colonialism has notably engendered. This is an important issue that the writer sets out to overhaul both at the level of thematic material and narrative structure. The novels deal with social and cultural tensions brought about by the arbitrary incorporation of the colonial institutions and values into the traditionally-based world of the African communities, and the inevitable incoherence and turmoil that has become the prevalent aspect of the emergent community because of this inadequate cultural composite. In this view, Achebe's novels bring to the fore "the intimate circumstances of the African in Becoming", as Irele Abiola states. (Irele, in Innes & Lindfors, 1979, p.21)

Achebe's post-colonial novels are then texts which have immensely contributed to the development of African literature for their representation of the most complex aspects attendant upon the historical evolution of his community at its turbulent moments of cultural transformation. In constructing the stories of his novels around different settings and diverse social contexts, the writer tries to bring to the surface, to use Homi Bhabha terms, those 'interstices' or ramifications which are located 'in-between' the determined and overlapping categories of the community's historical experiences, divergent categories of an emergent social fabric which have given rise to a convoluted condition of cultural relations. For Bhabha, any attempt to deal with the post-colonial condition is related less to a comprehensive conception of a simplistic and a coherent situation of the post-colonial individual than to his location within a multi-stranded situation, a complex position that disavows any allegation of adherence to a homogenous culture (1994). In the case of Achebe's novels, these interstices

include an intentional or unintentional cultural movement along transitional historical spaces that have generated in the new community a complex process of cultural mutations. What the novels display, in this sense, is an authentic representation of an emerging culture that does not border on the static or the rigid categories of identification; there is a strong preoccupation with the different overlapping socio-cultural experiences that have given rise to new intellectual orientations for a genuine cultural representation.

In this regard, many of the sub-stories that the novels include will be read as counter-narratives to the ethno-centric discourses of the White colonizer (officials or writers). The very technique of depending on diverse modes of thought in the texts of colonial writers reveal the profound and purposeful correspondence between the ideological and the imaginative cultural discourses which are put forward to set up a mythical image about Africa and its people. Through his elaboration of the different and multifaceted factors influencing the transformation of African culture, Achebe abrogates the disparaging colonial discourses in support of the African's constructive representation of his / her community's real stories and histories. Writing from his stand both as a committed intellectual and a critical cultural nationalist, Achebe is conscious that the objective to contrive a complete narrative that subverts the invented account of the colonial official (Mr. Green in *No Longer at Ease*) contains implications only partially expressed by the asymmetric relation between the latter's most inaccurate and irrelevant views of the African communities and Achebe's objective examination and criticism of his people's culture. For the colonial official was not merely an unsympathetic stranger observing the natives in a disdainful manner; his view was always traversed by potent racial and cultural connotations. The views Mr. Green posits of unchanging and corrupt Africans stems from his own established view as a racist English official, vindicating a most conventional criticism within the tradition of a colonial discourse which has deliberately depended on mythical images of representation to provide a strong ideological support to the colonizer's apparatus of domination.

In fact, Achebe's narratives have strongly demonstrated how the post-colonial dichotomy of backward native culture and developed Western culture has been the

main defining principle in the codified memories of cultural and racial subordination engendered by the colonial discourse. The sense of cultural alienation and mental anguish which seem to obsess the ex-colonized individual in Achebe's novels is firmed up, in part, by well-designed colonial systems of thought which serve to underline what Edward Said describes as the "dreadful secondariness"(1989,p.207) of some people's histories and cultures. Still, the reader is made to realize through the apathetic societies of Achebe's novels how the allegedly new subjects of the independent era are predisposed to undervalue the psychological grip of the colonial traumatic experience on the different institutions of the post-colonial community. The embittered experience of colonialism, as Said rightly puts it, stands as a "fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results"(1989, p.207). Writing on the same issue, Achille Mbembe invites us to study and understand the African post-colonial situation on the ground of its complex hybrid construct. He contends that the prevalent social and political systems that organize the different African institutions and organizations are taken on from different foreign sources, tangled historical stages, overlapping cultural traditions and modes of order which over time turn out to be brought into one complex cultural composite to the extent that a given value or practice" has the look of 'custom' without being reduced to it and partakes of 'modernity' without wholly being included in it"(2001,p.25). In this case, it is essential to depend on varied systems of thought in studying the African transitional existence in view of the fact that Africa as a material of research in the Western anthropological discipline is continuously misrepresented, altered and distorted to fit specific conventional ideological implications. Thus, the task of looking for adequate scientific materials which deal with African cultural issues includes a reference to anthropological and cultural documents which provide an abundant space of criticism and analysis for the subject under study.

This chapter, then, discusses *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* as post-colonial novels which shed light on the deep-seated influence of Western instruction and its residual effects on the psyche of the African individual. Achebe's two novels convey a critical view of the post-colonial African struggling to find an adequate sense of locality and belonging within the sweeping confusion resulting from the colonial

experience, attempting to achieve a secure position between the basic exigencies of her/his patriotic allegiance and her/his espousal of many foreign values related to Western culture. In these narratives, Achebe draws upon the socio-cultural realities of Western instruction and culture in Nigeria, focusing on the underlying weaknesses of the colonial discourses and ideological perceptions on which the new independent society was being patterned in *No Longer at Ease*, and shifting to the post-independence time of *A Man of the People*, when the consequences of the cultural fusion on the social and political spheres begin to undermine more and more the people's interest in the basic principles of their indigenous culture. In both novels, Achebe is intent on conjuring in the reader's mind a whole image of the realities of traditional culture during post-colonialism, by creating specific social contexts which reveal its limitations and triumphs along the exigencies of the changing times. The writer intentionally draws on many traditions of his community in his narratives in order to indicate the people's changing dispositions towards their customs, traditional ceremonies, beliefs and rituals, and also to bring to mind the double-consciousness and confusion engendered by the interference of Western culture. We see in the study of *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* that the adoption of Western culture and religion by the African individual, whether intellectual or ordinary person, has its negative effects not only on the general fabric of social and economic organization, but also on the very setup of social relationships, kinship values and the sense of identification with one's own culture. In many critical scenes, the novels reveal a fluctuating association between the community's old values and the imposed or adopted mores of Western culture. The firm splitting up between the traditional dispensation and Christian teachings that Achebe evokes in the colonial context of *Things Fall Apart* has now given way to an impulsive compromise of the two different world-views in the post-colonial world. In his first novel, Achebe presents a self-contained community which can establish its own principles of social organization and moral conduct. Now, in the bifurcated setting of his post-colonial novels, Achebe brings to the surface disintegrated communities which fail to suppress unhealthy behaviors, and yield to a morally bewildering cultural chaos.

Through the objectivity which prevails in his narratives, Achebe's novels represent a significant and subtle body of intellectual reflection on complex communities which have been stripped from the traditional ethos of its moral mores. In bringing forward the stories of these communities from an insider's perspective, the writer does not decrease the level of objectivity which frequently features the import of his narratives. The writer's focus here is on contriving well-constructed imaginary situations as much as on creating living individuals whose personal experiences are only a miniature story of the society's changing conditions. In fact, in Achebe's mode of representation, we are frequently presented with characters who are "intricately bound up with history and social circumstances" (Ngara, in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991, p. 114). It is, in one general sense, the reflections of individuals on the different events they are involved in, and their ultimate evolutions in the course of their contact with other individuals' thoughts and perspectives that build up the fictional world of Achebe's novels.

As we will endeavor to argue in this chapter, the significance of Achebe's novels stems not only from the critical thematic material he draws on, as Abiola Irele argues, but particularly "from his complete presentation of men in action, living reaction to their fate, as well as from his own perception that underlines his imaginative world and confers upon it relevance and truth" (Irele, in Innes & Lindfors, 1979, p. 10). For example, Obi and Odili appear to be genuine characters that carry distinctive individual qualities and yet their behaviors and eventual choices are subjected to the transitional conditions of their society. In all Achebe's post-colonial novels, there is an apparent attempt to reflect the complex conditions of the depicted community in the elaborate development of his characters; the different stages of their lives represent particular experiences of the writer's actual community. The writer portrays them and their ardent ambitions, idiosyncrasies, and oscillated dispositions as an expression of the unsettled conditions that mark their societies. The cultural predicament of Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* is a critical projection and exposition of the experiences of those rising African intellectuals who found themselves required to play a mediating role between the past traditional world of their community and the lingering effects of Western instruction and culture. This leads us to suggest that in tracing the development of Achebe's fictional figures we are involved in the critical

task of interpreting and evaluating the different experiences of development and breakdown which mark the African communities.

Following these aspects of literary representation, we will argue in this chapter that in reading Achebe's post-colonial novels alongside theoretical writings and literary criticism we intend to lay emphasis not only on the thematic focus of his texts, but also on the necessity of approaching his novels as substantial artistic texts which critically reconstruct the socio-cultural world they draw on. The approach adopted in this chapter is of a close analysis of the texts, but it has sometimes been necessary to pay greater attention to some particular incidents in the novels than to others. Primarily, it is important to query critically how the author has presented those aspects of cultural tensions and dilemmas he has selected for treatment and how successfully he dramatizes in his novels the link between cultural tradition and the realities of the post-colonial condition. We shall also discuss the particular cultural values the writer is upholding or opposing, and what particular cultural or intellectual effects he uses to achieve his purpose. We shall examine how close Achebe's texts are to the context of post-colonialism in Africa. We shall question, as Jameson posits it in an endeavor to explain the problem of text interpretation whether "the text (is) a free-floating object in its own right, or does 'reflect' some context or ground, and in that case does it simply replicate the latter ideologically, or does it possess some autonomous force in which it could be seen as negating that context?"(1981,p.38). In effect, the post-colonial context has prompted the writer to deal with new questions and preoccupations that would measure up to the harrowing tensions and anxieties of the time: did Achebe replicate Nigeria's cultural pressures or did he counteract the realities of its time in quest of an alternative discourse that might better project the realities of the new community? Obviously, the writer may not proffer a plain or a definite answer to this intricate issue, but he can create narratives that serve as cultural constructs. They provide a useful space of representation that expose the socio-cultural reality and the prevalent ideological discourses of which they are themselves an integral part.

1.1. No Longer at Ease and the Disintegration of the Old World

No Longer At Ease depicts a paradigm of a post-colonial society caught between the exigencies of its traditional culture and the adopted Western values. It takes up the

theme of cultural degeneration that the writer has already introduced in *Things Fall Apart* and carries on to accentuate the lingering effects of the European colonization on the different facets of African societies. The events focus on a self-conceited young Nigerian who has received a British education. At the beginning of the novel, we see him overwhelmed with nationalistic emotions; his anxious desire is to deliver his country from the moral and social decay which he attributes to unhealthy social practices. Gradually, his idealistic views start to fade away in front of the temptations of the Civil Service privileges and the many convoluted values of the time which engender a general condition of moral laxity and social depravity. As the events unfold, we see him yielding to a deep disillusionment and realizing the inability of his elite generation to provide adequate solutions to the sweeping decadence which besets the whole society. Achebe uses specific socio-cultural experiences and the different locales of the story to expand on the issue: to disprove and counteract the white man's perceptions of the African world, and to bring to the surface his own analysis of the convoluted socio-cultural situation that inevitably propels a young intellectual to undo himself by sightlessly succumbing to detrimental social behaviors. Along the whole course of the novel, we find the writer placing this conceited intellectual in "a liminal space, in which he finds it difficult to formulate a coherent sense either of himself or his community" (Morrison, 2007,p.91).

As Arthur Ravenscroft demonstrates in his study *Chinua Achebe* (1977), the title of *No Longer At Ease* is drawn from a distinguished Western literary text, T.S. Eliot's poem "The journey of the Magi" (1927). The intertextual reference indicates themes of cultural fragmentation and historical transformation in which the narrative voice of Eliot's poem ponders on the significance of seeking the path of the Christ child to achieve spiritual redemption. When he returns home, he finds that his people have gone through many changes, and comes to realize that he is unable to adapt to the new dispensation. Achebe begins *No Longer at Ease* with the last four lines of this modernist poem to set forth the difficulties that his protagonist is confronting in his attempt to adjust with the different exigencies of the new society. Obi Okonkwo is a typical representative of the rising elite of independent Africa which could get an important social status during this period due to its high education. An enormous

amount of duty as well as advantaged opportunities were vested in this brilliant minority class since it was deemed by its people as the genuine leaders of the new independent society. Like these intellectuals, Obi has achieved a great success at school, a fact which has induced his kinsmen and tribe to collect funds to send him off to one of the British prestigious universities. As a foreign student in England he expresses his nostalgia towards his country in the form of romantic poems. When he returns to Nigeria he gets an important post in the civil service. Obi recognizes the inadequacy of his attitudes and surrealistic ideas only when he goes through difficult circumstances that cut him off from his family and his tribe, as well as his most proclaimed principles. The first verses of one of his nostalgic poems expound the romantic value of Obi's early feelings towards his country and this is projected in such a way as to foreground the author's distance from his character:

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

(136, all quotes in this study are from the 1987 Heinemann edition of *No Longer At Ease*)

Obi's renunciation of these unrealistic images is expressed in the symbolic discarding of this poem. He does not find in his fatherland that mythical existence of "peace" or "nobility" articulated in his hyperbolic verse. When he repudiates his idealistic ambitions he allows himself to submit to deep suspicion and pessimism: he accepts to take bribes, is arrested, tried by colonial officials and imprisoned. The disavowal of his alleged principles represents the fundamental theme of the whole narrative. He finds himself compelled to take bribes to preserve the prestigious image he builds for himself in front of his associates and his kinsmen; his anxious desire is to maintain his status in the shining world of the modern city.

No Longer At Ease opens with the painful trial of Obi, who is convicted of taking bribes through the mishandling of his position in the Civil Service. Two colonial officials bluntly express their puzzlement at Obi's implication in such a shameful act without presenting rationalized explanations. "I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this"(p.2), wonders the judge;

“I cannot understand why he did it”, comments the British Council man. For some colonial officials the issue is quite comprehensible. Mr. Green, Obi’s superior at work, analyzes the issue in terms of “anthropological facts”: “The African is corrupt through and through”; they are so because they are “sapped mentally and physically” by “the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease”(p.3). Mr. Green presumes to present a rational explanation of the prevalent nature of corruption on the African societies. He refers to climate and diseases as determining factors in imbuing Africans with immoral behaviors. These unavoidable inherent factors, according to him, make them unable to release themselves from those social evils, whatever the quality of western education “wasted” on them. In spite of the ideals of “equality” he alleges to advocate, Green concludes his scientific theory with rational detachment: “Equality won’t alter facts”. This simplistic explanation is fundamentally a re-inscription of those established colonial discourses about African ‘primitiveness’ and ‘inferiority’.

In fact, through this incident Achebe has intensified his overtly-formed critique of the Westerner’s mode of cultural representation to deliver the African’s self-contained world from the potent racial images that have been embedded in the colonizer’s discounting anthropological accounts. The narrative foregrounds how Mr. Green represents the excessive account of the racist, paternalistic colonialist, who postulates that all the institutions and teachings that the white man worked to firm up on the African’s psyche prove to be unfitting, for the African cannot break out of his inner ‘backwardness’ and his government’s institutions will always fail because of the sweeping corruption that beset the whole facets of social life. Green serves to enact the familiar pretentious version of the colonizer’s enlightening mission: theoretically, the British officials are still in the newly-independent Nigeria because the paternalistic colonial agents see as their duty to orient the first plans of the growing nation into the new condition of self-rule. He satirically addresses Obi: “There is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of his country.(...) And you tell me you want to govern yourselves”(p.139). Here the British official is directing his criticism to Obi who stands completely helpless in front of his financial problems, but through the general statements he uses one can grasp an overt reference to the wider sphere of the new nation.

In fact, Mr. Green seems unaware that in viewing the African in terms of an unchanging and stagnant nature of time evolution he is in this way abating the whole phase of colonialism, as though it had exercised no form of influence on African beliefs and dispensation. Mr. Green's negative portrait is meant to strip the African of all form of social and cultural evolution. This can be expounded through what Johannes Fabian has termed "allochronism" in his study *Time and the Other* (1983), which explores the dependence of anthropology on a given politics of time structure in outlining its mode of epistemology. The anthropologist's preoccupation with interpreting cultures in terms of a given movement in time rests on particular epistemological impulses which are theoretically oriented towards desecrating the world of other's cultures and exploring the specific conditions attending all forms of encounter across the ancient cultures. In Fabian's explanation, the concept of race which is the key principle in identifying the historical value of different human cultures in anthropological studies is frequently associated with a given mode of time development, where the cultures of ancient societies are classified along a chronological historical arc, "a stream of time – some upstream, others downstream"(1983, p.17). In this sense, the effort to determine the whole view of the contemporary human world according to some designed systems of thoughts can be attained only by constructing the anthropological discourse around the assumption of a 'typological time'(Fabian,1983,p.23) which presents the possibility of locating some societies within a static historical arc. In opposition to this, the pattern of dynamic and active development is an aspect which is attributed to particular progressive societies. Thus uncivilized and tribal races are deemed by anthropologists as fixed cultures because they do not yield to the effects of time movement. To this end, the colonizer's unrestrained desires for absolute domination had engendered in the minds of its agents a set of detrimental assumptions of racial implications and relations, vindicated by some false pretensions of ideational reversals and imaginary convictions: the supremacy of the Western civilization, the white man's idealistic mission to enlighten the backward races in the whole world, the need of the natives to be ruled by the civilized races and their inability to create fruitful mores of social conduct, and many other reductive images which are attached to them. Such established racial allegations

are not rational representation of the native's character and world but proved to be as a designed set of racial signifiers which the Western colonizer had worked to instill in the black psyche in an attempt to provide an ideological basis for his exploitive and oppressive policies.

However, Stuart Hall's study of the historical and cultural evolution of the Caribbean communities in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora"(1997) advises us to move away from an obsessed dependence on fixed assumptions of cultural identification and to perceive cultural identity in its continuous constructive process. Most post-colonial critics and theorists emphasize the fact that the ex-colonized individual is a complex cultural entity engendered by the turbulent encounter between two asymmetrical worldviews and orders of life. For Hall, cultural identity does not constitute a sort of pure and stable system of values and codes. To a certain extent, it is the inevitable outcome of some unpredictable historical experiences which mark the evolution of a given community. Particularly, Hall distinguishes two useful conceptualizations of 'cultural identity'. The first is a conventional conceptualization of identity that accentuates the consistent and the unchanging essential fabric of a particular cultural identity that brings together various social groups and ethnicities within a shared history and a common cultural legacy. These basic cultural elements endow its people with "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning", beyond the predetermined or sudden changes which traverse the course of their history.(Hall, 1997,p.111) Hall reminds us that this fundamentalist view of cultural identity has played a significant role in the liberating ideologies and nationalist thoughts of the anti-colonial movements. It has served as a sort of strengthening sources of self-identification against the oppressive white colonizer who had used all the repressive policies to distort and obliterate the different cultural legacies of the colonized peoples. Hall uses the example of the Jamaican artists, particularly the photographers, who have addressed the creative force of their people's cultural heritage within the rising forms of cultural representation. These artists have attempted to create in imaginary terms the historical and cultural oneness of the Caribbean black people who had been subjects to traumatic experiences of migration, slavery and colonization. Their artistic works, as Hall says, present a means of "imposing an

imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation”, which is rendered as the usual condition of the Black people.(1997,p.112) This symbolic act of “reunification” can be achieved only by evoking the past historical and cultural connections with the African soil which continues to present itself as a living legacy in the history and culture of the Caribbean peoples.

The second definition of “cultural identity”, as Hall explains, emphasizes the aspects of ruptures and mutations which may occur in the general fabric of a particular cultural identity due to unremitting interplay of different historical interventions. Hall expounds that what we conceive as a unique cultural essence is in itself an ongoing process of formation and re-formation. For rather than being perpetually calcified in some fixed archaeology, cultural identity is constantly determined by the inevitable orientations of history and power relations. It is grounded on specific historical and social contexts – and historical interventions impose a designed course of cultural discontinuities and mutations. This is why Hall argues that we cannot comprehend the trauma of the colonial experience and its effects on the Black culture by drawing only on the first essentialist definition which focuses on the stable and unchanging cultural codes, but we can put this issue into better scrutiny by depending on the second definition, which puts emphasis on the influence of the historical and social factors on the general makeup of cultural identity. The abiding task for Hall is, therefore, to seek how to interweave the patterns of transformation and mutations within the other fixed or essential elements which constitute the developing course of cultural identity. In response, Hall presents again the convoluted fabric of the Caribbean cultural identity. He presents the cultures of the Caribbean Black peoples as a sort of becoming identities which are generated by the congruent interplay of two different folds of aspects: the aspect of uniqueness or continuity; and the aspect of discontinuity and transformation. He contends that these two aspects function in a dialogic way: for while the past cultural legacies of their African origin provide these people with fundamental frames of cultural and historical reference, the different historical experiences make them go through “traumatic ruptures” which estranged them from their indigenous cultures. Crucially, these cultural aspects, according to Hall, have not to be perceived in terms of absolute conflict between some set of binaries – past /

present, similarity / difference. In fact, the complex cultural fabric of the Caribbean peoples transcends this simplistic twofold scheme of identification. In response to successive historical locations and events, and in relation to antagonistic stereotypical discourses, the cultural practices and codes of these people are incessantly adapted to new contexts and dispositions to encompass other emergent aspects of identification.

This post-colonial debate about cultural authenticity and change is most prominently deployed in Achebe's novels. This, alongside the dichotomy of local culture and Western values, was one of the issues of greater significance in the nationalist writings of Achebe, and a key source of contention in the writer's abiding effort to examine the different historical factors attending the development of his nation's cultural identity. In presenting his intellectual characters in situations of tensions and conflict with their communities, Achebe attempts to have a deep representation of the crosscurrents of history, and to expound that the context is a complex interaction of the African traditional past, the colonial encounter, and the emergent hybrid culture. Social and cultural transformation was no longer determined by a conventional conflict between self and other; on the opposite, Nigeria's progress to independence and post-colonialism was brought about by complex forms of historical and cultural experiences which rendered the new developing intellectuals like Obi Okonkwo vacillating about their cultural disposition in society. The novels present to us these individuals in experiences which are deep-seated in uncertainty and ambivalence; they are entangled in a social impasse, trapped between the residual colonial values which seem to change the whole fabric of African society, and the traditional cultural values which are shifted to different uses and perceptions because of the unavoidable impact of the colonial inheritance. This unsettling cultural composite, as Achebe states in an interview, presents a most convoluted pattern in which "the worst element of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added on to them"(Achebe, in Duerden & Pieterse,1972,p.8). The argument that emerges here can be related to the problematic issue of cultural identity as a contingent and a dependent experience; it is linked both to the complex formation of social relationships and the diverse facets of social life which may change according to the community's historical conditions. In the novels, Achebe does not depend on some set

of alien theoretical notions to resolve the post-colonial problems of his community; he brings to the fore genuine stories that carry his characters' multi-stranded reflections on the collective experiences of which they are an integral part.

The main intellectual impulses behind Achebe's strenuous endeavors to restore the status of African culture, and to scrutinize the cultural and historical forces that hamper this process are related less to the socio-cultural fabric of African society than to the way Africa and its people have been projected in the racial discourses of the colonial authority. Achebe is naturally aware that the African communities must be released not so much from the constraints of their 'backward' indigenous cultures, as different pretentious trends of development and modernity use to assert, but from the disparaging discourses of colonialism and the Western world in general which have rendered the African individual as a fixed being and defined him along a determined mythical portrait of what Edward Said describes as a 'comprehensive vision' that strips the African of the very innate feature of change. Said argues that narrative can indeed project a counter system of thoughts beyond the essentialist truths inherent in the colonial and post-colonial relations of cultural and racial representation. As a means of representing the community's history and culture, narrative can bring to the fore many obliterated or hidden realities that may subvert the stereotyped colonial perceptions which have stripped the colonized people of the innate feature of change and historical movement (Said,1979,p.240). In an attempt to represent the colonized (or ex-colonized) as a known and visible entity which is, at the same time, unaffected by historical mutations, the colonizer views the colonized as an individual without a valued history and hence yielding only to those forms of change that emanate from the colonial civilizing institutions. In Achebe's case, to bring to the surface the rich heritage of his people's culture – which is one of Achebe's declared and constant themes, his narratives had to take the turbulent colonial experience into account; they had to counteract its pretentious vision, historical and cultural claims on Africans.

In *No Longer at Ease*, Mr. Green is an archetype of the British conceited officials and administrators. His way of dealing with Nigerians can be explained in terms of those inconsistent attitudes of the colonial officials who frequently find themselves wedged between the presumed missions of civilizing the natives and the realities of the

colonial oppressive policies in Africa. The recurring reductive statements he makes about the African nature and its people stem from his own conventional view as an English official, accentuating in this way a sort of anthropological facts which border on the conventional racial signifiers of the colonial discourse. Mr. Green's insistence on presenting Africans in totally negative terms is one pattern of a tradition of thought, convictions, and meanings that the Western scholar, official and administrator resort to in an attempt to establish a distorted and an inaccurate reality of the colonized and the ex-colonized as well. The colonial authority had relied on its stiff officials and administrators to internalize this negative representation in the African mind. G.D. Killam in his *Africa in English Fiction* (1968) examines a set of selected English novels which failed in varying degrees to present a satisfactory image of African people and cultures. Among the many memorable fictional characters that are presented in these colonial writings, Killam focuses on the example of George Alfred Henty, a most faithful advocate of colonialism and its uncritical follower. As a devoted colonial officer, Henty used to present misleading and unnecessary imaginary reports about the African communal life. His representation can be conceived only within a paternalist attitude – the attitude of the liberal imperialist who asserted the postulation of African inferiority as an appropriate argument to rationalize the colonial presence. We are used to be told that Africans

are good-natured and passionate, indolent, but will work hard for a time; clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond. The intelligence of an average negro is about equal to that of a European child of ten years old. They are absolutely without originality, absolutely without inventive power. Living among white men, their imitative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilization. Left alone to their own devices they retrograde into a state little above their native savagery.

(qtd in Killam, 1968,p.21)

These literary pretensions of the English narrative concur with what Edward Said calls “a discursive consistency” in the system of knowledge about the Orient or the colonized. It is in one sense an established history of thought with supporting colonial institutions and scholarly doctrines which occupy “a common field of play defined for them (the Orientalists), not by some inherent common subject matter alone, but by some common history, tradition, universe of discourse”(Said,1979,p.273). Ania

Loomba observes that this discourse which is intended to construct “in-depth analyses of colonial epistemologies” presents a one-sided account of the colonial rule in Africa in which the focus is put more on the cultural field than the economic and political institutions. She explains that in colonial discourse studies the term ‘discourse’ is used in practice to denote ‘literary texts’ and other forms of ‘cultural representation’. In this sense, as Loomba writes, “colonial discourses erase any distinction between the material and the ideological because they simply concentrate on the latter”(1998,p.51).

In all his narratives, Achebe propels us to view his colonial characters as a device of representation which is meant to deconstruct a conventional system of thought, a set of reductive discourses predicated on imaginary implications of racial and cultural relationships. Achebe brings to the surface the prejudiced signifiers of this colonial discourse in the projection of representative British administrators like George Allen in *Things Fall Apart*, along Captain Winterbottom and Mr. Clarke in and *Arrow of God*. They firmly impose a rigorous system of subordination and domination upon the local people whom they allege to civilize. We see them in *Arrow of God* as those “who can deal with men as others deal with material, who can grasp great situations, coax events, shape destinies and ride on the crest of the wave of time ... to lead the backward races into line”(Achebe,1974,p.33). Achebe’s poignant statement refers to the debasing colonialist tradition of racist representation whose basic tools of thoughts are deliberately oriented to minimize the cultural and historical value of the native people – to internalize in their mind the idea of inferiority and subordination. In Achebe’s terms, this conventional way of representing the African concurs with the comprehensive act of constructing the corpus of events and history of objects within the established discipline of Western anthropology; it is a deliberate attempt to abrogate the complex condition of the living colonized subject in all its historical and cultural bifurcations, and to present in its place the all-knowing vision of the colonial agent which is posited essentially to dominate the backward race. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe’s narrative draws an apparent breach between the reductive racist perceptions which are presented in the discourses of the colonial officials – in which the local people are viewed as “children” (38), and “dogs” (76) and what Achebe’s counter narrative portrays as the complex and resilient traditions of the indigenous culture.

This antagonistic relationship between the two different discourses of representation brings to the surface the conventional intellectual breach between what Said critically calls ‘vision’ – a conventional and an inflexible perception of racially categorized people through a discourse of “synchronic essentialism” – and “narrative”, which he explains as “a specific form” of representation used in the discipline of “written history to counter the permanence of vision” by accentuating the factor of “change” in the different realities of the human history (1979,p.240). In his essay “Colonialist Criticism”, Achebe describes an aspect of the colonialist mentality that exemplifies his satiric treatment. He indeed refers to Western criticism of Africans as follows:

To the colonialist mind it was always of the utmost importance to be able to say: ‘I know my natives’, a claim which implied two things at once: (a) that the native was really quite simple and (b) that understanding him and controlling him went hand in hand – understanding being a pre-condition for control and control constituting adequate proof of understanding.
(1975,p.5)

In *Arrow of God*, the writer uses the English character Clarke, who is a new official in the colonial administration, to criticize Allen’s Pacification memoire (colonial official in *Things Fall Apart*) for its unwarranted prejudiced language and insolence of native set of values and order. Clarke’s view is considered as unrealistically ‘progressive’ by Winterbottom, who attempts to rationalize his opinion through the superior knowledge of his long experience with the natives: “When you’ve been here as long as Allen was and understood the native a little more you might begin to see things, in a slightly different light. If you saw, as I did, a man buried alive up to his neck with a piece of roast yam on his head to attract vultures you know...(Achebe,1974,p.36;original ellipsis). The contrast between the newcomer’s wavering liberalism and the experienced administrator’s overt contempt towards the local people exhibits the obscure and convoluted objectives of colonialist attitudes. Prominent among Achebe’s critical essays which vehemently set forth and condemn the fallacies of colonialist discourse are “Colonialist Criticism”, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness”, and “Impediments to Dialogue Between North and South”. “Colonialist Criticism” expounds how white peoples’ denigrating, diminishing assessments of black culture in the colonial era and of black literature more recently as framed within the same immobilizing assumptions of black inferiority. In the colonial phase, Achebe

points out, black peoples were subject to the ostensible advantages of European regulation, religion, and education; likewise the black writer is deemed as a “somewhat unfinished European” whose cultural creations will achieve some level of endorsement when they reach a “universality” that really conforms to the tradition of European texts and all its aesthetics and epistemic preoccupations (Achebe,1975,p.3). Within this and the critical essay on Conrad, Achebe deconstructs the prejudiced postulations of colonialist discourse, asserting that the subjective and static restrictiveness of colonialist institutions are induced by “the desire (...) in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil for Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe,1988,p.2). He reads Conrad’s dismissing of the African’s existence as a re-inscription of well-structured racist myths that contrived different imaginary thoughts to support imperial systems.

It is not surprising that Green’s understating of Nigerian local life is a blend of stereotyped colonial prejudices and falsified anthropological reports. African readers are likely to scorn Green for his most racist and simplistic views that identify the African as a mere child, but Achebe employs Green as an example of British colonial paternalism. Achebe points out that Mr. Green as a colonial type is manifest in every juncture of Nigeria’s colonization by the British: “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”(pp.96-97). Particularly, Mr. Green ranks typically among the memorable British officers not because of any obvious gracious principles he owns (as indicated by his allegiant secretary Marie), but because Achebe deems the colonial officers as the first colonial agents to deny the Nigerians the possibility for cultural and political autonomy. The very fact that Achebe assimilates Green to a missionary of 1900 sets forth how men such as Green could continue to have a deep-seated influence in the task of running Nigeria in 1960 and after achieving its sovereignty. Achebe expresses further his contempt for Green by likening him to Conrad’s Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe unreservedly loathed Conrad, viewing him as the “bloody racist” whose books only contributed to keep up the prejudiced ideas about Africa in the

imperial British community. Similar to Kurtz, at the beginning of his duties, Green embarks on the pretentious mission to assist the African societies. In his own proclaimed ideals he was carrying out the honorable and the humanitarian mission of the Great Kingdom, but by being involved in the realities of a colonized milieu his own deep-rooted racism appears to overwhelm him and becomes manifest in the form of his revulsion and derisive scorn for the natives he initially pretends to enlighten.

Through the whole course of the novel, Achebe contrasts the static restrictiveness of Mr. Green's colonialist discourse with the narrative elaboration of the complex multiple factors driving Obi to yield to bribe taking. The limitations of Mr. Green's subjectivity and self-assured judgments and the failure of the colonial judge to understand Obi's corrupt act despite their education and long experience in Africa consist of established discourses which belong to the tradition of colonialist systems of representation. When the writer ends the novel with a direct comment on Mr. Green's self-assured knowledge of Africans, the writer allows us to trace the dramatic gap that has separated Mr. Green's 'superior knowledge' from the whole narrative that evinces the irreconcilable values and cultures which have ensnared Obi. In the final sentence of the novel, Achebe appears to comment that not only didn't the White judge and the Umuofians understand why Obi succumbed to unhealthy social behaviors, but "we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either"(p.154). The important argument this narrative suggests as a contextualization of the writer's disavowal of the prejudiced premises of Mr. Green reinforces the conflicting demands of the Western background and traditional culture on Obi. Obviously, the white colonist lacks the 'rational' competence to apprehend the deep-seated effects of cultural pressures on Obi's act.

Robert M. Wren appropriately discerns the whole novel "as a refutation of Mr. Green's remarks"(1980,p.38). Thus the judge's query and Green's pathetic racial fallacy reveal a typical paradigm of colonialist position to which the novel's major incidents are the counter-narrative, for Achebe devotes the entire narrative to present an inside view of the socio-cultural background which has generated an unanticipated moralistic behaviors; to expound precisely how and why such an idealistic intellectual person as Obi Okonkwo succumbs to disgraceful social evils. Achebe makes Green

repeat similar discounting statements throughout the course of the narrative in order to express the colonial discourse, and relatedly he allows Obi an inadequate scale of comprehension of the colonial subdued influence upon his ideas and cultural existence. At the beginning of the novel, we see that Obi is well aware that such colonialist denigration has afflicted the inner psyche of his own race. While he is in London, studying English literature, he finds the experience of speaking to other Nigerian students in English very discomfited:

It was humiliating to have to speak to one's countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own. He wished they were here to-day to see. Let them come to Umuofia now and and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. (p.45)

This passage sets forth important clues in Obi's personality near the beginning of the novel. It points to some pungent experiences of racism during the four years of study he spends in England where submission to recurring experiences of racial inferiority boosts his sense of cultural identification and intensifies his nationalistic emotions. He informs us about one approach he resorts to for countering some aspects of racism when being in the public places of England: he seizes the opportunity of using his native idiom on every occasion he encounters one of his countrymen. Such situations give him a great sense of cultural belonging in the presence of the English speakers.

The novel depicts an unstable existence of socio-cultural incidents and interactions. It shows a fragmented society that is dramatically cut off from the well-arranged and moralistic world portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*; social and cultural partitions have developed between metropolitan and rural communities, and between a Western educated class proficient in achieving material richness and social benefits and a village society increasingly attracted by the alluring conditions of the big modern city. Villagers are more inclined to desert their sound systems of values, and the social status which was once attained by the possession of prolific lands, yam barns, social and religious titles and large extended families. Achebe's deep concern is not only about the lingering effects of the colonial experience or the imperial practices, but also about the growing class of the European-trained Nigerians in a transitional society relinquishing the values of their indigenous culture and extolling the Western

set of mental attitudes. Within his novels, Achebe expresses his wrath against the Nigerians because they have too readily espoused the European values and pretentious ideas that obliterate what was valuable in their traditional culture. As Lloyd Brown points out, in Achebe's satirical portrayals of African adoption and internalization of defective colonialist discourses, "the perceptual problems created by the foreigner's cultural norms have been compounded by those Africans who accept or pander to the European's irrelevant judgments" (Brown, In Innes & Lindfors, 1979, p.33). These ideas concur with Albert Memmi's and Frantz Fanon's studies of culture and colonization, they were the first post-colonial theorists to study in depth these detrimental cultural effects of colonialism and to emphasize the thesis that the colonizing turbulent process contributed to engender perplexing psychological conditions of cultural identification. Both thinkers analyzed the different aspects of inferiority complex which the colonial agents had worked to firm up in the minds of colonized peoples, among whom one is taught to perceive and evaluate oneself in terms of the reductive conceptions of the white man; a false sense of lowliness and weakness which partially stems from his unsighted dependence on the perspectives, values and ideology of the colonizer or the imperial forces. Describing the 'myth of the colonized portrait' which becomes utterly recognized by the natives as a 'familiar description', Memmi writes:

The accusation disturbs him and worries him even more because he admires and fears his powerful accuser. "Is he not partially right?" he mutters. "Are we not all a little guilty after all? Lazy, because we have so many idlers? Timid, because we let our-selves be oppressed". Willfully created and spread by the colonizer, this mythical and degrading portrait ends up by being accepted and lived with to a certain extent by the colonized.

(Memmi, 1974, pp.131-132)

This psychological analysis of the turbulent experience of internalizing the sense of cultural lowliness and weakness within the colonized psyche is given an ample space of analysis in Fanon's studies of culture and the colonial experience. He delineates the depressing condition of cultural estrangement which results from the unsighted acceptance of the colonizer's reductive and stereotyped images. Fanon describes the paradox of this sense of cultural belonging at the level of the black man that emanates from his inclined identification with the colonizer world-view in terms of the racial realities of his experience of colonization: for the black man is taught to believe in the

supremacy of the colonizer 'white' culture. The controlling idea for this analysis is Fanon's view of the colonial world as being separated into two irreconcilable and incongruous socio-cultural locales, one white and one black, hence, giving rise to a Manichean ground of identification which draws on absolutely antagonist bigoted values. Fanon's poignant statement about the anxious quest carried by the black Antilleans to "whiten" themselves put on view the depressing level of self-alienation and self-contempt that besets the life of the colonized subject: "The negro of the Antilles will become proportionately whiter – that is will become closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language"(1986(1967),p.8). While this mimetic inclination stands as an eluding strategy to eschew the white man's mythical and degrading stereotype of the black man, it also compels the black man to espouse the colonizer's culture, to abate and obliterate the old dispensation of his indigenous existence, including his relationship with his family and society. Fanon expounds his satirical view of those black people who willingly renounce their own culture in this most memorable passage:

Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (Fanon,1986,p.9)

In one way or another, the belief in the utter superiority of the colonizer's culture and world-view generates an internalized sense of cultural inferiority in the African subject, who strives to eschew this humiliating state by adopting Western institutions and mode of life. Thus stripped of the mores and beliefs of his/ her own culture and cut off from the daily experiences of his/her community, the African individual is bereaved of all genuine feeling of social identification; he is turned out into "a vacant imitator without a culture of his own"(1983,p.5), to use JanMohamed's words.

Achebe's intellectual reaction to this cultural degradation affecting the colonized (and ex-colonized) people provides us with the motives underlying the thematic preoccupation of his fiction. Though he accepts the inevitability of change and recognizes the benefits that the colonial system has brought to the African societies,

Achebe still demonstrates that its adverse effects have been distressing and detrimental to the well-being of his people. Through his texts, he evokes the traumatic effects of the colonial and imperial devaluation of the African history, culture and existence in general. Achebe powerfully sets forth, particularly in *Things Fall Apart*, the white man's deliberate plans to bring down the general foundations of his people's communal order through distorting the real connotations of their cultural and religious beliefs. The white man induces Nigerians to despise their own culture, discount their traditional beliefs and rituals, and even affront the tribe's most reverent elders. Through the colonial context of his first novel, Achebe delineates the derisive language and behavior of the court messengers towards the native. While demonstrating a total servility towards the white man's name or institutions, they express scornful and uninformed comments on the traditional titles of their society: "We see that every pauper wears the anklet of title in Umuofia. Does it cost as much as ten cowries?"(Achebe,1967,p.138). This statement reflects the initial stages of that cultural lowliness which the unsettling contact with the white man has engendered in some Africans, that internalized presumption resented by Achebe that everything connected with the African people and their culture must be deemed to be backward and defective, while everything related to the white man's practices and values must be considered superior. He makes frequent references to these cultural aspects both in his fiction and non-fiction. For example, in his article "The Novelist as Teacher", we find Achebe writing with an unreserved wrath about the scorn shown by Christianized Nigerians and their finding fault with the act of performing indigenous dances in the new-year occasion, instead of the modern official performances that commemorate the spread of Christianity in Nigeria. Equally, he recounts how the Nigerian Christianized people never utilized native ceramic objects for their daily needs because they overtly associate the local-made products with cheap and sleazy things. What is accentuated here is that denigration and self-abasement can bring about a serious cultural crisis which besets the different facets of social life: Achebe is astonished how a schoolboy could believe that there was a sense of shameful about the indigenous weather to impel him to write about the common aspects of winter when he implied the Igbo harmattan, just to eschew the derisive comments of his civilized classmates. This

blemished aspect of yielding to the colonial myth of native inferiority stands as the most terrible form of cultural obliteration and for Achebe the adoption of such a depressing self is a miserable transgression: “If I were God I would regard as the very worst our acceptance – for whatever reason – of racial inferiority”(1975,p.44). The statement reveals Achebe’s wrath at the deep-seated damage inflicted on the African mental attitudes in terms of cultural value and human self-esteem. He knows very well that his role as a cultural agent attempting ardently to refurbish the value of his people’s traditional order is to reverse the belief in “a world progressively re-created by white men in their own image”(Achebe, 1975,p.15).

In *Things Fall Apart*, the communal life before the coming of the white colonialist is carried in terms of stability and balance, but this absolute antagonism between the old dispensation and the new colonized existence has carried complex implications in the confused society of *No Longer At Ease*. Here issues of cultural identity and belonging have much more problematic perceptions, particularly for the Western trained intellectuals as the novel’s protagonist, who is exposed both to the African attitudes and British values. A thorough reading of the speech used at two different communal gatherings in the novel demonstrates the way in which the author depicts the people’s inconsiderate attitude towards traditional values, their deliberate handling of two incompatible world-views, traditional and western, and sometimes their manipulation of their cultural values for acquisitive ends. The first gathering is arranged by the villagers of Umuofia to bid farewell to Obi before travelling to England. During the minor events which mark this party, we find frequent allusions to the transformation and also weakening of some traditional ideals because of the deep-seated effects of the alien behaviors on the people’s culture. We are informed that the whole members of Obi’s tribe have participated in collecting the required funds for Obi’s scholarship. A prayer led by one member of his village, Reverend Ikedi, demonstrates that Obi’s scholarship for his education in a British university is conceived of as the community’s reasonable response to the changing times. In his speech, the Reverend does not appear to recognize that Obi’s great opportunity to study in England represents an unavoidable leap into a different culture and alien

values. For him, the whole incident is actually a promising experience of fulfilling greater expectations for the whole tribe:

In times past (...), Umuofia would have required of you to fight in her wars and bring home human heads. But these were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the lamb of God. Today we send you to bring knowledge. Remember that the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom. I have heard of young men from other towns who went to the white men's country, but instead of facing their studies they went after sweet thing sof the flesh. (p.9)

Certainly, the pastor finds no paradox in arranging his message along what he calls "heathen" wisdom, starting the speech with a reference to traditional expectations and supporting his argument with an Igbo fable. This conscious confusion which stems from the Pastor's juxtaposition of the traditional wisdom with the Christian terminology allows the author to deal with one of his critical concerns in this novel. In one important sense, the cultural problems evoked in this novel cannot be analyzed within a simplistic pattern of cultural mediation and synthesis. In the modern context of Obi's village, as Obiechina most rightly argues, "you either pray as a Christian or as a traditionalist; but good sense dictates that you pray the Christian way when you are in a Christian home and like a traditionalist in a traditionalist's home"(1975,p.259). Unequivocally, this uneasy combination of different world-views in the same milieu reveals the people's absolute apathy to the state of cultural confusion which becomes a common aspect in their daily life. The Pastor's speech expounds the extent to which the villagers of Umuofia, with their characteristic resilience, realize the necessity for western education and progress in order to preserve and expand the benefits they have already achieved by their espousal of the Christian teachings. Dramatically enough, the memorable experiences of the tribe's big achievements are now simply deemed as disgraceful examples of a backward way of life. Thus, the very event of Obi's leaving for the white world to extend his western knowledge is seen by the Pastor as a supreme quest towards realizing a spiritual and a religious prophecy. Obi has been commissioned to fetch light for his "dark" village. However, the Pastor's speech shows also how Obi's people are still yielding to the basic principles of their culture and would therefore regard it as a grim offense for the community if their outstanding young men will go after unhealthy values and practices in the white men's country.

Generally, the preaching speech at this send-off gathering brings to the surface many disappointing aspects of cultural confusion; the people's traditional values have been deeply combined with western ethics and its Christian principles.

In the prayer of Mari, a friend of Obi's mother, the reader is also made to observe the confusion brought about by the overlapping of the two incompatible worlds, the indigenous and the Christian. This intended blend of the two world-views is behind the disorder of many social relationships and behaviors in the novel and it leads eventually to the end of Obi's expectations towards improving ethical behaviors. Mary (the name itself presents a direct allusion to the sweeping state of cultural transformation) holds the prayer with an apparent fusion of different religious idioms:

Oh God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob (...). Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not big enough for to wash your hands in. *You have the yam and you have the knife (...). We are like ants in your sight. We are like little children who only wash their stomach when they bath, leaving their back dry.* (p.8, italics added)

This is a significant incident through which the writer sets forth the way in which the villager's figurative idioms have been embedded into their newly-adopted Biblical language, and in which the foreign signifiers are given new implications by using them in the proverbial and specific patterns of local experiences. Here Achebe demonstrates how the people are blending the Western rite of prayer with the Umuofian aphorisms. Even though Mary draws on the people's traditional proverbs to lead the prayer, the reply is expressed through the Western familiar word, "Amen". The whole prayer reveals the split among the people caused by their obvious drift from the center of their indigenous beliefs. The people no longer behave according to the traditional principles and ethics. In the case of the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union in the Lagos locale, Achebe shows how a socio-cultural organization established to represent the clan in the big city has turned into an acquisitive group preoccupied with securing the financial interests of its members. They have expected Obi to have his studies in law overseas to help them carry out all their land cases against other hostile tribes.

But what his kinsfolk fall short to predict is that the Western knowledge which bestows status and progress also engenders detachment and estrangement. In fact, Obi's mental bewilderment and cultural dislocation indicates the far-reaching effects

of that foreign education on his psyche. Obi does not yield to his people's pragmatic choice of law, and reveals his attachment to the British culture through his decision to study English Literature. The people's absurd reaction to this unjustified shift of academic interests is indicated in the remarkable tribute poured on Obi when he returns from England and is described as one of the prominent members of the village: "we are not empty men who become white when they see white, and black when they see black"(p.48). The statement is mainly a direct satire of Obi's cultural disposition. The writer ensures that Obi has indeed turned into a hollow person when he decides to dissociate his life from the one of family and people.

The fact of exposing this harrowing state of alienation between Obi and his community is one implicit indication that Achebe is not totally supporting the sort of learning that deprives the elites of the feelings and values required to deal adequately with their people. His standing grows less at some stage in the ceremony. He appears in casual clothes and uses the English that is crammed with the "is" and "was" utterances while his people expect him to be well-versed in the use of ostentatious language (p.29). His kinsmen and, particularly, the Union members appear unconvinced and unimpressed by his speech. This speech incident works further to vindicate Achebe's anger against Obi who represents the rising Western educated Nigerians. The welcome occasion points to the communal ties that hold the villagers together, and this is expressed even in the way of dressing, for "(e)verybody was properly dressed in agbada or European suit"(p.28). The word 'properly' suggests an example of the residual cultural values which are still somehow preserved by those who have gathered, who consider proper dressing as an important cultural aspect on such occasions. However, the westernized Obi does not seem to understand the value of this ceremonial gathering, and for this reason he would not bother himself to be dressed in formal clothes to satisfy his people's expectations. By adopting a foreign mindset, he is unable to revere the people who "have taxed themselves mercilessly" to enable him study overseas, people, who despite his egotistic resolution to study English, rather than law, had helped him by raising the required funds to send him abroad for his education. By contrast to the permanent bonds of clan kinship, Obi's position to the Progressive Union members and to his people is marked with apparent

repugnance. Within this self-conceited attitude, Achebe presents him as a Europeanized intellectual who looks upon his people's behaviors and convictions in a disdainful tone. On his coming back to Nigeria, he comes to emulate the narrow representations previously used by the colonizer's agents in "describing the natives", to use Carroll's words (1990,p68).

In fact, in unfolding Obi's profound sense of alienation, Achebe's novel affords a far more subtle examination of Obi's Eurocentrism than an uncomplicated picture of a cross-cultural outlook. Obi's cultural and social background proves to have a decisive consequence on his personal stand towards his family and community. His most intimate friend Joseph describes him as a "stranger in his country" because of the Christian beliefs that his converted father has imposed on him from his childhood and the European values he receives in the different stages of his education (pp.64-65). This is a poignant remark on Obi's predicament. The narrative relates the roots of Obi's lack of cultural sensitiveness to the Christian principles which were imposed on him from his early years by his parents, and led him to scorn his tribe's culture, while making him attend regular sessions of Bible teachings. Obi remembers how his father had dogmatically prohibited his wife from reciting folk-stories to their children. "We are not heathens", he had said. 'Stories like that are not for the people of the church'(p.52). After being subjected to such a fanatical religious system that repudiates all kinds of interest in traditional conventions and even arts, Obi is deprived of a genuine sense of cultural belonging, and this dramatic situation has given rise to a distressing sense of personal incoherence. At the elementary school, for example, Obi recalls the special course of 'oral' which he did never like because of the cynical comments he used to receive from his class mates. During this lesson, the teacher would select any pupil to recite a folktale to the class. Obi is fond of these stories but his Christian parents had not given him the opportunity to learn some of them. One outstanding passage depicts Obi's deep humiliation in front of his class mates:

One day the teacher called on him to face the class and tell them a story. As he came out and stood before them he trembled. 'Olulu ofu oge', he began in the tradition of folk-tales, but that was all he knew. His lips quivered but no other sounds came out. The class burst into derisive laughter, and tears filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks as he went back to his place. (p.53)

The implication here is that Obi's Christian family background is undoubtedly an influential factor for his cultural disinheritance, which his formal colonial education only worked to intensify. Colonial training entails a deliberate approach intended for the designed plans of cultural deprivation and disposition of the colonized. It is an intrinsic component of the racial policies of colonialism projected to confine the African individual in a harrowing state of cultural disruption and subjection, a condition of social and cultural incoherence from which he / she has to untangle himself / herself. At any rate, Colonial education was used as a tool to obliterate the native's history and culture, and in this way render him/her trapped in a state of psychological imbalance. The designers of the colonial programs of education methodically relied on a particular set of knowledge which was oriented to engender a perpetual inferiority complex in the Africans, the sort of schooling which would render them uncreative individuals. It enhances an unsightly dependence on the Western orientation and control. It did not provide them with concrete systems of knowledge to allow them to develop the different cultural aspects of their communities. Christie Pam explains how the racial connotations of the colonial discourses were subtly embedded in the pretentious objectives of missionary teachings (1991,p.81):

Missionary education usually had little respect for the local African culture. Local culture and history were not included in the school curriculum, and the curriculum was usually based on European schools. Mission education was rooted in Christian values, and attempted to teach attitudes like patience, humility, piety, discipline and the value of hard work. Critics argue that these values helped to prepare black people to accept a subordinate position in society.

A great deal of Achebe's literary vigor has been put into debating these detrimental effects of colonial education. His disapproval is not related to the general institutions of language or school system, in spite of the ideological assumptions underlying these basic tools of colonial domination. Generally, the colonial agents presume that their educational systems tend to present valuable means for forming a developed and an enlightened society. Nevertheless the planned foundation of these tools needs to be carried from their imperialistic impulses to African cultural and historical imperatives. The persistent discourses of the lowliness associated with everything African and the sightless intentions to establish a typical image of the Western world in Africa through education, presents a hindrance in the pursuit for a consistent cultural identity. In his

essay, "African literature as Restoration of celebration", Achebe focuses on those conventional discourses that located his people in that context of historical void and cultural dispossession. In this essay, he vehemently criticizes colonization for its unsettling practices of not just abrogating the "presence" of the African, but also for its persistence in "questioning" the African's "very humanity". In Achebe's view this racist thesis is feasible among the colonizers because every attribute and character of the black man have been put under 'rational' scrutiny throughout anthropological theories and European education. European education, he argues, has instilled in the minds of its people that the African possesses "no soul, no religion, no culture, no history, no human speech (...) and no sense of responsibility" (Achebe, in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991,p.5). The Western literary tradition, he emphasizes, has denied the African characters even the simple traits of the human nature. Shakespeare fashioned Caliban, the negro-type whose sole trait was that he speaks "like a thing most brutish". But Conrad's black characters, as Achebe says, appear to be more sinister and weird than Shakespeare's most memorable black character, Caliban. Whereas Shakespeare, at the closing acts of *The Tempest*, can endow Caliban with the language of the white man, Conrad's African Negroes were kept wordless till the closing events of the novel. In Conrad's racial mode of representation, these Negroes can only produce "a violent babble of uncouth sounds".

Achebe succinctly uses the educational experiences of the novel's protagonist to demonstrate the unpreventable cultural dislocation such foreign training can generate in the African communities. Ode Ogede, who considers the novel as an autobiographical fiction, handles these connections as well (2001,p.53):

The narrative of *No Longer At Ease* derives its peculiar power from its indepth exploration of the drawback of such a hostile educational system. Through Obi Okonkwo, an unsuspecting individual, who is a product of that education, Achebe graphically illustrates the mental anguish that an unsuitable educational system causes its African victims. It also maps an insensitive administration's exploitation of the indigenous people, their level of confusion, and ultimate drift from their own cultural center.

From his early writings, Achebe can discern how the European book and text were always used as a potent form of ideological domination through which the West was able to instill the racial signifiers of its imperial discourses on the African mind. As

Edward Said postulates in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, “texts and words are so much of the world that their effectiveness (...) are matters having to do with ownership, authority, power and the imposition of force”(1983,p.48). This serves to expound how texts are generally fraught with a set of designed ideological discourses which are utilized for maintaining specific relationships of power and subordination. The idea that emerges here is related to the link between the texts and the external world they draw on; Said asserts that the texts are “enmeshed in circumstances, time, place and society”(35). This argument can be related to the complex historical experiences and ideological mechanisms that intervene in the general formation of the postcolonial subject. In Achebe’s novel, the different social facets seem to be plagued by the asymmetrical power relationships between the colonizer and colonized, but Obi finds no wrong in adopting the Western way of life. Obi has consciously espoused the Western mindset and he expresses his great fascination with the richness of its literary heritage – especially the English tradition of literary modernism to which he refers many times in his intellectual debates and reflections. Estranged as he is from the realities and obligations of his tribe, he retreats to the surrealistic world of the Western anti-heroes he became familiar with. He is indeed the anti-hero who fails in maintaining his ideals in front of the depraved society: Achebe’s literary allusions serve to bring forward a sharp satirical commentary on Obi’s state of cultural dislocation. As Philip Rogers suggests, this literary obsession with a number of modernist antiheroes is directly connected to Obi’s growing sense of helplessness. For example, Obi’s frequent readings of his favorite poem “Easter Hymn”(1936) by A.E. Housman (1859-1936) present a clear allusion to his inevitable tragic end. As Rogers points out, Housman’s text is a prayer to an insensitive or deceased Christ who shows no attention to men’s imploring calls for support. The reference to this poem accentuates the sense of Obi’s disbelief but it also foregrounds his indifference and passive attitude to his cultural and social demands and his inability to fulfill his clan’s expectations. As Rogers rightly comments, “(t)he failure of Housman’s Christ to respond to man-kin’s prayers also reflects Obi’s (...) recurring paralysis and inability to act decisively in the major crises of his life”(1983:p.168). Symbolically, Obi has folded his romantic poem, “Nigeria”, into the Housman collection; at this point, Obi’s

pretentious patriotic conviction that his 'noble country' will surmount unhealthy practices and regenerate itself is rendered absurd by Housman's sarcastic view that even the demise of Christ had not succeeded in redeeming the human psyche. This relevant juxtaposition of the two poems works essentially to point out to Obi's superficial relationship with his country, both at the religious and the cultural level.

Many incidents in the novel are constructed around the profound rift that exists between Obi's Western learning and his limited attention paid to the lives of his family and people. His remarkable admiration of the tradition of English literature is not transferred to issues that are of significant value. One can observe a conscious irony in Achebe's presentation of Obi's dependence on literary statements in his conversations, as when he addresses his girl friend, Clara: "You know you are a poet ... to meet people you don't want to meet, that's pure T.S. Eliot" (p.17). The poetic sense expressed in this poignant statement will lose many of its aesthetics when one encounters Obi's hollow discussions and perspectives of pertinent social issues. His Westernized set of mind is well displayed in his oblivious and passive character. His disdain of the unhealthy social behaviors which he sees sweeping the different fields around him does not move him to any constructive action. His frequent shallow denunciations of the corrupt milieu of his people manifest themselves only in the form of intellectual discussions with his friend Christopher, a cynical attorney dedicated to absorbing the different material benefits of the capital city. His indifference is illustrated by his cynical reaction to the incident in which a policeman is offered a bribe by a lorry driver under the sight of many other taxi drivers and passengers, including Obi when travelling home by public transportation. Obi stands perplexed by the whole scene: the passengers seem to be accustomed to such corrupt acts and rebuke him of embroiling them in problems by staring at the policeman with an incriminating look. Obi's sneering condescension towards the behavior of these people with whom he shares the long journey is not very different from the derisive language that Mr. Green uses in describing the Africans:

'What an Augean stable!' he muttered to himself. 'Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses? He shook his head. Not a chance there. It would take a handful of men at the top. Or even one man with vision (...). But what kind of democracy can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance?' (p.40)

At this level, Obi's derisive judgment concurs awkwardly with the reductive representations imbedded in the conventional logic of colonialism. Like Mr. Green's attitude, Obi contends that reform and development will never be realized by Nigerian society itself; the people lack the useful faculties to understand their essential interests. At this level, the writer also reveals Obi's unwillingness to bring to scrutiny the underlying factors which have led to the present uncomfortable situation. Through Obi's unconvincing judgments and reactions the novel is able to build up an overt criticism of the highly-positioned intellectuals who stand as enthusiastic advocates for social change but they show no genuine efforts to realize this objective.

One crucial example of Obi's unconvincing idealism and shallow-mindedness is demonstrated in the weak arguments he has used to expound the reasons behind the problem of corruption: the prevalent state of depravity is manifested in the practice of bribery, which is caused by those experienced old men who are in charge of the high positions in the civil service. He considers them inadequate for those fundamental jobs which require elevated integrity. On the other side, he is convinced that the young intellectuals can lead the country's different institutions without resorting to unhealthy practices. The moral rectitude he draws from his intellectual foundation makes him adopt the idea that the intellectual persons are capable of resisting the different forms of corruption. Through this limited view, Obi relates the whole situation simply to that conventional colonial presumption of the Africans' uncontrollable personalities and deficient minds. What is at stake here is Obi's failure to relate the problems of his community to the unsettling experience of colonialism and its lingering effects on the indigenous dispensation. Like his boss, Mr. Green, he thinks that Nigerians can found an efficient and creative government only through depending on the Western well-thought theories. However, despite his considerable efforts to preserve his idealistic but cynical judgments, he himself is trapped in the depraved behaviors he is used to condemn. The novel presents abundant incidents that display the impossibility of averting corruption, and thus tends to vindicate Obi's remarks.

Indeed, some of Obi's criticism of his community's unconstructive traditions is very poignant. For example, Robert Wren reports that the Igbo old tradition of "kola"

offering – drinks offered to maintain and strengthen communal ties – generated a social rationalization for the permissible act of receiving bribes in the contemporary era (1980,pp.47-97). This does not suggest that the prevalent state of corruption embedded within the systems of the budding post-colonial society is a typically old traditional practice which should be abrogated by a simplistic shift to Western modern values. In fact, many of the harrowing emerging forms of social corruption are caused by the arbitrary fusion of the African traditional values and the capitalist ethos inherited from the colonial institutions. In the complex context of *No Longer at Ease*, the writer shows how the impulsive mixture of the African and the European cultures generates complex socio-cultural experiences which have put the whole community in a state of dislocation and incoherence. In particular, the way Obi's people depend on the practice of 'kola giving' (bribe) in the city locale to maintain the interests of their kinsmen is totally related to the unavoidable aspect of shifting their tribal cultural values to the complex world of the modern city. Michael Valdez Moses explains the transformation of the traditional cultural practices in these terms:

For a great many Nigerians (...), bribery is merely the modern equivalent of 'kola'. The gradual transition from the giving of kola nuts as an Igbo ritual that provides a ceremonial means to encourage neighborly relations among clan members to 'kola' as the popular term for bribery is one key to what is happening in *No Longer At Ease*. (1995,p.141)

In this way, the corruption of the symbolic traditional function of 'kola' in the present society can be deemed as a representation of the most overwhelming effects of cultural intermixture that have given rise to the new society. In Achebe's rural novels, we read how traditional behaviors and relationships were effectively arranged around the principle of communal balance, in the post-colonial context, however, such basic harmonizing principles no longer preoccupy the interests of the rising acquisitive community. Traditionally, the offering of a kola nut in the different occasions and meetings of the tribe is used as an essential practice to maintain the communal ties and values. The ritual breaking of the kola nut firms up the proper attitudes of trust and honesty among the ones who lead the community's discussions. For the present generation, however, the offering of a token of respect has become completely associated with pragmatic and acquisitive ends; it means to offer a bribe to a public

official who can use the power of his position to guarantee a particular favor. In the case of Obi's people, the ability to accumulate big amounts of "kola" without being caught by the authority is deemed as a symptom of cleverness and nimbleness. For example, the Union members do not really appear rigorous towards such unhealthy practice. This is revealed in the Igbo maxim used by one of its members who comments upon Obi's inexperienced way of receiving bribes: "If you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one"(p.5). It is clear that in referring to this proverb to back up their argument on bribery, the Union member has removed the traditional proverb from its ethical sense; he seems totally unaware of the moralistic connotation it refers to. In this way, he divests the proverb of its original meaning and value when he shifts it from its original locale to the present locale. The anger of the Union members is related less to Obi's shameful succumbing to accept bribes than to his lack of sight in risking his career and social status for an insignificant amount of money.

Although the real factors which have led to the sweeping state of corruption are not plainly expounded in *No Longer At Ease*, the reader can depend on some events in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* to grasp the deep implications of this issue, and we can briefly focus on one revealing incident for the sake of bringing to scrutiny the underlying roots of culture conflict and confusion in this novel. Fraud and graft in Achebe's previous novels are not generated deliberately by the colonial agents; nevertheless, they stand as an inescapable upshot of the working mechanisms followed by the colonial administration towards the natives. In these novels, we are made to see that the colonial district officers show no interest in learning about its colonized indigenous cultures and languages. Likewise, the Africans cannot discern the overwhelming socio-cultural pressures embedded within the colonial institutions and practices that are imposed upon them. Within this disturbing state of cultural misperception, unhealthy behaviors and practices are rife. For instance, the district officer in *Things Fall Apart* imposes a fine of 200 bags of cowries upon the people of Umuofia when Okonkwo and some of his tribesmen were arrested for being implicated in demolishing the White district church (pp.136-138). But the messengers of the district officer intentionally augment the fine to 250 bags and take hold of the

increased amount because they are most certain that their evil behavior would not be disclosed since there is no genuine form of communication and intercourse between the agents of the colonial administration and the natives. In the welcoming ceremony incident, Achebe brings to the surface a kind of such colonial corruption through the judgments of the Union members who are more familiar with the practices of the white man in the city locale. When Obi informs the Union members that he would go through a job interview, the Union chairman advises him to offer a good 'kola' to the interviewers. However, because the employment interview for the prestigious positions of the Senior Service would be under a white man's commission, the chairman argues, Obi could eschew the whole embarrassing matter of offering a bribe. However, the reader is immediately informed that the chairman is mistaken in his judgment, as one member hastens to present a different view about the white men's corruption: "You think white men don't eat bribe? Come to our department. They eat more than black men nowadays"(p.30).

This state of decay pervades the different institutional structures, stripping in this way the new society of the moral order which it was required to uphold. This is inevitably brought about by the inadequate fusion of the old and new values: the colonial agents have imposed on the Nigerians a series of alien behaviors and convictions that have affected the general fabric of their traditional culture. In his *Chinua Achebe: New perspectives* (1991), Umelo Ujinmah examines Achebe's fundamental issue of culture confusion within a historical perspective. For Ujinmah, a significant part of Achebe's analysis of the post-colonial cultural transformation is related to the author's discerning understanding of the cultural legacies inherited from, or imposed by the colonial institutions. Historically, the introduction of the cash market system into the Igbo society during the colonial period was a most appreciated aspect that was easily assimilated to achieve material wellbeing. In the traditional context of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe displays the materialistic and acquisitive inclination of Okonkwo's society which is always tempered by the tribe's religious spirituality, held by the earth goddess, Ani. In the chaotic times of *No Longer At Ease*, materialistic aggrandizement has become the anxious quest for the different social groups. The country as a unified entity is beyond the understanding of its self-seeking

members. This issue is to be examined later in *A Man of the People* where the outlook of the common people towards the growing nation is displayed as a source of wealth that each tribe can share in. At the ceremony which the Umuofia Union organizes to pay tribute to Obi for his great academic achievement the president asks him if “they” have offered him a job. In this situation, the answer is given by the omniscient narrator, or the implied author, who straightforwardly explains to us that: “In Nigeria the government was ‘they’” (p.29). This means that the people have no genuine ties with their country. It is deemed as an alien institution from which the people can get material profits without paying attention to moralistic considerations.

In the confused world of Lagos, neither the Christian teachings nor the traditional ethos can posit a common moralistic reference; the new city has become an abundant source of material opportunities because of the growing orientation towards trade services and possessions. The writer evokes the plain reasons that induce Igbo villagers to abandon the vast lands of their forefathers to turn toward the shining streets of the capital city. In one of the monthly meetings that the Progressive Union organizes, the president speaks in support of many of his tribesmen who come to the city to seek better opportunities of labor: he is immediately reminded by one of the union’s members about the “plenty of work (they) left at home”, for “it is money, not work” which has brought them to the city (p.72). The obsessive inclination of the villagers towards the tempting affluence promised by the larger city cuts them off from the rural occupations of their ancestors. Through a plain satirical tone, Achebe displays how a traditional-based association created to defend and represent the cultural identity of the clan in the Lagos locale has turned into a mere group of acquisitive members who are preoccupied primarily with their financial interests. The Umuofians seem to yield easily to the materialistic milieu of the city. They show no interest in the fact that they contribute to the malpractices of the city; indeed, they are willing to adjust their communal and social mores to the conducts of this alien milieu despite the sense of discomfort and insecurity it can produce. The moralistic rules which were used to organize the basics of personal achievements in Okonkwo’s traditional society are now substituted by a typically pure tendency of materialistic acquisition.

Some aspects of this issue of change are expounded in the colonial context of his rural novels (*Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*) where Achebe depicts the inevitable state of cultural confusion which has resulted from the introduction of the colonial standards and institutions into the self-contained world of the traditional communities. The obsessive espousal of the colonizer's culture and its mental tools has been already delineated by the author in the colonial world of *Arrow of God*. The white man has brought in new aspects and institutions of order which the clan has received with high admiration, and which are connected to his knowledge and his tongue. The ability to use the white man's tongue, whether in speech or writing, was deemed as a highly valued skill among the different villages. In *Arrow of God*, we hear Ezeulu expressing his deep regrets about the fact that no man of his village has the 'prestige' of speaking the white man's tongue (78). Before the white man's occupation, the tribe's elders taught their young people that the individual can achieve reputation and respect among his tribesmen only through possessing lands and titles. But the deep-seated effects of the Christian teachings and the colonial institutions upon the natives' values and convictions ushered in a different mode of life which engendered new possibilities to attain a good social status. The tribe's high ranked individuals and elders lost a great deal of the community's reverence because many of its members had adopted the colonizer's religion and culture. Now in the new world-view instilled by the colonizer, high status and good reputation are measured with everything associated with the white man's culture. The colonial authority could instill a foreign cultural facet into the Igbo society which had led to obliterate to some extent the major grounds of the people's traditional dispensation.

In his urban novels, Achebe satirically displays how the rising youth gain the reverence of their kinsmen and their clan by taking on Western patterns of culture. The novel foregrounds this sightless adoption of the white men's things in a poignant sense through the words of an unwise elder; this latter brings forward the deteriorated image of the leading group in the traditional society, which was in the past the custodian of the community's cultural repositories: "Today greatness has changed its tune. (...) so we too have changed our tune. We are the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land"(p.49). So, to meet the requirements of the changing time,

Civil services positions, scholarships to studying in British universities and proficiency in the English language are taken as the new norms in measuring the tribes' achievements. The conflicting interests between the different clans and villages are shifted to the complex milieu of the big city through the forming of urban organizations, like the Umuofia Progressive Union. This is a long-term plan used by the clans to look for new sources of material profits, and to provide jobs and overseas scholarships for their young people. As in the case of Obi, the Union's astute plan was not merely to aid its young intellectual to carry on his studies in a British institution and then to get a sophisticated civil service post, but to induce that young intellectual serve the diverse requirements of the clan under the potent calls of tribal ties.

No Longer At Ease provides then a critique of the community's bending towards unlimited acquisitiveness without relying on any form of ethical or rational principles that can moderate the materialistic tendencies of its members. This is clearly reflected in the language of the Union members. For example, the secretary refers to his kinsman Obi as the "invaluable possession"(p.29) of the clan; he states clearly that the scholarship provided by the U.P.U. to Obi is a good "investment" which is expected to endow them with significant "dividends"(p.29). Obi's influential position in the Senior Civil Service is most important to the Union since Obi can get good opportunities to develop relationships with important individuals due to the nature of his job as the responsible of over-seas scholarships. Achebe's attitude here is that the unconstrained indulging in nepotism under the pretensions of tribe's attachments can bring about the collapse of the moral grounds of Obi's learning. In his second visit to the Progressive Union during their monthly meeting, Obi is heaped with flattering cheers when he arrives at the Union headquarters with his car for the first time. For them the car represents the most valued symbol of the white man's materialistic aspects of affluent life. This slavish inclination to the western mode of life can be identified particularly in the attitudes and behaviors of Obi's close associates. For example, in discussing the fact of their helplessness in front of their traditional conventions, Joseph advises Obi: "In future, when we are all civilized, anybody may marry anybody"(p.68), revealing his utter belief in the potent racial connotations of the colonial mode of representation. According to Joseph's crude understanding of this issue, to be deemed as a civilized

person is to acquire a level of complete liberty at the level of one's manners and actions; to be deemed as a primitive person, he postulates, is to yield to the rigorous order of tribal conventions. Through this unpromising intellectual, Achebe's apparent wrath is directed towards the African rising intellectuals who take part in perpetuating the racial conceptions of the ex-colonizer by yielding eagerly to its bigoted doctrines. But Obi does not seem to cut off ties from the communal background of his home town. His painful initiation into the inevitable clash between his association with the Western values and his allegiance to his people's traditional culture begins to develop more and more because of the accretion of social obligations and demands, which are manifested in terms of financial pressures. In addition to the heavy loan he has to repay to the Progressive Union, Obi finds himself under the pressure of other financial burdens. Observing the low financial means of his parents, he finds that he has to help them through a monthly contribution, and he has to take in charge the different school expenses of his young brother, and send gifts to his clansmen as well. These diverse material obligations stand as a big hindrance to the requirements of his personal social status and his most proclaimed will to live independently in the big city of Lagos. Directly after receiving his first salaries as a senior civil servant, he hastens to buy a car on a credit without thinking about the usual costs of its insurance and maintenance, and he finds himself compelled to lead a life of material extravagance by having a chauffeur in order to maintain his budding position as a black intellectual in a white man's milieu. Under these heavy material demands that he cannot afford, Obi decides to take a loan, to be repaid from his government salary. He finds himself further beset by other financial demands when he is obliged to take the charges of his mother's two surgeries and also his fiancée's distressing abortion. Obi's pretentious moral standing is eventually undermined with the accumulation of all these social obligations and demands which are beyond his financial means.

In fact, Obi is entangled in the anxieties and pleasures of a new form of life which is completely centered on materialistic grounds. Commenting on this materialistic-based colonial doctrine which seems to beset all the social institutions, James Booth says that the colonizer has introduced into the African community a mode of life which depends on the acquisition of "irresistible material goods", and Obi's tribesmen

“demand of him, their educated Europeanized son, the benefits to which his education has given him access”(1981,p.96). But, these illiterate people fall short to realize that Obi’s income can never be sufficient to cover all the different outlays of his family and the unlimited needs of his fellow villagers. In fact, all the narrative’s events are deliberately constructed by the writer to evoke the prime factors which impel Obi to succumb to economic pressures and accept a bribe. Certainly, Obi’s corrupt act cannot be rationalized, but what one should put to scrutiny is the heavy demands put on him by the different social allegiances to keep up with the superficial aspects of the westernized milieu in terms of car, dress and expenditure; all these impel Obi to capitulate to the malpractices which beset his society and accept bribes. Here lies the characteristic effect of Achebe’s argument on the distressing consequences of the clash between, and sometimes juxtaposition of, the African world-view and Western values. His interest is not simply oriented towards documenting Obi’s condition. Achebe sets out to look at the different directions and dimensions it presents for building up a thorough analysis about the complex cultural transformations resulting from the unsettling contact with the Western culture. Obi’s state of alienation, even deracination, is emblematic of the forces of cultural clash attending his post-colonial community. Whether in the village or in the capital city, we are presented with a social milieu that is distressingly shallow. There is no potent social authority which can propel Obi to reflect earnestly on the convoluted dimensions of the cultural conflict he is caught in, as well as his oscillation between his personal ideals and the social obligations.

The tension between Obi’s Western ethos of individualism and his allegiance to his community in general is particularly expounded by the development of his emotional relationship with Clara, a Western educated nurse who belongs to the Osu caste (a family lineage dedicated to be slaves to a god, i.e. social outcasts), and whom Obi’s Christian parents look upon with revulsion. Obi’s western mind deems this form of social division irrational and attempts overtly to defy it. When his parents and tribesmen attempt to warn him against this abhorred association, Obi shows no hesitation in defending his personal decision and upholding the image of his emancipation from some tribal and taboo behaviors. We are made to observe how his

esteemed principles of individual freedom overtly manifest themselves against the suggestions of the Union members: “Don’t you dare interfere in my affairs again”(75), he reacts wrathfully at the Union President. Symbolically, in this important incident, the writer invites us to see that the traditional beliefs are both pursued by the new Christians and the adherents of the old religion and conventions of Umuofia. In spite of the altered circumstances generated by the far-reaching impact of the foreign culture and its religion, the traditional culture and the ancestral structure of social relationships still reign in the different facets of communal life. Emmanuel Obiechina records that many West Africans who adopt the Christian religion also resort to particular traditional practices like consulting “medicine men, diviners and priests – especially during major crises when the Christian God failed to provide remedies”(1975,p.246). This most critical experience is expounded in the confused reaction of Isaac Okonkwo, a Christian believer, to his son’s (Obi) proposed marriage to the Osu Clara.

Obi’s parents overlook one of the basic doctrinal norms of their Christian faith; social equality, when they unequivocally reject their son’s intention to marry Clara. Obi’s father, Isaac, was called Nwoye before his convert to the new religion. At the beginning of discussing the issue with Obi, he has admitted that the “Osu” cult-slave taboo is an oppressive tradition because he is reminded by Obi that the Christian teachings which he used to present in the village church discard such a social discrimination. During this incident, the narrator reminds us of Isaac’s revolt against the traditions of his people. For Obi’s father seems to forget that he himself, as Nwoye Okonkwo, had made his father utter a curse on him when he had deserted the traditional culture and religion for the new faith under the pretext of getting away from what he considered were the oppressive codes of the tribe’s traditions. His un-Christian attitude towards the matter of discrimination against innocent individuals brings to the surface his superficial understanding of the Christian liberating virtues for which he has rebelled against the will of his rigid father. Ironically, Isaac Okonkwo refers to the Biblical analogy of Naaman to vindicate his argument on the issue of social outcasts, and explains in an ample way the painful consequences of marriage to an Osu. Certainly, Isaac’s confused attitude displays an obscure fusion of the Christian and traditional systems of thought. Obi’s father may have renounced traditional culture

in its negative and oppressive aspects, but he fails to come to grips with the genuine virtue of the human value, inherent in the Christian teachings, that he is all anxious to defend because he himself is still steered by many of the traditionalist codes and rituals he cannot discard.

It is true that Obi often displays an incisive intellectual evaluation of such convoluted cultural situations, but he does not seem to possess the power of independent reflection to follow up the high ideals he believes in with practical decisions. This constitutes a self-defeating aspect which isolates him from all groups. Obi attempts to alleviate his resentment against the Umuofia Union members only when he finds himself in front of heavy financial pressures that he has to contend with. At this level, we see Obi totally stripped of his pretentious ideals. He knows that he can get the financial help from the Union if he puts his request in terms of traditional ties and commitments:

He would not give them another opportunity to pry into his affairs. He would just stop paying and, if they asked him why, he would say he had some family commitments (...). Everyone understood family commitments and would sympathize.(pp.141-142)

Drawing on false claims might not appear like a serious malpractice, but, given the moralistic stature of Obi's initial attitudes, this behavior leaves a harmful consequence to his idealistic disposition. Through the word "pry" Achebe attends to bring to the surface Obi's wavering thoughts and position towards the Union, particularly the way he frequently discounts the status of the union as the embodiment of traditional dispensation. The writer makes it clear that Obi is willing to yield to the union's ostentatious claims of traditional kinship ties to resolve some of his financial troubles, but he does never accept to abrogate his personal freedom in exchange for the Union's interventions. Obi does not seem to understand that it is within the ground of these "traditional ties" that the Union President can grant himself the right to interfere in his social associates, including also the issue of his engagement. Obi thinks that through his constant display of self-assured individualism he can eschew the Union members' intrusion in his private associations. Yet he shows some claims to kinship relationship and attempts to reconcile the two compatible positions to settle his financial problems. This wavering position has damaging effects on Obi's moral authority. At this stage,

we see Obi sliding dangerously from his primary mental tools. He appears not different from the members of his community who are victims of unsuitable juxtaposition of different systems of thoughts.

In fact, Obi's typically moralistic and self-righteous attitudes prove totally helpless in front of his community's traditional mores. Although he appears to over-estimate his presumed emancipation from the restricted customs of the clan, and can overtly criticize the way his people are still bound to some unconstructive old traditions, his strong-willed decision to marry Clara is utterly undermined by the mounting opposition of his father and also the threats of his mother who is closely related to the collective spirit of the tribe. She stands symbolically to represent the most definite statement of traditional opposition to Obi's progressive attitudes and actions. At this level, Obi is required to revolt against the will of his family and his tribe if he decides to keep up his relationship with Clara.

It is utterly ironic that Obi would yield to the mores of his tribe when his father in his youth deserted his people's traditions and religion. But his father Isaac could get strength and peace of mind in alternative mode of values to those espoused by the clan and his father Okonkwo: Isaac had chosen to identify with the Christian principles of brotherhood and tolerance because he wanted to get away from some of the cruel traditional practices which were threatening the well-being of the collective spirit. In the case of Obi, we are presented with a naïve intellectual who cannot defend his right ideals against a primitive traditional practice. He eventually deserts Clara because his mother threatens to kill herself if he marries her. He is made aware that he cannot after all challenge the traditional codes, and in giving up the idea of engagement with Clara, he is reluctantly compelled to adhere to the social conventions of his people. However, it is the last capitulation for Obi. On his mother's death, Obi simply decides to send money to support his family and save the journey's expenses instead of attending the funeral rites; an act which reveals once more his complete estrangement from his family and village. In this hollow and rough moment, he writes in his journal that he sees himself as "a brand-new snake just emerged from its slough"(p.150), but he is well-aware that this dreary rebirth offers no space to his defeated ideals. In projecting

this convoluted experience the novel is able to expound a subtle analysis of the diverse socio-cultural factors behind Obi's alienation from his family and tribe.

But Obi's eventual estrangement from his family in a time of grief and need comes with a humiliating exposure and a fatal chastisement, when he arranges to receive a bribe in his government flat without taking the required precautions. Obi does not understand that one cannot merely escape the traditional codes of the community without undergoing some defeating results. In seeing him succumbing to bribe-taking we are made aware of the shallowness and insincerity of his national consciousness and moralistic claims. Obi's destined humiliation is to be construed as an instance of the thorough social corruption and moral decadence which have become the common norms of social order in the vast metropolis. The unrestrained liberties of Lagos and his complete estrangement from his family and kinsmen have eventually precipitated his submission to evil deeds. Ironically, the act of receiving the bribe takes place in the isolated setting of his apartment, the more private space which offers him a form of personal independence from the traditional authority of his tribe.

But the important point to be noted in this apparently straightforward narrative is that the writer's persistent preoccupation with socio-cultural behaviors is to mount revealing complex ironies around the critical issue of society as a reliable referential authority. Society as a centre of socio-cultural dispensation and a custodian of moral order is not vindicated in the events of *No Longer At Ease*, where unhealthy social behaviors are exacerbated by an unsuitable conjunction of two different cultural worldviews and where a world of moral confusion is engendered by the absence of a coherent system of communal values. Achebe has projected a society that has lost its moralistic and didactic sway over its people's behaviors. Unhealthy social behaviors, predicated on the disintegration of social values and communal traditions, are then a display of the perversion of the moralistic and ethical template that maintained the strengths and potency of the pre-colonial traditional society. The urgent meeting of the Union to talk about the humiliating incident of Obi's trial evinces the distressing effects of the social and cultural change on the most fundamental and cohesive aspects in the traditional dispensation. The president of the union allegedly represents the collective voice of Umuofia and its indigenous culture in the city. Even though he is

supposed to embody his tribe's principles and conventions, his standards and conceptions of social behaviors have in fact changed to accommodate the materialistic requirements of the urban milieu. For him, it is disgraceful for a superior civil servant to be imprisoned on account of illegally receiving twenty pounds. The matter for him is not related to the disgrace of being implicated in such an unhealthy practice but with the humiliation that will be attached to the Union and the whole tribe if their British-trained young man will be sent to prison. Another member of the group sharing this view blames Obi for not having taken the required precautions when he received the bribe. Other members who seem to be familiar with these malpractices condemn Obi for being caught for an unimportant amount of money. All the Union members appear to possess no sense of morality; no one of them has focused on the moral dimensions of Obi's act.

This failure to discern the ethical dimension of Obi's misconduct sets forth the general breakdown of the traditional moral order. Through the Union members' acquiescing attitudes towards different forms of malpractices, we see that obnoxious behaviors have turned out to be an established pattern of the developing society. The novel depicts the failure of the new community to suppress corruption as a morally confounding cultural impasse. Achebe appears to pour his anger and contempt on those individuals who presume to embody the tribe's culture and order; no one of them presents the argument that the act of receiving bribes is itself immoral. In these terms, the Union's members who embody the social quintessence of the Umuofia ethos are as perplexed and implicated in the moral deterioration of their society as their most eminent intellectual son whom they castigate, "for no man of title could retain the ozo rank if caught thieving' (*Things Fall Apart*, p.49). Achebe poignantly builds up this straightforward scene to evoke the degree of cultural schism between old and new time. His critical mode of representation allows the reader to grasp the different points of view from which the actions and attitudes of his characters may be construed.

In fact, Achebe's abiding preoccupation of depicting the chaotic encounter between the community's traditional culture and the residual values of the ex-colonizer culture is as central to *No Longer at Ease* as it is to *A Man of the People*. The absence of a convincing body of socio-cultural standards has given rise to a dangerous state of

political disorder in this novel. As we will read with the novel's main characters like Nanga and Max, politicians appeal to the traditions of the people, the traditions which in the past have allowed the people to construct their lives through ethical standards of collective control, in order to deceive and blind others, instilling in the people's minds false and superficial cultural traditions.

1.2. *A Man of the People*: Cultural Disintegration in the Political Arena

From the first chapters of the novel, the writer deliberately brings to the surface the disconcerting juxtaposition of the people's traditional mode of life along with the increasing manifestations of the emergent socio-cultural values and behaviors, and this is what creates the intricacy of the narrative. The novel's first sentence immediately lays emphasis on some inadequate aspects of this conjunction: "No one can deny that chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. was the most approachable politician in the country"(p.1, all page references in this study are from the 1975 Heinemann edition of *A Man of the People*). Through this statement, the reader may infer how the strange combination of the tribal title with the Western prestigious and honorific naming, adopted from the British tradition, is emblematic of a profound confusion. The novel presents incoherent and perplexing social situations where the inclination to blend the traditional culture and foreign values is manifest in all facets of communal life – behavior, food, dress, language and the entire sphere of social relationships.

The rising society of Chief Nanga possesses no sense of morality and devoutness that Achebe presents in the spiritual societies of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Chief Nanga and his associates in the government conduct a malicious plan of inconsistent perceptions of order by which they influence the political allegiances of their people. The critic R. Wren satirically calls Nanga's government 'The New Shrine'(1980,p.96). However, this shrine is not constructed around the community's traditional principles; for the tribe's great gods are totally disregarded. The potent veneration of the land's gods and its traditional religion is no longer recognized. This has given rise to a general state of social decadence and degeneration: the integrity of the social order is extremely diminished, its celebrant leader is dishonest, fraudulent, authoritative and revengeful, and the different communal relationships are constructed around the norm of material considerations.

Together with the narrator, we are introduced to many episodes which present the corridors of politics, and how the state matters are incompetently handled by the people in charge. Despite the fascinating milieu of the political educated class, the narrator demonstrates a good awareness of their wicked and dishonest actions. In one farcical minor episode, Achebe exposes his criticism and indictment over this political environment. Chief Koko, Nanga's colleague and Minister of Overseas Training, is portrayed as a ridiculous agent of politics. He thinks himself poisoned by his cook because he unintentionally drinks a local manufactured coffee which the government so enthusiastically encourages its poor people to buy (pp.33-34). Koko's panic creates a sense of abrasive humor for the scene but also gives way to notice the hypocrisy of those in power. In fact, while the government promotes national economy, Nanga and his colleagues persist to undermine that plan by continuing to cling to British commodities and products and deem them as intrinsically superior to those manufactured in their own country. They presumably call upon the people to maintain the nation's interests, but dishonestly go after the remnants of colonialism. This sightless dependence on European services and products is manifest in different facets of the politicians' lives, as Nanga tells a colleague in a phone chat: "You know very well T.C. that you cannot trust these our boys. That is why I always say that I prefer to deal with Europeans... What? Don't worry about the press: I will make sure that they don't publish it..." (p.42). The narrator provides many of the satirical incidents which contribute, in one way or another, to evince the far-reaching effects of cultural confusion besetting the new community which Achebe seeks to fictionalize.

In fact, *A Man of the People* demonstrates that the consistent anatomy of traditional beliefs and mores have been obliterated almost beyond recognition by the persistent adherence to cultural values and practices which are foreign to the African self-contained communities. The village itself which stands to maintain the cultural repositories of its people is rendered helpless under the ossification of traditional values and the influence of the adopted Western way of life. The writer does not depict the changing milieu of the present village as a sustaining reservoir of cultural legacies and allegiances. In Achebe's writings, we learn that the word 'bush' connotes ignorance, uncivilized mode of life, lack of skill in the language and manners of the

white man. In this novel, Mrs. Nanga explains her deferent attitude towards her husband's choice of a new and younger wife in this diffident tone: "I am too old and too bush"(p.87), implying that she is more fitting to attend to her husband's simple and traditional concerns at Anata, the village, and permit the educated wife, Edna, to accompany her minister husband in the big political ceremonies and cultural occasions at Bori, the capital. Achebe uses the word in another context that demonstrates the disintegration of traditional culture at the level of Nanga's family, who himself is the one in charge of the ministry of culture. Mrs. Nanga tells Odili that she attempts to keep her children attached to the village milieu by taking them from Bori to Anata in their yearly visit. She asserts that "(w)ithout it (...) they become English people. (...) they hardly speak our language?" And she adds in a humorous way that her little son calls her mother "a dirty, bush woman"(p.38).

Other examples however show that the emerging city behaviors and new aspects of affluence are trapping the desires of the villagers. The definitive mark of a prestigious social position in the developing community is the possession of the car. Odili's father views with disdain his son's job which does not grant him prosperous conditions of life. He keeps nagging him to abandon 'this foolish teaching' and look for a highly regarded job in the government that can provide him with a car (p.31). This acquisitive impulse appears most explicitly at some stage in his ride to meet his mistress Elsie in the minister's prestigious car driven by a white-uniformed chauffeur. Unfolding his sense of jubilation aroused by the special treatment afforded to him in that short-lived moment of authority, Odili appears overwhelmed by the whole glamorous experience of being taken in an official government car which is a foreign-made product.(p.56) The foreign-made car functions as a critical symbol for Achebe to expose the false pretensions of the new African leaders. In the context of the underdeveloped African countries, the ministerial long car is a remarkable symbol of both prosperity and decay, for it can be seen as exhausting the limited resources of the country. Ode Ogede appositely connects the car metaphor "with the overall absence of any durable vision of alternative societal values"(2001,p.83).

In this fourth novel, the government leaders as well as the people continue to verbally condemn the deep-seated influence of British imperialism on the elite group

of their community, yet they nevertheless bind all their private politics and interests with that imperial force. The British manners and values are still deemed as the pattern of progress and development that the developing Nigerian leaders adhere to in a sightless way. Here Achebe's interest is not to posit simplistic judgments or express implied indictments as much as to construct vivid situations to evince the aspect of cultural confusion. A most articulate example of this duplicitous approach to post-colonial politics is Chief Nanga, the Minister for Culture. Through his spontaneous manners with the people, his oratorical persuasiveness, his shrewd acquisitiveness, Nanga is portrayed as a prominent type of the fictionalised West African leader. In this character, as Bernth Lindfors writes, "Achebe has created one of the finest rogues in Nigerian fiction"(1979,p.61). Even though he assumes to work for the well-being of the people and the country, Nanga is apparently revealed to be a dishonest politician who adheres to no genuine system of values. We are presented with many farcical scenes where the narrator sneers at the politician's poor intellectual level. In one satirical incident, this minister of culture unwittingly shows his ignorance of the nation's literature. The narrator is taken by surprise and deception to witness how a Minister of culture can state in public that he has no information about his country's most celebrated novel.(p.65)In this straightforward satirical scene, Achebe emphasizes the most apparent incongruity that such ignorant politician would represent the important status of the nation's culture abroad. The narrator informs us that this first responsible of the nation's culture, who conceitedly inaugurates the activities of the first exhibition of literary works by local writers, carelessly displays his unawareness of the country's most famous novelist. The writer further constructs a satirical sketch of the minister when we see the latter rebuking the young writer in front of the whole audience for not wearing 'a suit' or their "national costume".(pp.62-63). At any rate, the traditional robes and the different forms of the community's cultural traditions are only a part of those pretentious political claims to maintain the chauvinistic image for this dishonest minister. Ironically, the minister starts to display some value for the artist only when he notices the abundant compliments and flattering treatment accorded to him by some highly-positioned intellectuals and also the foreign diplomats.

The writer introduces the character of Nanga through Odili's critical and satirical narration of the whole events. Through him Chief the Honorable M.A. Nanga is introduced to the reader during his visit to Anata Grammar School where he himself used to be a teacher and where the narrator Odili is now teaching. The event is portrayed by the dubious and unconvinced attitude of Odili, who is deeply disenchanted by the political policies of the leading government. For on his first and last visit to Parliament he witnessed the political dismissal of the minister of finance, an outstanding economist with a Ph.D. in public investment, by a government disinclined to face up the austere measures he proposed to overcome the country's economic crisis. His disillusionment stems from both the country's leaders and their advocates who have cynically pursued greedy plans. The politicians like Nanga keep up their high positions in the government by occasionally serving the material interests of their local electorates in the sphere of the nation.

In the novel's first chapter, we are presented with Chief Nanga as a devoted traditional leader among his adherent followers in his home town. He is depicted as having a warm personality. Nanga communicate spontaneously with the people because he appears to share their communal and cultural values that he respects, and he occasionally offers gifts to the people of his village because he is clearly using his political position as a means to serve his interests and his allegiant supporters. He who is supposed to defend and represent the nation's welfare and the interests of his constituency, selects the young Odili from among his people to get a prestigious post in the civil service. And to show his profuse generosity, Chief Nanga opens the doors of his home in the capital city to Odili. He has to convince his supporters that he has good communal intentions in order to keep them ignorant of his treacherous character. His motivation, as he alleges in all his public meetings, is to allow his supporting community to take its share of the nation's wealth. This attraction to the profit-oriented interests, advocated overtly by the leaders themselves, induces the people to associate political action with material gain.

In fact, the narrator makes it clear that politics is viewed merely as a means by which people rush for access to material objects, to amplify their power and to inflate their social status. Achebe presents other satirical scenes in which the dishonest

politicians enter into a squabble about local allegiances and interests. Chief Nanga uses all ways and means to keep his hold on his constituency. Devoid of any deep political insight, Nanga and his colleagues follow their profit-oriented practices by making their ignorant followers believe in their right to access the nation's bounty. In this unsettling tribal context, Nanga, who is appointed to defend the interests of the nation, invites Odili to hold a good position in the civil service under the control of tribal and ethnic allegiances. He openly states that "we shouldn't leave everything to the highland tribes. Our people must press for their share of the national cake" (p.12). The narrator explains how tribal allegiances become the definitive political principles espoused by the government parties in the absence of communal moral order. This abuse of power makes it difficult for national institutions to be accorded any reverence because the nation is deemed as a means to acquire material profit.

This unpromising situation of political, social and cultural schism is generated when the alien institutions of the colonizer are juxtaposed with the indigenous systems of order without taking into account the particular socio-cultural anatomy of the African communities. In the novel, Achebe appears to emphasize the difficulty of the multi-ethnic Nigeria to survive as one united nation because of the sightless tendency of ethnic loyalties which is used as the ultimate basis for leading the country's affairs. With the first experiences of the first republic, John Ostheimer states, one can infer how "(c)olonial rule failed to mold all Nigerians into one economic and constitutional system. Therefore, no basis for a dominant set of political attitudes and ethics was created" (qtd in Aigbe, 1993, p.437). Right from the beginning of the novel, the narrator explains how the villagers show no form of resentment towards the corrupt politicians who use their positions to enrich themselves because they themselves have become more cynical and apathetic towards the interests of their country. The people adopt this outlook towards the country's riches because they do not see themselves as influential members of its government. The unrestrained acquisitive mentality exhibited by both the country's leaders and their apathetic followers has its roots in the colonial period when the country's diverse riches are despotically put under the control of the colonizer. This expounds Achebe's abiding reference to the turbulent and chaotic effects of colonialism, which is expressed in this wrathful tone: "No one arrogates to

himself the right to order the lives of a whole people unless he takes for granted his own superiority over those people”(1975,p.139).

In this novel, Nanga’s people perceive political power in terms of the colonial authority which was predicated on repressive and abusive systems of rule. In the post-colonial context of Achebe’s fourth novel, we are presented with inexperienced and self-seeking politicians who have glibly followed the white man’s exploitative policies. In Nanga’s government, where there are no strict constitutional laws that could impose adequate punishment on the corrupt leaders, the politicians are in this way given an opportunity to use any way at their disposal to render their power a source for acquisition and retention of material goods. Achebe shows obliquely that only the holders of power could influence the political orders to control and distribute the goods that power assured. And from his position of bureaucracy, Nanga employs political power to affect and manipulate services even at the level of rural positions. He uses his authority to punish the defection of Hezekiah Samalu (Odili’s father, and Nanga’s party chairman for Urua who has allowed Max’s party to start its campaign from his compound) by reassessing the old man’s income for taxation and by removing the pipes deposited for a projected rural water system at Urua (Odili’s village). The people of Urua are aware of the necessity of confirming their support for Nanga to get the water pipes installed again (pp.132-33), but Hezekiah remains penalized by the revengeful leader for not reaffirming his allegiance to him. These minor incidents reflect Nanga’s deceiving behaviors towards his constituency. Official local projects and private opportunities are withdrawn from any groups or individuals who do not support the will of the corrupt leader, and penalties are imposed on them arbitrary. By far the disintegration of the social integrity is caused by the absence of a moralistic communal authority which can hold in check the despotic and corrupt practices of the leading groups.

The decadence that follows such condition is manifest in the action of the governing group which is fraught with manipulation, corruption, and is demonstrated by people like Nanga, who exploits his apparent communal spirit with his village to promote his political self-aggrandizement. Chief Nanga, in making reference to the highland people, is, in effect, evoking and exploiting what Odili has concisely

described as “primitive loyalty”(p.7). Tribe loyalties are carried into the political field as well as into personal life. As in Urua and Anata, the people believe utterly in the value of tribe or village kinship. For them, this form of collective attachment represents the nucleus of the whole traditional order. Nanga tells Odili, “we shouldn’t leave everything to the highland tribes”(p.12). Chief Nanga can win the support of the people of his home town through the frequent reliance on these emotions of tribal loyalties in his speeches. In the novel we read of other corrupt politicians like the minister for Foreign Trade Alhaji Sulaiman whose Islamic title and Arabic name present him as a member of the Northern Region of Nigeria where Islam is the dominant religion, in addition to the largely Christianed Eastern Region and the evenly divided West of the country (Wren,1980,102).

Even though Achebe does not appear to focus on this aspect of national politics, the political hostility between Odili and Nanga does show that the feeling of tribal loyalties is one important aspect which can give rise to conflicting relationships. The two candidates derive from the same area, but do not belong to the same village. At the beginning of the story, Odili, the narrator, criticizes his school colleague Andrew Kadibe who contends that he cannot be against Chief Nanga’s visit to their school because they belong to the same tribe. Odili deplores this blind and irrational principle of tribal loyalties because, as he argues, it undermines the nation’s unity and it increases the sense of hostility and enmity among the different tribes and regions. Later in the novel, Odili’s candidature is cheerfully received in his home village, Urua, when Max, the leader of the Common People’s Convention, emphasizes that the village of Urua can depend on the efforts of its elected son to have its legitimate share in the nation’s wealth. One of the village elders, a local councillor and who speaks up in favour of their promising young politician; Odili, expresses this in a cynical way:

The village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make the way for us to reach the plate (...). I want to tell our son (...) that we are waiting here like a babe cutting its first tooth: anyone who wants to look at our new tooth should know that his bag should be heavy (pp.125-6) .

The elder’s statement brings to mind that the Igbo society attaches a great value to social status and personal achievement. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, we read how Okonkwo, the protagonist, can turn the uncultivated farms of his lazy father into

prolific fields through his hard work and become one of the most successful leading men in his clan. This diligent man, who presents a typical pattern of his society's ethics and demands of material achievement, is obsessed through all his life by a deep anxiety of being thought improvident and weak. He is intent on accumulating crops of yams and acquiring titles to meet his society's conditions to grant him rank and status. The crucial point of these conditions, however, is that the social achievement in Okonkwo's time also requires the attainment of prosperity through the person's good morality in the milieu of his work. In this sense, Nanga is seen by his village advocates as a titled chief who has to win the nation's election against other people from other tribes. Yet, the problem with the elder's words is that they are put in a new context in which the different social practices and behaviours are totally stripped of the traditional moralistic order which holds in check the individual's material ambitions, and hence at variance with the unrestrained acquisitive mentality of the new community and the unlimited dishonesty that turns out to be a common feature of all the national government associations. The writer seems to point out that this man of tradition does not comprehend that the chiefs of the post-colonial time have completely renounced their traditional values of personal honor and morality, and are well-prepared to make use of all corrupt tools to achieve self-interest. In a poignant tone, Achebe writes in one of his essays: "The success of the culture was the balance between the two, the material and the spiritual (...). Today we have kept the materialism and thrown away the spirituality which we should keep it in check" (Achebe, in Killam, 1973, p. 11).

In a society where the traditional moral order has been disrupted it is not possible to eschew some situations of confused standards. The disintegration of the social values is made more explicit in the minor incident of Josiah the shopkeeper and the blind beggar. Josiah steals the blind man's walking stick, to make up a 'juju' medicine that he needs to use in his shop to render the villagers as his blind clients. The blind man realizes that his stick has been taken by the greedy trader and calls upon the whole village to penalize him. The villagers decide to boycott Josiah's shop and exclude him from the different social assemblies. The villagers act within the combined strength of their general moralistic order against a malpractice of one of its

members. The village maintains its controlling status by a strong moral law to which no one can go against without taking the risk of facing serious social sanctions from the whole community. But traditional moral considerations are not carried into the official relationships and practices of the nation. This dramatic schism between the general concerns of the nation and the village is clearly illustrated through the incident of Josiah when he returns to the village as a bodyguard for Nanga in his election campaign and receives the cheers of the same villagers who have previously snubbed him because of his evil act.

The absurdity of applying different moral values in relation to the same ostracized Josiah is not grasped by the villagers who have not yet learnt to compromise with the complex institutions of the nation. Indeed, the incident is significant in the way it foreshadows the primary interest of the writer's representation of the village and town settings. The village setting is usually used to convey essential cultural connotations in Achebe's narratives. As in *No Longer at Ease*, the writer constructs the events around the growing conflict between the traditional world of the village and the emerging cultural values of the town. In this novel, as it is usual with Achebe's "intelligent objectivity" (Taiwo, 1976, 116), there is no intention to gloss over the social and cultural weaknesses of the villagers' world. The two villages, Anata and Urua, where most of the novel's events take place, are presented to us in terms of their strengths and also limitations. The writer can create an objective and realistic picture in which all the facets of the village space are fully evoked. The two villages represent the political force upon which Nanga and Odili rely in their campaign. Even though the villagers are depicted as being cynical and indifferent, they can grasp the implicit political intentions of both Nanga and Odili. This is reflected in the discerning statement of Edna's mother: "They are both white man's people. And they know what is what between themselves" (p.106). Achebe's perspective of the village is pointedly apparent; although this vigorous centre of the people's traditional culture does not constitute the strong authority of social organization and control that it used to possess, the author appears to emphasize that the African villages still preserve their socio-cultural function as a custodian of the community's ethics and morals. This is aptly indicated in the Josiah incident. This minor incident is intended to bring forward a

significant truth that no one can overlook: the people's traditional culture proves to have a substantial order of thought which modern institutions of government find difficulties to work through. The villagers prove to possess a body of values which is significantly superior to those deceitful politicians who pretend to serve the people's interests. Achebe's denunciation of the larger society in general is nevertheless framed within his understanding of the deep-seated effects of the colonial experience which has engendered the present confusion of society. The uneasy shift of the African world from the self-contained culture of the village to the complex socio-political conventions of the nation has made it impossible for the budding community to regulate and control the behaviour of its members according to a unified set of order.

The incidents of Nanga's political campaign show that the budding nation which this deceitful minister and his self-seeking political colleagues seek to rule is still a vague construct because the majority of its people do not view themselves as an integral group of a well-ordered national community. In fact, all Achebe's post-colonial novels evince the apathetic attitude of the people towards the nation's affairs; these people are frequently presented to us in their traditional communal function within the well-drawn boundaries of their village or clan. The conception of the nation as a complex political institution is inherited from the unsettling colonial experience in which its modern institutions of political conduct are being applied in governing the African countries, particularly the colonial policy of central authorities. The whole institutional fabric of this complex entity of political and social organization is alien to the Africans who are used to organize their different social activities and communal relationships in terms of the well-arranged socio-cultural order of the village. In the novel, this apparent breach between the traditional world of the village and the big affairs of the nation can be seen in the contradictory reactions of the villagers towards some common malpractices. In the harsh conditions of the colonial period, the Africans were used to see the leading authority represented by dominating and foreign forces. Even after independence, they come to view authority as an alien practice which has nothing to do with the self-contained order of their rural world. This explains why the people in the novel seem to have no sense of anger or resentment against their self-seeking leaders who have only taken the white colonizer's position:

“‘Let them eat’, was the people’s opinion, ‘after all when the white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?’ ”(p.144) In this regard, the efficiency of maintaining traditional values in the village sphere makes its people able to hold their moral authority over communal actions, a fact that is pointedly brought in direct opposition with the people’s helplessness when faced with the corrupt setting of the large nation. In fact, in the money-orientated affairs of the nation “the laws of the village” are rendered ‘powerless’ (p.148). Through this statement, the writer is reminding his people of their communal values which have been obliterated in the corrupt milieu of the city and asserting that the sweeping decadence of the present conditions cannot be dealt with through an unsighted recourse to the living rural traditions. So, in addition to pointing out the limitations of the foreigner’s conventional view on the African cultural values and practices, Achebe also displays in many revealing incidents the restrictions of juxtaposing the African traditional principles of social conduct with the Western assumptions of modern society and politics.

The problem is, however, a crucial one, for it concerns those intellectuals who like Max and Nanga deliberately deceive (and very rhetorically) employ folk language and proverbs to influence the attitudes of the people. In the national context, Nanga is praised and honoured for his corrupt actions. Throughout the story, Nanga has used his people’s words and gestures to get their allegiance; a relationship between the abuse of common language and the abuse of cultural traditions is implicit. He has exploited his people’s traditional culture, their only supporting legacy in the multifaceted conditions of the present nation, under false-pretensions for his political goals. Nanga has turned the ethics of kinship and tribal loyalty against the people by cynically corrupting their nature and reducing them into materialistic considerations. Through such devious political strategies, the people view him as their honest and faithful representative who can strive enthusiastically to secure their interests in the national sphere. These loyal followers are not aware that their communal spirit which was in the past a symbol of their potency and vigour is now rendered as a tool of deceit, for this man uses them only as a political force to serve his own interests in the anarchy of national politics. Nanga’s self-interested perception of what he calls ‘African authenticity’, a cultural discourse which he presumes to defend against the African Western intellectuals, can

best be handled through the cultural and intellectual discourses of Négritude which had entailed a conscious and determined rejection of colonial negations, this significant literary and cultural trend that will be looked into hereafter.

For the advocates of Négritude, the African's quest for cultural emancipation is predicated on the passionate attempts to achieve better conditions at the different facets of social existence; it is in one important sense enmeshed in a remarkable complex relation between the community's traditional culture and the cultural legacies it has inherited from the European colonizer. In this movement, especially, this restless dialectic is engendered within the asymmetrical dichotomy of African cultural authenticity and Western modernity. In this incompatible intellectual relation "(t)he high valuation of racial and cultural antecedents, of what is imagined and projected as their coherence, has to be balanced against the recognition of the new imperatives of modernization dictated by the impact of a triumphant West". And "(w)hat this implies is nothing less than a drama of conflicting normativities"(Irele,2001,76). From Irele's statement one can infer that the prevailing aspect of African intellectual discourses is their focus on the issues of cultural and racial representation as they are projected by the western mental tools. Négritude has presented itself as a movement of ideological contestation; its leaders have worked to subvert the European racial images of Africans and of the Black race in the different historical phases of their turbulent contact, first in the inhuman conditions of slavery and later in the oppressive policies of colonialism. These hard experiences have instilled in the African psyche an acute racial consciousness in direct reaction to the discounting premises of Western racist ideologies and the cultural dislocations that these have engendered in African societies. The point that emerges from this aspect is that Négritude has been historically projected in an essentially adversarial attitude; it has devoted a great attention to the revival of African culture. The import of these intellectual efforts carry a decisive polemical connotation: as a cultural discourse, it represents not only the repudiation of the negative representations of the native African, but it also articulates the claim to a cultural consciousness based on a critical and argumentative attitude towards the national cultural claims for self-recovery and tradition reclamation.

The body of literary and ideological writings produced by Négritude intellectuals brings forward a deep exploration of the black condition in both its different historical experiences and its intellectual orientation towards forming a clear ideological conception of a black cultural identity. In this committed literature, the preoccupation with the issues of race which has provided a common thematic orientation for the imaginative expression of black writers has turned with time into an ardent celebration of the cultural values of the black race, associated with romantic memories of mythical Africa. Generally, the ideas of Négritude are associated with the writings of Senghor whose efforts have been outstanding in the development of this movement from the rigid ideological orientations to the specific issues of self-identification and cultural representation. Senghor's notion of Négritude presents itself as an effort at re-affirming and retrieving the cultural values of a society threatened by the influence of its colonizer's alien order. It is important to note that Senghor's theory does not represent in itself a rejection of the Western systematic notion of race classification in terms of identity and aptitude. What Senghor does reject is the way the European colonizer has manipulated the meanings of some set of racial terms to posit his theories of racial superiority and domination. As he says: "Race is reality – I don't mean racial purity. There is difference, but not inferiority or antagonism"(qtd in Irele,1981,p.71). Senghor's theory of Négritude consists of a logical exposition of the primary values of the African traditional world as they are embodied in the communal systems of thought and general social order. His intellectual efforts are oriented towards building up a complete approach of culture, which is intended not only to substantiate the human value and cultural significance of the traditional African world-view, but essentially to evince their suitability to the new conditions of the modern African community. The main cultural thesis which has to preoccupy the thinking of the African critics and writers, as Senghor argues, is to create new possibilities which may allow the modern African man to "integrate Negro-African values" into the present world, for it is not possible to cling blindly to the idea of "reviving the past" or "living in a Negro-African museum; the question is to inspire this world, here and now, with the values of our past"(qtd in Lloyd,1967,p.282).

Achebe in an interview with Janet Wilkinson, in *Talking With African Writers*, acknowledges the cultural valuable achievements realized in the African intellectual field by Négritude and its significant contribution for establishing the continent's own history of ideas and enriching its field of imaginative expression. He considers those different African discourses of thought as a useful pattern of cultural activism that serves over time to record and even escort the nation's different struggles. "By renouncing that whole movement", he argues persuasively,

We were really cutting ourselves off from a source that could have helped us. (...) We must recognize that there has been a ferment in Africa for a long time and that different people through the ages played a role according to their light and their ability and perhaps according to the constraints of the time¹. We must make use of all this to give us momentum. If you don't have a long history you won't have any momentum, you will be starting again every day, (...) and this is terrible. (Achebe,2002, p.54)

Achebe's appraisal of the value of African cultural movements in this passage emphasizes that his allusion to African discourses of authenticity is not meant to criticize the basic core of these movements but to display in most substantial means the negative use to which the very utopian and nationalist assumptions of these movements are put in contemporary African states. Through his critical portrait of Nanga's claims to authenticity, Achebe makes an objective reference to the ideas of a primordial African identity without underplaying the importance of its continuing impact in the formation of a substantial sense of cultural identification. For the independent nations, these intellectual movements become advocated by half-cultured politicians who have reduced the vital depository of the people's culture into pretentious labels of ideologies exploited for influencing political behaviors. Within this decadent employment of the communal cultural consciousness, the political philosophy of the leaders, promoted by imperial economic organizations, become a reverent national cause with which the entire population is invited to identify itself.

In *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga's occasional recourse to traditional culture is never a genuine attempt on his part to defend a self-contained culture that presents itself as a coherent system of social order, or an affirmation of his community's cultural values that serve to preserve its distinct world-view against the residual values of the colonizer and its imperial presence. Through the deceitful character of this

politician and his likes, the relationship between the government and its people is totally framed within a false consciousness, and the corrupt leader is deemed by his acquisitive supporters as a nationalist hero. Following these implements of ideological calculation and abuse, Nanga's nationalist pretensions are only a pattern of an illusory consciousness. He has spitefully used the traditional African claims of cultural identification as a means to influence the political behaviour of the people and to legitimize the authority of corruption and misconduct. He employs pretentious slogans of cultural authenticity to cover up evil-doing, validate political judgments and substantiate perversities. All his public meetings with his constituencies are accompanied with local 'cultural songs'. He attempts to convince the people that his relation to them is always based on a "pure and simple family reunion".

In seeking to gain the people's support and harbor their malpractices, the leaders attempt to manipulate the people's attitudes towards the elite class. Every time the government faces a crisis, the leaders hasten to invent false realities about the intellectuals' collusion with foreign forces as a way to distort the image of the educated experts in general. In relation to this issue, the narrator informs us how the Minister of finance and his cabinet group were dismissed by the Prime Minister because they suggested to the government to posit severe economic procedures, a plan which might weaken the popular position of the leading party. The minister and his colleagues were criticized as being un-African, self-indulgent spying agents skilled in uncreative and helpless theories of economics and espousing the white man's systems of thoughts and values. These are harsh indictments intended to stir up a detrimental image of the hard-working and the devoted elites. According to Nanga's government, these British-trained intellectuals show no sense of pride to be African and their high training, as the reader has noticed in *No Longer at Ease*, is a decisive feature in estranging them from the realities and world-view of their people. The pretentious comment, as expressed in the party's cell of communication, is that the 'Cambridge' and 'Harvard' degrees "only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people"(p.4). By relying on these chauvinistic slogans, the prime minister and the government succeeded in keeping off the minister of finance and his supporters from the cabinet, inducing the ignorant people to yield to the corrupt system

of the ruling group. Odili, the narrator, presents to us many other incidents where Nanga and his colleagues overtly criticize the educated elite and appeal to the rhetoric of the nation's autonomy for self-seeking benefits. These acts make the people view the intellectuals as white men's agents and propel them to offer their unwavering support to their leaders. The writer appears to relate this aspect to that sense of distrust that the African people used to express towards the western-trained elite. They tend to associate all forms of knowledge and awareness with the unique privileges and traits which constitute the main strengths of the colonial authority. This propels them to see the African intellectuals as white men's collaborators.

The absence of a good social relationship between the people and the educated elite is also a shrewd political approach taken up by the Nigerian leading group to pour scorn on the intellectuals and keep the people away from the real happenings of their country. The biggest irony centers on the fact that those governing groups had received their high social standing from their colonial rulers whom they still view in great admiration. If the politicians are attacked for political corruption and dishonesty by those intellectuals who seek to develop and reform the country's different institutions, they can in their turn accuse their opponents of foreign complicity and thus look like people hostile to Africanisation. Ironically enough, Chief Nanga attempts anxiously to attain the unique privileges which high degrees offer to its owner. In one of his public meetings in his hometown, his supporters receive him with flattering cheers and heap on him the qualities and standards he condemns in the intellectuals. During his enthusiastic speech in which he invites his people to benefit from the national bounty and not leave it to other tribes, the audience appreciates his acquisitive tone and describes him as "Owner of book"(p.12). Through these three brief words, the writer demonstrates how the people have totally changed the orientation of their social interests; they no longer deem the communal oral rhetoric as a means of social education and enlightenment. Instead, they are totally appealed by the western high rhetoric of knowledge which can offer them better opportunities of material progress. In granting this title to Chief Nanga, this devoted follower underlines in that short statement the possession of the white man's knowledge to the respectable minister of culture, who looks at the speaker in an approving way (p.12). The dreadful analogy

here is that the minister of finance and his group have been dismissed from the government specifically because of their being versed in the white man's modern theories of political and social conduct, which is deliberately related to conspiracy with the imperial forces. Nanga himself is shown jubilant when he informs his supporters about the honorary Ph. D degree which is offered to him from an unidentified college in the United States.

In fact, Nanga can win the support of his people because he knows how to mediate between their cultural values and the demands of the present political order. He could exploit distinguishing standards and behaviors of his people's culture and traditions opportunistically to achieve individual benefits and cover up his corrupt practices. His quest here is not so much for attaining good communication with the people as to attain some hidden plans through false pretensions. The people believe absolutely that Nanga is really serving their interests against their hostile tribes. He demonstrates that he genuinely wielded different norms of his people traditions than the Western-trained intellectuals who conceitedly adopt the white man's values and mental tools. This man of culture is very fluent in speaking West African pidgin, a feature which shows his social association with the urban people (half-literate workers, tradesmen, and craftsmen) who use this emerging colloquial language. In the rural novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the writer presents pidgin as a variant language which is used by the white district's interpreters to signify, as David Carrol explains, "the meretriciousness of the forces seeking to erode traditional Igbo values"(1990, p.128). In the post-colonial generation of Nanga, there has been a different impulse behind the use of Pidgin English. Carrol goes on to elucidate that the insistence of this intellectual character to use pidgin in a most flexible and lively manner with his intellectual associates propels us to understand it "as an African means of combating European, cosmopolitan values"(1990,p.128). Certainly, in this regard, the people's language, both in its rural and urban mode, and cultural traditions seem to constitute the vital force of a corrupt politician who shows no limits in the way of exploiting the collective spirit of his people to uphold his political potency.

At the same time, Achebe portrays this character in a disdainful image to point out his trivial perception of his people's culture. The trouble is that, being rather a

superficial traditionalist, he has wielded those cultural aspects – gestures, dance, language and dress – with a destructive opportunism rather than with a constructive concern for a healthy move towards self-apprehension. Yet, it is through these that Nanga succeeds to seduce his people into unsighted loyalty and attains the means to preserve his public role, a role which the villagers only vaguely understand in relation to their traditional norms. To gain the support of the villagers, Nanga shows a charming character with everyone. In commenting on his attractive appearance, Odili, who is himself mystified to some level by Nanga, says: “You could never think – looking at him now- that his smile was anything but genuine. It seemed bloody-minded to be skeptical”(p.8). So, recognizing the acquisitive character of his people, Nanga displays a remarkable generosity with his advocates, the villagers, the poor and particularly the journalists to whom he promises to fill their pockets during the election campaign. All the communal ties that he alleges to maintain under the name of traditional culture are only strategic political means oriented towards serving his concealed aims. When this minister pays a special visit to his hometown, the people are told that this important event is not meant to influence their political loyalty; it is only “a family reunion- pure and simple”(p.13). The implied connotation here is just the contrary for each word. Nanga’s well designed visit to his hometown is an important step in the course of his political campaign. Nanga has truly come to re-enhance his people’s loyalty for his forthcoming election which the people, of course, do not know about. In an interview, Achille Mbembe explains these frequent aspects of triviality and ‘fantasy’ which characterize the core of post-independence power:

(T)hese fantasies (of power) end up becoming a ‘habitus’ or at least part of the stylistics of everyday life, (...) assuming a nightmarish appearance, as reality and fable reflect each other, thereby transforming the very identity of the original and its referents. (...) In this kind of power formation, reality is each time erased, recreated and duplicated. It is this power of proliferation (and its ability to obliterate the distinctions between truth and falsehood, the visible and the occult) that turns domination and subjection into a magical song ...²

The point here is that of sheer repetition of the power strategies which are turned into a generic and a conventional system of the post-colonial African governments. This banal political apparatus, as Mbembe observes, works always to form submissive people who lack the ability to understand the reality of their social conditions, and who

do not distinguish between their leaders' pretentious communal slogans and their political responsibilities which they are required to carry in a moralistic way. In fact, Nanga's opportunistic tendencies can only be identified in these post-colonial terms of non-identity and uncertainty, an incoherent socio-cultural existence which is framed under the complexities of real experiences and fabricated truths. He is, without reservation, "a born politician", as Odili identifies him. He is well aware of the need to develop good relations with the people in every detail which he can use to his profit. He appears to them as the reverent leader who will give each citizen his or her own share of the national riches. He has to appear approachable in order to gain the trust and approval of his supporters. Nanga possesses an inherent wittiness of how to carry out his plans, and he is willing to bring to his support unhealthy behaviors as enticement, corruption and sometimes coercion. In the village milieu, however, Nanga attempts to display a virtuous and charming character. The narrator describes him communicating and joking with the people of his hometown in Pidgin English, sharing their principles and supporting their different needs. It is through this vital personality that he can continually keep hold of his constituency and cling to his political position. In bringing to the surface the complexity of this stereotyped character, Achebe expounds how the politician's nimbleness and skillfulness in dealing with his people constitutes a real threat to the general interests of the entire community because he can win the support of the people through false pretensions and deceiving pronouncements. On this character Achebe writes:

... he 's a very important character ; and he is proficient. He knows what he wants to do, and he's prepared to do it and has the training , the historical preparation for it. This is in part, perhaps the tragedy of our situation. Here indeed he's this proficient, and yet he's applying it all to destroy the society (...). He's applying it in a very narrow, selfish way.

(qtd in Lindfors & Kothendaraman,1993,p.171)

By the end of the story, it becomes clear that Nanga's communal empathy is only a pattern of his deceiving personality. His evil doings and manipulating means are increasingly disclosed when he is challenged by Odili's and Max's adversary party which reveals his dishonest practices and his political lies. At this phase, his hypocritical character becomes noticeable for everyone. To secure his chances to get a

prestigious position in the parliament, or to maintain his ministerial position, Nanga employs both intimidating and enticing practices to keep Odili away from the course of the election. He informs him that his political campaign is sponsored by British Amalgamated Company to emphasize Odili's financial limitation in front of the strength of the government rulers. When this achieves no appreciated result, Nanga offers him an interesting sum of money and a scholarship to study overseas as a way to induce him to withdraw from politics. Nanga behaves in this decadent way towards Odili and his party because he believes that he deserves to get all the votes of his people whom he has served in the whole course of his political experience. When all his threats and material temptations fail to undermine the political enthusiasm of Odili, Nanga resorts to exercise threat and pressure on the people of Odili's village, by using his reliable interventions to cancel the village project of pipe-borne water, in order to secure their support in election. All these acts of corruption handled by a minister of culture present a tarnished picture of the post-colonial agent of power who can even appeal to the cultural traditions of his community to seek empty and trivial personal objectives.

In *A Man of the People*, we have seen Achebe's portrayal of a community that has been stripped of its traditional cultural values, in a context in which the state of cultural transformation has brought with it a distressing condition of social incoherence and cultural breakdown. As the narrative moves from one social facet to another, the writer draws on revealing situations which demonstrate the unstable and wavering relation between the conservative cultural world of the past and the emerging order of the post-colonial society where the individual can acquisitively combine the two modes of values to attain particular personal interests as we have seen with Chief Nanga. The assumption accentuated by the writer through each situation of cultural confusion is that individuals and people alike are completely blind and indifferent to the cultural transition taking place in their community. What stands important in this regard is that the writer does not attempt to give us naive possibilities of compromise to the incompatible worldviews which are operating in this community. Instead, the idea of defending and preserving one's own culture is represented as a high ethical quest that cannot be understood by the likes of Nanga who pays tribute to his people's

culture only to uphold his position. In this sense, the writer's major concern in *A Man of the People* is less related to the conventional ideological task of presenting prosaic solutions to the post-colonial issues than to the critical task of bringing to light the different facets of cultural perplexity that must be dealt with and corrected.

As we have endeavoured to argue in this chapter, Achebe's texts explore how cultural identity is an issue which in fact determines the general fabric of the community. He is not dealing simply with the dissolution and ossification of some aspects of traditional culture, but with the effects of this harrowing condition on the relationship of the individual with his community and his indigenous values. The writer narrates specific incidents of this phase of cultural transition and the inevitable patterns of incoherence which become a prevalent feature of the African's life. The complicated relationship between the inherited legacies of colonialism and the indigenous ancient dispensation, the ever-increasing schism which frequently cut off the African developing city with its modern way of life from the traditionally-based rural locale, are all factors that lead us to study the development of African post-colonial cultural identities in relation to specific historical and cultural determinants. Starting from this problematic of cultural split and uncertainty, we will endeavour to show, in the second chapter, Achebe's further analysis of post-colonial dialectic of culture. More specifically, our study will focus on how Achebe tries to resolve the cultural ambivalence and double consciousness of the time through making his protagonists, notably intellectuals, embrace larger issues of cultural reintegration and regeneration for an act of cultural refutation of the unreal divide posited between the emerging modern nation and the traditional village, and by extension between the past traditional culture and the hybrid culture of the present. Along the course of their social and political explorations, we will see more essentially how Achebe combines the private stories of these intellectuals with the daily experiences of the larger community, a useful association intended to recover the community's past experience of collective consciousness. Along this thematic orientation, we attempt to show how Achebe's concern with his fundamental issue of cultural reclamation appears to relate less to the ideological than to the literary and the aesthetic. This leads us to focus on the literary value of Achebe's mode of writing manifested in his control of the tools of

artistic criticism to dramatize the interrelation between the referential context, the novels' themes, character and form of narrative.

Notes:

- 1- Many African authors and critics have not been in support of the ideological and cultural perspectives advocated by Négritude and other cultural movements. They have criticized the movement on the ground of the irrelevance of its romantic and extremist racial notions to the contemporary issues of the continent. According to them, these cultural movements have to go beyond a simple cultural romanticism, and present themselves as comprehensive investigation of the African contemporary condition. Many of those writers and critics sought to transcend the framework of cultural affirmation and defence which characterizes the intellectual core of Négritude and Africanism; for it is no longer a question of defining the African personality but of conceptualizing it within the contemporary conflicts of historical transition. For example, Wole Soyinka views Négritude as reinforcing colonial asymmetrical dichotomies of racial representation, a stand that involuntarily propels the black intellectuals to defend their culture in a prejudiced way. For Soyinka, "a tiger does not proclaim its tigritude, it jumps on its prey"(1976,p.22). In the same attacking tone, Sembene Ousmane says "Négritude neither feeds the hungry nor builds roads"(1973,p.150). This disapproval of Négritude particularly is also a critical issue which has found a frame of analysis in the writings of Achille Mbembe. According to Mbembe's critical perception of the post-colonial condition, Africa, as a discursive field, continues to function under the abstract connotations of culture and race. For him, the categorical inadequacy of such movements resides in the view that they are totally distant from the real requirements of the people, and they depend for their value not so much on a well-discerned socio-cultural plan as on metaphysical ideas based on sheer romanticism and uncritical quest for cultural revivalism. Mbembe is not suggesting that the African writers and thinkers have not reacted to some of the detrimental effects of colonialism which had given rise to many complex problems of identification and representation. He merely criticizes the inadequacy of some of the intellectual counter-discourses adopted by those cultural movements when related to the harsh circumstances, social and economic, that the African communities are facing till today. Ideologies of cultural assertion like Négritude, Africanism, etc - are deemed by Mbembe to be mainly ineffectual and unproductive because they do not directly draw on the socio-cultural conditions of the underprivileged social groups. For him, ideological discourses in Africa, in real experiences of government, are always used to serve particular policies and calculated objectives of some leading forces under the name of "resistance" and nationalism (2001,p.20).
- 2- Interview with Achille Membe, by Chistian Hoeller (Editor of *Springer in Magazine*, Austria).<http://www.mltiword.org/m_iversity/articles/achille-htm>

CHAPTER TWO

***THE REALITIES OF THE INTELLECTUAL'S QUEST FOR
CULTURAL LOCATION IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE***

A Man of the people is in many respects a critical representation of the socio-cultural issues conveyed by the earlier writings, including the status and contemporary relevance of folk knowledge, the complex conditions of the developing nation and the role of the intellectual in bringing together its dispersed socio-cultural experiences, the issue of gender-relations, and the need for different social members to tell their own stories (conveyed by means of the first-point of view). In doing this, Achebe has taken new formal modes of imaginative expression, including using representative characters of contemporary Africa as spokespersons. This mode of writing develops what Dan Izevbaye calls “realist mainstream of the African tradition of prose fiction”(2009, p.44). The fictional figures in this literary tradition reflect the developing social realities and the transformation of cultural values. Likewise, the changing historical periods depicted in Achebe’s fictional works have brought into focus different types of characters that stand as representatives of the manifest changes and mutations attending the different facets of modern communal life. These characters differ markedly, including taxi-drivers, political activists, students, priestesses, teachers, civil servants, and government leaders. Through this new generation of professionals the writer brings to the fore new social issues carried by well-informed intellectuals whose liberating voices and revolutionary dispositions defy the repressive tools of the post-colonial authority. In every case the author has placed such representative characters in a mediating social position to stand for the dominant precepts of the culture supported by him; these characters are the novel’s main protagonists and they convey the writer’s objective attitudes towards his people and community; indeed the intellectual discourses carried by the narrated events point to the critical voice of the author and his implied moralistic judgments. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe takes a neutral position, but he makes one of the characters act as a mediating narrative voice between the text and the reader to expose the absurdity of the socio-cultural circumstances that he highlights, although this witness is shown in many situations caught in states of uncertainty and obscurity. This narrative mode is intended to bring to the surface the protagonist’s problems of social and cultural identification.

The way Achebe's emergent intellectual is preoccupied with recording and narrating the nation's history, and how this re-inscription of present happenings within the self-conscious accounts confer alternative ways of perceiving the emergent social realities and the links between the individual, particularly the intellectual, and community's culture constitute the focus of the thematic orientations in *A Man of the People* (and also *Anthills of the Savannah* that will be studied in the subsequent chapter). The novel as a whole stands as a good pattern of a committed literature which reflects the writer's consistent commitment to his fundamental theme of 'cultural reclamation' and his general literary inclination to "artistic objectivity" (Taiwo,1976,p.116). Such realistic interplay which can be observed along the novel's different artistic elements, particularly between narrative mode and characterization, is related to Achebe's 'intelligent objectivity', to use Oladele Taiwo's words, and his artful use of specific tools of literary representation to bring into play the strong interrelation between the socio-cultural context and character development. "His realism", as Abdul JanMohamed rightly puts it, is "based on his view of the symbiotic relation between the individual and society (...) as well as the richness and complexity of the cultures and individuals that he depicts". (1983,p.179)

In fact, Achebe's reiterated concern with social and cultural issues, his depiction of decisive moments of transition in the history of his Nigerian community amounts to constructing memorable fictional figures of realist quality. His main characters achieve a certain level of importance not for being "eccentrics or outsiders", as C.L. Innes argues, but because they are "products of the society which has formed them, and they seek to reform and conserve it"(1990,p.167). The pursuit of Achebe to represent his characters as vital members of a particular community affected both by its values and by its cultural world, characters that have the aptitude to learn, to change when encountering more constructive ideas, constitute an important aspect in which Achebe deconstructs the tradition of colonialist writing about Africans. His central characters come to realize that their intellectual dispositions and actions have to be bound up with the daily experiences of their people. They usually offer a pertinent intellectual evaluation about their irresolute disposition towards the realities of their community.

This abiding artistic tendency to balance the needs of the individual and those of the community expounds Georg Lukàcs' theory of 'typicality' in realistic characterization:

Realism is the recognition of the fact that a work of literature can rest neither on a lifeless average, as the naturalists suppose, nor on an individual principle which dissolves its own self into nothingness. The central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in character and situations. (Lukàcs,1964,p.8)

Obviously, Achebe's post-colonial narratives border on the realist mode of writing. They are located between the particular experiences of the individual and the external reality of his / her society, contriving in the process adequate forms of narration to depict the multifaceted socio-cultural experiences attending the history of the nation. The nationalist system of thought, and its cultural authentic allegations upon the individual in society, instills in the individual's mind an idealistic tendency predicated on simplistic principles of socio-cultural unity and belonging, though premised on many pretentious postulations which the multifaceted post-colonial condition, as evinced in Achebe's texts, cannot consent to. Thus fictional writing, as Achebe asserts, is always oriented towards challenging "the canons of orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice". It is designed at the beginning to achieve a state of "self-discovery and ends in wisdom and human conscience" (1988,p.105). In the fictional social contexts of *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe explores the state of uncertainty and dislocation entangling the lives of the post-colonial ambivalent subject and his attempt to find some sense of cultural belonging in a society that itself proves to be culturally and socially disjointed. Achebe's narrators exhibit a deep unease with the complex systems of thought that appear to determine the orientation of their intellectual dispositions and, in turn, influence the form and import of their narratives. With the disintegration of communal values and disruption of cultural traditions, the narrators retreat into the secluded and detached world of writing where they can project the realities of their fragmentary society, work out an alternative form of consciousness and existence, and ponder on their concrete experiences in order to achieve a satisfactory sense of self-apprehension. In fact, in associating his intellectual protagonist with the art of narration, Achebe has aptly presented culture as a necessary medium for social change, where personal narratives are turned into a vital intellectual

means towards communal enlightenment, a substantive mode of expression that can “release”, what Gyan Prakash terms, “other sources of knowledge and agency” (1995,p.11). For Achebe, there is then an important role that fictional writing can play in the formation of a substantive cultural experience: narrative and culture are thought of as complementary intellectual elements that can present the act of imaginative writing as a vital aspect in the quest towards representing the richness and the complexity of the African communities.

In Achebe’s novels, the reader can discern how the writer goes beyond Jameson’s concept of national allegory¹ which is described in terms of organizing the text’s form along the specific problematic of “aesthetic dilemmas” and “representational crisis” (Jameson,1986,p.81) to reproduce the enclosed sphere of the nation. Instead, Achebe’s texts, which present a positive mode of national allegories, are conceived of by its writer to be distinctively able to create and advance a substantive experience of social and cultural transformation, one in which the writer constructs a crucial link, however imaginary and political, between the production of literature and the complex realities it draws on. In Jameson’s view, all imaginary and cultural modes of expression present an “unstable and provisory solution to an aesthetic dilemma which is itself the manifestation of a social and historical contradiction”(1979,p.94).When thinking of the text’s individual characters with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds as standing for specific national features, this allegorical form of expression can be understood as a mode of “cultural critique”. In these terms, the distinctive characteristic of Achebe’s texts is to have intervened into the political by bringing together the various national socio-cultural categories into one larger setting, thereby creating “a dialectically new and more complicated allegorical system (...) that specific and uniquely allegorical space between signifier and signified”(Jameson, 1979,pp.90-1). This explanation of national allegory is vindicated in the specific interpretive pattern of post-colonial cultural issue that Achebe has been preoccupied with over the course of his narratives. To this end, Achebe’s narratives build up a fundamental link between the function of writing, the impulse towards cultural representation, and the writer’s fundamental concern to combine the two discursive needs through his intellectuals’ constant

endeavor to construe and express their unease with the whole socio-historical context of their community through the symbolic act of writing.

Achebe's artistic aims concur with the persistent Fanonist view of the symbolic act of writing and its important function in the quest for creating a national culture. Fanon relates writing to the act of "fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow"(Fanon,2004,p.168). This interest in the idea of writing as an imaginary mode of expression that restores self-esteem to its people, records and rationalizes the different historical experiences and expectations that escort the lives of that people is an abiding discursive preoccupation in Achebe's texts. Achebe has always insisted that the fundamental purpose of African imaginative writing is to express a complete commitment to addressing the imperative problematic of how to construct a developed and a unified national community. In his works, questions of national cultural identity are closely related to the novel's thematic orientation and narrative strategies. Achebe has always the tendency to associate his art to superior objectives of socio-cultural representation in which the narrative is oriented to defend the value of the community's cultural legacies or impose on them some adequate mutations and transformation. As we will attempt to show in this chapter (and the subsequent one), Achebe's novels relate the external realities they draw on to the narratives' preoccupation with the problematic of cultural interpretation, with a self-conscious narrator who takes on the function of cultural representation or identification. To this end, the inducement to continually move from an examination of the isolated experiences of the particular individual, to the obsession with the whole society is most prevalent in Achebe's texts about the African convoluted experience of cultural representation.

Fanon's and Cabral's writings provide a basis for Achebe's viewpoint. His disillusion with the historical failure of the African colonized and post-colonial elites find some remedy in Fanon's and Cabral's guarded but hopeful analysis. Fanon's amplified analysis of national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* contributed a great deal to the understanding of the critical issue of post-colonial culture. This important position granted to culture and its deep-seated effect in uplifting the nation's existence accentuates the roles of the intellectual elites in social development, making this basic

concern, as Partha Chatterjee identifies it, “an elitist program”(1986, p.51). One of Fanon’s central issues here is related to the value of the contribution that the intellectual elites can present to the project of nation development: how the more sophisticated and high-ranked facet of national culture, (the ‘culture’ of books and critical theories, artistic representations, foreign mannerism, etc.) can participate abundantly in the interpretation and formation of national culture deemed as a whole way of social-cultural life.

Theoretically those who are upholding innovation and restoration have been intellectuals who have generally assimilated some facets of western culture, contrary to the ordinary people, and who as a privileged minority group, have gained a lot of advantages from the turbulent historical condition attending their communities. Culture is perceived as a prominent element in their plans for progress and nation formation because it allows them to recognize the weaknesses that they have to rise above to lead their post-colonial and poorly informed communities. The process of development in these communities requires those intellectuals to meditate upon the conditions of their national action and to seek how to represent and reinterpret the inherited mores of their indigenous culture. The great challenge here is how to construct a national culture that encompasses the modernized world of the intellectuals and the traditional identities of the people. This is a revolutionary and progressive cultural quest, seeking both to preserve and transform the nation’s cultural materials, and to contrive at the same time an uninterrupted interaction with the daily realities of the people. Accordingly, Fanon affirms that one cannot allege to achieve self-identification and maintain cultural uniqueness by slavishly adopting the colonial discounting discourses of the native people which deny them history and development, but by constructing a strong bond with the whole community and opening up wide-ranging communal associations that allow them to join the earth’s people in that “fluctuating movement zone which they are just giving a shape to, and which will suddenly call everything into question”(2004,p.163).

Contained in these intellectual reflections on the issues of cultural identification and self-transformation, Fanon’s depiction in *The Wretched of the Earth* of the ambivalent dispositions of the nationalist intellectual offers instructive comments for our study of

the wavering position of the post-colonial intellectual in Achebe's *A Man of the People*. Fanon relates the indefinite cultural position of the ex-colonized intellectual to typical phases of his / her cultural development; he links these phases directly to the historical experience of colonialism and its lingering effects on the whole ex-colonized community. He views this required growth of the native intellectual as a dialectical phase of mutation, including three successive phases: first, a stage of incompetent integration of the culture and institutions of the colonizing power; then, a subsequent remedial 'immersion' in the general facets of the indigenous culture; and finally what Fanon describes as the 'fighting phase', in which the nationalist intellectual resorts to defend his land's culture through compiling "a revolutionary literature and a national literature"(159). At the same time, Fanon refutes any abiding connection between the genuine value of writing a nationalist literature by an intellectual elite and the sophisticated quest of forming a congruent national cultural identity. This is illustrated in the chapter "On National Culture" in *The Wretched of the Earth* where Fanon sets forth what he deemed a deep suspicion about the cultural allegiances of the third-world intellectual. This latter seems to be an inescapably ambivalent individual, oscillating between two incompatible worlds in such a way that his or her role to build the national culture must always be perceived in a critical way; he/she is inevitably estranged from the unsophisticated realities of the people by virtue of his highly positioned world and must resolve this estrangement before attempting to represent the stories of the nation's different socio-cultural zones.

Fanon's profound analysis of colonial society depends on classifying the social classes along lines of cultural interaction and association with the colonizer's different institutions (i.e. structures of instruction and employment). For Fanon, colonial patterns of domination are not just a projected process of abrogating and restructuring the general living order of the colonized people but an internalization of a given psychological mindset in the colonized individual and community. Through intensive educational plans of integration and acculturation, the colonizer sets apart a privileged group of the colonized society from the larger core of mass-population, thus giving rise to a highly ranked group that is socially a prominent part of the nation's body but culturally cut off from the throbbing heart of society; the people. At any rate, this

cultural structure serves to engender not only the formation of class inconsistency within the colonial social space but conscious yielding to colonial culture, language and general institutions. In this view, the state of “alienation” for Fanon would then imply an imperative need for the intellectual elite to join the material circumstances of the people. His theorizing on the relationship between the cultural disposition of a given class and national liberation is structured within the group’s aptitude to preserve cultural distinctiveness and strength in face of the deep-seated colonial influences. Within his structure of colonial society, Fanon views the peasantry group as the vital revolutionary might in the process of anti-colonial fight. This preoccupation with the peasantry is related with his structuring of colonial society along the grounds of social-cultural intercourse and engagement with the colonial worldview. The elite show a more influential role in the political field due to their Western education, but also adopt wavering attitudes towards the colonial institutions. The peasantry, secluded from the specific political order inherent in the colonial condition, has very limited interaction with direct colonial pressures. Nevertheless the peasantries once brought to an adequate state of collective consciousness stand as the most vigorous force in the struggle for national freedom, due to their remoteness from and lack of engagement to the colonial institutions. In contrast, the elite, who in this intricate outlook of relationships appear to hold passionate anti-colonial thoughts, continue to be the faithful adherents to colonial culture during the phase of independence. Indeed, they continue to bear and possess the most predetermined and dubious potential: their unavoidable intellectual association with the colonial culture. This critical position towards national culture and colonized elite concurs with Cabral’s materialistic terms of ‘re-Africanization’ and ‘return to the source’.

Amilcar Cabral’s “National Liberation and Culture”, *Return to the Source* (1973), vindicates Fanon’s analysis of national culture and social class across the divided order of colonized societies. The turbulent influence of the colonial institutions and practices causes the indigenous culture to lose some of its consistency and uniformity; “it is not equally developed in all sectors of society. The attitude of each social group toward the liberation struggle is dictated by its economic interests, but is also influenced profoundly by its culture”(Cabral,1973,p.44). Like Fanon, Cabral relates the cultural

strength possessed by the rural people to their limited intercourse with colonial institutions and existence. In opposition, he sees how the contact and engagement of the intellectual group with the colonizer's systems of thought and conduct cut them off from the authentic resources of their people's culture. Read in these terms, Cabral finds in the rural sphere a genuine source for cultural autonomy, an unspoiled social space which virtually maintains the strength of its inhabitants' traditions and values. For even though African culture is occasionally deserted and 'betrayed' by some of its individuals who easily yield to the temptations of colonial culture, it can survive through "taking refuge in the villages, in the forests and in the spirit of the generations who were victims of colonialism" (1973,p.49). This explains how the whole substance of African culture stands as the retained repository of the people's collective values and traditions, further reinforced against the colonizer's imperial culture. In forming his theory of the role of the elite in the development of national culture and collective consciousness, Cabral introduces his notion of the "re-Africanization of the mind", comprehended in more important sense as "cultural reconversion"(1973,p.47). In this view, "re-Africanization" suggests a socio-cultural and intrinsically political mutation of the intellectual elites from the confined world of colonial culture towards the sensible grassroots sphere of the people. This re-association with the emblems of the land's culture is a preliminary process in the disentanglement of the élite from the colonizer's pretentious perceptions of racial superiority, and a repossession of new meanings of cultural identification. Cabral's reference to the intellectual's socio-cultural position complements the Fanonian approach in that the needed "re-Africanization" necessarily relates the intellectuals' rational ideas and abstract theories to the lived conditions of the mass-population. At this point, in the conscious attempt to transform the intellectuals' notions and precepts through new socio-cultural relationships, Cabral introduces his symbolic notion of the "return to the source" as an essential phase in the eradication of the elite as a term and as an alienated socio-cultural class in the core of national culture.

The identification with the collective source of the people's culture is the social-cultural phase of the colonized elites' refutation of the pre-established principle of colonial alleged intrinsic superiority. The foundation of the elite with its conceited

alignment with the colonial mentality and institutions is the internalized conviction in the definite superiority of the colonizer's culture. Against this, the "return to the source" is meant to express "the denial, by the petite bourgeoisie, of the pretended supremacy of the culture of the dominant power over that of the dominated people with which it must identify itself"(Cabral, 1973,p.63). In more specific terms, this "return" suggests more than the rational disavowal of the colonizer's mode of cultural representation. According to Cabral's viewpoint, the recognition that the elite must build up real associations with the people and its socio-cultural existence sets forth that the "return to the source" is meant in essence to emphasize a genuine commitment to the people's material circumstances, which is directly related to the formation of a cultural consciousness. This association with the people's world takes on a distinctly social-cultural commitment and, equally essential, an actual return to the very vital zones where the people dwell; the villages and forests. Yet, the metaphorical connotations of Cabral's notion of "the source" need not be perceived in terms of an essentialist view. Cabral's general stance is presented in an unambiguous way in his essay:

It is important to be conscious of the value of African cultures in the framework of universal civilization, but to compare this value with that of other cultures, not with a view of deciding its superiority or inferiority, but in order to determine the general framework of the struggle for progress, what contribution African culture has made or can make, and what are the contributions it can or must receive from elsewhere. (1973,p.52)

The colonized elite are basically against essentialist positions. This highly-positioned group, through a concrete involvement in the real happenings of the larger community, can reconstruct its ideas and dispositions and in the process reorient its intellectual potentials to the development of the people's consciousness. The developed skills attained through the engendered institutions of colonialism or through the direct opportunity of Western instruction can be used as useful tools to set up a different pattern of society predicated on more congruent socio-cultural associations.

In essence, Fanon's and Cabral's abrasive analysis of the post-colonial issue of cultural identification reinforces Achebe's important debate about the proper relationships between intellectuals and national culture. Achebe's abiding stance is to assess the intellectuals' attempt to reflect on the different conditions that have

contributed to determine their positions towards their indigenous culture. The overriding interest here is the way in which their critical thoughts, firmly centered on a reconsideration of their role towards the whole community, are associated with higher concerns of cultural consciousness that can mediate between the different social groups. In the course of Achebe's narratives, we observe how these intellectuals are completely preoccupied with telling their own authentic accounts of the nation's historical happenings without providing adequate space for the 'little happenings' of the people's lives. In the case of *A Man of the People*, Odili begins to learn the importance of the people in the construction of a better community only when unpredictable circumstances compel him to take part in the political field to confront the malfunction of the leading government. In describing his diligent quest to bring together the different socio-cultural spaces, Achebe delineates his dilemma in constituting a proper cultural perception predicated upon the specific needs of the intellectual self and the conditions of the larger community. For this self-conscious narrator, bringing to the surface the socio-cultural bifurcations and reversals of this historical condition, under the anxiety of an artfully selected form of writing, constitute the centre of his intellectual concernment. He is presented as an intermediary between the novel's main stories and the reader. He can endow his accounts with a strong sense of authority because he describes himself as someone who is well-versed in the political realities that have marked the feeble development and rapid decline of the growing nation.

In many ways, the writer presents some socio-cultural experiences of specific parts in the community through the voice of a narrator who is himself a witness and a protagonist of the events depicted precisely to shed light on particular facets of the community's real circumstances. In his belief in the significance of his commitment to the larger cause of his community, this narrator is not only employing the act of writing to bring into light the difficult experiences he has undergone but also to conjure, in the reader's mind, "a sensation of experiencing the real"(Beverley, 1989,p.22). Exactly how the people's vital force can be brought into the nation's general concerns and what is the role of the intellectual in attaining this involvement are knotty questions explored by Achebe in a complex mode of writing; both at the

level of content and form. Undoubtedly, the complex structure of Achebe's narrative is meant to refute the possibility of achieving a definite transition from the Europeanized alienated African élite to the imaginary cultural authenticity of the African people. But even if the progression in Achebe's intellectuals' socio-cultural outlook exhibits a necessary complication of the politics of interpretation and expression that aptly correspond to the seemingly convoluted cultural experience of post-colonial Africa, Achebe does not want to make his intellectuals retreat into the privileged space of their secluded world and leave the nation's cultural question unsettled.

As we will see in this chapter, the attempt of Achebe's protagonist to arrange the nation's incidents in his personal narrative could attain effective results only if he can display a discerning identification of the relationship between self and other, and of the narrator's own implication in the occurrences he draws on. To this end, some of the main concerns of the present chapter have to do with the following questions: How should the post-colonial intellectual come to terms with the lingering residues of Western knowledge that remain in the form of postcolonial desires and anxieties? In other words, to what extent can that intellectual subject now refute, deny, or abrogate all that is colonial and Western? We shall study to what extent that cultural bequest from colonialism (language, political systems, education, etc.) is an irreducible part of the post-independence nation. Consequently, we shall see how tenuous is the line that sets apart this cultural legacy, manifest as it is in the lives and ideas of the elite class, from the rich local core. In the literary sense, what is invoked under the artful experimentations of Achebe's narratives is a deep reflection on the power of imaginative writing to re-enact history and to describe the specific relationship shown between the possibilities of cultural representation and the intellectual activity. In each part of this chapter and the following one, I will discuss not only the various forms in which literature is immersed into the very hidden angles of reality, but also the way in which the act of writing and telling stories becomes itself an integral expressive mode of the cultural experience that it is made to evoke and also at times transcend some of its bounded spaces and discourses. In other words, we try to shed sufficient light on Achebe's novelistic aesthetics whereby we can resolutely contend that he genuinely

appropriates his moderate and dialectical intellectual understanding and proclaimed convictions to set constructive approaches to his culture.

Many critical discussions of *A Man of the People* have been based on what is to be considered as a fundamental misunderstanding of the problematic relationship between Achebe's strategic choice of narrative mode and the external realities which generate its confusing perception of social and cultural events. Clearly, most criticism and commentary have been limited by the failure to pay close attention to the ideological dimensions and historical context which the writer attempts to foreshadow through the complex fabric of the novel's narrative. A short review of the critical treatment of the novel and particularly its central character, Odili, shows obvious divergences of analysis and mostly inconsistent critical readings of the novel's main discourse. The act of combining his private concerns and conflicts with his idealistic tendency towards social activism has exposed Odili and even the writer to harsh criticism. Eustace Palmer, for example, sees Odili as "one of Achebe's most unpleasant characters". For him, Odili "is lecherous, egotistic, vulgar, shallow-minded" (1972, p.79). Palmer goes on to contend that the author's "didactic mission" impedes him from "creat(ing) situations, characters, and a plot which can convincingly carry the message" (1972, p.84). Likewise, Gerald Moore views Odili as "a potential Nanga" who shows "a cheap desire to revenge himself on Nanga" (1969, pp.194-5). In the same way, Adrian Roscoe criticizes Odili for satirizing his political associates and opponents, like Chief Nanga, "while showing moral weakness himself" (1971, pp.129-130). Joe Obi, in his terms, describes Odili as a failed hero who "does not inspire us precisely because he represents the ineffective plight of idealism in a rotten environment." (1990, p.407)

In fact, all these critics overlook the deep complicated concerns that Achebe desires to deal with through the ambivalent disposition and identity of Odili. The latter's apparent perplexity and sometimes inadequate choices or actions are principally a manifestation of the general confusion he strives with difficulty to depict and criticize. Along the whole course of his story, we observe Odili attempting to bring together the complex social relations and the declining cultural world of his society into a well-identified image of possible awareness and understanding. Achebe's text, far from

espousing some simplistic dogmatic thoughts, is oriented to depict the actual, complex fabric of communal life with its various facets. In addressing the post-independence situation in his fourth novel, the writer painfully expresses an authentic sense of disillusionment at the malfunction of the different institutions of the new nation, including its failure to decisively construct a synthesized national culture. In this sense, the novel's re-inscription of the historical realities within its narrative scheme is actually significant: Achebe was writing in a complex historical period which has given rise to conditions of social and cultural incoherence; both the narrative structure and the discursive material of his novel are direct reflection of the socio-cultural confusions and ideological reversals of the postcolonial moment which is still in the making. In dealing with this argument, Simon Gikandi rightly points out that Achebe had written his novel in a historical condition which was marked with confusion and disorder. He asserts that "the form and ideology of his novel was bound to carry the contradictions and confusions of the times, and if he fails to carry the message, it is precisely because the message is still forming as Achebe writes.'"(1991b,p.105)

It is pertinent to consider in *A Man of the People* the writer's competent use of appropriate representational strategies that serve to provide an authentic rendition of the novel's external realities. For one of the most persisting themes which shed light on the post-colonial issue of culture in *A Man of the People* is the narrator's inability to build a complete and coherent narrative which can be used to explain the novel's unfolding events and their immediate connotations for him as an intellectual and his society in general. With this in mind, the uncertainties attending the first-person method of narration which Achebe uses in this novel for the first time (and then in *Anthills*) reflects to a great extent the absence of a unified and rigorous system of values which can embody a reliable reference for a healthy cultural and social order. Odili, the narrator and hero, finds himself willingly entangled in the murky politics of the time as he tries to grapple with the confusing problems that have afflicted the daily lives of his small community. But so long as the general fabric of post-colonial society and its pretentious thoughts of national consciousness were developed in direct relation to the inherited remnants of colonial culture and its world-view, perceptions of national identity are inevitably fraught with convoluted ideological contradictions

which generate in the minds of the new Nigerian like Achebe's heroes a distressing state of ambivalence towards their culture and society. The disillusioned realities of the new nation also alienate such characters from their indigenous background, thus impelling them to debunk and even abrogate their idealized image of the nation which had in the past formed their main rhetoric of national development.

A Man of the People depends heavily on this orientation of intellectual interest. Achebe makes his characters ponder on the emerging aspects of social life which appear to determine many of the relationships between individual and community. Very often, the post-colonial novel leaves its protagonists helpless before such complex conditions. In *A Man of the People* the reader does not grasp clearly the real intentions behind Odili's involvement in political affairs, so he wonders whether his pretentious plans are worthwhile in relation to the general interests of his community. The reader's perplexity is intended to be as distressing as Odili's. When this self-conceited intellectual begins to turn aside from the high ideals which he uses to evaluate the actions of his opponents, the writer makes us come across a dramatic irony: we are invited to witness how this character goes against his most proclaimed principles. The writer creates many ironical situations which work against our initial interpretations, since in the beginning of the novel's events Odili is presented to us as a 'reliable' persona. In this kind of work, narrated through a confused and insincere character, the main import of some events cannot be captured till the novel's conclusion. In general, the moral and intellectual dimensions delivered through the point of view of the protagonist are intended by its creator to be nebulous and perplexing for the reader. This form of representation sometimes leads critics to inquire whether literary texts constructed within this confusing form can really be deemed as "novels". But Wayne C. Booth pointedly explains how this structural device functions as an important feature in the imaginary fabric of the novel form. According to him, "to succeed as art (novels) must have a strong didactic effect; the more the reader feels the moral dilemma as a personal one, the stronger will be his reaction to the work as a formed, imaginative experience"(Booth,1991,p.293).

In fact, Achebe has moved a long way from the instructive communal voice of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* where his explicit discursive intentions in these

earlier works require an objective organization of the novels' mode of narration in order to draw an adequate mediation between the people's appreciation for both village life and the more 'healthy' principles of the "civilizing mission". With the confusion of local values and Western culture that mark the community of his fourth novel, the events are narrated from the erratic point of view of the young teacher, Odili, who is preoccupied with mitigating his own individualistic principles and self-centered dispositions at the same time as he condemns the state of corruption which plagues the different facets of the emergent nation. This is a conscious shift towards a different mode of narrative for Achebe who attempts to draw a useful interplay between the realities of the nation and the technical demands of aesthetic considerations, i.e. to contrive an adequate balance through narrative technique between reference and imagination, between fact and fiction. The technique, positing reliance on the unreliable first-person narrator, departs distinctively from that adopted in Achebe's earlier novels, where the omniscient third-person narrator rigorously evokes the value of Igbo tribal order as well as the weaknesses that caused their disintegration under the potent influence of the Western world-view. In *A Man of the People*, the writer takes on for the first time a persona, a mouthpiece who can appropriately and independently narrate and construe the events of the novel. This is a useful instrument for the author to distance himself from his subject of denunciation.

The most constant characteristic of his previous works was then the combination and conflict of different systems of value, African and European, either in the inner thoughts and narrow world of the hero as in *No Longer at Ease* or in the remarkable confrontation between the secular worldview of the British power and the traditional rituals of the villagers in *Arrow of God*. Now, more significantly the conflict of values is reflected in the technique of narration, a situation that requires narrative strategies that might give a point of reference to the resolution of the present incoherence. In the complex narrative of *A Man of the People*, the reader is impelled continuously to make his / her own interpretations of the realities and judgments given by the unreliable narrator. At this level, "we are required", as David Carroll argues,

to examine the object and the point of view from which it is presented, making the adjustments necessary to counteract the double refraction of malice and self-justification. In the last resort, subject and object are insepa-

rable; there is no detached stand-point from which we may isolate and assess the characters with confidence. This is the relativity of experience which the unreliability of first-person narration represents.(1990,p.121)

The most important characteristic of narrative mode in *A Man of the People* is the controlled distance posited between the reader and Odili Samalu, the novel's narrator and main hero. The reliability of his narration appears to some extent to be inconsistent and inconvenient. In the first five chapters, the narrator stands as the spokesman of the author, a representative of those conscientious intellectuals revealing the wrong elements responsible for the general social disorder. Gradually, from chapter six, the author's mouthpiece starts to engage in an unimpressive task of self-analysis, examining some of his past experiences and then finally preparing himself, rather unpersuasively, to take revenge on the target of satire, both emotionally and politically. The reader may infer that up to chapter five, the author appears to identify with the satirical views of his first person narrator in order to ridicule the dishonest power system symbolized by Chief Nanga and his political associates, and then dissociates himself from the persona of narration in order to depict the ironical position of the first person himself. As such, the narrator turns out to be an object of satire for the author. This sharp diversion in the process of narrative invites the reader to make himself judgments upon the narrator and the events he attempts to record.

Along the whole course of the story we meet Odili seeking a narrative position that might allow him to organize the tangled conditions of the new nation in a coherent account; he also seeks to work out a persuasive ideological stand from which he might assess the nation's changing conditions. But the detached and disparaging position from which he views the immediate realities at the beginning of the events distorts the real connotations of his idealistic disposition; he comes to realize fully the true meanings of the happenings around him only at the end when he starts to contrive the story in retrospect. Odili presents the story of his country from a distant time reference in the belief that by dissociating himself from the authentic events he observes as a direct witness he can describe them in a comprehensive way; however, all through the novel he frequently finds that he cannot grasp the real truths of those experiences that occasionally engulf him as a helpless individual caught in the labyrinth of the nation's

corrupt politics. When the writer chooses to convey the story's events through a typically unreliable narrator, he intends in this way to make the reader adopt different interpretations in relation to the narrator's commentaries and also to the novel's characters and events. Even when the work brings forward characters whose ideas and disposition the author explicitly disapproves of, it imposes them on the reader's mind, and thus it invites his/her judgment. This explains why many such complex texts, like Achebe's novel, have been received with misplaced readings and negative comments. Rosemary Colmer is a typical example of those critics who have failed to discern the deep connotation of the unreliable narrator in *A Man of the People*. She plainly points out that the problems of representation exposed in the adoption of the first person narrative point of view in Achebe's novel are related to the oscillating character of Odili Samalu who is continually caught between individualistic moral attitudes and insincere responses. For Colmer, this wavering character can have the sympathy of the readers because of the story's narrative form, and "not by his firm stand for a moral philosophy"(Colmer in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991, p.90). Here the reader may inquire about the implied discursive intentions of the writer that lead him to depend on an unreliable narrator whose vague posture and limited knowledge can undermine the truthfulness and authenticity of the events presented. One of the reasons why Achebe adopted a homodiegetic narrative, to use Gérard Genette's term referring to the first person narrator (Genette,1980,p.51) is to project the external reality we are involved in the very moment we endeavor to come to grips with a social world which has not yet built up its determinant groundings, a world in which communal relationships have lost their primal values because of the absence of a unified cultural authority.

In effect, the writer can show some signs of unreliability in his story. Many ambiguous stories make the readers oscillate between the different interpretations he can adopt because of the unclear motives of the narrator. Indeed, the reader can suspect the moral scheme and intentions of this narrator. Shlomith Rimmon-Kinan provides clear explanations for such experimental rhetorical terms in his *Narrative Fiction* (2003 (1983)). He describes the reliable narrator as "one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth." In opposition to this, he defines the unreliable narrator

as “one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect”(Rimmon-Kinan,1983,p.101). Accordingly, unreliable narration is a suspect account that arises from a deliberate distortion of the fictional reality. It is based on contrasts and ambiguities in the narrator’s language and attitudes. Thus, the readers are left in a situation of constant fluctuation between equally exclusive interpretations, this presents a “deliberate confusion of the reader about fundamental truths”(Booth, 1991,p.285). Sources of incongruities in the narrator’s account can be easily captured, and the text’s fictional truth, then, has to be studied in the ground of the whole arc of narrative structure. According to Rimmon-Kinan, again, various factors in the text may indicate a possible unreliability in the narrator’s judgments and evaluations, though not essentially in the way he depicts situations and events:

(W)hen the facts contradict the narrator’s views, the latter is judged to be unreliable(...); when the outcome of the actions proves the narrator wrong, a doubt is retrospectively cast over his reliability in reporting earlier events; when the view of other characters consistently clash with the narrator’s, suspicion may arise in the reader’s mind; and when the narrator’s language contains internal contradictions, double-edged images, and the like, (...) undermining the reliability of its user. (1983,p.102)

What follows from this illustration is that the main signs which undermine the reliability of the narrator can be determined in his narrow understanding of realities, his direct participation in the events he narrates, and his subjective value-scheme of judging other characters’ actions. Therefore, the narrative method impels us to re-examine the complex unfolding and flow of the story’s events and to take an active part in constructing and making sense of the text’s implied meanings.

As a form of indirect commentary, the writer delivers the novel’s story not according to the general progression of events but particularly along the lines of Odili’s working thoughts and momentary recollections. Odili’s direct commentary about the moral and intellectual traits of other characters serves sometimes to influence our perception of the incidents in which we see those characters. This kind of narration consequently turns into direct accounts about the import and development of the novel’s incidents themselves. Every fact and information which is intended to set the reader’s mind in a given direction of thought is related to the changing disposition and developing experience of the narrator. In this carefully wrought narrative, the writer

presents the events through the subjective attitudes of his young intellectual, with his limited knowledge of the world that surrounds him, his inability to deal adequately with the immediate reality, and what this unreliable narrator secretly views as a form of youthful faults and gullibility. This is because Achebe uses the technique of “completing analepses”, or “returns”, to use Gérard Genette’s terms (1980). This device, Genette explains, “comprises the retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative (the narrative is thus organized by temporary omissions and more or less belated reparations, according to a narrative logic that is partially independent of the passing of time”(1980,p.51). Such analepses or temporal gaps allow the reader to locate the newly introduced events in the narrator’s main story. Along some short-lived retrospective insinuations, the writer introduces the reader to a form of narrative interference with the main line of the story. The technique involves a movement from one level of individual events which can take place in the past to another level of the story line and therefore the logical ordering is brought into a complex overlapping and impedes the narrator from unifying the whole events around one thematic orientation. The first chapter of *A Man of the People* is a distinctive example of Odili’s effort and failure to achieve coherence at the level of his narration even though the immediate experience he is recording is related to the main subject matter of political dishonesty and confusion. The reader may observe many inconsistent levels of narration and analepses that run along the narrative arc of this chapter alone. The primary level represents the moment of narration, the current time in which the first events are depicted: at this level, Odili sets out to bring forward events which took place some period ago before the resolution of the action, when the experiences being recorded are brought to an end, and all the events now can be grasped and can be organized in a full template of narration. However, contriving a total and a coherent image of the very immediate reality will continue to posit a problematic form of representation for Odili.

This problem of inconsistent narration is further complicated by the moment when the narrator takes us back to that eventful day when Odili renewed his relationship with Chief Nanga during the minister’s visit to the village school where he works as a teacher. But instead of relating the events of that occasion to the moment of narration,

Odili right away presents another sequence of events which occurred sixteen years previously when Nanga was an unfortunate primary-school teacher and the narrator was one of his pupils. Further, this moment of narration is followed by a fourth level in which we are taken onward to a more immediate past when an economic crisis in the government and the removal of intellectuals from power circles disenchanted Odili with post-colonial politics. In essence, such narrative switches are symbolically intended to accentuate the problem Odili has as a first-person unreliable narrator in forming effective causal relationships and in accounting for time periods and their possible meanings. Yet, his uneven strategies of representation can be deemed as attempts to account for all the contradictory strands that went into the making and unmaking of the nation. Simon Gikandi's study of the novel in his *Reading Chinua Achebe* (1991b) provides an interesting analysis of the writer's choice of narrative strategies. "Why does the narrative roam from one level to the other and how are we expected to explain all these movements in time and space?"(p.107), asks Gikandi. In answering this perplexing question, Gikandi dismisses any idea that Achebe is out to "estrangle his readers from the events narrated", arguing that "such shifts are intended to underscore the problem" Odili faces in coming to terms with the chaotic situations and their meaning in his country. "As both a character and a narrator", states Gikandi, "Odili would prefer to fit the truths and realities of the nation – and Chief Nanga's place in the collapse of the nationalist dream – into clear political, cultural and social categories, but the historical crisis in the new nation negates this desire for systematization". (1991b,pp.107-8)

In effect, the rising politics had also created its own norms of allegiance, its order of discourse, a discourse of duplicity and fragmentation, of division and revenge. In following the depicted circumstances which surround the new leaders, it is not difficult to comprehend why Achebe would want to bring forward the conditions which have given rise to this distressing political discourse in *A Man of the people*; but he was also using the whole narrative as a means to abate the inadequate allegations of those illusionary discourses. Our contention here is that Achebe's turn to a strategic mode of first-person narrative discourse and its related forms of criticism and satire was incited by his need to develop an alternative way of representation. At the beginning of the

novel, Odili manifestly describes his work as ‘a story’ which is projected to assist the reader comprehend the country’s controversial and complex conditions. Afterward, at a decisive stage in his story, when Odili is invited by Chief Nanga to visit a book exposition, he informs us about his eager desire to write a real novel (p.58). Odili is fascinated by the novel genre as a literary mode because it provides its practitioners with an unlimited range of expressiveness and lucidity at the level of social representation and intellectual criticism. In its most traditional convention, the novel refers to external realities which the reader can easily be familiar with. But as we will see in this study, Odili’s unreliable mode of narration presents us with a disintegrated world where there is a dramatic schism between the uttered words and the objects they refer to, a world of trivial individual intentions and illusory social relationships, which the narrator himself cannot bring into one coherent body of existence.

Achebe employs Odili, the narrator, to criticize the government and the people, but in the process of the main narrative he also criticizes Odili’s restricted field of knowledge and biased interpretation. He reflects the different social relationships through Odili’s lenses but detaches himself from Odili in order to expose his thoughts and actions for the reader’s scrutiny and criticism. Yet, as the narrating voice through whose perception incidents are brought forward, Odili has the inclination of continually evaluating those situations according to the value-scheme of self-defending disposition. Odili starts his narration in this way: “No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. (...) I have to admit this from the onset or else the story I’m going to tell will make no sense.”(p.1) Through his objective view of Nanga in the novel’s first chapter, Odili appears to advance the thought that he will provide the reader with a reliable narrative point of view. But the last sentence of the passage presents a good reason to question the truthfulness of Odili’s judgments and comments. As we read in many passages, Odili blends the narrated events with his subjective commentary; this is a good reason not to associate the narrator’s biased comments with the writer’s attitudes on the issues depicted in this novel. His unreliable story is affected by the fact that the history of the nation is still undergoing tense events as Odili writes and also the

connotation of the experiences he records is itself determined by the fragmental and confused rhetoric of the social world which engenders them.

This is the murky condition of the socio-cultural experience which is invoked by means of the unreliability of first-person narration. In this view, one of the main thematic concerns of *A Man of the people* is to put the emphasis on the main point that when the individual is taking part in the immediate events which he records, he cannot form an intelligible and comprehensive interpretation of the main import and actions attending those happenings, for his direct involvement in such events is also marked by unconstructive ambiguity and suspicion. As the study will show, when Odili turns out to be an active element in the chaotic sphere of the country's realities, his depiction and rendition of events is carried in a shallow and distorted way. Achebe employs a first person narrator to endow the story with a more authentic value, and so that he can evince how the African individuals, mainly intellectuals, are caught up in the convoluted socio-cultural orientations of post-colonial moment which also calls attention to their oscillation between conflicting worldviews. This is why, to quote Ngara, "the author exploits the first person narrator technique to create an ironic situation in which the protagonist is both the author's spokesperson and one of the prime objects of criticism"(Ngara in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991,p.115).

Achebe's novel is primarily an explicit criticism of the educated class that failed to play a constructive role in the public sphere of post-independence Nigeria. The story of Odili as a typical figure of this privileged class is a miniature story of ethical inadequacy and socio-cultural oscillation. So viewed from this perspective, Odili's character can be read as an embodiment of the memorable intellectual inferences expressed in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* of the dubious disposition of the budding middle-class in post-independent African communities. Rather than devoting its intellectual and high field of knowledge to the service and enlightenment of the underprivileged people, as Fanon comes to argue, this pretentious intellectual class is usually seen retreating to a constricted state of cynicism and indifference. In Achebe's novel, Odili stands as an embodiment of these self-conceited intellectuals who cut off themselves from the daily world of their people. Even though he works as a teacher in his village school, we see him showing no form of allegiance to the communal

exigencies and cultural attachments of his traditional-based people. In the first events of the novel, Odili is shown as self-conceited, individualistic, and elitist, and even when he becomes a major representative for the Common People's Convention in his village he remains also indifferent to the basic cultural and social values of his people whom he is supposed to represent. Along the majority of the novel's action we see him overtly expressing his contempt towards the "silly ignorant villagers" and the town's wicked populace. He criticizes not only Chief Nanga and his corrupt associates in the government, but the general institutions which organize the whole fabric of society.

Certainly, Odili does not describe his attitudes in terms of these negative traits. He has an anxious desire to obtain a postgraduate degree from a British university and have an opportunity to live in a Western society. As the story develops, we are made aware of Odili's intentions to be involved in the country's politics: his political and social attitudes are shown to be indivisible from his allegedly idealistic disposition. In his criticism of the greedy politicians, he attempts to win our sympathy and support by informing us how he had sacrificed his opportunity of a prestigious position in a civil service in the capital city in support of an inadequately salaried profession as a teacher in a bush private school with slight expectation of progress. He emphasizes that he is not inclined 'to lick any big Man's boots'. Another reason for taking this teaching post instead of the civil service position and all the material advantages it offers is, according to Odili, "to give myself a certain amount of autonomy"(p.17).

In fact, Odili has little knowledge about the complex practices of politics and is totally ignorant of the real conditions of his people. Ironically, he does not know that his knowledge about his country's existing conditions is seriously narrow, and he has gone through many individual and collective experiences which have initiated him to more adequate phases of understanding (such as in the occasion when he comes to reconcile his individualistic character with the communal values of his own father). The young narrator who describes the events is the matured Odili who has gone through all the novel's incidents. He comes to understand some truths about the lives of his people, but in the long run this has rendered him more self-contained and more estranged from the realities he attempts to portray. The apparent derision with which he deals with the past experiences leads him to observe his previous behaviors and

thoughts as absurd. This serves to offer the reader an ironic narrative stand of Odili (as himself the object of the narration), but in the course of the narrative, the reader also sees mockingly Odili as the narrator. This compound relationship between the narrator and the object of narration makes the task of interpretation and judgment more intricate for the reader along the whole process of narration. Odili's general disposition is very convoluted, not least for the main cause that it includes two interconnected figures, the narrative voice and the object of narration. Each social situation (and the novel is structured along sequences of revealing socio-cultural situations that bring Odili into direct confrontation with other characters), provides Odili with the opportunity to build up and amend his judgments and attitudes: to go behind his individualistic ideals, or to yield to the general ethos of society.

The narrator begins his account with one instructive acknowledgment: Nanga is viewed by his advocates as a man of the people, no matter of the different indictments he may receive from his opponents. The narrator is aware that this apparently revered public status is both a desirable quality and an ironic hailing, for in the process of the novel's actions Chief Nanga is presented as a typical representative of the unconcerned dishonesty of the people he derives from. Relying totally on his self-defending rhetoric, the narrator can only show impressions of bitterness and disdain towards what he describes as the "silly, ignorant villagers"(p.2). During the celebrations that are held in Odili's village to receive Chief Nanga in this loyal constituency, we are made aware of the disapproval and scorn that Odili bears to his people. The context presented to us is one of celebration and excitement but Odili's self-conceited character impedes him from sharing the people's naïve sense of enthusiasm, or appreciating their forms of celebration. For example, he views their mode of music as a mere "din"; and he watches in a scornful way a group of village women performing the traditional dances of greeting and joy. This Odili is painfully aware how the people of his village are unconcerned about their politicians' malpractices: "Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you – as my father did – if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth." (p.2) On this important event, Odili can discern some of

the distressing factors which have given rise to the country's political turmoil but he fails to rationalize or explain this view in a convenient and analytical way.

Achebe makes it clear that Odili's family origins have a significant impact on determining the general orientation of his attitudes towards public issues. As in the spatial movement that the writer relies on in *No Longer at Ease* to evoke his character's oscillating social disposition, here also we see him sending his intellectual character on unwanted visits to his home village of Urua, to see his father and his large family to whom he shows no signs of affection or respect. Along the incidents that take place in the narrator's village we are made informed of particular details of his private upbringing in addition to the social conditions of his family. The writer reveals two important realities here about Odili's parents: his mother passed away at his birth and his father was a district interpreter for the British colonizer. Both circumstances have contributed to bring about the definite ground of the narrator's loneliness and alienation. The past colonial function of his father had entitled him to be the son of the most important but also detested man in the area. In this view, Odili is the evolving ex-colonized representative who would vindicate the remnants of the colonizer's imposed dispensation; he is the new interpreter of the inherited political God who destabilized and gradually undermined the revered order of the old pantheon. Recalling this historical period when he was only a little child, the narrator tells us how "the D. O. was like the Supreme Deity, and the interpreter the principal minor god who carried prayers and sacrifice to Him (...) so Interpreters in those days were powerful, very rich, widely known and hated" (p.28). At any rate, the high status held by his father because of his allegiance to the colonial rule brought Odili not only extreme dislike and grudge from his people but undeniable possibilities of prosperity as well. In those past days, Hezekiah, Odili's father, was viewed by the subdued villagers as the god of the new and most revered "shrine" to whom their sacrifices and offerings would be presented in exchange for services.

So, Odili, son of the new God, lived on these inherited benefits of his father's background (though he keeps emphasizing that he got his scholarship without the intervention of his father), and he has adopted from it the shallowness of social relationships instilled by the Western worldview. Even though his teaching books

present him with lessons about responsibility and integrity, his principles appear to be trivial and shallow. In general, Odili's estrangement is determined by the particular conditions brought about by his upbringing. The people of his village do not, of course, perceive the order of things in the way he does. Because of his family's good conditions, Odili cannot remember, or has no idea about, the long and recurring seasons of drought which had afflicted the lives of his people. The readers of Achebe's earlier novels remember, however, how the amounts of yams and crops were insufficient in the growing season, and how families had gone through agonizing times of hunger. Odili's rich father, in dramatic contrast, had the opportunity to "slaughter a goat every Saturday, which is more than most families did in two years" (p.29); the villagers' deadly calamity of food shortage was an annual experience which had no impact on Hezekiah Samalu's dwelling. In recounting these details, the writer aims to assert that the experience of Odili's succumbing to the corrupt practices of his acquisitive society is most different in kind from that of the villagers whom he feels no obligation to value. And so, Odili's symbolic metaphor of the man who has escaped from rain and retreated into a shelter that he refuses to leave, implying the politicians' corruption, is inadequate to fit the background of the villagers whose social conditions have never been improved. They are acquisitive, as the narrator describes them, because they are deprived of very indispensable things, and because they are the only ones' who are well aware of the fatal threats of starvation. Within the cultural fabric of their communal worldview the narrator has observed also an instructive set of values that himself is lacking at the beginning of the narrative: honor, truthfulness, kinship.

Achebe's earlier novels show how the first dramatic interaction between the indigenous culture and colonial institutions engendered a complex state of cultural change which undermined collective solidarity and tradition and therefore the ideological prevailing conditions that organized the general social fabric of the pre-colonial traditional community. The adoption of the white man's God, for instance, alienated the new practitioners from their traditional loyalty to their ancestors' deities and with that went their previous reverence and allegiance to the collective order of things which in the near past used to hold the whole group together. The community is stripped of its collective consciousness and can no longer build an integrated value-

system which can control and temper the general conduct of its own individuals. This state is best exemplified by the early Christian converts who had become utterly contemptuous of their people's beliefs and cultural traditions. Called the white-man's people, they were obsessively appealed by the unsighted claim of being the immediate successors of their white masters in their society. They conceitedly view themselves as "the people of the Church" and their tribe's people who were non-Christians "the people of nothing" and when they behave somehow in a moralistic way, as Achebe humorously observes in *No Longer at Ease*, they describe them as "the people of the world"(p.52). Odili who is himself a descendent of this cultural background found despicable the whole worldview of the village people whose insufficient understanding of Christian principles drive them to pay blind tribute to his father, a confused cultural disposition that combined the villagers' traditional trauma of the annual famine with an unsighted submission to the tempting material pretensions of the new religion.

In fact, Odili's idealistic attitude seems to have no kind of relation to the reality of his being the son of a Christian missionary; he does not show loyalty to his father's beliefs. Religious convictions, whether Christian or traditional, are not an issue which preoccupies or determines his intellectual orientations. Indeed, Odili acknowledges neither the village indigenous values nor his father's Christian way of life, and he does not show deference to them. The communal value of family kinship is so fundamental that Achebe's persistent concernment with it as a substantive theme in his novels expounds his thorough understanding of the general fabric of the traditional system. The potent relationship between father and sons represents the nucleus of the community's cultural system because it embodies the continuity of the ancestral authority which is predicated on the permanence of the collective order, common values, and the basic determinants of the traditional culture. The traditional social order is wholly organized within the dynamic structure of descent and kinship relationships. Within these most revered social relations there is a common moral ethos that need not be repeatedly confirmed because it is part of the general awareness of the collective group. And then, every individual is required to possess an accurate social-cultural knowledge to allow him to recognize his own position in society and his rights, duties, and privileges. Obiechina explains this relation in these terms:

A man was reverent and obedient to his father, who, when he died and joined the rest of the ancestral dead, would continue to exercise a benevolent tutelary influence over him and his family. A father brought up his son in the best tradition of clan customs and usages, and worked hard to provide him with basic necessities, because when he died his spirit would draw sustenance from the sacrificial offerings which his living son would make him.(1975,p.218)

In fact, Odili's estrangement from the social principles and ethics which bring the family members together proves to be dramatic: beyond the frequent act of overlooking his father's instructions, in the last event he is entirely prepared to use violence against his father if the father had turned his rage into action. In effect, Odili will not hesitate to call his father "Bush man"(p.119) when he does not consent to his political orientation and social behaviors. The racial cultural connotation carried by this colonial derivative insult is symbolic of how the new society, even the idealistic intellectual in the village, has repudiated its cultural legacies. According to the language and values of the colonizer, the term "Bush" connotes ignorance, backward conduct, and incompetence. It is this abusive discourse that Hezekiah refers to when he painfully recounts Odili's mistreatment of him: "It does not surprise me that you slunk back and said nothing ... to me. Why should you? Do I know book? Am I not of the Old Testament?" (p.118). Odili feels that his father affronts him because of his overt support of Nanga's political malpractices. Yet, his indefensible vice, according to Odili, is his obsession to have many children through wives whom he shows no concern for. This negligent behavior infuriates Odili who accuses his father of "storing up trouble for others"(p.30) when the old 'bush' man informs him about his intention to have a fifth wife. All these ill manners identified in the father's character increase Odili's contempt of him, whereas in the traditional family system, the son has to yield to the good will of his father and present to him offerings if he wishes to eschew the parental curse.

We can thus see the irresolute relationship prevailing between the people in general with their traditional ways and Odili's seemingly abstract attitudes. It is through the lenses of this apathetic and discontented intellectual that the events of the novel are contrived. One could think then that Odili is unfit to serve as the narrative's main point of view from which the different events are depicted and constructed. He pours his abrasive criticism not only on his father but also on the underprivileged villagers, to

whom he shows no form of social association. This impression is made quite apparent when he describes their communal loyalties contemptuously during the celebrating gathering held for Nanga's electoral campaign in their village school. In the whole narrative, we don't see the villagers as real individuals who can virtually use their own voices to bring forward the realities of their poor lives. The narrator's most repeated comments on their ignorance and primitivism serve to some extent to construct a prejudiced view of them, focusing in this way far less on the community's authentic and most essential experiences than on the narrating voice – a self-conceited and ambivalent figure. Since the people are not portrayed as real individuals with their own particular impulses and expectations in the novel – but are depicted only through Odili's unreliable position – the narrator proves unable to provide the reader with a sufficient background about the cultural world of the people to make him / her consent to his disdainful opinion of them.

Another crucial episode which highlights the incompetence of Odili's narration and representation of the public experiences is the scene where he is made to discover the harsh living conditions of "the night-soil men" who can afford to use only buckets latrines in the streets of Bori, the country's capital city. The whole scene of making Odili confront the poor streets in the city is worked out by the writer, as Rosemary Colmer points out, to put emphasis on "Odili's blindness at this stage in the novel to the social issues which ought to concern an idealistic young politician"(Colmer in Petersen& Rutherford,1991,p.97). During this unplanned night tour, the narrator's focus is on the personal predicament which has dimmed his reflections because of Chief Nanga's attempt at seducing his girl friend. Ultimately the failure to dedicate himself sincerely to the basic concerns of his community leads to undermine the truth effects of the social events that he appears anxious to depict. By delving deeply in the confused inner thoughts of this self-centered intellectual, Achebe builds up an amplified discursive material that serves to bring forward the reality of Odili's alienated tendencies. In the scene of "the night-soil men", we are invited to learn that Odili is both astonished and amused that in the prestigious milieu of the capital city the urban-poor can manage only to live in shacks, or spend the long hours of the night in the empty unsafe streets, whereas in the same glowing town he comes to learn that the

highly-positioned members of the ruling class, such as Chief Nanga and his political associates, possess great mansions which include all the basic services. Undoubtedly, the impressions of detachment and amusement that we find in Odili's view of the misery of the urban poor people reveal his absolute apathy to the social inequality prevailing in society. While having a critical look at the newspaper information of what he calls "the costly comfort" of the minister's "princely several bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming, silent-action, water-closets"(pp.40-1), Odili's unworried and inconsiderate comments about the dirty streets that the poor inhabit bring forward Achebe's explicit denunciation of the narrow intellectual orientations of his class that show no real concernment for the public conditions of its society.

Odili's inconsistent reactions and behaviours towards such conditions are quite obvious when the reader juxtaposes his stated intentions, motives, pronouncements, and practices with those of the politicians and people whom he criticizes. The opening chapter provides many situations which evoke Odili's wavering dispositions. In the first encounter between Odili and Chief Nanga in the village celebrating honour of its powerful minister, Odili acts out his role in stating the malpractices of this dishonest minister. He bluntly expresses his disdain and wrath for the minister's deceitful language and behaviours. From his self-defensive and detached site, Odili laughs at Nanga's pretentious mannerisms and the "ignorant villagers" who slavishly consent to his acquisitive tendencies; he derisively describes the untruthfulness of the whole occasion which is accompanied with images of unpleasant behaviours and views of utter confusion and indignity. He continually asserts that he wants to be far from Nanga's milieu – to maintain his safe and distant position outside the events that he records. However, the very moment when Nanga recognizes him as his previous pupil and then takes him in his arms, Odili appears unable to conceal his enchantment. In fact, this event is the turning point in the narrator's relationship with those individuals that he castigates. The fact of being recognized by his old teacher and being hailed in front of the minister's followers by his old nickname "Odili, the Great"(p.8) makes Odili see the special consideration and honour that one can receive when being praised by 'a man of the people'. However the narrator seems hardly conscious that it is the overwhelming praise poured on him by Nanga that propels him to become even

tolerant of the villagers' most exaggerating compliments to Nanga. Undoubtedly, the fact of changing his disposition and attitude completely in such a short time is really an insincere behaviour on the part of Odili. In commenting on this irresistible influence, Odili says: "I became a hero in the eyes of the crowd. I was dazed. Everything around me became suddenly *unreal* (...). I knew I ought to be angry with myself but I wasn't "(p.9).

On other occasions we are made to notice that Odili's actions do not reflect the moral good sense which he proclaims himself to support. He is certainly a complex character. Even though he shows deep resentment and harsh criticism for Nanga, he does not appear to possess a good will to vindicate this attitude. His oscillation between his declared moral position and the tempting realities he is involved in calls to mind Obi Okonkwo's succumbing to corrupt practices in *No Longer at Ease*. So, like Obi, Odili considers his university learning and the standards of idealism that it stands for as the main norm in evaluating his community's conditions and values. A characteristic aspect of this novel is the gradual change at the level of Odili's mental and moralistic stands which reveals him as essentially not much superior from the figures he rebukes. Despite his hostile position towards Chief Nanga, Odili accepts his invitation to his ministerial residence and the short period he spent in the milieu of this political shrine serves to initiate the inexperienced young intellectual into a crucial phase of political and social awareness. In front of the minister's munificent promises, Odili abandons his post as a village teacher and directs his intellectual interests towards the great opportunities of the glowing capital city. It is during this transitional experience that Odili attempts at expounding the hidden malpractices that are prevalent in the government's different sectors, but the value of his previous principles is totally abated by the appealing atmosphere of the luxurious comfort he enjoys in the minister's mansion. Ironically, this visit makes the narrator express appreciation and admiration for the minister's charming and astute character and his previous satirical descriptions are rendered insignificant; all the earlier pretentious intellectual ideals and commentaries are totally undermined by his unreserved enthrallment with the great magnificence of the minister's residence. In his words, Odili says: "there was no norm in my mind for criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite

assigned to me (...). I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one forever” (pp.36-7).

In yielding to the ensnaring influence of the political privileges, Odili is totally set to defend the minister against the indictments and criticism of his opponents (and himself was one of Nanga’s most unsympathetic critics). With the development of the novel’s events, the reader is invited to believe that Odili can really become a corrupt person like Nanga, and if he is granted better possibilities to get involved in the direct institutions and positions of power he may become as apathetic as Nanga’s political associates. Furthermore, we come to learn how Odili is taking advantage of the minister’s status and position to realize some personal interests, and how he is not hesitant to have the benefit of the varied forms of opportunities that his close relationship with Nanga can grant him. In the company of the minister, Odili begins to cling to his hypocritical attitudes and even public manners. Besides, he stands ready to vindicate the point of view of Nanga’s supporting villagers for whom he had previously expressed his unreserved contempt, and even to rationalize their unsighted loyalty to the minister and his likes. We see him, for instance, having the benefit of the high respect proffered to him when he is given access to enter the hospital court in the minister’s chauffeur-driven luxurious car, and exploiting it for his emotional relationships. In his appreciation of the minister’s comfortable mansion, Odili goes on to identify poverty as a most likely determinant factor which propel many people to use all possible cunning means that allow them reach and maintain power positions, an interpretation that undermines the very value of his previous ideals through which he measures the malpractices of Nanga and his colleagues at the beginning of the events. He comes to the simplistic conviction that: “(a) man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time” (p.37). Through this view the writer clearly sets forth Odili’s moral perplexity and brings to the reader’s mind his earlier satirical comments of “the poor contemptible people” who use to stand for the self-enrichment practices of their greedy politicians on the basis that “a sensible man would (not) spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth” (p.2). Through the image of ‘the rain’, the writer seems to stand apart from his insincere hero and locates him in an

ironical position to display the falsity and ineptness of his proclaimed moral attitudes. In this view, Odili's analysis of his experience in Nanga's mansion is not sustained with a sufficient sense of impartiality and intellectual criticism that are fundamental mental devices in the political setting; we see him many times committing some of the blunders of those figures he reproaches.

So, as both a direct witness of and a participant in the events he narrates, Odili is not a neutral and trustworthy source of information because he frequently finds himself unable to overcome the temptations of the immediate experience he is caught in or simply overwhelmed by a sweeping flattery that prevents him from forming an objective view about the crucial social issues that he used to deal with in a critical way. For example, Odili is presented early in the novel as a nationalistic intellectual who is well-versed in the history of his country's politics, and as a narrator who can construct a reliable point of view through which we can observe events. However, he finds out that it was only when he is observing the country's situation from the angle of the minister's surroundings that he is able to have an adequate opportunity to figure out an authentic view about the real causes which have given rise to the state of corruption prevailing in the different areas of the community. Through the private meetings and informal diplomatic parties, we see in Nanga's ministerial dwelling a miniature body of the government which is turned into a mere source of self-enrichment. Surrounded by the "enchanted" life of the political elite, Odili displays a completely detached position, while expressing his aversion of their corrupt milieu. Describing the abuse allowed them by their official positions, the narrator reports on their insatiable lust for authority, unrestricted greed, violence, lies, bribery and misuse of government positions that Odili witness on many occasions when he accompanies Nanga in his political and personal visits. The whole experience is deemed as a crucial phase of 'enlightenment' for Odili. He comes to learn more about the real world of the political field; he finds out that "some of the emergent forms were not nearly as ugly as I had suspected but many seemed much worse. However, I was not making these judgments at the time, or not strongly anyhow"(pp.39-40). The final observation calls again the reader's attention to the fact that the novel's main events are presented in retrospect by the experienced narrator who has brought together the different truths he

has received in this period to take hold of and conjure the significance of the events he is recounting. What's more, Odili himself informs us that he was not forming any genuine judgement when these occurrences were taking place because he was overwhelmed by the deceitful political discourses adopted by the new men of the people; the 'enlightenment' he received from his direct interaction with Nanga's political setting has its own value only in the novel's coming to a close, and when the whole experience becomes fully instructive for the young man. For what Odili thought to be his particular moments of awareness, at the beginning of the novel is also a confession of sightless reflection: for a long time he could not carry his intellectual criticism of Nanga's dishonest political actions and reveal them to the masses. In this regard, as a first person narrator, Odili is used by the writer to both evoke the malpractices of the men of power and their deep-seated influence on the social order, and most dramatically, the limited field of social awareness of those cynical intellectuals who conceitedly set themselves as reliable interpreters of the realities and history of their community.

This complex duality of understanding and limited field of knowledge which characterizes the arc of Odili's narration is a crucial part of the writer's artful combination of both the novel's aesthetic structure and thematic orientation to contextualize the post-colonial period as a more convoluted condition at the level of all its different facets than it may appear to some self-assured observers. This aspect is well identified by C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors in the writings of Achebe. They write pointedly that the "apparent simplicity of Achebe's novels is deceptive and (...) the discerning reader may discover beneath their surface a complex and subtle interplay of values and attitudes"(Innes & Lindfors,1979,p.7). For what is being implicitly presented by the writer in *A Man of the People* is merely the visible reflection of the realities of the budding nation, as the inexperienced Odili may be designed to reveal, but also the uncertain condition of the historical transition of the ex-colony into the complex socio-cultural fabric of the nation, a condition which cannot be projected through a consistent, or commanding narrative voice because "the surprises and contrasts in our country were simply inexhaustible"(p.40). In one important sense, Odili's compound role, as a narrator and a character, has to be

esteemed both for the significant truths and realities he has attempted to bring together and the many deceptive situations which impede him from taking adequate moralistic decisions.

Lindfors, in a totally different evaluation of Odili's character, writes: "Whatever he says can be trusted to be accurate and honest. Somehow Odili has managed to remain untainted amidst all the surrounding corruption and his clear vision provides an undistorted view of a warped society" (Lindfors in Innes & Lindfors, 1979, p.62). What such a challenging construal fails to spot, however, is the way the pretentious moral disposition of Odili is destabilized as soon as he is propelled into direct involvement in the country's politics. Once he begins to comment directly on the events he narrates as an active participant, he becomes a typical example of what Robert C. Elliott calls "the satirist satirized" (Elliott, 1960, p.130). According to Elliott's explanation of the "satirist satirized" device, the "primitive satirist" type associated with the language of cursing, derision, and mockery is "satirized, in the sophisticated sense of the term, by his creator". The writer's "sophisticated" satire is unreservedly oriented "for moderation, for rational discrimination in judging the ways of men" (Elliott, 1960, p.167). Likewise, Achebe positions the novel's moralistic dimensions between the boundaries of abstract idealism advocated by Odili and unsophisticated pragmatism represented by the uncultured Chief Nanga. His narrative neither entirely admonishes nor completely endorses the attitudes and practices of the two satirized characters, but inscribes his presence in the "dialogical" tendency that Frank Palmeri describes as a key feature in narrative satire. For Palmeri, the meaning of narrative satire can be grasped through recurring "internal reversals of value and implication"; this form of satirical depiction "counterpoises multiple frames of understanding without assenting to the authority of any single perspective" (Palmeri, 1990, p.3). Because of this plain inclination towards moderate representation, Palmeri says, narrative satire does not present definite forms of resolution for the novel's conflicting perspectives: "Narrative satires do not end with an achieved harmony; the struggle they embody between opposed views of the world reaches no satisfactory resolution or synthesis" (Palmeri, 1990, p.4).

The writer satirizes Odili and Nanga through their criticism of each other, and these satiric perspectives serve frequently to set forth the two characters' insincere principles

and positions. The novel brings forward many revealing situations where we observe Odili behaving completely against the high morals and behaviors he alleges to live with. He appears many times anxious to expound the motives behind his wavering attitudes and insincere reactions. His confused impulses for getting involved in election against Nanga distort the moralistic fabric of his intellectual dispositions with an infuriated and humiliated personality, romantic drives, and fervent quests for revenge. When he is caught in the immediate moment of political action we see him totally neglecting to look into the material sources of the party he represents in his village, he accepts the party's money and car with delight, and he shows no hesitation in taking advantage of the party funds to pay some personal expenses. It is the same narrative satire that portrays Nanga as the typical political emblem of what Gikandi calls "the great ironic moment" of African communities' freedom, so considered because it pledged a real separation from the unsettling policies of the colonial apparatus but it serves to engender "the continuity and consolidation of colonial institutions" (1991b, pp.110,114). It also presents Odili as the object of satire by demonstrating how his moralistic value-scheme proves feeble when being entangled in the enticing milieu of politics. In fact, the mocking language Odili employs to argue against the perspectives of other characters points not only to the undue egotism and superiority which undermines the value of his anxious objective to conjure the external reality into narrative, but also to how he is implicated in the same shallow meanings and perceptions that he uses to debase others. For example, he believes that the only motive that prevents the other teachers in his school from consenting to his critical attitudes towards Chief Nanga, as in the case of his colleague Andrew Kadibe, is their attachment to him by 'Primitive loyalty' (p.7), a demeaning expression that Odili uses to imply tribal ties.

If Achebe resorts to the kind of disjunctive narratives which permeate *A Man of the People* to accentuate the different tensions attending the post-colonial situation and the fragmentation of the socio-cultural fabric of the new community, his dependence on clichés and on an informal mode of expression contributes further to destabilize the process of interpretation by which readers strive to bring together the dispersed meanings of the narrator's account. Presented through Odili's incomplete statements

and vague phrases, the post-colonial condition is portrayed as a valueless and fictitious world because it presents plans and claims that it intends never to carry out. This is an important interplay between the use of language and the critical issue of political pathos addressed by the author. Because of the use of a self-conscious narrator, the mode of expression in the novel is itself an important element in building up a clear view about the moralistic and intellectual orientation of the central character. As a direct observer of the bleak circumstances that plague the realities of his country, Odili's main task is to capture a mode of language and narration that distances him from the corrupt figures who have given rise to this situation. In fact, a narrative satire in which the main character is turned into a target of criticism for the author entails an insightful employment of the characters' language. The trivial and cynical tone of Odili's language sometimes impedes the reader from getting a deep understanding or clear interpretation of the convoluted events he is entrapped in; the shallow statements that mark his language are illustrative of Odili's limited field of knowledge but they are repeatedly and humorously used as a means for creating a form of interaction between the narrator and the reader. The reader is frequently invited to listen to the narrator's proclaimed beliefs that he is a highly-knowledgeable person, and totally above the malpractices of those politicians with whom the reader sees him associated in some events. Admittedly, Odili has alleged to present a reliable narrative posture, but a careful examination of his conversations and statements reveals how even the linguistic tools he selects to depict the external reality proves inadequate and deficient, and therefore implicating himself within the same critiques he formulates concerning the utterances of other individuals.

In effect, the writer detaches himself from the actions of his hero through the linguistic act. He makes Odili speak in a vague language marked by verbal infelicities and doubtful grammatical quality. In one important sense, the writer attempts to create a stylistic correlation between the novel's themes and contexts through his narrator's language. This intention to display verbal infelicities which the reader comes across in the narrative of Odili gives explanation why Achebe's fourth novel is different from his earlier ones at the level of language and stylistics. An entirely changed socio-cultural situation entails a different mode of expression and Achebe's literary craft

employs the right verbal communication to evoke the confused world of *A Man of the People*. For what appears to present “stylistic infelicities, which one finds difficult to associate with the author of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, are calculated strokes intended to reveal the indiscipline in the hero’s mind”(Taiwo,1976,p.145). In spite of Odili’s apparent anxiety to bring together the different happenings of his country in a coherent and complete story, his moral and intellectual discourses appear to be stripped of their genuine meanings because of his scattered sentences. This statement is a case in point: “Max and some of his friends having watched with deepening disillusion the use to which our hard-won freedom was being put by corrupt, mediocre politicians had decided to come together and launch the Common People’s Convention”(p.77). In fact, Odili uses a set of expressions which are both inadequate and unimpressive because the happenings he records are too complex and distressing to be carried within an inflated poetic tone which Odili makes use of here: the narrator brings forward a most common attitude that can be expressed by the half-literate people but his sentence reproduces the pretentious discourses used by the dishonourable politicians. In effect, Odili refers to an important national issue but renders it less substantive in the context in which it occurs because of the unimpressive language that marks many parts of his narrative. In general, the weaknesses that mark the narrator’s account at the level of language use and reliability of representation is emblematic of the complex conditions besetting the developing nation. The writer’s explicit concern here is to expose the malfunction of the nation to inaugurate constructive institutions of social order which is deliberately manifested in the degeneration of its intellectuals’ language into shallow and sterile meanings.

In fact, there are many factors which work to undermine the reliability of the narrator’s account (although he seems anxious to convince the reader about his objectivity), for his narrative is constructed around the unfeasibility of developing a well-defined point of view in a complex social world where people realize their needs through unlimited practices of deception and hypocrisy. The reader can observe this aspect of duplicity many times in Odili’s self-conscious narrative when the latter tries to describe acts and events which do not totally concur with the main orientation of his individualistic principles. In one minor incident during his prestigious residence in

Nanga's mansion, Odili hears him devaluing the abilities of the local intellectual class and expressing his unreserved scorn towards them because of their inexperienced ideals. At this point, the narrator's response to the minister's disgusting tone is a good example of duplicity: "I knew I was hearing terrible things but somehow I couldn't bring myself to take the man seriously. He had been so open and kind to me and not in the least distrustful"(p.65). The narrator's words contain two different comments on the object of critique: in the opening chapter of the novel, Odili expresses overtly his wrath against Chief Nanga and his government for the way they had removed a group of intellectual members from their parliament positions because of their reforming plans which do not fit the corrupt policies of the government; now in the overwhelming influence of the minister's charming personality and the magnificence of his mansion, his previous critical attitudes are substituted by attitudes of acquiescence and support. Also in this event, the narrative reveals Odili's failure to take a decisive reaction, to defend the status of the intellectual class (of which he is typically a spokesperson) against the discounting comments of the half-literate minister, or to find adequate words to express his resentment utterly. What is to be emphasized at this transitional stage is that Odili's passive position towards Nanga's attitudes and actions is not absolutely bound up with some private ambitions or a complete diversion of his ideals, but appear to be determined by the limitations he shows at the level of his interpretations and depiction of some immediate happenings that he has not predicted, a pathetic condition that Gareth Griffiths rightly relates to "the inadequacy of relying on any single rhetorical procedure as a 'grammar of values' by which to judge the events of the book" (Griffiths in Innes & Lindfors, 1979, p.77).

A number of conversations juxtaposed in an apparently arbitrary way demonstrate Odili's inadequate line of reasoning, and function to question not only his changing attitudes towards Nanga's actions but also the reliability of the novel's narrator. Odili's apparent contradiction of detachment from and involvement in the events he records is best explored through the relations between Africans and Europeans in Nanga's home. In the incident of Jean's party (a wife of an American diplomat in Nigeria) we come to learn that Odili knows a great deal of the food and sculpture of his culture than the Europeans do. The European paradigm of egocentricity which

initiates a moral confusion within the post-colonial condition of the African community is thematically brought forward in this scene to explore differences in modes of cultural perception. Achebe is acutely aware that the Western foreigner's ethnographic fallacies of the African culture and society is subverted by the evidence that the majority of the ex-colonized African people do not view the historical development and cultural transitions of their communities within the cultural and racial norms used by the Western colonizer and ethno-centric anthropologists to represent them. The foreigner's prejudiced perceptions are displayed and sarcastically counter-balanced in order to have room for the African's insider view of the general fabric of his /her cultural and social world. Here, the fundamental preoccupation with the theme of culture representation is maintained by Achebe: through his narrator he turns down all forms of biased European judgments on the African conditions and values even more plainly than he does in the satirical presentation of the same issue in the earlier novels. The European's limited field of knowledge in relation to the African general background and order of life has engendered all too often a stereotyped colonial discourse which is fraught with narrow and misconceived cultural norms of generalizations. Odili comments that some foreigners, for example, think "we are funny with figures". He records how his father astounded a British visitor because the former appears to be unmindful of the size of the members of his own family: "My father grinned and talked about other things. Of course he knew how many children he had but people don't go counting their children as they do animals or yams"(p.111). Through his narrator and protagonist, Odili, Achebe shows some outstanding examples of the foreigners' incompetent critical interpretation of African art, which are central to the cultural and historical implications of his narrative. During the party in Jean's house, the guests are discussing a modern piece of sculpture, the wooden figure of a god carved by a European-trained Nigerian artist. In seeing an old African touching with her fist the modern sculpture of a god, an Englishman describes her as "quite an illiterate pagan". For him, the gesture of this ignorant woman towards the sophisticated carved piece shows no clear level of artistic interpretation, for the gesture may indicate a form of worshipping of "this very god". However, Odili hastens to expound that the shaking of the fist indicates feelings of reverence and respect in the local beliefs of his

people; “it means that you attribute power to the person or object”(p.50). Odili explains that this problem of unskilled interpretation is related to the specific cultural norms of perceptions which characterize every society: the English critic has incompetently attempted to explain some gestures of a foreign culture through depending on his own people’s cultural norms of representation.

On the whole, the common confrontation between the European cultural stereotyped judgments and the African mode of perception has given rise to complex socio-cultural tensions in the general fabric of the African community. After the end of the party, Jean takes Odili on a night tour in the city before driving him home. Despite their intimate discussions and behaviors during and after the party, Odili starts to distrust her intentions of the tour: he wonders if she has “some secret reason, like wanting me feel ashamed about my country’s capital city?” He is compelled by this foreign American to laugh at the aspects of poverty and social unfairness in Bori. During this moment of embarrassment, his uncertainties and pride are aroused: “Who the hell did she think she was to laugh so self-righteously? Or crying if she preferred it?”(p.54). But these impressions of anger are expressed only in a form of inner thoughts. This sequence of incidents reveals important points in the narrator’s character. In his silent resentment of the American visitor for criticizing his country’s capital city, Odili builds up a direct correlation between the shallowness and ineptitude of the foreigners’ ethnocentric interpretations of African art and the irrelevance of the foreigners’ views of African politics and societies. And crucially important, Odili’s defensive and protective position towards his own African culture is displayed only in his quest to correct the most unconcealed reductive interpretations of the Europeans. The most plausible explanation is that the reader has at times some difficulty in constructing a clear-cut view of Odili. Many incidents show that the main focus and judgment which the character of the narrator should present is not adequately comprehensible and certain. With this in mind, Odili is created by the writer to function as the means of uncertainty and hesitation; presenting his comments and interpretations from within a confused scheme of values and thoughts cannot provide us with an objective representation of the immediate moment in which he is involved, and this impels us to question once more the reliability of his intellectual standpoint.

And if the intellectual elite (in the figures of Odili and Nanga) are seen careless and ignorant of the public basic needs, the people too have become callous and indifferent towards the unhopeful conditions of their country. Like their greedy leaders, they look at the nation as a source of material interests, and the sweeping malpractices which mark the different social facets have been established as the most common rhetoric of general conduct. What is implied here is that the people themselves have been entangled in a sustained false consciousness that presents corruption and looting the nation's riches as inevitable practices in the contemporary way of living. The novel's title suggests a certain correspondence between the behaviors of the leaders and the uneducated people who sustain even their corrupt actions. "A man of the people" goes beyond its direct implication of Nanga's public support to imply other levels of associations through the multifaceted signification of "of" as an obvious indicator of socio-political correspondence and derivation (Nanga refers to and represents the people), and because of definite ethnic determinants and ties they made him their representative in the national sphere. In the filthy game of politics, Nanga and the people uphold and take advantage of each other's deficiencies and misfortune. As is noticed developing earlier in the newly independent society of *No Longer at Ease*, rigid tribal attachments impede people from developing genuine allegiance and warmth for the larger body of the nation in *A Man of the People*. E. Shils, in his essay "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties"(qtd in Geertz, 1963,p.109), explains how primordial attachments to blood, religion, or race engender in the group's spirit strong feelings of social hostility and coerciveness that result in sustaining one's kinfolk and relations in all situations. It is to this kind of attachment that politicians like Chef Nanga resort to guarantee the total support of their constituencies in *A Man of the People*.

However, the convoluted problem Achebe brings forward in *A Man of the People* is that Nigeria is unable to turn up as a unified entity and to build up a nation because the many incongruent cultural groups and ethnicities which constitute its body do not perceive themselves as its real or adherent members. If the country does not possess the required social norms and ties to develop a common order of conduct, then all simplistic political appeals which cannot realize this principal objective become a form

of false-consciousness. As in the fragmented society of *No Longer at Ease*, one can see that the essential factors for forming a nation are not yet available in the complex society of *A Man of the People*. Clifford Geertz makes the fundamental point that one of the distinctive traits of a developing nation is the people's need to be accepted "as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes and opinions 'matter', and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic modern state"(Geertz,1963,p.108). When people are fueled with these impulses, they are induced to make every effort to build up a nation which can answer their different needs. What comes to strengthen this ambition to bring into being an 'efficient' nation is the people's innate sense of collective belonging engendered by the common determinants of a shared history, race, language, locality, religion, or cultural traditions. When these ties are not provided in the budding nation, the bigoted loyalty to distinctive ethnicities or groups would undermine the all-encompassing basis of this socio-cultural body. Such adamant inclination towards belonging to a unique and narrow socio-cultural background is considered against the diverse cultural determinants, be they religion, race, or language, leading to the loss of and lack of general commitment to an order that is supposed to contain within its unifying structure all the incongruous ethnicities and groups. Indeed, the smaller groups have utter fears of being unfairly enfolded within the "culturally undifferentiated mass" or being subdued to "some other, rival ethnic, racial or linguistic community that is able to imbue that order with the temper of its own personality"(Geertz,1963,p.109).

This explains the anxious pursuit of high positions in the civil service by the different ethnic groups in the earlier novel, *No Longer at Ease*. We are informed how each of these groups found special urban organization that can provide its members higher privileges at the level of work and socio-economic interests. This is what Chief Nanga exploits to instill in the people's minds that he is in government for the main objective of allowing them have their "share of the national cake". This prevalent tendency of acquisitiveness explains why the different ethnic groups in *A Man of the People* continue to be passive and indifferent and tolerate even the mean acts of their political representatives for self-enrichment. The outcome is that the different ethnic groups in the country come to adopt the same practices of their leaders which promote

the material interests of one group at the expense of others. However, as Geertz states, almost all members of such societies which are plagued by ethnic, religious or cultural tensions do not realize that the way for social development and material advancement they so desperately long for “rest(s) with increasing weight on their being enclosed in a reasonably large, independent, powerful, well-ordered polity” (1963, p.109). In this view, Chief Nanga is a classic representative of those leaders who instill in their people the narrow ideas of ethnic allegiance to render them alienated from the real happenings of the larger body of the nation. He resorts to all forms of corrupt practices to ransack the riches of the larger body and, at the same time, alleges to promote the welfare of the particular constituencies which support him in his election. He defends the interests of the nation as a political polity only because it secures for him more possibilities to ransack its riches.

This profit-oriented order has encouraged a “national cake” practice based on self-interest and on forming large number of followers who sustain it. We see, for example, how Odili’s candidature is received with applause in his home town, Urua, when Max enthusiastically raises the most crucial issue which Odili considers ‘unworthy of him or of C.P.C.’, that the village will benefit from the good fortune of its designated son, and that it is time for Urua to have its share from the nation’s bounties. The audience starts to respond excitedly to Max’s speech only when he refers to the material benefits they can have access to if they have their son in the parliament. Undoubtedly, Achebe is extremely critical of this immoral and decadent orientation in the new society where communal relationships rest on the immediate materialistic benefits. The people do not denounce those politicians who work for their self-interest, since they too can benefit from some sources of the country’s riches. One character sums up the whole issue in this sightless perspective: “‘We know they are eating’, he said, “but we are eating too. They are bringing us water and they promise to bring us electricity. We did not have those things before; that is why I say we are eating too” (p.124). Odili’s ‘bush’ father also sees the domain of political action from this acquisitive spirit. He approves of Odili’s political activism for the main reason that it endows him with better material advantages than his previous teaching job. This simplistic disposition rests on the main belief that politics grant its practitioners more possibilities for self-enrichment. In this

decadent situation where there is no rigorous basis of moral values which can restrict and temper the general conduct of the individual and the group alike, the people become a mere social force used by the politicians in their electoral campaigns to maintain their positions, disregarding in this way completely the effects of such political malfunction on the wellbeing of the community. Confronting this devastating state of corruption, Odili stands ambivalent about the appropriate way he can follow to put his ideals into action and “tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths”(p.2).

In spite of this agonizing state of social confusion, it must be pointed out that Odili's brief residence in Nanga's palace functions as a central phase in the development of his ideas, a period in which he undergoes a state of real confrontation with all the matters he was only criticizing from his usual detached position. As he directly witnesses the practices of those who take charge of the government affairs, presented in the figure of Chief Nanga and his political associates, Odili's previous standards of truthfulness and moralist conduct begin to appear undermined in the sweeping influence of the political milieu. He comes to realize the difficulties he meets when attempting to bring the world of morals to 'the filthy games' of politics, as Nanga puts it. At this particular stage, Odili can recognize the intellectual limitations of his earlier thoughts and attitudes; he comes to realize that indifference implies lack of understanding, while participation generates some sort of impartiality and awareness. But ironically enough, the reader comes to discover that the real impulses behind his conflict against Nanga have nothing to do with any determined quest for changing the public order or with his former criticism of the man and the corrupt system he stands for; Odili is infuriated chiefly by Nanga's transient relationship with his girlfriend. During this event which has taken place in Nanga's mansion, Odili stands totally astounded and powerless in front of the minister's hideous behaviour. The deceived intellectual can only bunch his clothes and go away from this filthy milieu which exemplifies a part of the whole polity. The dreadful impressions left by this event propel Odili to begin arranging for his personal vengeance against the corrupt minister. He finds this opportunity by getting involved in the political party led by his friend Max, the People's Conventional Party, a group of proficient intellectuals. After

being selected as the chief delegate of the party for his village, he decisively moves onto confront Nanga in his constituency and embarks on his revenge plans by seeking out his proposed wife (Edna). When he makes his impulsive decision to get engaged in political action he expounds it to himself in these suspicious words:

I must say that I was immediately taken with the idea of the Common People's Convention. Apart from everything else it would add a second string to my bow when I came to deal with Nanga. But right now I was anxious not to appear to Max and his friends as the easily impressed type. (...) So I made what I intended to be a little spirited skeptical speech. (p.78)

This statement explains how Odili's representation of himself and others is related to his stated intentions and anxious need to defend his self-worth, to build up a good image of himself and to influence the way his new associates perceive his political position. He is very aware of the complex situation he is involved in: he is entangled between his pretentious principles, his anxious desire to see the country's different institutions operating in a constructive way on the one hand, and his personal pride that he has to recover through having his revenge against Nanga on the other. Undoubtedly, this ambivalent situation he is caught in is a direct consequence of the kind of schooling he is formed in, which has made him adopt a way of life totally different from the common realities of his society. Unsettling public events – the distressing political upheaval attending the affairs of the nation and the development of a new hopeful political party – are not part of the main reflections of Odili when he comes to rationalize his personal motives in entering politics. In this view, one may assume that the cynicism that marks the narrator's comments on other's actions and perspectives is chiefly related to his inability to distinguish between his public and personal motives. All the intricacies that Odili encounters as a self-conscious narrator stem from his direct involvement in those socio-political circumstances that he attempts eagerly to depict. In many of the novel's events, we observe how this inexperienced intellectual oscillates between the boundaries of his self-centered character and his pretentious quest for reforming the community's order of things.

However, along with all the disillusionment which he sees around him, his sightless eagerness for revenge grows quickly into a real and valuable act of social commitment. Odili never loses his principles. Even though the writer presents many events in the

novel which describes how Odili begins to follow the path of Nanga, he keeps a careful eye in advancing particular scenes where he makes a useful distinction between the high morals of his hero-narrator and the corrupt Minister. The reader is frequently invited to observe how Odili possesses a genuine set of morals which one cannot view in the characters of his associates. As a founder member of Max's populist social party, Odili is selected to represent the party in his village whose people used to support Chief Nanga. According to the basics of its founding principles, the party is fundamentally concerned with the different problems which plague their country and prepared to work unselfishly for the wellbeing of the whole community and for the interests of the ordinary people who still live under very low conditions. They are the only group that appears at the beginning of the novel, according to Odili's initial judgments, to put forward factual promises for the country's interests, because they build up their programs within the realities of the immediate socio-political situation of their country and not under some flattering pretensions of unreal or illusory plans. Max knows from the very beginning that they cannot look ahead to succeed in the election. Their party stands powerless in front of Nanga's long political experience and material sources. For instance, Odili's moralistic behaviors lead Boniface, his bodyguard during the election campaign, to contend that Odili is not carrying out the political campaign against his opponent Nanga with sufficient ruthless means. Unlike Odili, Max does not seem to be astonished by the filthy means and hideous practices that characterize the political campaigns. Through his popular party, he strives to liberate the country of the prevalent political malfunction and the slavish subjection to Western imperialism but finds that he is impelled to accept material supports from a communist country to manage the financial expenses of the party. Worse, when the campaign starts Odili is informed by Nanga that Max shows no hesitation in accepting a bribe from Chief Koko, his opponent, and it is this disgraceful act which makes Odili lose all faith in the ability of their party to face the state of corruption that seems to sweep the country's different institutions:

'Chief Koko offered me one thousand pounds', he continued placidly. 'I consulted The other boys and we decided to accept. It paid for that minibus ...'

'I don't understand you, Max. Are you telling me that you have taken money and stepped down for P.O.P?'

'I am telling you nothing of the sort. The paper I signed has no legal force whatever

and we needed the money ...’
‘It had moral force,’ I said, downcast. ‘I am sorry, Max, but I think you have committed a big blunder. I thought we wanted our fight to be clean.’ (p.126)

In this passage, the writer draws an important moral distinction between Odili and Max. While Max considers the material profit of the agreement with Chief Koko, Minister of Over-Seas Training, Odili is concerned with the disappointing act of accepting a bribe to withdraw from election. He is upbraiding Max for taking a bribe even though the amount of money allows their party to buy a minibus to hold an effectual political campaign. The indefensible blunder, according to Odili, committed by Max here abrogates all forms of moral distinction which one may use to measure the relation between Government and Opposition Parties and his submission to their illegal acts leads to his dreadful death at the hands of Chief Koko’s gang.

Then, even Max’s party is not free from the pretensions of political clichés used by Nanga and his likes. The name of the party is a case in point here. The People’s Conventional Party, as Odili has informed us, is only an assembly of intellectuals who have no direct interaction with the people they allege to represent and defend. Odili who theoretically does not approve of this condition is not to be excluded from the same intellectual shortcoming. The limitations of his political action are determined by the fact of confusing his personal impulses with the public ones. His incompleteness stems, then, from his inability to widen the scope of his intellectual quest and make it include the actual experiences of the community. Similarly, Max’s party is a dubious political organization which presents an illusory connection between the whole polity and the common realities of the people. Gikandi poignantly relates Odili’s malfunction to “ a post-colonial (...) context in which there is no shared and certain (...) system of values or thought into which he can extend himself and achieve fulfillment” (1991b, p.120). What Gikandi, in fact, asserts in this respect, is the absence of a general socio-cultural system of thought which can organize the behaviors of the different social members within one communal moralistic mode of order.

This disquieting void at the level of the community’s structure can also be observed in the cynical and unreceptive reaction of the villagers towards Odili’s and Max’s discourses and political ideas during their course of the electoral campaign against their supporting leader, Nanga. At some point in Max’s talk to the villagers about the

government deceitful and corrupt policies, the villagers react in a ridiculous manner; they have listened to the speech with total apathy. “No one shook with rage or showed any sign of fight”, the narrator comments desolately. “They understood what was being said, they had seen it with their own eyes” (pp.123-24). Even Odili who belongs to the village proves incapable of gaining the support of his people. At the foundational assembly of his constituency in his village, Nanga’s followers pour on him all types of demeaning insults to compel him to stop the political campaign and step down for Nanga’s political party. After this event, we see Nanga starting to resort to some ignoble practices against Odili with the help of his followers: in a rapid progression, Odili is sacked from school by his headmaster who is a ‘primitive’ adherent to Chief Nanga, mistreated by Nanga’s bush wife and aggressively beaten by Nanga’s supporters. These distressing incidents impel him to go over his attitudes towards the political conflict against Chief Nanga and his disposition towards the whole community. He comes to realize that the threats, harm, and insults he has been prepared to go through in his pursuit of Edna are part of the whole socio-political experience which has engendered in him a new sense of self-consciousness. He discovers that his genuine emotions towards Edna are no longer related to the self-seeking objectives of his previous revenge plans; they turn into a strong sentiment of affection which endows his political action with a clear tendency towards social commitment. At this stage, Odili turns to go over the value of his previous political impulses and associations, to evaluate particularly the complexity of juxtaposing the narrow scope of his personal political intentions with the ambiguous milieu of political action; he finds it necessary to deal with the different knotty motives behind this transitional experience in his life for the sake of ‘self-analysis’. He comes to observe how his intellectual and emotional intentions are “so mixed up” in his short-lived political activity; “my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl. And perhaps it was just as well that my motives should entangle and reinforce one another” (p.108).

Odili’s genuine involvement with Edna can be achieved after the bicycle accident, a minor incident in which Odili’s emotional concern towards Edna is disclosed partly to himself and to the reader as well. On their way to visit her mother in the hospital, Odili finds great delight in Edna’s appreciation of his physical force as he can climb an

abrupt hill with the bicycle. Odili's joyful moments are interrupted when a straying sheep crosses his way and makes him lose control of the bicycle, and provoke the fall on the road. Odili feels ashamed when he sees Edna crying and trying to collect the split soup. In this embarrassing moment, he thinks that her distress and tears are related to 'hurt pride' because "the foofoo and soup" which are lying on the sandy road reveal the poor conditions of her family. (94)

This incident is significant in the way it evokes Odili's true concerns and feelings rather than the shallow and vague sentiments and interpretations he often expresses in other parts of his story. He can notice Edna's pain and misery; he realizes that she may be embarrassed by this exposure of her family's poor conditions, and surely foo-foo soup is a clear mark of indigence. One can infer that the narrator's interpretation carried in this minor event is meant to highlight more about Odili's developing personality than Edna's, it appears clearly that Odili can for once ignore his shame for causing the accident and is actually interested in the physical and emotional state of Edna. The incident reveals an important development in Odili's emotional relationship with Edna, an impulse which will impel him to struggle for the girl personally, and not only to employ her as a means in his political plans against Nanga. This genuine evolution in his political involvement concurs with the important decision he will make afterward when, believing that Nanga has won Edna, he recognizes the urgent need to carry on with the political campaign whatever the upshot. And at this level, his real participation in the country's political happenings, whatever the previously entangled intentions, progressively initiates him into a wider social existence that he begins to understand and even value.

As the events reveal, Odili learns to dissociate his actions from the limited scope of his subjective outlook which frequently impedes him from bringing together the private needs and the public concerns. In the process of his self-examination Odili is unreservedly beginning to evaluate the entangled motives that come to determine the orientation of his behaviors and attitudes. Before this stage, devising meanings or telling stories for Odili was a simple process of depiction and interpretation in which events are given significance only because of their direct relation to his projected self-image. This subjective tendency in evaluating things reveals more than once the

narrator's limitations in constructing a constructive mode of knowledge; all the same it proves its importance because it helps the narrator understand his own implication in the events he tries to draw on. He can untangle his personal emotions towards Edna from his anxious desire for revenge, and now the main impulses behind his political activism are related to a genuine need to put an end to Nanga's corrupt politics. Following his capacity for critical reflection, Odili the idealist at last transcends many of his blunders and succeeds to commit himself and his personal concerns to larger public interests. His impressive emotions towards Edna can be deemed as a good initiation for a more associated relationship with the community's different categories as Edna represents the unfortunate group of the village. At this point, his ambitions ascend all of a sudden to the standing of genuine involvement, "a shining, monumental gesture untainted by hopes of success or reward" (p.130). In the process of his electoral campaign Odili remains firm in his defence of a moralistic order of things despite the devastating spread of corruption. At the very beginning of the campaign, Odili's morals stand triumphant in front of Nanga's ignoble political tools. We see him humiliating Nanga when he absolutely refuses to accept the scholarship to study abroad and the tempting amount of money which Nanga thinks he can use to win his adherence and to recompense his ambitions in getting a parliamentary position. Odili does not accept to yield to all these materialistic influences in spite of the distressing fact that his father is the local leader of Nanga's party in the village, and in spite of the fact that his friend Max has easily accepted a big amount of money from Chief Koko to withdraw from the electoral campaign. All these overwhelming pressures to which Nanga resorts prove to be futile before the strength of Odili's moralistic withstanding.

Overall, the brief experience of his political action makes Odili discover important social aspects that he was ignorant of. He realizes that the villagers and his father still preserve substantial values that can endure in front of the present chaos. Both stand as reminders of the cultural repositories of the land's traditions and principles. He desolately recognizes that there is a disquieting fracture between the naïve principles of the village and the complex organization of the polity; the village's order of things is rendered completely feeble in the sphere of national politics. Odili narrates that:

Two nights later we heard the sound of the Crier's gong. His message was unusual. In the past the Crier had summoned the village to a meeting to deliberate over a weighty question, or else to some accustomed communal labour. His business was to serve notice of something that was to happen. But this night he did something new: he announced a decision already taken.(p.134)

Odili's observations of the community's changing customs and order of life point to the distortion of the communal general body of ethics which Odili has come eventually to identify with. Unlike the firm social norms and judgments that characterize the traditional communities of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* and Umuaro in *Arrow of God*, the villagers in this novel are at the compassion of the self-seeking leaders who need their allegiance to maintain their political positions. When Odili comes to comprehend this disquieting reality, he begins to view the villagers with sympathy and understanding rather than disdain, for "why should they lose their chance of getting good, clean water, their share of the national cake"(p.134).

This new form of rational understanding that we see in Odili's attitudes towards his people is not related only to the deep-seated influence of his involvement in the public actions. His father, to whom Odili shows little respect in many of the novel's events, has unpredictably astonished his son by behaving in a most honest way towards Max's party, a high personal quality that Odili never expected to find in the character of the old man. The support he receives from his father at the beginning of their electoral campaign makes Odili shamefully realize how he had been ignorant of his father's real personality. At a crucial moment, the old man accepts to organize the launching assembly of his son's and Max's electoral campaign in his compound. Chief Nanga views this practice as an act of defection from Hezekiah Samalu, the local leader of his party in the village, and consequently he punishes the old man by imposing heavy taxes on the incomes he receives from the party. And most unexpectedly for Odili and the reader as well, the old man receives the news that he had been sacked from Nanga's party with complete composure, and does not resort to this hypocritical minister to plead for some sort of conciliation even when the tax imposed on him is cruelly increased. For Odili's father, the moral dimension of his act towards his son's party outdoes all the different interests he can get from his association with Nanga's party. At the time, he said wisely, 'I believe that the hawk should perch and the eagle

perch'(p.122). But what seems to change Odili's attitudes towards his father is the old man's moralistic explanation of the reason which impels him to refuse the money that Nanga offers him if he would both renounce his support to Max's party and would assert his absolute allegiance to his party. He expounds his behavior on the ground of the moralistic aspect which characterizes the cultural values and conduct of his forefathers: "Our people have said that a man of worth never gets up to unsay what he said yesterday. I received your friends in my house and I am not going to deny it"(p.135). What is expressed here is more than an affirmation of a rejection to disavow a given reality. The old man's words reinforce an important facet that Achebe's readers used to observe in the social fabric of his traditional communities; the strong ties of loyalty and devotion between father and son. Achebe insists through this significant incident that the traditional dispensation had its own constant principles of family relationships and social integrity that cannot be easily obliterated by some superficial foreign values. Especially significant, the father's traditional morality and Odili's intellectual ideals are brought together in this scene, making way for a promising moderate hybrid culture.

So, further than the state of remorse that Odili experiences towards the public concerns, we find here the reinstatement of family and kinship bonds. His strong appreciation of his father's moralistic act towards Max's party initiates Odili to a totally different sort of relationship with the village people. The narrative presents significant scenes in which the mature Odili comes to realize the value of the village life from which he had alienated himself. His proposed marriage to Edna, the symbol of the unblemished village values, and his decision to return to his village to start a new type of school, indicates Odili's identification with the larger concerns of his small community. This developing relationship with his father and the village values helps him vindicate something of his intellectual principles. The climax of Odili's self-conscious narrative occurs at Nanga's opening campaign meeting in the village. He finds this big gathering a most appropriate occasion to speak overtly to the people about the decadent values and actions of their leaders. In place of the detached and contemptuous schoolteacher whom we have viewed with dissatisfaction in the opening chapter we find now a well-informed and qualified public participant who is no longer

depending on the self-defensive value scheme of his initial individualistic rhetoric to express his thoughts or build up his judgments. When Nanga ridiculously gives him opportunity to speak through the microphone, Odili bravely addresses him in front of the amazed audience: “I come to tell your people that you are a liar and ...”(p.140). When viewed from the more developed thoughts of the matured narrator, this act is not to be taken as a hasty challenging reaction, but as a culmination of an important set of intellectual ideas sustained and tempered throughout the difficult circumstances that Odili endures along his passionate quest for social and political change. His intellectual ideas, now adapted to the immediate experiences and realities of his community, have induced him to confront the depraved men of power in front of their followers without thinking of the perilous consequences that he may go through because of this unselfish public act.

One can conceive that in *A Man of the People* the writer directs his unreserved criticism on the different aspects of self-seeking interests and unconstrained pursuit of material acquisitiveness which have given rise to a distressing condition of socio-political depravity, tribal conflict and communal cynicism. This immediate link between the sweeping social evils and individualism does actually determine the thematic orientation of the novel. Odili sees how the new leaders of the people can keep hold of their position in the government through exploiting the drawbacks of the traditional order. For what we see in the confused conditions of this modern society is a deliberate break between the functional and well-organized communal life of the village and the complex order of the larger nation. As the people’s mode of life is kept from the well-controlled sphere of the village to the convoluted relationships of the nation, the high-minded nature of their collective spirit and the authority of their cultural values were rendered powerless and the community’s traditional order turned out to be a mere stagnant legacy of the people’s past dispensation.

In fact, the rural values of Achebe’s tribal community prove helpless in the complex conditions of the nation’s contemporary concerns. In the well-controlled sphere of the village, any person who perpetrates an evil act would be subjected to heavy penalties like social exclusion by the whole collective body, as we see with Josiah, but Odili comes to comprehend that no social group takes the initiative to adopt

the necessary actions and behaviours for controlling the national moral issues. This sense of indifference to national issues is most intensely captured in the scene of Chief Koko's death. Odili does not share the people's unsighted comment that Koko is given a most proper punishment because he 'had taken enough for the owner to see'; this communal determinant morality may prove its efficiency in the village sphere, but "in the affairs of the nation there is no owner, the laws of the village became powerless". Personal loyalties stand as the only determining impulses behind one's attitudes and actions in the nonexistence of a consistent and integrated public moral order. At the end of his narrative, Odili draws a connection between the relative accomplishment of the individual's aspirations and the totally deteriorated socio-political conditions on the societal level. He does not seem to be too anxious about the political turmoil which has followed the elections. We see him most satisfied with the goals he has attained: Nanga and his political associates no longer exist because the whole government is put under the military rule, and in getting Edna's approval for their engagement, Odili can turn his previous plans of revenge into a beautiful experience of romantic fulfilment.

Yet the individual's ability to realize some personal objectives does not encompass the larger concerns of the community. The writer does not appear to support Odili's vindication of the individual pressing reformist performance in the face of public lack of concern on the belief that the different institutions of the contemporary nation are more complex to be dealt with through the simple and moralistic norms of a smaller community. The political collapse of Chief Nanga is not related to the strong challenge he faces against Odili's and Max's party and their proclaimed intentions to educate the populace about the scope of his dishonest practices. Odili concludes his narrative with an ironic, acquiescent recognition that the knowledge he has received from his involvement in the immediate socio-political realities has impelled him to admit the inefficacy of individual idealistic action, given the people's lack of concern towards the nation's issues: "Max was avenged not by the people's collective will but by one solitary woman who loved him. Had his spirit waited for the people to demand redress it would have been waiting still"(p.148). The narrator concludes the novel by emphasizing this distressing rift between the individual's direct interests and the community's concerns, and valorising as such the individual action and morals in the

face of public apathy. He point out this idea not as a mere inference that he comes to through his usual cynical reflections but as a reality to which he is a direct witness. But what Odili's conclusion fails to consider is the very chaotic conditions which have marked the election incidents. Eunice's act of shooting Max's murderer is deemed as an impulsive gesture of personal retaliation, totally incomprehensible to those who were witnesses in the event. Both of Odili's and Eunice's redemptive individual acts border on the narrow scope of the personal interests; Achebe's thematic preoccupations are more related to the external social context within which their acts occur than with the specific impulses behind the two individuals' acts.

In the novel's concluding passage, the writer's social-cultural ideas seem to be pronounced directly by the narrator; he painfully laments the disintegration of the community's collective spirit and the loss of its authority over its whole members – a most distressing condition which cannot be resolved by some achievements at the individual level. At the novel's resolving actions, Odili informs us that he has reached a more mature knowledge of his country's realities; yet he does not appear completely cognizant of the real factors, cultural and historical, which have given rise to the present socio-political turmoil. As seen in the novel's previous incidents, his interpretations do not go beyond the surface level of the events he records. Here in the last event, he presents a short account of the final stage of the government's political disorder without showing too much interest in the important process of socio-cultural regeneration which is still within reach in the communal world of the village and which can serve to engender a strong state of national awareness.

So, through *A Man of the People*, Achebe intends more to dramatize observable socio-cultural experiences than to bring forward a possible set of resolutions. The difficulties which confront Odili at the beginning of his self-conscious narrative, and which in due course manages somehow to get through, stem from his inability to associate himself wholly with either the traditional 'primitive' loyalties of his people, as he frequently puts it, or the pretentious values of his intellectual disposition. This oscillation between two different cultural entities is intentionally reproduced by the writer in the narrator's unreliable and complex account. The writer shows that the useful task of achieving an appropriate combination of values, out of a tension

generated by incongruent world-views, entails a particular force of imaginative expression and critical thinking. For Achebe, whose literary works as a whole present an objective debate on the African issue of cultural transformations, all forms of utopian quests or plans cannot be easily achieved within a well-determined line or course of development. He holds out an objective perspective about the adaption of society to the cultural transformation that it undergoes:

Unfortunately when two cultures meet, you would expect, if we were angels shall we say, we could pick out the best in the other and retain the best in our own, and this would be wonderful. But this doesn't happen often ... and I am not being so naive as to think that the progress is in one direction. You see, there are halts, there are even backward steps and so on ... But if you take a long view of society, you will see ... that society is in fact adjusting.

(1972,pp.13,14,17)

This 'long view' that can define for us the possible development and the form of the necessary transformation of the post-colonial community is projected through the socio-cultural interaction outlined in his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, i.e., between the common people and the intellectuals.

Notes:

- 1- Jameson's term "national allegory" first employed in his essay *Fables of Aggression* as an interpretation of Wyndham Lewis's novel *Tarr*. According to Jameson's explanation in this work, the notion "national allegory", as a mode of literary presentation, is used to describe the way individual characters with different national origins or backgrounds stand essentially to embody "more abstract national characteristics which are read as their inner essence".(1979,p.90). This explanation of allegorical system as a mode of representation concurs with the general ideas of literary interpretation that Jameson has developed with notable uniformity along the course of his critical writings, particularly in his significant source of literary criticism *The Political Unconscious*.

CHAPTER THREE _____

***RECONSTRUCTING THE NATION'S CULTURAL
BOUNDARIES IN ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH***

Chapter Three: Reconstructing the Nation's Cultural Boundaries in Anthills of the Savannah

The events of *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* are constructed around the intellectuals' determined quest for social enlightenment, political reform and cultural identification. In the first novel, Max and Odili have not really succeeded in bringing their inexperienced intellectual ideas to the social context even though they show a stubborn opposition to the corrupt politicians. In the course of their political activism they recognize the difficulty of pursuing the local tradition of collective consciousness which they have seen in the behaviors of the villagers and extending it to the larger world of national consciousness. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe shifts these unresolved socio-cultural anxieties into more amplified intellectual debates. He creates an entirely new narrative mode for discussing the issue of post-colonial culture within the structural complexity of the nation's story narrated by three intellectuals, Ikem, Chris, and Beatrice, who seem to function as the writer's surrogates. Achebe's fundamental theme of nation building and culture revival, his resolute literary tendency to depend on the aesthetic experience, the community's truths and its historical actuality as the main devices for critical interpretation and representation are given substantial concernment in this highly-structured novel. The way he has combined literature, ideas and culture to bring to the surface his thematic material is a particularly telling pattern of Achebe's unwavering belief in the committed function of narrative.

The final chapter of *Anthills of the Savannah* artfully builds upon the fundamental problem identified in the *A Man of the People* – the elite's alleged social concerns cut off from the concrete needs of the common people – and proffers strong prospects of a more inclusive and congruous community. The authorial politics of character representation here have been criticized as advocating a contradictory, utopian theorized combination of radical populism and rehabilitated élite leadership (e.g., Maughan Brown). Neil ten Kortenaar appears to approve of Achebe's treatment of the issue, he states that the novel “does not offer a solution to Nigeria's woes, but says, ‘Here's what a solution would look like if one could be imagined’” (1993,p.70).

Whatever one may assume of the intellectual debates raised by his main characters, however, Achebe's thematic preoccupations in *Anthills* are noticeably not expounded with the authorial satire and criticism which characterize *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*. In these novels, the writer does not stand on a positive resolution and closure in support of his satiric representation. Distinct of Odili's insufficient understanding and interpretation of the requisite conditions for genuine communal regeneration along individual fulfillment, the brief diagnostic affirmations at the end of *A Man of the People* appear to be substantiated by the writer. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, however, the writer resolves the novel's conflicting events at both the individual and collective levels. Whether one may deem the closing scene's description of the nation's reconciled classes and ethnicities utopian or not, one cannot help but think that the author is genuinely projecting it as a stimulating, dialogic interaction of once-estranged cultural issues.

In an interview with Kalu Ogbaa, Achebe emphasizes that one could "transmit a national culture to Nigerians (only) through works of imagination; literature", he adds, "is a life and death affair because we are fashioning a new man. The Nigerian is a new man. How do we get this into his mind?" (1981). What Achebe is concerned about in his writings is the degeneration of the ideal or mythology of the nation as a general testimony of cultural reference. If the turbulent colonial experience is a plan of converting 'non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs', as Mudimbe poignantly writes, and of turning 'the space of the 'other' into a field of expansion for a system of production' (1988,p.xxvi), the African writer, then, is compelled to make the fundamental connection between the emergent constructed traditions of his nation. Achebe's abiding concern with the different issues of the rising nation, apart from trying to mediate between the real conditions he draws upon and the imaginary events he creates, lies in his attempt to bring forward objective stories through which he intends to restore the image of the African culture that had been underestimated and undermined by the Western colonizer and scholars who had little or no understanding of the native's traditional world. Achebe's intellectual anxiety is aroused by the undeniable truth that colonialism has engendered a disturbing state of social and cultural transformation in the continent during its turbulent occupation; the African

writer's association with his nation and people is wavering and even strained; the reader can frequently observe the absence of a well-defined connection in his message between the notion of the nation and its socio-cultural existence. He describes a postcolonial convoluted condition which Jean Franco calls 'the blue prints of national formation'. Their writings present themselves as a 'skeptical reconstruction' of the land's past traditions and values; they are in many ways constructed around imaginary cultural signifiers which do not fully 'correspond to the nation'(Franco,1988,p.205). Still, the important controlling idea is that in the absence of a genuine communal fabric that represents the socio-cultural entity of the nation, Achebe finds himself required to devise his own notion of this all-encompassing space, although through a metaphorical frame of representation within which issues of cultural identity can be explored. Frequently, the reader of Achebe's fiction or non-fiction can observe how his allegiances to Nigeria are turned to smaller socio-cultural concerns like Biafra or Igbo land, but these multi-stranded allegiances should not be considered as a form of the novelist's hesitant loyalties. The uneven and shifting historical experiences which afflict the new nation serve as a decisive factor in shaping the writer's intellectual and literary preoccupations. In a 1982 interview with Kwame Anthony Appiah, Achebe explained (Appiah,1992,p.73):

I'm an Ibo writer because this is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer ... no black first, then a writer. Each of these identities does call for a certain kind of commitment on my part. I must see what it is to be black – and this means being sufficiently intelligent to know how the world is moving and how the black people fare in this world. This is what it means to be black. Or an African.

This problematic of un-decidability in understanding or locating these multiple and shifting cultural identities for post-colonial writers and intellectuals reflects the deep ambivalence that surrounds the present Africa as it becomes increasingly more entangled in the European colonial discourse in its compelling orientation towards modernity while simultaneously maintaining its abiding attachments to its authentic cultural legacies. In essence, Achebe's discerning stand suggests his adamant commitment to his proclaimed cultural preoccupation that never admits any forms of reductive binary thinking or ideological dogmatism. The writer's fundamental concernment in this novel is to project the different incidents of his protagonists'

narratives against all sorts of stereotyped discourses: a worldview that is built up in cognizance of differences and multiplicities. His central focus is in the overlap of time, not from an essentialist perception, but through contact with the nation's different groups, their cultures and their characteristic modes of life. This is a useful mode of reflection that carefully assesses the connotations of the nation's historical experiences and the accumulated socio-cultural conditions they have engendered in the post-colonial individual. The events of *Anthills of the Savannah* are precisely constructed around this argument of social representation: Achebe makes the novel function as a form of intellectual and aesthetic projection of the complex issues of cultural relations.

At any rate, the post-colonial perceptions invoked for this study are particularly concerned with indicating how the different conceptions of binary relations and grand narratives function within a rigid mode of thought that endorses or imposes a determinant system of power relations and practices. This dialectic discourse counteracts all forms of stereotyped discourses which are based on a conventional logic of binary oppositions, invoking thus the relationships and conditions of ambivalence, hybridity and diversity as important patterns and aspects intrinsic in the general discourses of social representation that are given an ample critical space in the fields of culture and literature. As bell hooks expounds, the convoluted arguments related to the notions of 'identity and difference' are carried to larger contexts of socio-cultural debates and struggles in the post-colonial writings specifically for the reason that its inclusive and all-encompassing discourse brings to the fore the real conditions and the voices of the marginalized, the exploited and the subjugated (qtd in Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.141). The intellectual import of this argument is developed further by Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, which deems it as a problematic aspect of the colonial mode of representation "that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that other 'denied' set of knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha, 1994, p.156).

This conception of hybridity which opens up a critical space for different and contesting thoughts or discourses is not to be understood as following a simplistic idea of resistance or subversiveness and hence to render this conception ideologically prejudiced and, as some cultural critics observe, another form of imperial tendencies to

“universal liberalism”(Friedman,1997,p.81). In the convoluted conditions of post-colonial society, the discourse of hybridity can generate a form of acculturation that can give rise to either cultural strength or cultural disintegration. Alternatively, while some states of cultural degeneration and self alienation may bring into play awkward ideas of a dispersed, or broken whole, post-colonial theories of hybridity may in fact build up more inclusive and prolific experiences of cultural existence. In this sense, the hybrid space may be understood as a stimulating and inclusive field of cultural synthesis. This perception of hybridity, hence, functions so as to transcend the narrower and deep-rooted essentialist discourses of culture. Such a positive understanding does not abrogate the many-stranded difficulties attending the experience of cultural hybridity. Bhabha suggests his notion of the ‘third space’ not to allegedly resolve cultural tensions but to recognize and encompass them, so as to be marked out in the self-critical approaches and self-conscious narratives of Achebe’s protagonists.

However, at this level it is worth noting that the postcolonial theory derives many of its notions from the ideas of the Russian literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin who employs the notion of ‘hybridity’ in different fields of thoughts as language interaction and the novel discourse. Bakhtin’s constructive distinction between intentional and organic hybridity provides a useful intellectual background for the postcolonial discussion of culture; it helps to theorize the different processes of cultural change and incorporation in the lives of the groups. With his notion of organic hybridization, Bakhtin explains how the common unintentional acts of assimilating and fusing different cultural elements function as an important pattern in the historical progression and transformation of languages. In such particular situations of cultural and linguistic interactions, Bakhtin explains that the emergent blend in itself presents a sort of constructive cultural outcomes because the states of unintended hybrids do not draw on a simple logic of binary oppositions; they offer “new world views, with new internal forms” for understanding the external reality (1981,p.360). Carrying this productive potential into the controversial issue of culture and the frequent aspects attending its transformation, Pnina Werbner contends that there is no culture which is totally a self-contained one in its course of development, for in spite of the common

fallacious notion of “boundedness, cultures evolve historically through unreflective borrowings, mimetic appropriations, exchanges and invention.”(Werbner,1997,p. 4-5)

On the other side, Bakhtin suggests the notion of “intentional hybrid” to refer to the process of bringing together deliberate contrasts and oppositions in some given patterns of language contact. He expresses this in relation to the area of statements and expressions in the linguistic situations where one can observe a conscious fusion of two different linguistic modes which belong to different historical periods and social states (1981,p.358). The main idea that is related to this argument is that the intentional hybrid situation has not to be viewed as a simple state of integrating two distinctive socio-linguistic modes, because it presents useful experiences of productive conflicts between the diverse elements that are embedded in the process of interaction. The states of intentional hybrids are thus constructed around ‘dialogic’ relationships (1981,360). In the same way, as it is seen from Bhabha’s post-colonial perspective, the state of hybridity is identified as a productive mediating space in which the different impulses of intentional and organic hybrid states are brought together. As Robert Young explains it, Bakhtin’s dialogical form of hybridity presents itself as a particularly significant constructive theory for perceiving the complex ramifications of cultural relationships: an organic hybridity that functions within innovative patterns of combination and fusion, and combined with intentional acts of hybridity that works through a resilient setting of cultural differences posited within a dialogic interaction (Young,1995,p22). It is this characteristic potential of hybridity which is oriented towards abrogating and subverting the structures of all forms of binary coding which is also expressed by Bhabha’s theory. At any rate, Bakhtin’s two forms of hybridity have been carried by Bhabha into more specific forms of discursive oppositions; Bhabha’s idea of hybridity relies on the intentional pattern to counteract the dominant oppressive colonial power, challenging thus the dogmatic racial signifiers of the colonial discourse and its pretentious assumptions of cultural authenticity.

As elucidated by Bhabha’s theory of culture location, the notion of hybridity is deployed as a conscious aspect of an oppositional critical pattern to the pre-established ideas of colonialist epistemologies and serves as an attempt to counteract the essentialist and reductive tendencies inherent in the colonial premeditated system of

ideational reversals. However, because Bhabha contends that the colonial relations of domination and knowledge are not held in a comprehensible way, he indicates that its discursive system may generate a dispersed and variously positioned native who by employing the terms of the dominant ideology in an inappropriate manner is able to get involved in or subvert this system of mental tools. In Bhabha's amplified interpretation of colonial texts, we grasp how hybridity reveals the oscillation and 'ambivalence' at the very foundation of conventional conceptions of authority, where the discourse of colonial authority is stripped of its general command of meaning and finds itself exposed to deep-seated traces of the language of the other, opening up space to the critic to mark out complex movements of mutations and assimilations. The linguistic and diverse features of the native world view are in this manner inscribed in and interwoven with the alien language and by extension the general principles of colonial discourse. In this view, as Bhabha expounds, "when the words of the master become the site of hybridity – the warlike sign of the native – then we may not only read between the lines, but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain"(1994,p.104).

Bhabha's significant argument is to demonstrate how hybridity and the useful dialectic it encompasses may well be viewed as the characteristic feature and imperative actuality of the post-colonial condition, conferring a language of critique that makes it possible to eschew the recurrence of the colonial binary system of representation and give rise to positive facets of cultural exchange and collaboration. Such vital experience of cultural relationships allows the development of that form of "'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism." This expounds how "hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty"(Bhabha,2001,p.34). In fact, the main impulse behind Bhabha's view of hybridity is to firm up relations of intercultural dialogue rather than politics of cultural differences predicated upon relations of antagonism. This mode of critique is important because it makes it possible to transcend the different grounds of opposition and bring forward a useful space of containment and collaboration. The point at stake here, as Bhabha aptly puts it, is to open up "a space that can accept and regulate differential structure of the moment of intervention

without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction”. (2001,p.37)

This moderate pattern of cultural hybridity is well described by Achebe in relation to the complex cultural background of his family. In his autobiographical essay, “Named for Victoria, Queen of England”, Achebe presents interesting incidents about his family’s religious background where he focuses on specific instances of the impact of colonial values and institutions on the socio-cultural relationships of his Igbo community. He shows how some Igbo groups who had chosen to adopt the colonial culture and religion – some of his ancestors were included – could find sometimes better alternatives to their previous traditional mode of life. He describes the first experiences of this cultural interaction in his village where the people were definitely split into converted Christians and pagans, where his family members, himself included, were taught to despise the beliefs and traditions of the heathen or even “the people of nothing” as they used to call them. By far this generation of Igbo Christians was exploited by the white colonizer to promote the missionary teachings whose plans were intended to demean the value of African traditions, to strip the African of his indigenous principles and hence propel him to despise everything that is traditional and African. Distinctively enough, Achebe shows within the same sphere of this cultural clash strong scenes of cultural co-existence. He informs us about his father who had become a devoted adherent of the church in the early years of his youth and how he had been chosen as a missionary teacher there, at the same time as his maternal grandfather was the titled elder who first permitted the Christians to hold their religious rituals and prayers in his compound. But, regardless of their different religious convictions, the two relatives could maintain their family ties in a manner which Achebe views as ‘deep, moving and perplexing’. They had found no difficulties in dealing with each other across the different beliefs and cultural traditions which were commencing to signal the disintegration of the authority of the collective spirit in the traditional community.

In fact, Achebe has not gone through the knotty conditions of “spiritual void and mental stresses” in which the African intellectuals are entangled, Achebe honestly expresses his fascination with the intellectual richness he finds in the interaction of

cultures (1975, p.67) – at the overlapping point where the Igbo tradition interweaves with the colonizing culture. In the same locale one can find the hymn-singing and Bible-reading filling the sphere of the Christian compounds and the non-Christian kinsmen who were holding their pagan rituals and offering sacrifices to their several gods. However, in his infancy Achebe found himself immersed in the mode of life of both worlds without discerning the possible distressing experiences of spiritual anguish that such cultural composite may give rise to. Achebe's discussion of his village as a paradigmatic milieu of cultural interaction reflects in one important sense his resolute support of the aspects it stands for; cultural dynamism and resilient social relationships. He informs us about his fascination with the important cultural meanings and values that can be drawn from this innovative act of "evangelical dialogue between proselytizing Christianity and the Igbo religion" (1975, p.90). Achebe's critical view of some limitations in his people's culture is to be taken, then, not as a form of alienation from its worldview but as a "necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully"(1975,p.68). The overlapping concern in this synthesizing perspective is with arriving at an understanding of the changing aspects of the communal cultural existence as it is situated between the substantive traditional order of the bygone times and the emergent values carried by "an embittered history", to use Achebe's words in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Achebe's fictional society is also a milieu of complex cultural interaction, and this prevents the reader's identification of post-colonial culture in terms of a simple logic of binary opposition. Achebe conceives African cultural identity as a project that seeks to represent Africa within its contemporary context that sets forth the complex cultural sources attending to the development of its communities. Achebe's self-conscious narrators, from Odili's fragmented and immature narratives of the nation in *A Man of the People*, to his more self-critical narrators in *Anthills*, are presented to us in terms of their intricate relationships with the convoluted circumstances of their hybrid communities. The narratives evince a complex state of "double consciousness"⁽¹⁾ in many of the community's facets of life: the overriding challenge of the novels' narrators lies in conceiving of the inextricable cultural ambivalence in which the post-

colonial emergent subject is caught because of the overwhelming cultural heritage imposed by, or adopted from, the Western institutions. This complex idea of the multi-positioned post-colonial individual presented in Paul Gilroy's notion of "double consciousness" is pertinent to the hybrid cultural fabric of Achebe's post-colonial communities as much as it views the "intermixture of a variety of distinct cultural forms" as a vital possibility that can overcome the different forms of social antagonism and cultural tensions that mark the post-colonial period. (Gilroy,1993,p.7) The main idea that emerges here is that culture can never be confined in an enclosed area of some particular groups and their social concerns. It is an integral part of the larger core of the nation that belongs to and encompasses all its individuals.

In *Anthills*, the presentation of characters is irrevocably connected to the historical, cultural and social circumstances which determine, to some extent, their lives and cultural consciousness. This notion of collective consciousness is brought to the surface in a range of different stylistic tools to denote an all-encompassing or inclusive narrative voice, providing in such a way both an objective and a critical interpretation of character or situation since the writer constructs the general fabric of the main narrative through interweaving the personal narratives of the three protagonists themselves. The anxious need to identify with and overhaul the community's diverse realities overlaps with the issues of personal representation and self-fulfillment which also preoccupy the frequent conversations and revelations of the central characters. In dealing with the main intellectual reflections set forth in this novel one cannot fail to find out about the stylistic tools followed by Achebe to combine the narrative structure of his novel to the unique experiences of socio-cultural transformations and tensions inherent in the realities of the communities he writes about.

Indeed, Achebe's last novel demonstrates a considerable focus on the complex relationship between the individuals' particular concerns and the socio-cultural circumstances of their nation. Like *A Man of the People* (which is dealt with in relation to narrative mode in the previous chapter), *Anthills of the Savannah* displays a structure that consists of contriving a specific mode of narrative appropriate to the transitional historical conditions and complex events portrayed by the writer, and which is created in such a way as to support the main orientation of the novels'

discursive material. Achebe's most committed notion of the importance of narrative in recreating and reclaiming the nation's culture is vindicated in the carefully worked out structure of this novel. He shifts the abstract intellectual debate of the novels' themes into the literary level by making his protagonists identify with the little world of the people and espouse their just causes through the act of writing and narrating the land's history, and calling upon the reader to follow their continuing growth towards a higher sense of cultural identification. These intellectuals have no inclination to attain positions of leadership, but are typical representatives of the élite class, the "been-to's" who perceive themselves as vigorous and enlightened agents who can question and inveigh the corrupt policies of their leaders. In presenting these characters through a first-person-point-of-view mode of narration, Achebe has the main intention to involve them in the nation's situation and to propose a mediating ground between their aspiration to particular individual achievements and their proclaimed objective to be recognized as vital members of their community, while also revealing at the beginning of the novel's events a certain level of dishonesty and uncertainty about their political and cultural impulses.

In fact, many incidents of the novel are constructed around the issue of narration's social function and its relation to the development of the nation's realities. This major role is aptly carried by the novel's self-conscious narrators who attempt to embed their personal stories in the multifaceted experiences of their community. For Simon Gikandi, this deliberate intervention on the part of the main characters to narrate the nation's transitional histories serves precisely to substantiate both the literary and ideological connotations of Achebe's novels (Gikandi refers here to *Anthills of the Savannah*):

(Achebe) will not share the now common belief that narrative is no longer an adequate figure for plotting the human trajectory in society (...). On the contrary, Achebe is seeking ways of establishing new forms of narration that might have the power to liberate us from the circle of our post-colonial moment; he seeks a narrative that speaks about, but also transcends its historical imperatives.

(1991b, pp.119-120)

The narrators, Ikem, Chris, and Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*, are all preoccupied with rearticulating and recollecting their past experiences along the changing conditions of their community, seeking to confer upon them more wide-

ranging implications in light of the emergent social circumstances they are part of, and to ascertain the individual choices they have taken on in relation to their position towards the underprivileged people. They learn how to revise their pretentious ideas through a genuine association with the different social groups whose voices are not heard by the agents of power. This inclusion of the little happenings of the common people is closely interrelated to the thematic material and stylistic aspect of the novel. The use of multiple first-person narrators in this novel enables the writer to evince the cultural tensions of the present. Through this mode of narration, Achebe makes the novel's protagonists value the right of every social class and group of people to have their own version of the nation's story, including women, the underprivileged, and the land's ancestors. In one important sense, Achebe uses the technique of multiple narrators to reach particular discursive effects similar to those intended by his explicit thematic intentions.

As this chapter will show, Achebe's intellectuals, as narrators, are vital figures in the social, political and cultural issues they are telling us about; they confirm their intellectual and cultural authority as modern story-tellers by bringing forward the ways in which they start to influence the course of the events which they attempt to overhaul and construe. They are very conscious that the contemporary experiences in which their community is caught are constructed around multifaceted cultural aspects which cannot be figured out and evoked in terms of simplistic and absolute contentions. And so, bringing forward the complete story of their nation is regarded by these intellectuals not just a mere communicative means intended to portray the circumstances attending to the new society and drawing some highly-structured statements about them but also of embedding one's own story within the concrete stories they tell of their people. A remarkable correspondence was thus recognized in their stories between their proclaimed ideas and their actual quest for social change; they refuse to stand as cynical observers and passive intellectuals who apathetically eschew the perils of social and political involvement. Instead, they learn how to orient their intellectual concerns towards their country's conditions that they can also put into a self-conscious narrative that can offer them an alternative orientation of thoughts.

As a whole, Achebe's last novel sets forth the possibility of a paradigmatic conception of the nation that seeks to come out with a genuine quest for socio-cultural reintegration of all groups involved. Much of the narrative overshadows the gradual development and progression of the intellectuals' self-awareness – Ikem, Chris, and Beatrice – and their ardent desire to learn of the value and integrity of the ordinary people of their community. For example, Neil ten Kortenaar argues that the explicit thematic concern of this novel is that the protagonists must realize the social and cultural value of ordinary people, but the whole events are constructed around the way in which they attain this objective than upon the real life of these people (1993,p.62). In effect, Achebe attempts to build up a constructive ground of cultural compromise and inclusion, one that can be realized through the process of mediating between the community's different socio-cultural groups. Through revealing events, the writer makes his intellectuals bring into work a positive dialectic of cultural relations, a dialectic that seeks to conjure the different and dispersed parts of the nation's polyvalent culture, and to draw values from them at the national level. This persistent preoccupation demonstrates that the practices of participation could bring about a remarkable level of collective consciousness, a new born ethos of common order predicated on a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural convergence of interests. The Achebean hybrid society requires the ratification and rearrangement of the basic human fabric of socio-political relations that Fanon describes as 'national politics' manifested in rendering the nation's issues and causes themselves the immediate concerns of all its individuals. And this can be attained only through making the people view themselves as an integral part of the general fabric of their nation.

In this light *Anthills* can be read as a fictional extension of particular themes dealt with in *The Trouble With Nigeria*: it is both a praise and a satire of the elite's contemporary disposition, developed through the typicality of elite characters who occupy decisive positions in the political apparatus, which is intended to urge them to modify their perceptions of themselves and the community they live with. Chris and Ikem in particular come to learn, even if belatedly, that "this world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented"(2001,p.222, all subsequent page references in this study are from this edition). They realize that

political and social reform will have to take account of the people in some realistic and convenient way than simply as a rational or romantic reflection of an élite with a singular, pretentious democratic set of principles. Because it is only when the people are themselves taking a vital part in the nation's formation that the project of social development can be substantive and enduring. In *The Trouble With Nigeria*, Achebe appears preoccupied with the Nigerian quest for political, social, and cultural unity, the national dream which was used as a political and cultural delusion by those in charge of its destiny. "Perhaps it was an unrealistic dream at the best of times, but some young, educated men and women of my generation did dream it"(Achebe,1983,pp.5-6), writes Achebe bleakly of the lost dream of the Nigerian nation. Since this socio-cultural quest has continued to preoccupy Achebe's fundamental tasks as a committed writer, one of the pivotal issues raised in the novel is how this knotty question of the nation's culture can be brought to the fore through the novel's stylistic aspects and possibly resolved in imaginary terms: what narrative strategies can be deployed by the authors' crucial need to experiment with different forms of the nation's cultural representation?

Achebe's last novel shows that literature is not simply an aesthetic practice, but has significant impact in addressing the problematic issues of society, and the inscription of national identity: instilling an ethos of cultural belonging and integrity. Indeed, *Anthills of the Savannah* is most distinguishable in all of Achebe's novels in its reliance on the traditional art of story-telling as performed by its protagonists while presenting their account of the unrecorded and repressed truths of the nation. Achebe works diligently and conscientiously to construct this relation between the novel's form of narration and the oral tradition genre through the significant role of story-teller as presented to us by the elder from Abazon. In *A Man of the People*, Odili, the protagonist and narrator, stands fearlessly in front of a massive gathering and tells Nanga challengingly: "I come to *tell* your people that you are a liar"(p.140). In this brief informative statement, Achebe points out the fundamental role which story-telling can play in social development. Particularly, in *Anthills*, the art of story-telling embedded with the main narrative and reproduced in the novel genre is not a mere formal device in artistic creating, but a vigorous expression of the social tensions to

‘survive’, to ‘resist’ and even an imperative cultural act to create awareness in those deprived people to confront power and to point out the legitimacy of their rights in benefiting from the nation’s wealth. In a more explicit sense, the story serves as one inherent aspect of the people’s socio-cultural enlightenment. The act of narrative defies those in control of people’s lives because its authentic discourse opens up a space for truthful realities and clear-cut meanings.

In the novel, the Abazon elder, one of Achebe’s most traditional and memorable figures, views the cultural activity of story-telling as a paramount one in the whole fabric of the community’s existence because it offers its practitioners the possibility to subvert the falsehood of history and withstand all forms of orthodoxies. In his amplified speech on the crucial relationship between the artistic tradition of story-telling and communal organization, the old man refers appreciatively to the God Agwu who stands as the supporter of the land’s story-tellers. He says that Agwu uses his gifts of judgment and regulation steadily to serve the interests of his compound (p.125). According to the Abazonian elder, the reason that induces Agwu to hold the storyteller to carry the task of serving the community brings to the surface the main claims of many past events that are inherent in every account as it is intended by its narrator to set up a subversive attitude with regard to a particular oppressive force. To expound his talk about part of the land’s mythical tradition, the old man presents the story of the tortoise and the leopard and discerningly draws an important analogy between the real conflict of the people of Abazon facing the despotic head of state and the imaginary event of the struggle between the weak tortoise and the tough leopard. Traditionally, the two animals are frequently used as fictional types that are meant to refer to certain social behaviors. The Abazonian story-teller says that the tortoise does not show any form of fighting, yet finds it important to leave behind clear traces which may make others understand that he shows resistance against the ferocious leopard.

The story-teller makes a useful link between the traditional story of the tortoise and the dramatic experience of his people’s helpless struggle against Sam. Their opposition to the authoritarian policy of the head of state seems to achieve no significant objective, “except with the hope that those who come after us will be able to say: True, our fathers were defeated but they tried”(p.123). What is highlighted in the old

man's well-constructed and enthusiastic narration is the moral unsteadiness on the part of the highly-positioned intellectuals of Bassa, the fictional capital city, who appear at the beginning of the events apathetic towards the repressive policy of the military regime. For bringing to light the reality of their poor conditions which are made worse and worse because of their antagonistic relationship with the military oppressor, the Abazonian old man and his peaceful delegation are detained under the indictment of threatening the country's security. In the very act of re-narrating the old man's allegorical story of the leopard and the tortoise in the context of his activist speech to Bassa University students, Ikem points out the instructive and enlightening role that can be played by story-tellers, a role which constitutes a real menace for those leaders who are used to keeping their people away from the affairs of the state. He contends that story-tellers are deemed as a threat to all those desirous individuals who are obsessed with the act of controlling and dominating, they increase the fears of all those pretentious advocates of human rights – in government, in the different religious centres of worship, in political assemblies, in the prestigious university halls or wherever(p.146). Ikem's adaptation of the traditional story to the circumstance of the detention of the Abazonian delegation expounds why some stories of the oppressed people or those who defend them are kept away from the communal attention. The truths and realities contained in the little happenings of the people's story carry a serious intimidation to the authoritarian leader who shows no preoccupation with the daily realities of the people. What emerges from this act of telling and re-telling the people's story is a form of opposition, a resolute attempt to subvert the government's alleged myths of social development and good leadership with genuine accounts of the drought that comes over the Abazonian province.

The art of storytelling hence does not present itself simply as an artistic soothing quest granted to inspired writers who draw on its wealthy material particularly to fine-tune the stylistic fabric of their art, but as a primary cultural testimony that conjures the community's authentic experiences and the common mores which organize the everyday living of its people. Generally, the fairy tales which were narrated around the tribe's common fireplace in primordial time were intended to serve a high communal function; they were constructed and told for the main objective of conveying group

traditions and history for the young generation as much as to present adequate orienting principles to deal with the burdens of recurring predicaments which could strike the community. They promoted the ethics and values of a collective way of life and a shared destiny that are intended to generate an enduring unity at the level of people's behaviours and beliefs. Fanon's description of the storyteller's communal function opens up a wide-ranging role for culture: "The storyteller responds to the expectations of the people through (searching) for new models, national models, apparently on his own, but in fact with the support of his audience"(2004, pp.174-175). What we grasp here is a culture as a general embodiment of communal conditions that is generated out of this interactive relationship between the story-teller (intellectual) and the people through recurring adaptations or approximations as the storyteller finds himself many times entailed to restructure and reproduce his stories according to the people's current conditions (since the community's beliefs and behaviours could endure substantial states of permutation because of particular historical or social conditions).

Achebe's use of the novel as a form of self-identification entails a quest for a different mode of narrative that is typically African, a complex aesthetic experience which foregrounds the cultural strength and richness of the primordial society as it is carried in the rhetorical narratives of its proverb, stories and myths. This characteristic link between narrative and culture constitutes the main orientation of Achebe's development of his thematic concerns. In his last two novels, one can observe how his selection of self-conscious narrators is intended to point out the great value of the story and the act of telling in the course of social development and cultural construction. In Achebe's words, it is through this communal cultural act of telling stories that "the ancestors are sending us signals from the long history and experience of bygone days about the meaning of life, the qualities we should cultivate and the values that are important" (1988,p.93). In view of this functional aspect of cultural correspondence between different creative generations which has helped to carry the writer's Igbo culture into his literary writings, Achebe expounds how Nigerian writers in general are more inclined to create a mode of writing that is more associated with the artistic legacy of the land's storytellers rather than with the purely and distinctively

literate tradition of the Western novel. The traditional story-teller was not an alienated person who was concerned merely with the aesthetic implications of his artistic material and the amusement it presents to his audience but also with the way he can employ the ancient truths contained in those stories to reorient particular cultural experiences or social realities to the time he is living in.

This characteristic function of the traditional story-teller is not abandoned in the complex structure of *Anthills of the Savannah* even though the act of telling the land's stories has been carried to the broad-based urban locale and into more elevated levels of poetic and literary writing as it is artfully handled by Ikem, the surrealist poet and writer, to answer the larger preoccupations of the community's present conditions. In the same sense, we see Beatrice paying tribute to the "barely literate carpenters and artisans" of the town market who have the habit of accompanying their daily craft with the amusing activity of story-telling. They draw on traditional allegorical stories about animals and birds and use them for entertainment or general moralistic teaching. Likewise, the leader of the Abazonian delegation expresses his great appreciation of Ikem's writings and stories in his editorial newspaper for the persistent support and enlightenment they offer to the ordinary people of his country in general and the people of his native region in particular. Due to his outstanding command of the traditional art of oratory and story-telling, the elder convincingly and artfully carries the story of his people to the modern context of the capital city. He has come to Bassa with his delegation to bring to light the miserable conditions that his people face because of the drought. The envoys present their petition and request to meet the president, but they are not given access to the enclosed cabinet of His Excellency, for their predicament is seen as a threat to the stability of the government.

Through the artful rhetoric of the elder, Achebe has combined the realistic mode of the novel form with the oratory mode of story-telling which enables his thematic concerns to contain the different cultural experiences of the present by drawing heavily on the resources of Igbo wisdom. The interrelationship of the story-rhetoric and literature brings to the surface a highly-structured narrative since the writer has deliberately woven the two imaginative modes of expression to develop his major themes in the novel, presenting thus this literary composite as a substantial cultural

repository that endows the reader with an abundant material about the field of artistic discourse in the Igbo community as well as the larger Nigerian community. Achebe then has embedded the traditional verbal rhetoric within the literate form of the novel, creating thus an appealing artistic movement between two levels of imaginative expression. From this perspective, the act of re-narrating individual and collective stories through intellectual story-tellers entailed for Achebe a vigorous effort to integrate the oral genre into the narrative-line of this novel as way to draw an adequate correspondence between the authentic didactic tone of ancient truths and the critical implications of elitist reflection. What emerges then in Achebe's hybrid narrative is a different form of story-telling: stories are told from the point of view of self-conscious narrators who with imagination, intuition and rationality bring to the surface the miserable experiences of those ordinary people who are denied even the simple right of expressing their woes and suffering. Bringing forward the community's primordial stories through Western-educated intellectuals (and also through a traditional elder who represents the people's culture) thus induces the writer to both transliterate them into the new contexts of the present as well as conjure their socio-cultural implications into the complex circumstances of its modern heroes.

The strength of these story-tellers is not related only to their good command of the narrative's events; rather, we see them playing a major role in the circumstances they record and stand as the custodian of those memorable experiences which are significant to the general enlightenment of the community. The movement between the past and the present events in this novel requires the writer many times to depend on the art of story-telling: most of the incidents are presented to us by narrators (Ikem and Chris) who have died before the resolution of the last events of the country's turbulent political experience. These narrators are modelled by the past experiences which have influenced their personal and intellectual choices as much as by the present circumstances which they try to have their hold on. It is this abiding quest to mediate between the past ideals of his heroes and the convolutions of their present experiences which the writer chooses to engage with at the level of his thematic orientation and narrative structure. But this passionate concern on the thematic and aesthetic implications carried by narratives in general points to the issue of meaning and

representation which constitutes the particular discourse of culture that preoccupies Achebe's post-colonial writings; plainly put, the dogmatic romantic narratives of nationalist thought, which alleged that the developing nation would present itself as a real embodiment of political, economic and cultural sovereign entity, stand helpless in front of the complex imperatives of the present new conditions. Yet, Achebe's pronouncements on the power of narrative in changing the community's conditions do not concur with the postmodernist sceptical tendency which expresses its dissatisfaction with the utopian and rhetorical discourses of liberation; he does not consent to the reductive postulation that narrative is "no longer an adequate figure" for designing one's own course in life or scheming the general conditions of society. In the postmodernist thought, narrative is deemed only as a form of fictional construct that can never present an alternative order, for "there is nothing to look forward to: we are struck within our circle. The line is now enclosed within a circle"(Said, 1986,p.50).

This view does not find support in Achebe's narratives. Achebe's literary preoccupations are centred on creating different forms of narration that may offer adequate directions of thoughts and meanings that allow his characters to deal with the overlapping and convoluted experiences attending the postcolonial stage. The writer defends this view through embedding the traditional story in the main narrative of his novel. He presents a good example of the story's continual capacities to adapt its functional task to the changing and shifting needs of its milieu and addressees in Ikem's lecture to the students' community, "The Tortoise and the Leopard" – an intellectual reflection on the significance of resisting oppression, a creative revision of the elder's traditional tale. In fact, Ikem's adaptation of the elders' story into the context of his activist speech presents a form of cultural correspondence between two different expressive modes. By making manifest the oral tale in the rhetorical discourse of a modern intellectual, the writer makes his hero bring to light a concealed and suppressed cultural legacy of his indigenous land, Abazon, and in this way conjuring it to the present setting as a significant cultural reference for social redemption. This act of carrying the allegorical tale of the Abazonian elder into the context of political and social tensions which afflict the present community necessitates from its modern practitioner, Ikem, both to displace it from its ancient

setting and to consider its intellectual worth for contemporary collective consciousness. By far Ikem's act conforms to the creative principles that are generally related to the transmission of this artistic genre to the different audiences who understand its cryptic motifs and didactic morals. Abiola Irele (2001) informs us that every endowed individual in the traditional community who was versed in the art of story-telling could employ his creative potentials to reinterpret and go over the tales of his culture and to come out with new accounts, new rhetorical registers, and even new implications that can render this form of imaginative expression as a living communal construct. Crucially, Ikem relies on the critical and creative tools of his intellectual experience, derived from the foreign education and culture he has received, to bring to the surface the indigenous cultural legacy he had learned about from the elder through the expressive and communicative function carried in the verbal arts of his native land. Within the fabric of this particular cultural composite Ikem builds up his own analysis about the hazardous political conditions which surround the historical framework of his reformist lecture, in his intentional act of retelling the Abazonian traditional story he is propelled by the critical and edifying function contained in every story of his people: the anxious need to triumph over the government's repressive practices in relation to the issues of social representation and freedom of expression.

Characteristically, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, we are given stories that are intended to influence the audience's perceptions of the conditions they live in and prompt them to reflect upon their ideas and principles. In attempting to understand the circumstances of their community along the stories they narrate, these intellectuals need to ponder on the way their past experiences have determined the circumstances of their present and their social disposition, to go over their early ostentatious intellectual attitudes in order to arrive at a rational explanation for the choices they have taken on as highly-positioned intellectuals cut off from the daily lives of their people. Through the useful development of their different stands towards the shifting conditions that relate them with their people, Achebe sheds light on the prevalent contradictions and differences that can be included within the general fabric of national culture. In displaying the cultural strength of the story and presenting it as a living communal construct, the writer wants to draw a vital cultural correspondence between the past

ancient truths and the present emergent values. He uses the old man as a spokesperson to accentuate the dialectic nature of the traditional stories. For in addition to its historical and educative features, the old man stresses the dialogic peculiarity carried in the ideas and principles that any story sustain, “for what is true comes in different robes”, says the old man (p.118). In this statement, the writer appears to draw a useful distinction between the utopian narratives of the early nationalists where the emphasis is put on the notion of the nation’s homogeneity and the post-independence narration which comes to grips with the diverse and different perspectives inherent in the general outlook of the new society. In *Anthills of the Savannah* the narrative clearly borders on the dialogic character attributed to the functional role of the story presented to us through the amplified discourse of the old man. Specifically, the main characters in the novel meditate constantly on the ways their individual cultural identities have been constructed, and in some way determined, by the very historical experiences and intellectual factors that have engendered the heterogeneous and convoluted state of the postcolonial community. The writer attempts to bring forward the ideological and cultural aspects of this complex condition in the general structure of the novel’s narrative. In the process of telling the novel’s incidents from the dissimilar, and even conflicting, perspectives of the three main characters – Ikem, Chris, and Beatrice – we are presented with multiple narrative voices which the writer artfully employs in his novel to bring to the surface the fragmentation and contradictions which inform the post-independence situation. This view is vindicated by Achebe in an interview with Anna Rutherford; he contends that he depends on different perspectives and voices at the level of narration in his last novel to point out that the contemporary experiences cannot be expounded within “naïve simplifications”. As he says, “life (must be accepted) with all its complexities” (Rutherford, 1987,p.6).

So then, Achebe presents that time space of cultural multiplicities and complexities at the level of theme development and also at the level of narrative mode which displays different consciousnesses and perspectives. Through the different views and reflections evoked in the accounts of his three protagonists, Achebe is attempting to call to mind a set of intellectual views and ideologies that bring to light a particular perspective of the whole era. The Russian literary critic and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin

states in relation to the link between the novel's discourse and its mode of narration that "(T)he speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue and his words are always ideologemes." (1981, p.333) In *Anthills of the Savannah* the writer attempts to reflect the community's different predicaments in the complex makeup of the novel's narrative. The whole narrative is presented through intentional shifts between different sub-narratives constructed by a number of self-conscious narrators participating in the representation of their own personal stories as they are woven with the realities of the whole community. In fact, Achebe's adoption of multiple discourses and narratives in the novel expounds in one way or another his intellectual orientation in dealing with the fundamental theme of national cultural identity; through the writer's artful employment of different voices in bringing together the many disjointed sub-stories and incidents of the text's main story, the novel presents itself as a rhetorical and critical discourse which embodies a compelling cultural dialectic. It is this structural design of a plurality at the level of narrative voices that allows the writer to develop his thematic material in a most artful way. This idea concurs with Timothy Brennan's significant analogy between the heterogeneous pattern of the nation and the plurality of styles that the novel may comprise. This critic has explained that the evolution of the novel as a distinctive imaginative mode of writing "accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the "one, yet many" of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles" (1989, p.8).

In *Anthills*, the reader can grasp the writer's thematic orientations through examining his approach of applying the "dialogic" mode of narration: the Bakhtinian principle that constructs the novel's mode of narration around multiple voices and consciousnesses. Theoretically speaking, dialogism is used to refer to that concurrent existence of many forces or ideas brought into intense relationship through the process of stasis, fusion and modification. Along the probable levels of variance between the forces of consistency and those of change, there is the possible development of a state of mediation that can take in all the conflicting elements of this experience. Michael Holquist views this notion of non-absoluteness in Bakhtin's dialogism as an essential multiplicity in any human mode of thought. In a most specific meaning, as Holquist

explains, dialogism has not to be taken as a form of binarism where the perceiver focuses on drawing basic distinctions between particular categories. Instead, this mode of perception “enlists the additional factors of situation and relation” that may present these binaries in a non-oppositional state (Holquist,2002(199),p.22). Keeping this statement in mind, we deem it important to draw on Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism”, or the dialogic fabric of novelistic discourse to discuss Achebe’s use of heterogeneous narratives as a stylistic device which enables him to develop his critical view of postcolonial culture, an all-encompassing mode of perception which subverts all systems of thought which are predicated upon the oppositional presumptions of categorization and splitting up. In fact, Bakhtin’s thought of dialogism raises significant questions about the authority of any mode of perception that presents itself in absolute terms. His remarks about dialogism can be found in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (PDP)*. Bakhtin depends on the hard-working narratives of Dostoevsky to develop his discussion of dialogism. He considers him as the first genuine novelist who has brought forward a well-structured ‘polyphonic novel’, a most creative and a critical approach of representation which the novelist contrives to bring forward an unparalleled mode of visualizing the human socio-cultural existence in the fictional world. In exploring this idea of ‘polyphony’ in Dostoevsky’s novels, Bakhtin explains how the novels’ events are constructed around a number of interactive consciousnesses or a combination of multiple voices which do not seem to yield completely to the finalizing presuppositions of the authorial intentions or the firmly structured boundaries of the omniscient narrative voice.

According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky’s utilization of multiple narrative voices stands as the basic feature of a dialogical principle which may transcend the confined semantic framework of the monologic text, wherein the established values of communal existence and creative impulses of socio-cultural life are presented through the fixed design of a single, prevailing consciousness or perspective. Bakhtin criticizes the single-toned orientations of monological works, a quality which impedes the author from grasping the requirements of unconventional meanings and practices in the social sphere as well as the intrinsically multi-stranded directions of human life in general. In this ground, Bakhtin draws on the multi-voicedness of Dostoevsky’s novels

to illustrate how the dialogic character of social reality can be carried into the complex narrative structure of the novel. Bakhtin views human consciousness as a disjointed whole which is constantly positioned in continuous experiences of change and adjustment along other consciousnesses, a state which can be projected in the novel only through a complex use of multiple narrative voices. This explains how the polyphonic text presents itself as an adequate narrative mode that allows the writer to draw faithfully on the complexities and inconsistencies of the social and cultural world as a whole.

Bakhtin argues that the dialogic principle can be observed in the course of the dialogues that occur between the novel's different characters, the discursive interaction between the author's and his hero's ideas, and also the internal dialogue that brings to the surface the hero's inner thoughts and consciousness. In view of this, the author builds up his fictional world not through a set of secluded characters, but precisely through interactive characters that exchange their point of views and intersect intensely in the unfolding of the events. So, following the writer's creative contours, those characters are not presented as finished visions which reflect exactly the authorial ideological dispositions but also as independent subjects who bring to the fore different thoughts from those of their creator. In effect, Bakhtin designs a hero who is occupied with the ultimate objective of gaining a certain level of self-awareness through extending himself / herself to other consciousnesses and other perspectives about the external world. In a crucial passage, Bakhtin writes (1984,p.32):

(...)consciousness in Dostoevsky's world is presented not on the path of its evolution and growth, that is, not historically, but rather alongside other consciousnesses, it cannot concentrate on itself and its own idea, on the immanent logical development of that idea; instead, it is pulled into interaction with other consciousnesses. In Dostoevsky, consciousness never gravitates towards itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness. Every experience, every thought of a character is eternally dialogic, adorned with polemic, (...) open to inspiration from outside itself.

Thus Dostoevsky is not concerned with presenting his characters along a linear arc of social-historical development, but rather with making them endeavor to reach a certain level of self-awareness through direct involvement in a number of complex and unresolved situations with other consciousness. Dostoevsky's fundamental intention

here is directed towards the formation of a character's ideas (and views), ideas which are intended to influence other characters' views and attitudes, thus rouse them and make them react in dialogical terms. In this sense, these characters convey what Bakhtin identifies as an 'integral ideation position'. Accordingly, the hero is presented in Bakhtin's dialogism as a particular point of view on the world he / she lives in, as the set of accumulated ideas which allow a person to construe and evaluate both his / her position in the world and the influence of the total external reality on his / her perspectives. What emerges here is an important aspect of artistic representation which allows for a new and integral method of projecting a fictional character. The hero is constructed not as an isolated point of view adopting other characters' consciousnesses into itself, but as a plurality of points of view contrived in the process of the interaction between a number of consciousnesses. By far this dialogic relationship presents no support for a hero who seems to handle a whole reality in the ground of some accurate and finalized categories.

The dialogic principle of Bakhtin is evident in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. The writer presents his thematic material and characters through a hard-working plot. This is achieved partly through an artful shift from one first-person narrative to another in combination with the omniscient narrator technique. The reader can get the novel's whole story only through bringing together the different sub-stories which are presented from the point of view of the three main characters – Chris Oriko, the Commissioner for Information; Ikem Osodi, editor of the *National Gazette*; and Beatrice Okoh, Chris's girl friend and a Senior Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. The writer's use of a complex combination of the first person and third-person points of view lends the novel a particular sense of unpredictability which tends in one way or another to display the complexity of the intellectual debates the writer brings to the surface due to the vital interactions of the narrators' different perspectives. In depending on these different narrative voices, Achebe puts into scrutiny the two men's declared claims to represent the voice of the whole nation; the narrative presents the community's history from the diverse angles of its realities. What emerges here is a multi-stranded story which carries with it the community's apparent divergences and convolutions, not enclosed within the single-toned disposition of the nationalist

discourse. By presenting the events of his novel from the different perspectives of three narrators, Achebe is attempting to project the different tensions that afflict the nation's existence in the formal aspects of narration. Even though the three characters seem to shed light on the same issues – the upsetting realities of the growing nation, the social consequences of power abuse and repression, the anxious issue of national consciousness – their view and way of dealing with these vital matters is to be considered in the manner the narrators strive to achieve a certain level of social and cultural coherence in a degraded existence of which they are direct observers, and their anxious need to contrive an appropriate form of narration that can bring to the surface the fragmented moments of the postcolonial experience.

Achebe's choice of multiple points of view in his last novel induces the reader to think that no one's point of view is entirely satisfactory, and that to achieve a convincing interpretation, he/she is required to bring into synthesis the different views of the several narrators. In these terms, the reader of *Anthills of the Savannah* is made to recognize that only through a considerable combination and fusion of the different incomplete truths postulated by the three individuals' accounts the writer's critical intentions on the issue could be figured out and grasped. This narrative mode serves as an important stylistic device to reiterate the main themes of the novel, and also to shed light on the development and adjustment of the main characters' perspectives. In functioning through a set of recurring shifts in temporal contexts and narrative voices, and the movement from the wavering tone of the first-person to the authorial tone of the third person point of view, the writer has given himself a wider narrative space to depict the social development and mutations rendered by his characters. The writer emphasizes the importance of Chris's political common sense but he shows also its apparent limitations when compared with the genuine committed position that a most devoted intellectual has to play to soften the bitter conditions of the nation. Likewise, he reveals the demeaning influence of the political and social high status which considerably strips Chris of all sense of intellectual criticism. This results in confining him to the enchanting corridors of the government prestigious offices which make him at the beginning of the story totally unconcerned with the little interests of the larger group of the nation, i.e. the people. Achebe also sees Ikem's quixotic ideas of social

and political development as an essential component of the general socio-cultural politics that he writes about in his editorial writings. Equally, Chris' and Ikem's different ideas complement and harmonize Beatrice's feminist perspective, bringing forward a wide-ranging intellectual disposition which, in Achebe's dialogic conception, could generate adequate solutions to the different socio-cultural conflicts besetting the post-colonial nation.

In employing multiple narrative voices, Achebe is thus able to evade the firmly projected semantic boundaries which the monologic text dictates, presupposing a fixed set of meanings and a rigid framework of characterization. This narrative mode is an essential device in the total stylistics of *Anthills of the Savannah*, as it offers the writer different discursive orientations from which to examine the complex conditions of the post-colonial experience of culture. Accordingly, Achebe's novel is constructed around the irreducible principle of the polyphonic mode; it projects a cross-cultural society which is factually based on a vital interaction between its diverse groups and classes. This interaction among a number of narrative voices may be deemed as a key device to understand Achebe's discussion of culture, where the complete meaning of the novel's events can be grasped only when it is related to the different stories of the three protagonists. Indeed, the writer relies on the narrative fabric of his fictional text to contrive an adequate basis for the rejection of all forms of rigid thinking, and he presents in this way his notion of opening up the possibility of equal collective participation in the construction of the whole nation. Achebe's polyphonic text stands as a cultural act in itself: through its multiple voices, the writer gives opportunity to many silenced and repressed individuals to embed their own personal stories within the nation's story; it thereby reduces the socio-cultural schism between the underprivileged groups of the community and the Western educated elite. His text is constructed not only around the quixotic or the heroic stories of some idiosyncratic characters coming from fortunate socio-economic backgrounds, but also around the little happenings of the society's disadvantaged individuals like the urban workers, the peasants, and the taxi drivers who are more attached to the land's cultural traditions. Here, the protagonists' journey through diverse social settings and cultural registers is

viewed as a many-voiced narrative since the reader is presented with two or more different worldviews which are brought together within an intricate cultural condition.

So in reading Achebe's novel through Bakhtin's conception of dialogism, we can understand how his primary artistic strategy is oriented towards the main objective of developing his characters' perspectives, characters whose discourses and views come into sight only when they are put in direct contact with other characters' views. In these terms, the writer has succeeded in weaving his text's sub-stories by means of the polyphonic narrative mode since he can contrive along the unfolding of the novel's events a particular engagement in which the perspectives of his intellectual individuals are strengthened and even altered by the views of other social groups. In due course, Achebe's protagonists can understand the relationship between the social ideas they advocate as highly positioned intellectuals and the external reality of the larger community through this relation between different consciousnesses which is termed by Bakhtin as 'a dialogic event'. We are presented with complex characters that move in unpredictable situations of existence, situations which range between states of tension and exchange, hybridization and mutation. The various narratives in this text carry within the complex incidents they present 'living' dialogical experiences in Bakhtinian terms, and turn the novel into an amplified discussion about post-colonial culture. Though a hybrid set of cultural traditions is what is pursued in building up the foundations of a new nation, albeit on the apparent and poetic level, the ideas and actions of Achebe's intellectual characters work in opposition to this useful cohesive frame, this is displayed in the use of self-conscious narratives and utopian requests to bring to the surface the traumatic moments of the community's past happenings. Chris views the developing circumstances of the nation only in their direct effect on the constricted lives of Ikem, Sam and himself. Beatrice rebukes him for such a narrow view, and for the conviction that the collective history of the country can be summed up in the short-lived experiences of the three individuals, despite their high status and prominent role in the government apparatus. This view, for her, is burdened with personal impulses which are based on self-satisfaction and pride. With the influence of his friends' ideas on him, we see Chris defending the postulation that the history of the nation is a combination of multivalent and diverse stories which belong to the

community's entire memory, and not to some self-conceited intellectuals.(p.62) Achebe's artistic anxiety, then, is to shed light on the marginalized stories of the community's underprivileged groups and make them incorporated into the narratives contrived by the elite.

As we argue in this chapter, Ikem's, and Chris's zealous intentions to write about their nation's political and cultural tensions are prompted by their anxious need to define their own position in relation to the history of the whole community (Beatrice will recount the myths of the past traditions in the last chapter). In the course of their contact with other social groups (taxi drivers, urban workers and peasants), they come to comprehend that their political and social activism can achieve no significant or effective results if they will not include within its intellectual contour the pressing needs of the ordinary people. For the general understanding of this complex condition of the African post-independence situation, different systems and patterns of thoughts suggest different orientations of conduct and organization as to the reconstruction of the convoluted socio-cultural boundaries of the reformed nation. With reference to this state of heterogeneity at the level of representation tools or interpretation devices which is a typical feature of post-colonial experience, Edward Said invites us to think that one method of understanding "the commonest post-colonial debate is to analyze not its context, but its form, not what is said as how it is said, by whom, where, and for whom" (1986, p.45). This concern with form and little details is delineated by Chris's rationalization of the unsubstantial intellectual differences which continually involve him in unsympathetic debates with Ikem. He tells Beatrice that "there is nothing concrete on which Ikem and I quarrel. What divides us is style not substance. And that is absolutely unbridgeable"(p.112). In fact, their adoption of different intellectual orientations in approaching the prevalent predicaments of their community do not impede them from maintaining their passionate quest for nation-building and their genuine devotion in representing the dispossessed of the embittered African history. In what follows, we will analyse how the novel's protagonists and narrators are prompted to shift their positions from isolated witnesses and story-tellers to vigorous participants and, more particularly, how they come to recognize the reality of the common people when they are stripped of their privileged positions as the political turmoil reaches a

most hazardous phase. In this regard, we are going to discuss the way Achebe makes them go through a useful experience of self-examination through a sequence of revelations and conversions on which the strictly designed boundaries of individual and community, elite and people, are reconstructed both socially and culturally within a more dynamic principles of dialogue and mediation.

Crucially, Achebe presents the novel's critical debate on culture and social transformation through the writings and intellectual pronouncements of Ikem. As a well-versed poet and a most committed writer, this character is granted an abundant space to express the writer's ideas on the different issues discussed in this novel. Along Achebe's oeuvres, Ikem can be identified as his most memorable literary character bringing forward a well-elaborated intellectual outlook related to post-colonial issues. His intense reflections on his position as a highly positioned intellectual and his surrealistic notions of communal ethics and human relationships are displayed to us when he observes with an utter amazement the notable communal attachment that associates Elewa, his market girl-friend, with the taxi drivers that he meets accidentally on the street. He realizes that he cannot overlook his inexplicable feeling of envy towards their innocent honesty and truthfulness, "a stubborn sense of community" which can allow Elewa to begin so instinctively with the driver a jocularly friendliness within a few moments of intercourse (p.135). Symbolically, his apparent amazement towards such ordinary communal scene makes us question the truthfulness of his socio-cultural function as an editor of the government newspaper and as an allegedly committed literary artist in a society with which he is supposed to be familiar with all its little happenings and needs. Ikem can understand the implications of such concrete social experiences only when shifting them to the deep levels of his surrealistic thoughts. He begins to think about the possibility of being involved in these appealing ingenuous contexts of social contact that appear to combine the common people in more genuine and enduring relationships. Reflecting on the causal relationship between his intellectual status and the state of social estrangement he confines himself to, Ikem comes to realize how the individual's anxious quest for self-identification which he deems as an imperative precondition for social engagement, is attached to more complex issues of cultural meanings and

concernments: “What about renouncing my own experience, needs and knowledge ? but could I? I could renounce needs perhaps, but experience and knowledge, how ?”(p.136). Through these knotty questions the writer hints to the complex position of the African intellectual who has to work out a possible mediation between his / her ideas and experience and the daily lives of a traditionally-based community. Ikem’s bifurcated inquiries are related to the unremitting anxiety of the African intellectuals to include within the confined boundaries of their intellectual experiences and rationally-based ideas the interests of those excluded from the zones of power and privilege, and their unwavering concernment to build up within the contour of their activist programs an essential core of knowledge about the common conditions of their people who are in themselves the throbbing heart of the land’s history and culture. To achieve such quests Ikem needs to revise the notion of culture as a completely abstract system of static thoughts and behaviors because the general framework of its development is always related to a different and changing set of social and historical determinants. As a highly-educated intellectual, he needs, then, to take on a multi-stranded approach of analysis towards the complex historical experience of his African cultural background, a critical approach that embraces the idea that the cultural mores and ethics of any developing community are permanently interwoven.

The cultural and historical thought that arises from Ikem’s critical reflections has deeper and complex connotations, further than its direct allusion to its connection with the residual effects of the Western instruction and knowledge on the African psyche. For no rational cultural scholar can overlook how this assimilated foreign intellectual heritage has firmed up in the African intellectuals’ consciousness and thoughts a fusion of the meanings of class and culture, which works in many ways to bring about a distressing condition of discontinuity in the cultural experience of the post-colonial society. In her discussion of social relationships in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Lyn Innes has pointed to the most apparent breach between Ikem’s virtuous pronouncements about the actual rights of the common people and his insensitive dealing with them in some private situations. As Innes has pointed out, his ardent intellectual struggle to write about the poor lives of the dispossessed appear to be imprecise and vague because of his “lack of identification with them”.(1990,p.155) We see this, for

example, in his unreasonable refusal to let Elewa, his half-literate girl-friend, spend the whole night in his government flat. His pretense of making her leave his flat and go to her home in a taxi at midnight rather than staying the whole night in the government compound as a loose girl seems a little confusing and not really convincing to Elewa who is totally subjected to his powers. At the same time, his defense of the people's rights is seen in direct opposition to his estrangement from their simple world, an aspect which is revealed in his conceited statement that he is utterly "amazed" at the people's pure sense of "perceptiveness", and in his utter impression of enjoying the experience of reading books inside his car near the crowd in the marketplace, emblems of richness and learning which are out of their reach (Innes,1990, p.153). Although he is intellectually and artistically concerned with the anguish and misery of the poor and ordinary people and he uses overtly his writings to defend their rights against the despotic government, we see that the manner he deals with them, as being shown in the first events of the novel, is really inadequate and even absurd. For example, though the old man and his tribesmen look upon him with great pride and consider him as their 'brilliant son', we come to learn that Ikem has never paid a visit to his region, Abazon, since the time he left it to carry on his overseas education. Likewise, his manners with his lower-class girl-friend Elewa lack many of the nobility and kindness that he shows to Beatrice, with whom he excitedly discusses the import of his artistic writings since they share the same Western intellectual background.

Later in the novel, Ikem recognizes the existence of a certain social gulf between himself and the people that he cannot go beyond. He comes to learn that this severance from the people's world can be surmounted only through some artificial and unreal allegations of social and economic reform which evoke the typical ideological slogans of 'the people's useful concerns and affairs' when the people's real conditions are totally disregarded and the term 'public' is merely used as an impulsive expression for getting the support of the uneducated social groups. For Ikem, there is a kind of false pretension to admit that the intellectual person can all of a sudden abrogate all his /her experience and knowledge and be immersed in the ingenuous experiences of the ordinary people. As he puts it, there is no way to turn into an ordinary person except by adhering to some socialist ideas which depend on illusionary discourses of social

equality and homogeneity. So, even though he clings to his intellectual background, Ikem is sincerely prepared to lend a hand to all the poor who seek his help. As an artist who is well-versed in the rhetoric of words, Ikem expresses this idea in a most poetic image: “I have arms that reach out in all directions – a helping hand, a hand signaling for help. With one I shall touch the earth and leave another free to wave the skies”(p.136).

The image that is evoked here brings to the surface Ikem’s intellectual disposition in a metaphorical meaning. In literary terms, his dependence on the image of ‘earth’ and ‘skies’ to express his idea on the relationship between social classes can be read within the tradition of African poetry which attributes a particular significance to the rhetorical function of the “word”. Through the potent expressive dimension carried by the word, or “Nommo” (Janheinz, 1990, pp.124-126), the poet is given more artistic possibilities to contrive a fluid unity between spiritual and physical elements, endow the natural forces and the different things of human existence with living attributes, and so incorporate them into a specific and more meaningful reality that is intended by the poet. Jahn Janheinz’s *Muntu, African Culture and the Western World* (1990 (1958)), presents an important study about the cultural connotations inherent in this artistic element which characterizes the general aesthetic fabric of African poetry, an aspect which has been carried on even in the modern African poetry written in the acquired or imposed European languages. Janheinz points out that the African poet does not form the meaning of his /her text through the simple mode of description, but through conjuring a series of key images which can be related to a particular communal reality – for the African author; orator, story-teller or modern artist, knows that he / she can have a good influence on the thoughts of the audience only through the deep meanings and the fine-tuning arrangement of the images, through “the procreative force” of the word (1990,p.151). The poet turns the simple objects into appealing images; he/she invokes them within new meanings and contexts, and employs them to support the thematic material or the aesthetic template which he/she intends to present in his/her work. In the process of this rhetorical experience, the poet’s physical world is completely fused with the imaginary meanings carried in the images he/she creates: “Out of the sky, the birds, the parrots, the bells, silk cloths and

drums, out of a touch of drunkenness and wild endearments (...) I will build a world, my world with round shoulders”, writes Aimé Césaire (Césaire in Janheinz, 1990,p.153). What emerges from Césaire’s nice poetry is a good pattern of the way the African poet breaks up the different natural forces and things into a series of images which he interweaves within a new aesthetic fabric to serve a certain designed meaning inherent in the poet’s external world itself. This means that every image carries within itself a conventional meaning which is strengthened by the poet’s thematic material.

Certainly, Ikem’s word poetics presents a good pattern of the African tradition of poetry; he employs images of nature to develop his critical ideas, he manipulates and shifts them to certain level of surrealistic representation to grant them some sense of symbolic connotations. His images of “arms that reach all directions”, ‘earth’ and ‘skies’ do not border on the amplified explanations and arguments of the conversant intellectual, but on the beauty and the rhetoric of the poet’s words. The image as a whole does not explain Ikem’s thoughts in relation to the complex condition of the nation’s diverse cultures which seem to posit unbridgeable boundaries between its social classes. Certainly, Ikem is a type of a poet who is well-versed in the art of symbolic expression and the projected pattern he puts for the nation can be realized only in the imaginary world of metaphors. But still the implied meanings which can be grasped from the words ‘arms’ and ‘directions’ bring to the surface the main import of Ikem’s socio-cultural vision: the intellectual is no longer the indomitable leading actor who can reform all the conditions of the underprivileged social groups, he is himself caught in a distressing situation of vacillation between conflicting cultural consciousnesses and requires a new sort of social comradeship to rise out of his alienated cultural and social world. In the same vein, the different implied connotations carried by the image of the ‘sky’ and the ‘earth’ may be related to a more specific meaning when they are perceived in terms of Ikem’s critical social ideas. The poet’s figurative combination of the “earth” and “skies” presents an expressive image of an all-encompassing existence which brings together diverse cultural entities; this can be realized only through a genuine socio-cultural association between the initially estranged intellectuals and the subdued ordinary people.

At any rate, Achebe's view of socio-cultural relations as brought forward by Ikem's writings and debates does not present itself as a non-critical approach which advocates unrestrained principles of tolerance and pluralism and thus sidesteps the community's complex conditions which are engendered by the prevalent unsettling cultural tensions. Rather, it encompasses such conflicts within the notion of an inclusive culture that may put forward the possibility of forming the nation's entity across its different ethnic and social groups; it thus fosters a useful integrationist communal discourse – the dynamic correspondence between the nation's diverse cultural zones. Yet, in perceiving culture as a developing and a transforming discourse, Achebe is not thought to abrogate the tensions so happening or the states of cultural alienation felt by his alienated characters, neither does he allege to discount or disavow the negative effects of the historical contact between the African and the Western cultures. In this respect, the writer has shifted this debate on culture to the multi-stranded experiences of his protagonists. He presents to us self-conscious individuals whose primary concernment is to create constructive socio-cultural combinations out of the ramifications and contradictions inherent in the hybrid culture of their developing communities.

It is in these terms that Ikem's reflective interrogations on his own notions of self, community and socio-cultural purpose explain how the post-colonial African cultural identity encompasses the modern thesis of progress and transformation while preserving African traditional identities. African cultures become understood as national cultures through adopted discourses of modernity that fundamentally underscore constructions of African identity. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) and Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993) present important conceptions on the issue of nationalism as a notion evoking particular cultural conditions. Both Anderson and Chatterjee contend that the discourses advocating nationalism draw on the primordial worldview of social cohesion as much as they take up the Western tools of thought in order to take part in the modern systems of communal organization. Many theorists of nationalism defend the nation's dependence on the uniqueness of its cultural resources, religious principles, folk dialectics, rural communities – fundamentally on a romanticized primordial dispensation – to give emphasis to cultural distinctiveness and stimulate the

collective consciousness of its people. In his discussion of the development of the institution of nation-state in relation to the historical phases of third-world struggles, Anderson explains how the nationalist thoughts of anti-colonialism were a direct reproduction of the European patterns where the American and European nationalist histories were universally “modularly imagined” partly for the reason that the European languages used by those countries were part of the heritage of “imperialist official nationalism”(1991, p.113). In the developing countries, Anderson argues, the national elite class dedicate themselves to invigorating nationalist consciousness because they have generally received their schooling in Western institutions and enjoy a great interaction with the different aspects of modern Western culture, and in particular, with the thoughts of “nationalism, and nation-state” developed in the nineteenth century.(1991,p.116) In these terms, Anderson seems to postulate that all forms of national resistance against colonial powers derive their theories from the European political and intellectual system of thought.

Nationalism is then perceived as a ‘derivative discourse’, a re-appropriated model of resistance which is reliant upon the Western ideologies and languages. The expression ‘derivative discourse’ is employed deliberately by Partha Chatterjee as a subtitle to his book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986) which criticizes Anderson’s biased conception of Third-World nationalism, contending that the view of nationalism as a direct replica of Western ideas discounts the very aptitude of other societies to develop their own systems and philosophies of authority. Chatterjee expounds that the relationship between third-world and western nationalisms is built up within a complex factors of both assimilation and difference. He relates the distinction between Western and Eastern nationalism to the position of ‘culture’ as an influential constituent in the course of national self-identification. National culture as a derivative concept has evolved in the non-western countries in relation to the struggles of peoples and states for sovereignty, land, identities. Here, Chatterjee draws a useful distinction between nationalism as a political tendency which opposes colonial power, and nationalism as a cultural set of principles which allow groups to maintain their belief in their own history and cultural resources. A range of diverse theorists of nationalism stress that the supremacy of the Western

civilization is related to “the materiality of its culture, exemplified by its science, technology and love of progress. But the East is superior in the spiritual aspect of culture”(Chatterjee,1986,p.51). What is expressed here is an utter recognition of the Western supremacy at the material level and the prerequisite of replicating its patterns of advancement. However the need to adopt Western skills and means has been connected with the greater exigency to maintain cultural distinctiveness. In these terms, theorists of nationalism divide the sphere of institutions and systems of order into two distinctive fields, the material and the spiritual. The first includes the different means of material production and the field of governance, an important sphere of influence where the West has established its supremacy and imposed its model on colonized countries. On the other hand, the spiritual field, encompassing the fundamental features of cultural resources, is deemed as an autonomous body which can stand firm against the different influences of the colonial power (Chatterjee,1993,p.6). The inner domain of culture is recognized as the stirring power of national culture. The more there is an impulse to emulate Western developed means and practices in the material sphere, the greater the need to keep hold of the indigenous cultural worldview: “the search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture, adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness” (Chatterjee,1986,pp.1-2).

The post-colonial nation is then a concept that mitigates the intricate tensions between the Western material worldview and the inner field of the local culture, and between a coherent past and a fragmented present. Fanon’s dialectical postulation that “it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives” (2004, p.180) presents an incomplete thought or pronouncement when related to Chatterjee’s arguments. This statement can achieve its full-circled meaning when we add it to the concluding dialectic discourse of “On National Culture”: “And this dual emergence, in fact, is the unique focus of all culture” (Fanon, 2004,p.180), wherein culture can materialize within the constructive blend of the national and the global spheres. For rather than advancing a biased concern with one’s own local worldview, Fanon’s theories of national culture essentially foster principles of helpful interaction and dialogue among different groups by strengthening self-

assurance among them, by inducing them to seek out adequate support in their own cultural legacies, to preserve their self-reverence while integrated into a trans-cultural mode of existence, and in due course to contrive a nation on the ground of congruent cultural categories. Nationalist thinkers like Fanon and Cabral build up their moderate thoughts of national resistance through incorporating the pre-colonial heritage and the bequeathed modernity of the West, in gratifying associations that did not call upon any firm separation between the two.

What Ikem's narrative attempts to do, then, is to assess essentialist assumptions about culture, value and aesthetics as a determined moral standard and refute its linear-biased structure of development that views "the subject as a coherent unit" (Gilroy, 1993,p.10). Ikem's clear-sighted thinking permits him to realize his need to reconstruct his quixotic intellectual ideas and the necessity to review his own sense of socio-cultural relationships, which does not consent to the idea of culture as a predetermined intellectual value which is advocated by nationalist ideals. To this end, Ikem places considerable emphasis on the dialectic mode of reflection and social relationships, wherein individual subjects can retain their distinctiveness and capacity for taking on a moral choice, but at the same time must be understood as developing entities that are prepared to revise their ideas and perspectives (cultural or intellectual) when they are brought into close contact with others. This point of dialogical resolution which Ikem's intellectual meditations border on is delineated in Achebe's idea of social incorporation and cultural 'fulfillment'. Achebe points out that "fulfillment is other centered, a giving or subduing of the self, perhaps to somebody, perhaps to a cause; in any event to something external to it. Those who have experienced fulfillment all attest to the reality of this otherness"(1988,p.36). Given the need for a more enlightened commitment, the main possibility of attaining a genuine experience of social fulfillment depends on building up more wide-ranging connections across social-class and cultural representation. This will bring to the fore a hybrid existence where the convoluted cultural debate may offer the impetus to develop more constructive conceptions in the individuals minds about the nation's diverse ethnicities and religions. This concurs with Bhabha's notion of 'the in-between space' that carries the

multi-stranded meanings of culture within the mediating principles of ‘translation and negotiation’.

In this view, Achebe artfully combines the cultural, the intellectual, and the political in the character of Ikem, and he presents to us through this figure the required multi-faceted features of the committed public intellectual. Ikem as a dialogical figure remains ready to accept other individuals’ viewpoints, cultural, social and intellectual. Along the whole of the novel’s events, we see him refusing to collaborate with the repressive strategies of Sam’s regime. In so doing, Ikem’s self-critical attitude fosters the view of a coherent socio-cultural community; a balanced and realistic communal body predicated upon strong forms of collective relationships out of which can emanate a progressive cultural and social existence. Ikem’s committed character stands as a complete realization of Achebe’s theorization of the cultural and social role of the African post-independence intellectual. Ikem is fully dedicated to his enlightening social role as editor of the *National Gazette*. As conceived by the repressive president, Ikem’s main function entails passing on through his editorial writings the government’s discourses to the people, fabricating and projecting realities according to the wavering impulses of the government’s despotic leader. Ikem, however, sees the field of the press as a means of instruction and reform, and desires to employ this enlightening tribune to forge an efficient sphere of interaction between the people and the institutions of the state. He tells his friends that he “‘had always felt a yearning without very clear definition to connect his essence with earth and earth’s people”’(p.134). What emerges from this figurative contention is his attentive quest to bring forward a different conception of social relationships which helps to reposition the devices of the nation and the self in more nuanced ways, a quest which requires him to orient both his literary and editorial writings towards the hidden realities and stories of the less privileged groups.

Through Ikem, as a writer and a poet, Achebe insists on the function of the Nigerian artists and intellectuals, which is to bear a social responsibility towards their community regardless of the intimidations and temptations of authority. Ikem is portrayed as a valiant public intellectual who is prepared to defend the rights of the people with sincere intentions and to endure different repressive experiences, like

losing his prestigious job as an editor, rather than relinquish his values of social enlightenment and restoration. When his direct boss Chris keeps nagging him about his writings which criticise the president's regime, Ikem replies: "as long as I remain editor of the *Gazette* I shall not seek anybody's permission for what I write (...) If you don't like it you know what to do?" (p.40). The very act of setting constrictions on the editorial writings of Ikem and dismissing him set forth the intellectual sacrifice required to reform the nation's distressing conditions. Achebe portrays this complex character as a most conscious individual who speaks overtly against all forms of orthodoxy. Though he has eventually confronted a most terrorizing penalty for his social activism, the significance of his selfless sacrifice has given rise to many other activists who ardently adopt his ideas and uphold his intellectual vision. By giving outstanding acknowledgement to the anxieties and difficulties Ikem endures, Achebe carries the narrative to a more realistic level of representation. In Chris's view, Ikem does not write from the position of an experienced and a pragmatic intellectual; he is totally immersed in his idealistic notions which do not display any genuine relation with the realities of the common people he writes about. Chris goes on to associate him with the idealistic characters of romantic fiction and with their illusionary yearnings of redeeming the whole existence. In fact, Ikem's insightful reflections upon the malfunction of the government's institutions are always presented in a form of artistic imagination. We see him projecting, or rather conjuring, a romantic image of the nation and creating a metaphorical redeeming mission for himself in this romanticized space. As such, the reader can infer that Ikem's writings of the nation's 'real' history bear a social concernment which concurs with other's narratives (Chris and Beatrice), even though the devices of narration and the forms of interpretations they proffer do not seem to converge.

As editor of the national newspaper, Ikem's narratives call attention to the ambiguities, distortions, and apathy which mark out both the government official discourse and Chris's account of the cabinet insignificant meetings. The most important characteristic of Ikem's mode of narration is the intense focus on abstract thinking which is totally related to poetic passion and imaginative depiction. His passion and metaphorical redeeming character serve to counterbalance Chris's

‘clinical detachment’. Ikem’s remarkable reliance on romantic projection and personal intuition as a way for adequate interpretation and representation is given substantial resonance in the novel not only by the way it subverts and defies Chris’s impulsively rationalizing position, but also by the very figurative connotation contained in the title of the novel which is derived from Ikem’s poetic prose poem, ‘Hymn to the Sun’:

The trees had become hydra-headed bronze statues so ancient that only blunt residual features remained on their faces, like *anthills* surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year’s brush fires. (p.28 italics added)

In effect, Ikem shifts the sense of ordinary reality into higher imaginary meanings and tries to turn it into a surreal form of expression through which he can conjure the unobvious and barely visible truths of the repressed present experiences. He argues that the unsurpassed strategy against those in charge of the nation’s affairs who control even the act of expression has not to depend on collecting or organising “facts, of which they are truly managers, but (on) passion” which can give them motivation and force.(p.35) Ikem’s reforming ideas arouse great happenings and incidents, such as the small collective community that we meet in Beatrice’s house at the end of the novel, which seems to put into practice Ikem’s intellectual quest and vindicate his vision of a coherent community. While Chris (Ikem’s friend and immediate boss) resorts every now and then to bring together authentic events to explicate and rationalize the experiences he records, Ikem relies on the rhetoric of words which can accentuate the legitimacy of the cause to which he has dedicated his writings and even his life. In those momentary states of intense surrealism and fervour personal insights crowd his reflection, especially after he finds out that he may possess an influential role in improving the nation’s general order. Here are Ikem’s strong and inflated images:

He saw himself as an explorer who has just cleared a cluster of obstacles in an arduous expedition to earn as a result the conviction, more by intuition perhaps than logic, that although the final goal of his search still lies hidden beyond more adventures and dangers, the puzzle just unraveled point unambiguously to inevitable success. (p.134)

Such ample use of images identifies Ikem with the idealistic romantics he castigates in his editorial writings. Nevertheless, his inflated language is a key element in his artistic romanticism and his moralistic intellectual activism, and the reader may miss many of the novel’s ideological and aesthetic implications if he / she dismisses this

character's idealism. No serious critic or reader can overlook the view that romance is an important tendency for setting forth the ambiguities and contradictions of social and human existence. It presents itself as a strong expressive approach which is intended "to restore the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and imperfections will have been effaced"(Jameson, 1981,p.110). Ikem's description of himself as an explorer surmounting obstructions and impediments on the course to attain social consciousness and justice can be read in light of the difficult and passionate quests carried by the indomitable romantic protagonists in what Northrop Frye has described as the 'quest-romance' – "the search of the desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality" (Qtd in Gikandi,1991b,p.145). The basic value of Ikem's writings hence can be captured in the most artful way of combining the referential role of narrative with the idealistic impulse that runs along the general structural fabric of artistic texts, that is, shifting the experiences of the ordinary world into a legendary space in which a new order of things might be brought to the fore. Indeed, a scrutinized examination of Ikem's romantic reflections reveals a constant perception of this purposeful conjunction between the referential mode of representation and the poetic projection – by employing narrative to thwart the repressive policies of the military government, Ikem, like Achebe, puts forward an elevated system of thought and order. To this end, this fantasist poet and journalist is yearning to form genuine links with the underprivileged and the dispossessed of his community and switch his intellectual preoccupations, handled as they are through poetic intuition, to the anxieties of real experiences that he needs to explore and deal with.

When applying the Bakhtinian perspective of dialogic relations to Ikem's complex intellectual stand one can view how his poetic and somehow reserved association with the earth's people contributes to orient and mitigate his surrealist and utopian public ideas. Ikem, as a cultural producer, is well aware that he can present a significant contribution to popular and social life – the formation of a true experience of national consciousness through the socially-based writing of what Fanon terms a 'literature of combat', a most stimulating and edifying pattern of the nation's cultural patrimony that is characterized by the writer's complete preoccupation with the direct issues of

his / her people. This mode of imaginative writing induces all the social groups to adhere to the general interests of the nation, it engenders a good experience of socio-cultural awareness, grants it a national common history and existence, “flinging open before it new and unlimited horizons”; it presents itself as a literature of resistance “because it takes charge, because it is situated in historical time”(Fanon, 2004,pp.173-4). As Fanon comes to describe it, true national literature presents itself as an enlightening cultural legacy that does not only stir the people’s wrath against its different oppressors, but generates and maintains the community’s collective consciousness that renders the anxious quest for a national culture attainable. These issues start to preoccupy Ikem’s thoughts only when he comes into a close contact with the people’s simple world, an association which finally allows him to comprehend the effects of cultural conflicts upon the nation’s concord and the necessity to identify culturally with the larger existence of the community’s values, traditions, and history.

Ikem’s participation in the national affairs serves as a significant initiation to a more moderate system of thought through which this highly-positioned intellectual slowly revises his cultural and political consciousness. Achebe advances many incidents which make obvious Ikem’s concrete commitment to the issues of his society. His anxious aspirations to improve the lives of his people are essential and do not call for any complex actions to accomplish them. Along his editorial publications and his intellectual debates with his friends, we grasp his passionate desire to educate the people to the realities of their existence and make them understand their important role in developing the general conditions of the nation. He discourages self-defeat and insists on the different social groups to come to grips with the reality of deceit and dishonesty which are the overriding scourge of the ruling elite.

One of the social issues that appears to preoccupy Ikem’s reflection was public executions (pp.36-40). When the official authority puts into effect the death sentence of four poor people in a public place, Ikem seizes the occasion to criticize the excessive oppression of this violent authority. At the beach, many people come to witness this execution; they apathetically express their amusement in watching some of their own members facing capital punishment for petty crimes. Ikem presents his

own account against the authority's obscure discourses in his strong and effective description of this hideous act, and lays a great emphasis on this issue in his editorial publications to influence the public opinion, as well as to impel the authority to put an end to such a severe form of public punishment. This minor incident of the dreadful spectacle of public execution sets forth the coarse realities which the official power works to conceal and repress. Ikem notes how authority exposes its real image in the horrendous practices it commits; he says: "(A)uthority and its servants far exceeded my expectations that day on the beach"(p.37). These dramatic performances catch the attention of Ikem for the main reason that they appear to endow him with reflections which do not need the support of some factual experiences or rationalized explanations. The execution event makes him stand voiceless in front of the dreadful moment and context: he observes with bewilderment how the poor men can find amusement in "their own humiliation and murder."(p.37) Apart from the surrealistic level he associates with the incident, Ikem shows his rightness in defying the prejudice and injustice of the law. It is a tyrannical system that shows no limits in victimizing and oppressing its underprivileged citizens, he explains. Most of them pilfer worthless things or petty amounts of money to feed themselves and their families, and if arrested, they would face heavy penalties, some of them can be sentenced to death; but the wealthy and the powerful, who loot the government treasuries, not only get away despite their hideous crimes, but they are cherished by the same deceived poor people, who appear unresponsive to the unfair and inequitable policies inherent in the system.

Ikem's intellectual alignment to the people's concerns takes important orientations after his acquaintance with the old man of his local region who leads the Abazonian residential delegation to the presidential palace, and the special visit he receives of the two taxi-drivers whom he had encountered on his way to work. The Abazonian elder is well-versed in the art of oratory; he knows that the past stories and the cultural implications they bear within their fabric can direct the people's lives to a better destiny. During his planned meeting with Ikem, he had urged him to write in his newspaper about the government's lack of concern towards their poor conditions which is caused by the drought. For their part, the taxi-drivers had come to his house to express their profuse thanks and gratefulness for his selfless commitment as editor

to their different concerns and needs. In one important sense, the two taxi-drivers' recognition of the importance of Ikem's writings clears up the deep-seated effect that the press can even have on the common people's attitude. One of them, who answers in pidgin English, shows a great approval of the helpfulness of Ikem's editorials writings: "I no sabi book but I sabi say na for this oga de fight, not for himself. (...) he fit stay for house, shop him (...) and forget we. But he no do like that. So we come salute am"(pp.129-30). The taxi-driver's pertinent analysis of the efficient impact of Ikem's writing on the drivers' strike, is a sign of Ikem's deep concern with the daily needs of ordinary people. In visiting Ikem in his private sphere, the taxi drivers intend to insert their overlooked views into Ikem's intellectual horizon. The accumulated problems of those unheard urban workers, the little happenings of the common people from the town's public market (including Elewa and her mother) present important referential experiences upon which Ikem draws to construct his critical account about the general public conditions.

Ikem's most valuable function is made manifest through his short-lived experience with the old man. Devoting his writings to defend and enlighten his Abazonian people, Ikem stands as their supporting instructor in confronting the injustice of the ruling group. For instance, during the old man's speech in *The Harmony Hotel* after being denied admission into the presidential building, we are made aware that the reticence of Ikem over the country's important occasion of His Excellency's re-election is an implicit call for them to withdraw from the government's undemocratic election. In his speech, the old man vindicates the taxi-driver's appreciating words and acknowledges "all the fight (Ikem) has fought for the poor people in this land"(p.117). In fact, the spontaneous statements and gratifying responses of those selfless and uneducated individuals set forth the positive effects of Ikem's committed writings. The influence of his reformist ideas on the different social groups accentuates Ikem's determined view that the press and writing, in general, when represented by conscientious intellectuals can open up broad horizons of communal enlightenment.

Through Ikem's activism, Achebe moves us to a more critical mode of thinking and brings forward a mediating vision that links the artist to the different voices that make up post-colonial culture. In this highly structured novel, Achebe develops a complex

and dialectical view of thoughts where one of the novel's three narrators expresses points of view that may bring to the surface Achebe's different thoughts; social, cultural and literary. His critical statements and relative conceptions of cultural identity in his novels do not yield to the totalizing ideas of some conventional theories. Achebe's post-colonial writings present themselves as a living cultural repository which evokes the plurality of meanings which mark the general fabric of the developing nation. This perceptive writer, in one important sense, subdues the a-categorical meanings and perceptions to the critical reflections of his protagonists. In this line of reasoning, we see how Ikem's committed editorial writings are chiefly directed against all forms of dogmatic theories, social and political. He overtly criticizes the totalitarian policy that the government is trying to impose on the different facets of social life.

To break away from the restraints the government tries to hold over his reformist writings, Ikem resigns his prestigious position as editor, and goes on to speak out more valiantly about reform and social development. Ikem's lecture to the students at the University of Bassa is fundamentally a vindication of the ideas that Achebe has dealt with in his later essays and in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, presented dramatically in the form of a revolutionary speech. Part of the influence of Ikem's lecture emanates from his good mastery of the art of dialectic that may bring together his intellectual experience and knowledge and that of the collective entity of the nation in such constructive and enlightening cultural interactions. The reformist and critical thoughts that Ikem arouses in his lecture point to the different intellectual preoccupations that must orient the program and actions of any activist quest. Through the dialectical atmosphere he creates with his audience in debating the role of the intellectual and the writer, and other essential sets of concepts and perceptions, Ikem presents a more flexible way of theorizing the multifaceted problems that beset the new nation. Ikem's socio-cultural critical thoughts can best be explored through the Igbo notion of duality.

Achebe informs us in his essays that contradictory ideas and beliefs are an important feature that marks the general fabric of the Igbo system of thought. As he emphatically stated, the Igbo philosophy of existence does not show a determined interest in any complete mediation between the diverse forces that order the different

social practices; the controlling point that emerges here is related to that abiding attempt to come to grips “with a multitude of forces and demands which give Igbo life its tense and restless dynamism and its art an outward, social and kinetic quality”(Achebe in Cole & Aniakor,1984,p.ix). What emerges from this progressive general ethos is a synthesizing view of society and existence which is predicated upon moderate relationships between all forms of social and cultural values, persistently refuting the simplistic inclination to reduce, to codify, and to absolutely determine the boundaries of things. Within this characteristic outlook of reality one may be appealed by an important thought that can be adapted for anyone’s mode of reflection: there is no form of knowledge or truth in religion, politics, society or the different life experiences of the group which can be deemed as supreme and total, and any effort or intention to confirm the opposite is to be considered suspicious and dubious. For example, in Igbo traditions, all the community’s different groups, privileged or less privileged, implore the gods’ help and support for their well-being and general security but the gods also get hold of their power from the continuous reverence their worshippers present to them; each person has the complete right to work for self-fulfillment and financial enrichment but no one can overlook the clan’s collective will and sacrosanct beliefs. One belief or communal value is constantly balanced or corrected by a different truth which is posited by the community to deal with a given complex experience; this is what Achebe has described characteristically as the Igbo dualistic system of thought which refers to a dynamic relationship between opposites: “Whenever something stands, something else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute. I am the truth, (...) would be called blasphemous or simply absurd” in Igbo system of thought (1975, p.94). This traditional dialectical adage evinces the dynamism of the whole fabric of Achebe’s Igbo worldview which calls for an open-minded pursuit of truthfulness that subverts all forms of rigidly constricted perspectives and dogmatic systems of thought.

The Igbo order of critical thought presents an adequate cultural corpus for Achebe precisely because it provides him with a multiplicity of meanings and unfixed zones of cultural representation which bring forward alternative narrative mechanisms. For Achebe, duality or relationship between conflicting truths has become an attendant

aspect of the post-colonial condition of social-cultural relations, and the generic structure of his narratives too. Ikem's lecture to the students is an unreserved refutation of all systems of thought that operate through those discounting dichotomies which are backed by some hidden policies. Through Ikem's critical thoughts, Achebe expresses his complete rejection of all forms of intellectual discourses which allege to function through straightforward notions and solutions; it is by far a criticism of many simplistic ideological labels that put forward unrealistic and pretentious programs of social, cultural and political order. This is an intellectual withdrawal that is aligned to a more moderate mode of order because it may create better possibilities for political reconstruction in Africa away from the inactive and corrupt attributes of its autocratic and unpopular regimes. Such a policy needs to be organized according to the perpetual occurrence of unexpected transformations that may traverse the course of social development. Out of this emerges the view that any level of understanding we can achieve in relation to our social and cultural milieu is always conditional, tentative, and open to an unrestricted levels of reconsideration. Ikem seeks to firm up this vision as a mode of critical thinking in the students' minds in rejection of the repressive practices adopted by the totalitarian government against the activist intellectuals and unprivileged people who do not yield to its orders.

This anti-lecture represents the culminating phase of Ikem's public activism. He builds up his relationship with his audience through a vivid process of dialogue rather than through a hollow discourse. We are given a direct intellectual debate in the prestigious space of the university hall where Ikem enthusiastically induces the students to develop a more critical perspective by accentuating the constructive dialectics of his mode of thought that is based on an acknowledgment of interconnection between different thoughts and perspectives. Each time his audience embraces a given view we see him hastening to support a different view that subverts theirs: "If they fancy themselves radical, he fancies himself conservative; if they propound right-wing tenets he unleashes revolution!" In the process of this deliberate session of dialogue he seizes the occasion to criticize all forms of ideological tendencies like the egalitarian totalitarianism of the proletariat, the trade unions, and the sweeping expansionism of imperialism. It is a plain onslaught upon all forms of

prevailing conventions of thoughts and their proclaimed allegations of changing things through ready-made solutions. In his letter to Beatrice which he titles “Love Poem”, Ikem criticizes those political theories or movements which rely on totalizing generalizations and abstractions and sightlessly have brought the oppressed together within a unifying ideological force such as the “working class” or the “proletariat” without taking into account the specific historical experiences which have determined the general social fabric of the different communities in the world. For Ikem, the pragmatic thoughts of Western “orthodoxies of deliverance”(p.94) are more often than not dubious pretensions combined with intangible ideas, abstract assumptions which do not correspond in any way with the realities of social existence and culture of the African nations. They have been essentially developed by Western intellectuals in a specific historical phase in an attempt to improve the social and economic conditions of their specific communities. In his view, all the different plans of reformism adopted from Western theories of political and social conduct prove their malfunction in comparison to the African systems because they do not seem to be adequate to the typical nature that they present. In clearing up the issue, Ikem postulates that all attempts of restoration and reform at the level of politics and nation formation could achieve promising changes only if they draw upon the direct realities of the existing social values, communal truths and unique historical conditions which cannot be simply combined with alien experiences of political and social organization.

Therefore, for Ikem, even if culture and society need to be constructed around a firm structure and order, there is still the possibility of unpredictable changes occurring during this process. This means particularly that all attempts toward alternative ways of perceiving and organizing the complex conditions attending the new nation have to be reformist, while involving a considerate relocation and appointment of its developing socio-cultural elements “around what it is, its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction”(p.95). To this end, Ikem, conveying and vindicating Achebe’s moderate system of thought, thinks that the goal of any critical duality is not to find out a utopian vision that can reconcile the conflicts between divergent traditions of thought but to come out with a complex and multi-stranded perspective that opens up an adequate level of interaction and co-existence between

the different systems of thoughts and values. It is within this conviction that he criticizes the different rigid orthodoxies that view the determinant categories of race, ethnicity, class and gender as basic parameters in describing and classifying communities, groups and individuals. The spirit of this constructive dialectic is inherent within a substantive intellectual disposition which fosters tolerance, sincerity and critical reflection towards a complex communal existence which does away with fanatic discourses and notions. This is a valuable inclusive perspective which calls for a genuine experience of communication between the varying systems of thoughts within the same culture and community.

On the same issue of defending the nation's culture in his lecture to university students, Ikem deals with the central question of the writer's responsibility in addressing the different concerns of social existence. In this novel, the three chief protagonists present their experiences of struggle against the repressive government through the act of writing. On the one hand, we see Chris, the Minister for Information, through the realistic autobiography he writes about the nation's realities and his pertinent criticism of Ikem's romantic writings. On the other hand, we are given a full account of Ikem's intellectual disposition as an editor of the *National Gazette* through his fine-tuned skills in writing by using different literary genres. However, in the course of the difficult circumstances they face in their escape from the brutal apparatus of the military regime, these characters recognize the imperative necessity of combining their act of writing with a direct involvement in the experiences they write about. In the early chapters of the novel, Chris who is the first official representative of the government press is totally remote from the real lives of the people with whom he is supposed to keep close contact. In fact, his duties do not go beyond the formal meetings of the cabinet's secluded hall. The only figure who is viewed with veneration and granted a complete hearing in this murky space is the president, and Kangan's people, represented through the Abazonian delegation that have come to the cabinet building to see the president and implore his help, are brutally expelled. In the undemocratic milieu of this cabinet, the members of the government are not supposed to discuss or revise a given program or policy; they are rendered as political puppets who willingly or unwillingly present their complete

support to the president's despotic discourses and practices. Ironically, the intellectual institutions which appear to cause continuous anxieties for the president are those represented by the Western forces like the field of media. He uses all means to fabricate unreal truths of the conditions of his country when he is required to present his political report to the Western advisers or observers. This is displayed in the special dinner he organizes in the private presidential palace where we see him preferring the company of the American journalist, Louise, over Beatrice who represents the successful intellectual woman of his country.

Achebe's persistent emphasis on the writer's role as a cultural nationalist is brought to the surface through Ikem's defense of the people's rights against the authoritarian government of his country. Ikem is represented as the country's most prominent writer who uses his journalistic writings to influence the people by inducing them to look at their miserable social conditions and to draw their attention to some aspects of their default. Through the apparent resentment and antagonism that seem to characterize the relationship between the committed intellectual and the agents of power, the writer points to the fact that in military governments, the writer's severance from the realities of the social world and estrangement from his/her people's traditional culture would be a most appropriate condition that the authoritarian government will exploit to perpetuate its dogma based on national repression. But Chris's role as recorder and collector of information makes the leaders of this system undergo dreadful fears when he exposes their lies and fabricated accounts about the circumstances of Ikem's death. This is portrayed at the end of the novel when he and Emmanuel, the student leader, make certain that the accurate story of Ikem's arrest and assassination by the government's security force will be conveyed safely to the whole world through the objective voice of the foreign media.

The disturbance caused by the dissemination of accurate information from the writer to the community and the apprehensive reaction of the authority to this kind of social commitment reveal why writers and intellectuals in general are deemed as a threat to the existence of the dictatorial regimes. The Kenyan writer and playwright Ngugi Wa Thiongo, who employs the expression of 'literary guerrillas' to refer to the writer's direct involvement in revolutionary social action, was unfairly detained and

also expatriated because he started to use the language of his people, Gikuyu, rather than English in writing his novels and plays to defend the rights of the working class and the peasants. Both in his fiction and non-fiction, Ngugi writes extensively about the conditions of “submission, silence, and obedience” that many of the African authoritarian regimes impose on the elite group in order to weaken their influence on the public opinion and to abate all forms of opposition to its system (1981,p.xi). The aspects of non-communication or confusing information are an integral part of the designed repressive policy which is pursued by the post-colonial governments to keep their undeveloped societies in a permanent state of ignorance and therefore rendering their individuals disempowered, depriving them of the very act of expression through which they can defend their legitimate rights and urgent needs. In studying this established policy of cultural repression, an aspect which many historical and cultural theorists see as a perturbing and a dubious norm in the politics of post-independent African countries, Ngugi affirms that the excessive exploitation of authority is an incompetent policy that has inherited its means of subjugation and despotism from the inhuman past of colonization which could impose the Western civilization and its racist discourses through the power of repression it had used against the colonized communities. He argues that the post-independence leaders draw their view of authority from the colonizer’s systems of government in the countries it seized and their strategies of using power are consequently patterned on the colonial repressive policies.(1993,p.85) Ngugi’s deep anxieties are related to the colonial policies of cultural repression which many African leaders had relied on to silence all the opposing voices. These leaders are well aware that they can maintain their positions only through subjecting all forms of communication and self-expression to a set of repressive laws and practices. In this way, the African leaders can instill in their people’s minds and psyche “a culture of silence and fear (...) directed from police cells and torture chambers”(1993, p.71).

In Fanon’s theorization of the colonial condition and national culture, the crucial impulse behind writing about one’s own culture in a colonial situation is an integral part of the whole revolutionary experience. For Fanon, the very act of struggling for recovering and retrieving one’s own culture and human existence is in itself a form of

struggling for the freedom of the nation's existence, the material template and milieu around which the people's different cultural aspects are constructed. (2004, p.168) However, the convoluted realities which have marked the formation of the independent nation have somehow undermined the value of Fanon's critical views on cultural liberation: the budding nation cannot fulfil the nationalists' idealistic plans of transforming the cultural remnants of its pre-colonial existence into a well-unified body of values and practices that can generate a progressive national order; on the contrary, the developing nation presents itself as a replica of the colonial repressive apparatus that erodes every imprint of the people's cultural identity. In fact, Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* present this state of cultural repression through articulate scenes of power exploitation. In both novels, we see how the different forms of public communication are turned into a strategic means in the hands of the government leaders to hold absolute power over all the details of social lives. In *A Man of the People*, the press reporters are totally stripped of their professional ethics; they cover the leaders with flattery just to get from them some material rewards. In his first visit to his hometown, Nanga attempts to win the support of his constituency through his generosity. When he grants a journalist an amount of money under the sight of many people who were close to them, he rationalizes his act through this mean view: "If I don't give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me" (p.66). This chief who in charge of the nation's culture states overtly that he does not believe in the freedom of expression; he views this supposedly enlightening and instructive field as an influential way to uphold his high position which he uses for self-enrichment.

In *Anthills*, the limitations imposed on all forms of self-expression have a direct effect on the socio-cultural fabric of the community; restriction of the freedom of the press is a crucial policy used by Kangan's regime to prevent the intellectuals from denouncing the miserable conditions of their people. The writer deals with this issue explicitly when Ikem as a literary artist and editor of the *National Gazette* is aggressively arrested and then killed by the secret police of the government for the simple reason that he represents those committed writers who can exercise a far-reaching influence upon the public opinion and intimidate the despotic agent of power.

His strong-willed rejection to renounce his reformist activist ideas has caused him to be dismissed from his editorial newspaper especially after his defense of the members of the delegation from Abazon who have been victimized and detained because of their peaceful manifestation near the closed doors of the government. So, by revealing the distressing state of the people's situation, Ikem's editorial writings have aroused anxiety in the despotic cabinet due to his accurate representation of the community's predicaments, and the suspicious policies that take place in the government. This is followed by a hideous repressive policy against the protesters, based on threat and terror in order to eradicate all forms of opposition to the president's rule.

After the announcement of Ikem's death, the students tear up the copies of the *National Gazette* because of its falsified representation of Ikem's militant ideas and commitments. In many ways, the government leaders attempt to rationalize the regime's oppressive actions against the activist intellectuals by contriving totally fallacious narratives to manipulate the public opinion. In fact, all the urgent accounts that Sam's government brings forward draw attention to untruths. For example, the conspirators in Kangan and unpatriotic individuals mentioned in the distorted accounts of the Special Announcement are just those selfless intellectuals who have dedicated themselves to defend the rights of the underprivileged groups against the disregard of the despotic government. Chris's report of the real causes behind arresting and then killing Ikem is put into many copies and distributed by the leader of the Students' Union, who finds himself compelled to escape with Chris to another region to save himself from the threat of the state authorities because of this challenging act. Equally, Chris's militant action immediately after the assassination of Ikem is to disseminate the correct account that has been completely altered in the authority's fabricated version. Chris's correcting account is very important because it makes many of the different social groups show an ardent spirit to promote the revolutionary ideas for which Ikem has died. What emerges out of this act is a miniature community which combines the élite class and the other social groups within an important socio-cultural experience, a hopeful association that arouses more and more the fears of the estranged and suspicious president. The hideous incidents of Ikem's assassination call our attention to the view that in *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe does see the value of

artistic writing both in the possibilities it offers in handling particular aesthetics considerations and ideological implications. The significance of committed literature can be discerned in its high meanings and truths that may present different directions of social change. Many of *Anthills*' events are constructed around this fundamental idea. The very act of assassinating Ikem because of his revolutionary writings firms up in the minds of his friends a strong will to go on with his social activism. Immediately after Ikem's death, Chris attempts to gather internal and external sympathy through the support he can get from some of his associates in the foreign media, and he resorts also to get the help of the university students and urban workers who are themselves victims of the regime's concealed crimes. These actions display the important role that committed writing can play in sharpening one's attitudes and ideas.

Ikem's intellectual analysis of the nation's general conditions stands as a crucial part of his rigorous quest to build up genuine relations with the underprivileged and oppressed of his community, "with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being"(p.135). Through his involvement in an emotional and social relationship with a half-literate girl whose mother is a market-woman, and his revolutionary preoccupation with the different concerns of the deprived social groups – the urban taxi-drivers and the peasants of his local region – Ikem comes to learn the substantial role that can be played by every member in reconstructing the social body within a more progressive system that can fit the needs of every social group. In the instructive language that he adopts for his speech to the students, Ikem defends his view of a congruous society which can bring together the forces of all its groups and members – story-tellers, peasants, workers, intellectuals, and women. He shows a strong belief in a social existence which is not based on segregation; he finds no shame in declaring his intent to get married to an ordinary market-girl, and we see him clinging to his old car rather than benefiting from the government chauffeur-driven-car which could only put him above the underprivileged people. It is this high-minded conviction that induces not only Chris and his intellectual associates, but also many of his half-literate supporters to carry on and maintain his social activism through which he seeks to establish a unified nation in which all the varied cultural and social groups are interconnected. The despotic leader can silence Ikem by means of his repressive

system but he cannot undermine the deep-seated effects of his enlightening ideas. Ikem presents a powerful image of the committed intellectual he writes about; his selfless defense of social interests propels other rising committed individuals to resist and to present the land's account of the fiery sun.

Chris Oriko, Commissioner for Information, is another narrator and story-teller through whose lenses we are presented with an objective perspective of the nation's story. He is like Obi's friend, Chris in *No Longer at Ease*, a graduate of the London School of Economics and a devotee of intellectual debate for its own sake. He is promoted from the editorship of the *National Gazette* to the prestigious position of Commissioner for Information in the cabinet of his old classmate Sam after a military coup assigns Sam president of the West African State of Kangan. Chris's narrative is incited by the necessity to surmount anxieties about his own position in the unsteady conditions of the nation and especially the unexpected development of Sam as a (dictatorial) head of state. His rational quest for social significance is ineffective without a lucid cognition of the cultural relationship between self and other, and the narrator's own implication in the circumstances that reveal his lack of identification with the real concerns of his country's people. And still, his direct participation in the process of government hampers him from perceiving the aspects of misrule and cruelty that Ikem is able to inveigh and interpret critically. Chris's concerns at the beginning of the novel are restricted to his obsessive intent to understand "a game that began innocently enough and then went suddenly strange and poisonous"(p.1). As a recorder and collector of information at the highest levels of the government, Chris feels it is necessary for him to devise a rational reflection, to determine "a specific and decisive event and say: "it was at such a point that everything went wrong and the rules were suspended"(p.1). For what has been started as an attempt to sincerely participate in the development of a nation, is now disintegrated into a cynical game: Chris describes himself occupying "this silly observation post making farcical entries in the crazy log-book of this our ship of state"; his initial disillusionment with the government futile role in which he is implicated "turned long ago into a detached clinical interest"(p.2).

Chris's shift from genuine commitment to detachment is indicative of the problems intellectuals confront the moment they seek to find a way to articulate the ideas that

incite them to attain any process of social change. At the beginning of his narrative, Chris presents himself only as an unbiased witness who embarks on recording and construing the actions and discourses of the state representatives. On the one hand, Chris acknowledges explicitly his responsibility in advising the new head of state on his succession to authority and all the inaccurate appointments he has for his government, and how he is compelled sometimes to rationalize Sam's despotic attitudes and acts, particularly against Ikem's editorial writings. On the other hand, he starts to become increasingly disenchanted with the recurring repressive acts led by the military government of Sam. Within this wavering disposition, Chris admits that he stands unable to hypothesize the fundamental aspects and causes that have given rise to the impasse he writes about, nor can he proffer convincing interpretations on the postcolonial experience; nevertheless, he overestimates his task as a writer, as an interpreter, and a custodian of the nation's memory. At this point, Chris cannot spot plainly the suitable opportunity of other forms of power and reform, and hence can redeem neither himself nor the members of the cabinet. He overtly prides himself on his estrangement, his cynical rationalization; but those are the very traits which infuriate and distress Beatrice, his fiancée, and Ikem. Ironically, Chris appears unable to discern the inconsistency between his stated 'clinical interest' and his 'interest and excitement'; an attitude which is not at all convenient of someone who is responsible of national communication. Chris detaches himself from the experiences of his nation's history and re-expresses them as mere stories to be read. He satirizes himself and the discredited ministers as animals frightened by the presence of His Excellency. We read about the Commissioner for Education during a cabinet meeting with the president that "(a)s soon as he had sniffed peril in the air he had begun to disappear into his hole, as some animals and insects do, backwards"(p.2). Chris's statement hints at the diffidence and reticence that Achebe identifies in the general character of the Nigerian people when he says, "I think we still need to nurture and develop the spirit of dissent, of disagreement and to be convinced that disagreement doesn't mean treason, that because somebody says 'No' doesn't mean he is less patriotic than the yes-people" (qtd in Wren,1980,p.108). Chris is also a typical example of such yes-person; he is not different from the Commissioner for Education who 'crawls in and

out of holes', and his satiric journal-writing is not totally dedicated to defend the genuine rights of the powerless.

At the outset of the narrative, Chris exemplifies the depraving influence of privilege. His lack of realistic and analytical approach to deal with social problems could vindicate Ikem's criticism that he is inclined to rationalize the state's affairs of corruption because of his position. Reminiscent of Odili in *A Man of the People*, Chris takes on the disposition of appeasement towards the head of state, and expresses no sentiment of remorse over his moral decline; he puts it in an emphatically tone: "It meant nothing at all to me – no inconvenience whatever – and yet everything to him"(p.1). Chris justifies his lack of honesty by alleging that he has despaired of conflicting with the dictator, and has no strength left to resign from his prestigious position. In this view, all his pretensions of rationality and considerateness are insincere attitudes exploited to allow him to cling to his government position. Through the self-contained qualities of this character, Achebe's persistent question of "where did the rain begin to hit us" is brought to the reader's mind. Chris's attitude towards Sam's mismanagement of the state affairs reveals a certain level of dishonesty and helplessness; he has impulses which are related to issues of social commitment, the people and the function of the writer, but does nothing to follow with action.

Chris's narrow view taken from the enclosed Council Chamber does not take account of the people's basic concerns. His alleged rational view of power provides no role to ordinary people in the formation of past or present history of the nation. Chris's emergent engagement with the narrative of widening the social and cultural horizons is enhanced by his sincere friendships with Beatrice and Ikem. Beatrice induces Chris to widen his view of the state's perspective beyond the confined milieu of its illegitimate leaders. In admonishing Chris, she reminds him that "the story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you (i.e., Chris, Ikem, Sam)"(p.62). Chris, admonished and chastened, consents to Beatrice's argument, admitting that "we tend sometimes to forget that our story is only one of twenty million stories – one tiny synoptic account"(p.62). As said before, Ikem also defends the rights of the people, and he is the medium of expression to defend the cause of the Abazonian people who are seen by Sam and his cabinet as an intimidating, undeveloped gathering of

“hoodlums”(p.9). Chris will begin to make more such realizations and to conceive alternative issues and audiences, and alternative impulses for involvement as uninterrupted fierce circumstances plunge him from his “detached clinical interest position” into a condition of direct involvement. At such level, his abundant narrative is oriented to encompass other individuals and social groups outside the élite sphere, presented in the persons of the drivers, students, and workers who promptly help him in escaping.

Chris comes to recognize the value of the lives of the deprived people only when Sam turns ruthless and Ikem is killed; subsequently he relinquishes his position and goes into hiding from government armed forces. It is the shift from a language of detached condemnation to that of involved dramatic narration that releases Chris from the enclosed power chambers and enables his constrained worldview to expand and open up new experiences of intercourse with a larger national community. Only at that time does Chris start pondering on the same social and political tensions afflicting the country which Ikem first tries to address and resolve through his committed writings. In this sense, he admonishes the intellectuals’ conceited disposition towards the deprived people: “Why did we not cultivate such young men before now ? Why, we did not even know they existed if the truth must be told? We ? Who are we ? The trinity who thought they owned Kangan”(p.183). Achebe presents Chris’ association with the people in a most symbolic and substantial image. Chris comes to grasp the significant truths of the ‘people’ and to identify with their plight, even though metaphorically, when he is compelled to escape death from the brutal authority, by disguising himself as a pitiable motor mechanic with his new humble companions; Immanuel, the student leader, and Braimoh, the taxi-driver.

The people promptly assist Chris escape the fierce hunt of the government’s forces in spite of the severe punishment such defying acts could incur. They help Chris make public the real circumstances which have led to Ikem’s assassination. Ikem’s neighbours inform him that Ikem was in manacles when he was led away by the security forces, signifying that he had no opportunity to be tried in a court of justice. The official media just announce his death as ‘urgent news’. His murder has been deliberately arranged by the state’s leader himself. The taxi driver who helps Chris run

away is prepared to work against the despotic system when relocating Chris and looking for safe hiding places each time the security forces are closing in on him. There are other incidents which mark the prevailing forms of political and military oppression than those in which the people are presented. The people, even though they can on some occasions behave in a most disgraceful and apathetic way (as in Ikem's depiction of the public capital punishment), can as well refuse to be rendered as acquiescent agents of political authority. This stubborn and undiminished inclination to stay alive and prove one's own existence is manifest in the soldier-trader encounter in Gelegele market. When the soldier scornfully addresses the civilian trader in this statement: "If I kill you I kill dog"(p.44), the young trader construes it in a humorous manner that challenges the oppression of the soldier: " Does he mean that after killing me he will go and kill a dog?"(p.44) What is suggested in this reply is the trader's refusal to acknowledge the intimidation contained in the soldier's offensive utterance. The insolence and disrespect for the people which Achebe portrays in this encounter reveals the soldiers exhibiting scorn, abuse of power and total disregard for the life and wellbeing of the same people whom they had claimed to be their protectors, and now consider them as "dogs", "nothing". The focal point of the various episodes is now the way in which ordinary people, such as the taxi driver, cope with the politics of oppression – partly with simulated acquiescence, and partly through resilience and humour. It is the recognition of this which incites Ikem, Chris and Beatrice to revise their attitudes towards the ordinary people. In breaking away from the confined centres of power, they each grasp the political turmoil besetting their country, highlighting the fragmentations within the nation's culture that need to be reworked in order for such a nation to come into better conditions.

Chris, as we have seen, moves from proclaimed detachment into enforced narrative engagement, a development that thrusts him into both physical and socio-cultural movement that also begins to dislocate his restricted knowledge and self-identification by enabling his blinkered worldview to broaden and interact with a larger community. His journey to Abazon can be identified as a mollifying pilgrimage in which he undergoes an experience of self-evaluation and, fundamentally, an opportunity for a cultural regeneration. Throughout the journey of the Great North Road, Chris ponders

on the country's sharp contradictions that are definitely drawn and interpreted in the physical background of the landscape as the bus moves from the green forests of the South into the desert lands of the North. In a distressing course of natural discrepancy, the 'cocktail-circuit of the city' is contrasted to the 'impoverished rural areas', the living forest is contrasted to the waste land of the savannah, and the bus itself, through the symbolic statement which is inscribed on its back – "What a man commits (...) follows him?" (p.194) - holds the pernicious upshot which power preserves for its disloyal citizens everywhere they run away. What one may read in Chris's central narrative of the epic journey from Bassa to Abazon is fundamentally a dramatization of the socio-cultural rift between the village and the capital presented in terms of spatial imbalance, where Abazon's vital connection with its people's culture and the land occupies a 'traditional' space which is far removed from the disconnected modernity of the city.

In fact, this intense focussing on the spatial metaphor enacts a poetic of place where the individuals' search and yearning for a collective fulfilment continually delineate the physical space of the nation. Through the trope of Chris's journey, travel and displacement between the big city and the poor countryside become a means in which the literary text crosses geographic, cultural and literary boundaries. The trope of the journey as a symbol of movement has ramifications for the cultural, ethnographic and textual considerations inherent in the novel's basic theme. Chris's journey to the Abazon village is a metaphorical trope of Cabral's "return to the source". This return takes on a decidedly socio-cultural, and equally important physical return to the areas inhabited by the people. The writer makes his intellectual take refuge in the village, the most unspoiled source of traditional culture. Especially poignant, Chris' journey is reminiscent of the journeys of traditional oral narratives which make the protagonist undergo a phase of knowledge through the experience of special displacement to a mysterious but paradoxically more truthful world. In the traditional stories, as Eileen Julien explains, "the heroes humbly seek knowledge, they are disposed to learning, since they recognize an order outside themselves, greater than themselves, of which they are or must become a part" (1992, p.97). Yet, Chris is a hero who does not know that he is on his way to attain 'wisdom'; a "wisdom which

suggests connectedness, a harmonious relationship with both the natural world and the human community”(Julien,1992,p.97).

Likewise, the trope of the journey in *Anthills* points to similar cross-cultural contact, exchange and movement of ideas and people. The novel’s dynamics of space leads to a powerful symbolic connection between the living reality of the land and the need for cultural exchanges between its different regions. The narrative’s obsessive revisiting of the seasonal, changing and enduring presence of the natural landscape is evocative of how Achebe envisages the formation of a mediating national cultural identity in the nation’s setting. In these terms, as a journey of socio-cultural fulfillment, Chris reviews his evaluation of himself as an intellectual and the socio-cultural cognition of the relationship between self and other. He recognizes two important realities: on the one hand, he comes to understand that the nation is more related to the simple realities of the people’s existence than to the bleak and murky world of those allegedly brilliant members of the elite who believe that the land’s stories centre only on their narrow experiences; on the other hand, he comes to realize when disguised as a motor mechanic but incapable of embodying the manners of such a poor person, as nearly discovered by the soldier on the checkpoint, the difficulty and incapacity of the intellectual class to associate themselves fully with the real world of the ‘wretched of the earth’. Indeed, they give him the impression that they own and belong to Kangan in a manner he had never suspected. Chris comes to identify with the outstanding and beautiful reality that: “I no know before today say to pass for small man you need to go special college” and “to succeed as small man no be small thing”(p.186). In his brief moments of finding out these social realities, Chris can release himself from the feeble and false allegations of power disposition; he undergoes symbolic moments of regeneration in a new image produced by both his own experience as an intellectual member and his most significant act of sacrificing his life to take responsibility for the safety of an anonymous poor- school girl about to be raped by a police officer who seems to reflect the oppressive practices of the authority. Chris’ last act is very important partly because he attempts to prevent a violent and reprehensible practice rather than staying unreceptive, and partly because

his committed act is a wrathful reaction to the common disregard that the highly-positioned individuals have against the ordinary people.

It is important to point out that Achebe's perspective conveys a vision which though rhetorical and utopian, is at the same time authentically West African in its abundant dependence on objective representation and critical thinking, cultural warmth and social commitment. Through the rich and knotty stories of the novel's main characters, Achebe evokes the authority of narrative to accommodate the convolutions and ambiguities of post-colonial culture. And even when such complexities are clearly shown in the tragic consequences of the nation's political and social tensions, as in the case of Ikem's and Chris' deaths, the writer's main concern in the novel is focused on how the nation's collective memories and communal experiences can be projected through different forms of narrative. Within the introspective narratives of his protagonists, the writer portrays the small community that is generated during the period of Ikem's and Chris's political action as the emblematic nascence of an innovative cultural formation as it is composed of all of the diverse and formerly divisive elements of the national body. To this end, Achebe's fictional post-colonial nation allows a possible compromise of the diverse multiplicities of cultural zones and perspectives that eventually transcend the boundaries of ethnicity and class to create a considerably more heterogeneous community.

In place of the outstanding ostentatious intellectual, Achebe advocates the utopian union of the committed intellectual and the authentic culture of the people that can manage to appease the different hard times of history. He has a deep-seated conviction that many culturally-evolved Nigerian intellectuals can come out with constructive ideas and principles which will help in forming a cogent community and well-meaning individuals. This willful inclination to include the nation's different socio-cultural groups is strongly associated with the narrative movement, literary genres and aspects of the novel as a whole. This form of literary preoccupation explains how narrative functions as a form of inscribing the authentic experiences in which the post-colonial problematic of culture developed and to express the conditions in which truths about this condition are generated. In the last chapter, we will attempt to show how the dominance of politics by men gradually shifts to women, which is nothing less than a

renovation of one of the common conventional tropes of nationhood: the national “mother”, or motherland, a controversial intellectual issue in African literature employed by Achebe to further negotiate the cultural relationship of difference and authenticity, rupture and continuity in terms of tradition regeneration and revival.

Notes:

- 1- “Double Consciousness” is a critical expression that Gilroy posits as a means of examining the hybrid identity formation of black Afro-American people. Precisely, this critical expression emanates from the book *The Souls of Black Folk* by the Afro-American writer and critic W.E.B. Du Bois, in which he has approvingly written about the unique hybrid cultural state which characterizes his black people in the US. For him, it is a distinctive cultural pattern in which “one ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (qtd in Gilroy, 1993, p.126). Double consciousness is a term that expresses the distinctive socio-cultural and psychological experience undergone by the Afro-American people who are completely or gradually immersed in the history and culture of the multi-ethnic communities of White America yet still admitting their abiding commitment to the cultural values of their mother Africa. The interaction between the two conflicting identities generates an important experience towards the development of the hybrid cultural consciousness of the Afro-American Negro. Du Bois’s deliberate incentive in vindicating the notion of “double consciousness” was to express the unusual complexities arising from the enmeshment of the Negro with the racist milieu of White America.

CHAPTER FOUR

***REPOSSESSING THE PAST MYTHS IN ANTHILLS
OF THE SAVANNAH***

Chapter Four: Repossessing The Past Myths in Anthills of the Savannah

Achebe's prose fiction displays a unique engagement with the issue of the past and cultural tradition. He tends constantly to place the cultural world of his people at the center of the thematic and aesthetic fabric of his texts. Along the course of his different narratives, the reader can hardly posit a definite line between the past legacies and the present worldview, because in the scheme of socio-cultural experiences that he narrates there is always a conscious tendency to bring together the past and the present into a significant cultural act. In the whole issue, Achebe's main concern is not totally determined by the idealistic idea of associating the modern African with cultural practices and institutions that encompass the objective reality of the African indigenous culture as it continues in some way to function as a common pattern of social conduct. It appears crucial for him to point out the different directions of thought that tradition provides for the imaginative body of his texts, in addition to the literary orientations and intellectual reflections that it entails in the formation of African discourse. After revealing scenes of socio-cultural mediation and images of social interaction in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe's preoccupation in his last novel, as it will be shown in this part of the study, is to work out an adequate experience of cultural continuity between the traditional heritage and the post-colonial experience.

In fact, Achebe's search for a certain sense of cultural coherence on the basis of concrete and fundamental social truths emanates from the land's rich legacies. But can the post-colonial subjects interpret and deal with the present confusion and conceptualize a meaningful cultural experience? Can they delve deeper into the hidden and rooted knowledge of an alienated past and move into, as the memorable female protagonist, Beatrice, expresses it, "subverting the very sounds and legends of day-break to make straight the way"(p.104)? To achieve this crucial end, the writer focuses on the ways in which the past beliefs and stories can be conjured through narration, to be embedded into the critical discourses of the modern revolutionary intellectual. The way narrative blends archaic myths, history and memory, and how this rhetorical structuring provides new interpretations to convoluted socio-cultural conditions is a fundamental theme in *Anthills of the Savannah*. In this far-searching narrative,

contends Achebe, “there is more looking into the future, not just for women but for society generally; how, for example we can use our past creatively”(1987,p.4). In the writer’s discourse on the cultural value of story which is presented to us by the elder from Abazon, one of the main functions of telling stories is related to the fundamental principle of preserving the community’s cultural memories, of a narrator who tells about but also goes beyond the land’s cultural determinants. The old man asserts that the importance of the story is attached to its capacity to bring to mind the land’s past happenings: remembering, argues the old man, is a vital element for the continuity of the community, because it gives the story the possibility to “continue beyond” the events it evokes. “It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence”(p.119). In many ways, the story serves to implant and firm up past events and histories so that their enlightening connotations will be conveyed to future descendants which might then be destined to reiterate the same sins of their ancestors.

This artful conjunction between the primeval stories of the past and the ordinary realities of the present represents more than an issue of a simple nostalgic quest for myths of origin; Achebe’s cultural perspective corresponds more or less to what Achille Mbembe conceives of as the ‘endless’ intellectual anxiety to arrive at a certain sense of mediation between ‘total identification’ with ‘traditional’ culture and ‘merging with, and subsequent loss in, modernity’(2001,p.12). If he does foster such an unprejudiced perspective, Achebe also represents a postcolonial voice in search of mollifying the cultural dislocation of the post-independence African individual. Achebe originally relies on the ordinary realities of his Nigerian people; drawing on individual and collective memories to revalue and also to repossess his country’s past, providing an objective projection of its decline into corrupt and despotic order in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Post-colonial theory has always pointed to the issue of memory as an integral element of the movement of history and culture, one that can foster alternative or more truthful narratives of the past which are free from the colonial and neo-colonial dichotomies of cultural representation. The imperative mission for the colonized peoples struggling to reclaim their negated history and existence has always been to repossess their authentic culture from the

colonial inadequate mental tools. The colonial apparatus, argues Fanon, had always presented itself as a racial institution which had depended on designed devices of negation, stripping the native of their beliefs and history, and compelling them to question the value of their social codes and cultural values. Often, the need to deal with this haunting problematic of self-identification centers on a reconstruction of the traditional culture of the collective community, a question that is frequently complex and partial, as it is related to different historical transitions and cultural mutations.

In writing about the importance of nationalist post-colonial fiction and its function in reclaiming the community's past history and culture, Elleke Boehmer distinguishes three useful impulses: first, writing to achieve self-control and identification; for the colonized people to gain access to tell their history and "resist the stereotype of passivity", meant "taking charge of the past" and "of self-definition" (Boehmer, 2005, pp.187-188). Second, writing serves as an expressive medium for "self-making". In this sense, the experiences of the past, brought forward as the land's myths of bygone times, or retrieved in the form of national stories, could be used to offer "a kind of restitution" and "rekindle memory"(Boehmer,2005,p.189). Here Boehmer calls attention to the power of imaginative expression in recreating and preserving "a threatened, or neglected way of life", and in forming "imaginary connections between the reduced present and the legendary past"(188-189). Third, the post-colonial narrative can be taken "as a process of form-giving", especially because of the complex movement inherent in its space-time structure, a narrative work which functions so as to "impart coherence to a fragmented history" and also help explain some fluctuated ideological connotations in the bifurcated condition of post-colonial period (Boehmer, 2005,p.189).

Yet, the argument which emerges at the level of this rhetoric of return to the land's authentic tradition, which borders sometimes on a romanticized projection of the irretrievable past, is the difficulty of representing it through straightforward realistic narratives. Tim Woods explains this in relation to the position of history and memory in African literature; the two concepts are constantly used to denote more than "merely literary tropes – they are the crucial sites where post-colonial national and cultural identities are being formed and contested"(2007, p.3). What many memorable African

novels demonstrate is that African systems of thought can achieve their authenticity by reverting to the enlightening myths and stories of an uninterrupted line of forebears that proffer a genuine testimony of cultural presence and continuity. This resolute resort to archaic forms of imagination and cultural roots is itself a cultural act intended to resurrect a disrupted past dispensation, a past that can be imaginatively retrieved through conjuring the repositories of African authentic culture into the new contexts of the post-colonial condition.

In his essay “The Myth of Authenticity”, Gareth Griffiths warns against a simplistic celebration of an imaginary “authentic” cultural identity of the post-colonial subject when he / she is the product of a multiplicity of cultural worldviews and perspectives. According to Griffiths, this mythical quest for creating a homogeneous and “pure” cultural identity that would represent the whole community comes perilously close to “overwrite the actual complexity of difference” that marks the various racial-ethnic groups composing the single community (Griffiths, 1995, p.237). This problematic of spatio-temporality, which is inherent in the existence of the ‘post-colonial’ individual, has its impact on approaching the conceptions of “past” in post-colonial theory. The break embedded in the post-colonial condition has been displayed in the experiences of continuity and discontinuity between past and present with specific focus on the complex ideas of hybridity. This notion of culture, as being dealt with in the previous chapter, allows conciliation of the different composites of the individual’s cultural identity which emerges from particular conditions of socio-cultural displacements, education, colonization without ordering the boundaries of cultural identity along essentialist and biased grounds. However, at times the post-colonial critics’ advocacy of hybrid cultural identities demonstrates a sense of anti-essentialist disdain towards many racial-ethnic minority groups and oppressed societies compelled by some suppressive or colonial conditions to accept, for their very sense of collective identification, an estranged and somehow irretrievable aspect of their past legacies.

The principal idea that arises here is related to the problematic of forming a collective culture without inscribing it in a past canon of beliefs and practices. In fact, the adoption of a hybrid cultural identity as an imperative condition engendered by the brutal colonial experience and the different transformations it had given rise to after

independence does not necessarily signify that the nationalist and cultural trends of various historical struggles in the world should dismiss all attempts at reviving their past institutions and beliefs. For example, Negritude stands as a prominent intellectual and cultural movement which was honed by conscious plans towards a genuine sense of cultural identification that would retrieve the self-value of the oppressed and humiliated colonized subject, and cannot be examined within the dialectical explanations of post-colonial theories of hybridity. For the African communities which had witnessed hostile experiences of cultural distortion and obliteration, the impulse towards recovering an estranged and a concealed original canon of beliefs represents an essential strategic discourse for forming a resistant communal culture. Stuart Hall describes this as a quest for a form of homogeneous “true self” which acknowledges the position of history, religion, and culture in the formation of the people’s collective identity, or in Fanon’s most quoted pronouncement, a passionate impulse towards retrieving “some very beautiful splendid era whose experience rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves, and regard to others”(1994,p.37). However, Hall emphasizes the idea of representing the colonial individual in terms of a complex historical experience marked as it was by many aspects of cultural discontinuities and ruptures. At the same time, he has called attention to the fundamental value of those nationalistic notions of one collective culture and common history in firming up the individual’s cultural roots. The people’s cultural canon, according to Hall, “continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples”. And he goes on to assert that “We should not ... underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered essential identity entails”(1997,p.111).

This perception of time which embodies the continuing influence of the past on the present converges with the traditional mode of thinking in relation to the idea of “time”. In general, the African traditional worldview demonstrates a distinctive perception to the diverse and extended dimensions of time beyond that of modern societies which seem to be confined to the very immediate experiences of the present. Wole Soyinka’s essay “The Fourth Stage” presents an important discussion about the notions of time and history in the African mode of thought. Soyinka develops the well-

known idea of the three areas of existence which constitute the traditional world: the area of the forefathers, the living and the departed. Correspondingly, these metaphorical layers of existence represent the past, the present and the future, but these temporal spheres are not deemed in mere intangible conceptualization of time. For the African individual, "life, present life, contains within it manifestations of ancestor, the living and the unborn. All are vitally within the intimations and affectiveness of life" (Soyinka, 1988, p. 29). The individual can transcend the infinite fissure that disconnects these areas through a fourth sphere of existence, "the no man's land of existence" (1988, p. 32) which encompasses within it the different temporal aspects of those areas of existence. This transitional area can be conjured through ritual and sacrifice, argues Soyinka. Yet, he is completely conscious that there are many breaches between these spiritual and material spheres which should be mended by devoted acts of redemption and sacrifice. He views those who set out to penetrate into this metaphorical area as imaginary 'actors' (or artists) who spiritually transcend all the different temporal and special rifts and get from this area of transition "a patient submission of rational awareness" (1988, p. 35).

Following the critical paradigm we are given in Soyinka's transitional area, we should consider the main attributes of an 'actor' who can show a virtual acquiescence to the ancestors' good values to bridge the land's separated temporal experiences. For Achebe's heroine, Beatrice, the necessity of facing such dissolution is closely aligned with her ardent will to become a 'force of fusion' between the past and the present. Achebe's heroine and the context in which she operates suggest a dynamic society that is constantly readjusting and readapting to new situations. Beatrice embodies a distinctive cultural experience forged within a deliberate interplay of continuity and discontinuity, qualities which are characteristic of her traditional culture. The issue at stake, then, is not so much the writer's abiding commitment to his people's culture as his recognition of a resilient system of thought which sees a clear connection between different entities beyond the limited bounds of historical time. Achebe's frequent contention of his fundamental role – to "teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (1988, p. 30) – expounds by its straight yet

emphatic recognition of some common weaknesses and drawbacks at the level of the past cultural traditions that even the nationalist colonized intellectuals must consider in their revolutionary ideas against the racist colonial discourses. He demonstrates the unconstructive effects of the moral contentions inherent in colonialist discourses and refutes on the same ground the utopian images that these nationalist intellectuals tend usually to associate with their native culture and existence. When critics study the works of Achebe, their discussions and readings tend to focus on the notion of “balance”. Emmanuel Ngara, for example, writes approvingly about the “truthful and balanced picture of Igbo society” in Achebe’s novels, a genuine representation which “does not gloss over its weaknesses”(1991, p.116). In the same vein, David Cook explicates how in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe’s “lordly, objective, incontrovertible manner” of portraying the uneasy contact between European and Igbo world-views is not “concerned to pass judgment on social systems, nor to assert dogmatically that one is better or worse than another”(1977,p.67). And therefore the main consequence, writes Cook, “is one of balance” (1977,p.74). These constructions of objective representation are pointedly marked in Achebe’s thematic preoccupation. According to J.Z. Kronenfeld, discussions of *Things Fall Apart* as merely “a celebrative account of ‘traditional’, totally homogeneous and ‘communal’ African society” fail to grasp its representation of a community constructing a “balance” between conflicting and incongruous forces such as communal harmony and individual fulfillment, “masculine” and “feminine” virtues(1975,pp.218-9). For her part, Elleke Boehmer demonstrates the “uneasy co-existence” in *Anthills of the Savannah* of political discontent and cynicism with “an apparent commitment to gender reform and to the redemptive power of myth”(1991,p.105).

In one important point, Achebe’s ‘balance’ or objective representation can be associated with the duality aspect of his Igbo-world and its characteristic tendency of an open-minded pursuit of truthfulness that abates rigid beliefs and views. It is a significant approach to a cultural world-view based on the unique traditional Igbo thought of duality that Achebe explains in a note on the poem “Misunderstanding” in the volume *Beware, Soul Brother* which reads as follows (1971,pp65-66):

The Igbo people have a firm belief in the duality of things. (...) ‘I am the way

the Truth and the Life' would be meaningless in Igbo theology. (...) Igbo proverbs bring out this duality of existence very well. Take any proverb which puts forward a point of view or a 'truth' and you can always find another that contradicts it or at least puts a limitation on the absoluteness of its validity.

Emanated from the traditional belief in the world's spiritual existence, this aspect of dualism is fostered along the Igbo values of social flexibility and dynamism and which have been artistically integrated in the different thematic and aesthetic concerns of Achebe's novels. The 'mbari' art of Igbo-community is a distinctive example of artistic representation which expresses even the different "new forces" that are incorporated into the general order of this traditional society. Achebe expounds how

(t)he frequent representation of the alien district officer among traditional mbari figures is an excellent example of the mediating role of art between old and new (...). Art must interpret all human experience (...). Even if harmony is not achievable in the heterogeneity of human experience, the dangers of an open rupture are greatly lessened by giving to everyone his due in the same forum of social and cultural surveillance.(1988,p.44)

It is no wonder therefore that the adaptive characteristic of Igbo culture stands as a prominent factor in the development of Achebe's conception of post-colonial debates on culture. The specific form of Achebe's realistic fiction can be observed in his keen depiction of the socio-cultural history of his community. The latter is brought out in view of the turbulent experience of colonization and the different changes it has introduced into its institutions and beliefs. The essence of that literary representation is the continuity of that resilient nature of Igbo culture that Victor C. Uchendu describes as an inclination to recognize change at the level of some facets of living without giving up the distinctive aspects of Igbo culture (Uchendu,1965).

In fact, many of Achebe's critical essays and narratives reveal his discerning awareness of the constructive process of socio-cultural change intrinsic in the Igbo system of thought. The writer makes us observe how the community must revise its system of values and behaviors when some of its customs impede its quests for development and peace. This idea is in some way recognized in *Things Fall Apart* when Ezeudu, the oldest man in the village, recounts how the titled elders of the tribe could impose a set of severe penalties on any individual who did not show respect to the general communal codes of "the week of peace", during which no acts of violence were tolerated, because it was considered as an offense against Ani, the earth

goddess.(1967,pp.22-23) But for the sake of the general well-being of the group, the ritual had to be somehow altered because it ceased to maintain the usefulness for which it was set up in the first place. In *Arrow of God*, for example, we are given many references to such necessary aspects of adjustment. Ezeulu, who is himself a priest of a newly-founded deity, recounts with an overt pride how his grandfather set aside the undue tradition “which made any child born to a widow a slave”(1986, p.133). In the same vein, one elder speaks approvingly about the people of Aninta who even incinerated one of their deities because he failed to answer their needs (p.39). But this does not entail that these changes would necessarily unsettle the general body of the community’s belief-system. Needless to say, to burn or demolish a deity who is deemed as unproductive for the tribe’s interests is not to repudiate the other deities. In such a case, the failed deity would be substituted by another one to secure contentment and prosperity. In expounding this ritual practice, Uchendu mentions how the Igbo people expect useful service and good protection from their gods. When they cease to serve this task, “they are always threatened with starvation and desertion”. But when endowed with good shelter and abundance in crops harvest, “the Igbo are very faithful to their gods”(1965, p.95). In *Arrow of God*, the creation of Ulu as a deity of security and unity for the six villages of Umuaro people is an aspect of adjustment to some imperative conditions; it does not destabilize the people’s general order, but it functions principally to maintain it.

This is unequivocally a constructive system of general conduct which releases the individual from the confinements of dogma. Achebe has been hailed a “moderate” writer because his intellectual views rest on a critical and objective tendency which calls for a new orientation for the modern intellectual foundations of African systems of thoughts under the inevitable impact of the Western cultural inheritance. In these terms, his biographer Ezenwa-Ohaeto comes to emphasize Achebe’s good mediation between his African cultural world and the Western values which he has inherited from the Christian background of his family and his education. He quotes Achebe’s dialectic conviction that “you can be a Christian and yet be able to worship your own ancestors”(Ohaeto,1997,p.46). This emphatic stand on the part of Achebe to move between the past cultural traditions and the present emergent practices is not to be

understood as unwittingly abrogating the person's sense of cultural belonging. On the contrary, it sets forth a self-consciously assumed position on the status and meaning of culture in the lives of post-colonial individuals.

In fact, Achebe exemplifies that quality which is characteristic of the Igbo cosmology and culture, namely the impulse to contrive a possible balance between the two aspects of time; past and present, and hence refuse to yield to either of them. In the novel under study, *Anthills of the Savannah*, important customs, beliefs and literary genres are selected by the writer for treatment, but nowhere does this necessarily mean total and uncritical commitment to them. The writer frequently creates revealing socio-cultural scenes to expose to critical scrutiny those aspects of tradition which may stand in the way of progress or change. In *Anthills'* last chapter, one can notice how Achebe accommodates some traditional rituals with those of modern times. The traditional naming ceremony of Ikem's child is held under centrally modified rites; Beatrice as a woman takes the responsibility to name the child, abating thereby the original custom which requires the father or a male relative to undertake this role. This critical quality of dealing with the cultural issue is related, as will be shown with several incidents in the novel, to Achebe's deliberate method to present many sides of an experience with apparent impartiality. For example, he does not seek to justify or condemn the Igbo background on which he mostly draws. He is no doubt attached to this culture, but he does not put on view any idealized attitude when he evokes it. Achebe is as critical and satirical of the present as he is of the past. It is from this consideration that Achebe suggests that the new paradigms of the present order have to depend not only on a careful rethinking of the past traditions, but also on a reconstruction of the present frames in which the whole tradition is to be represented.

The question that arises from this is what kind of dynamic change in tradition can occur within homogeneous cultural bodies to make them engender possibilities of reform? Is there indeed a conception of a heterogeneous community that moves beyond static cultural norms? The grander question that we address in this chapter is to what extent Achebe's choice of narrative allows us to project the condition of the ex-colonized that takes account of both his indigenusness and the present time without being implicated in the biased stand of subsuming one category over the other? The

larger task, therefore, must be seen in the way the writer balances the diverse needs of the individual and society with the imperatives of a changing time, and in the way he effectively exploits the richness of the oral tradition to explore in depth the relevant link between tradition and modern experience. The next part of this study will set forth how the writer projects a story which relies for its truthfulness and significance on the use of traditional genres and myths. The writer's experimentation within the narrative form is therefore established for an important cultural experience, and all the essentials of a victorious transition and mediation of different cultural dimensions are assembled. The discussion of *Anthills of the Savannah* in these terms affords an opportunity to consider in detail the salient features of the attempt and to assess how successfully, in each case, the thematic and aesthetic form, the link between tradition and post-colonial experience has been established. The attitude of the writer to the whole issue of indigenous culture will be closely examined within the analysis of the problems of cultural interaction which arise in this novel, and the writer's use of myths as a form to recast the realistic mode of the events at the metaphorical level will also be dealt with. It is, then, to these problems that the next part of this chapter is devoted in an attempt to scrutinize how successfully Achebe has established a link between the past and the present in his narrative.

Achebe artfully relates his critical debate of tradition and the past to the novel form. His disapproval of rigid systems of thought and his abiding assertion of socio-cultural structures that are progressive and all-encompassing is manifest not only in the common and intellectual exchanges between his characters, but also in the stylistic unities of the narrative, which combines the presence of different social classes and intentional switches in the temporal and spacial dimensions. Achebe's novel emphasizes the principal idea that the art of fiction cannot be restricted to any particular or unique category of stylistics. Precisely the incorporation of different genres into the novel makes the latter the most convenient for verbally reprocessing reality in its intricate context. Achebe's novel demonstrates the possibilities of incorporating native oral narratives within his novels to assert the enduring validity of the past legacies to present realities while continually recasting them within new forms of artistic representation. Theorists of the novel make a number of claims about the

diverse stylistic unities of narrative structure and its dependence on specific shifts in time situations that appear requisite in depicting the narrative's main objects of representation. An important theoretician for this discourse is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose treatment and theory of the novel as "an extra-artistic medium" presents a useful argument to approach the artistic device of incorporating oral genres into the novel.

The main idea is that all the attempts to study the stylistics of verbal art can and must rise above the simplistic split between a theoretical formal approach and a similarly insubstantial ideological approach. "Form and content in discourse", states Bakhtin, "are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon – social throughout its entire range (...), from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning"(1981,p. 259). The highly characteristic principle in this form of analysis is to perceive the novel as a verbal art that is not limited to pure stylistic unities. From its primary development as a genre that had at its generic aspects a new approach of reprocessing reality and conceptualizing time, the novel has been theorized as "a secondary syncretic unification of other seemingly primary verbal genres"(Bakhtin, 1981,p.321).As a hybrid text it presents its themes, the totality of the things and issues portrayed and developed in it, by means of its versatile artistic techniques and narrative mode. This idea raises the emphasis on what Bakhtin calls "the stylistics of genre" wherein the literary scholars are placed before several diverse stylistic unities, often presented by means of different linguistic registers and subject to specific stylistic impulses.

In explaining this "multiform and variform phenomenon" of the novel, Bakhtin states that the novel allows the inclusion of diverse genres, "both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc) and extra-artistic (every-day, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others)"(1981,p.320). Bakhtin's conception is both literary and cultural in that it associates the novel with various structures of representation. Here, bringing elements together from other texts suggests not the identical elements with previous meaning but rather to use them in new contexts and thus construct different elements in the narrative. At any rate, the employment of particular elements of traditional oral genres in new forms of narratives would undoubtedly create new meanings, and bring about an important cultural experience.

This argument is analogous to Jameson's notion of the "marbled" forms of the novel's narrative, which serves to interweave the different narrative patterns. (1981, p.144)

Bakhtin's notion that the novel integrates into its own peculiar structure other genres and several diverse stylistic unities to render them the object of representation seems valid to Achebe's use of oral genres in his novel. *Anthills of the Savannah* is not completely derivative of traditional oral genres: rather it draws amply on particular forms of traditional genres that must be deemed not as the unities of the stylistic totality of the novel but as fundamental elements in the elaboration of the questions that Achebe's narrative puts forth. Achebe's novel is unquestionably a hybrid text: *Anthills* is a complex prose narrative which is punctuated with poetry, self-conscious biographies, myths, and critical essays. Moving between the mythic, righteous quests for self-knowledge and harmonious relationship with both the traditional world and the collective community, sometimes slight depictions of popular happenings and customs, it thus merges and brings into interaction various patterns of narrative giving space to different ethnic groups and classes who are all called upon to re-examine their socio-cultural subjectivity. In one important sense, as the study will show, past and present come together in the main events of Achebe's text through the artful combination of both the mythic and referential narratives. Achebe's text thus provides a constructive model for a new idea of culture and imaginative expression. In *Anthills*, Achebe demonstrates the ways in which the text's several tones and forms of narrative can be used to help to resolve a formal, aesthetic and a thematic issue that the writer's text is reflecting, for, like Bakhtin and Jameson, he is able to delineate the creative multicultural impulses inevitably suggested through the apparently hybrid convoluted structures of the text.

This characteristic of enduring continuity with different genres, mainly of oral tradition, is, thus, evident in African literature, in which the interplay between content and form is astutely oriented to accentuate the writer's immediate intentions of representation. This mode of oral-written interface, in its different patterns, exhibits for its practitioners a peculiar literary concernment not simply for the peculiar "overlap" between the expressive elements of the oral and the written artistic forms in traditional communities in the contemporary period, as Ruth Finnegan has viewed it (1982), but

also for that generic process inherent in what Wole Soyinka has identified as the “surviving patterns” of the African traditional culture in the contemporary imaginative writings (1988,pp90-203). Soyinka’s idea is related in essence with the imaginative adaptation of the traditional forms of drama (Masquerade) to the different facets of cultural transformation. This tendency towards appropriating cultural forms arises in the first place from the writers’ anxiety to recast their adopted linguistic medium as well as the literary conventions of the novel in order to reveal more adequately the authentic generic elements underlying the peculiar structure of their works.

In principle, the oral pattern of African novels refers to the depiction of little happenings of everyday popular life, or the insertion of proverbs, oral stories, prayers, myths and legends, and other forms of traditional verbal arts, which Alioune Tine identifies as the “ethno-text”(qtd in, Julien,1992,p.26). More precisely, this element of orality in the culture of traditional societies is identified by various African scholars by the term “oral literature”. For example, Isidore Okpewho defines it as a literature which is simply “delivered by word of mouth”, and deems it as “a useful concept for those scholars interested in examining the cultural relationships between (...) orality and literacy”(Okpewho, 1992,p.3). A more elaborated definition for this concept is provided by the two East African scholars J. Nandwa and A. Bukenya:

Oral literature may be defined as those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression. (Nandwa and Bukenya,1983,p.1)

So, following the different thoughts that may be gathered from these definitions, I can contend that oral literature implies an artistic experience in which cultural transmission is undertaken by word of mouth through face-to-face contact between individuals depending mainly on the collective memory of the community and the verbal skills of its practitioners. It includes riddles, puns, tongue-twisters, proverbs, aphorisms, recitations, chants, songs, and stories (tales and legends). This distinctive field of verbal arts expounds how the diverse forms of artistic expression in the African traditional societies rely primarily on an oral mode of realization, and this is a common denominator that renders the spoken word an essential residual element in traditional African culture. This aspect has its cultural and rhetorical implications for the general

reading and study of African literature which draws heavily on the distinctive rhetoric of traditional narratives.

It is therefore crucial to set forth that African novels could be explored and read valuably in their peculiar connection to all other forms of verbal arts, specifically those forms which rely on long narratives. At this level, I deem it useful to depend on Abiola Irele's distinction of the three levels of orality with regard to the oral literature of Africa which serves appositely to explain the aspect of continuity between oral narratives and African imagination. Irele studies the different uses of language (ordinary communication and literary usage) in African orality in an effort to provide a clear understanding of the different levels of continuity between the principles of oral and written forms of literature. At a first level, he distinguishes the "ordinary communication with a purely denotative use of language", a form that can be found in the simple factual statements and commands. At a second level, he refers to the connotative sphere of orality indicated by the use of those figurative and rhetorical forms of language, forms that occur as a frequent aspect of linguistic interaction in the daily life of traditional societies. In this rhetorical form of language usage we have the proverbs and the aphorisms. These culturally fixed forms, as Irele explains, define the "formulaic" framework for the act of speech and even for the structure of thought. At the third level of orality, there is the strictly literary and imaginative mode of expression, which is reserved for the imaginative uses of language. At this level, as Irele indicates, we have a coherent body of texts that constitute in its own right a literature in the ordinary sense of the word; that is, a body of verbal narratives that stand "as monuments of a collective sensibility and imagination, expressive of a structure of feeling itself determined by a profound correspondence between experience and imagination." (1992,p.9) Examples of African canonical texts in this sense include the great epics, like *Sundiata* and *Ozidi*. And it is at the level of this literary category that the process of direct progression of the modes of oral expression into that of writing is more apparent. What this cursory survey has tried to grasp is the primary idea that beyond its function in the cultural environment of African expression, orality also stands as a working pattern for the written literature in the European languages, a mode of writing whose generic feature is the insistence on

attaining the experience of oral expression even within the artistic templates set by Western literary tradition. The main idea here is to show how the “literary level” of this oral tradition, in both its artistic forms and with regard to its cultural implications, serves to orient and sustain the formal and discursive framework of the contemporary African imagination. In this primary sense, I will attempt to emphasize how the oral texts can function as the basic ‘intertext’ of the writer’s imaginative experience.

Orality is an important notion to which we shall pay particular attention in relation to Achebe’s novel, but here let us set forth that many practitioners of African literary texts have ardently attempted to outline the foundations of continuity in those oral genres which had been developed centuries before the colonial epoch and the creation of written literary narratives. Harold Scheub’s discussion of this link between oral and written literature is one example of such a literary preoccupation. In his interest in oral literature, Scheub pays great attention to the levels of continuity between the principles of oral and written forms of literature. In his “A Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature”(1985), Scheub lays the emphasis on the unity of the different forms of artistic expression, such as the novel and oral genres. According to his premise, “the early literary traditions were beneficiaries of the oral genres, and there is no doubt that the epic and its hero are the predecessors of the African novel and its central characters”(1985,p.1). In the history of African literary criticism, this simple observation is often rendered complex by challenging discourses of authenticity at the level of culture and literature as well. For many scholars and critics of African written literary texts, drawing on African verbal arts has signified most often an attempt to embed the artistic categories of these forms in the modern literatures written in the colonizer’s language. This process manifests itself in what Abiola Irele calls an “aesthetic traditionalism(2001, p.56); a poetics of ‘indigenism’ that characterizes the formal structure of much of the African imaginative writings. Let us hasten to expound here that Irele’s perception suggests more than a formal connotation; it accentuates a reflective function when the writer reveals a mastery of the written medium that allows him / her to evoke and reinvent those forms of oral narratives within the recesses of the imaginative consciousness of post-colonial Africa. “We can speak, then”, states Irele, “of a new mediation of the African imagination, which consists of a re-working of

tradition at the formal level and a creative interaction between the two modes of imaginative discourse (traditional and western) made available to the African writer”(2001,p.59). The issue at hand, then, is not the mere presence of oral elements in written literature but rather the way this literary composite serves to define and influence the range of our interpretation and perception of African written narratives. For the fundamental issue is not to examine the origins of continuity between oral and written literatures, but rather to find out how these conscious references to oral patterns carry an adequate and proper means of imaginative resolutions to aesthetic and ideological issues.

Eileen Julien’s *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (1992) is very perceptive in the way it analyzes this problematic. Julien studies the assumption that the links of continuity between the forms of oral literature and the novel is a preeminent feature of cultural authenticity; she shows that this ground of thinking stands as a conscious response to the biased theories of Eurocentric criticism. Critics in the West and in Africa adopt an essentialist view in their examination of African imaginative texts. Thus their studies of the links of continuity between oral and written texts are frequently built on a hierarchical conception (the novel is theoretically a European art; orality carries it towards specific literary uses and associates it with authentic patterns of expression which are particularly African). However the oral genres and the novel form should not serve as definite categories for an African or for a European literary tradition, argues Julien. Both orality and writing can conveniently record the different happenings of socio-cultural experiences: any attempt to study their “interaction in literary genres”, then “should not be in an effort to prove or disprove cultural authenticity but rather to appreciate literature as a social and aesthetic act”(Julien,1992,p.24). The principal point that emerges here is that the discussion of the relationships between oral and written art forms may be based on a less essentialist motivated tendency, and studies of orality and written literature may focus instead on the complex interpretation of those works whose writers are well-versed in building up a beautiful and effective interplay of different literary genres.

In one sense, all attempts to outline the aesthetic origins of the African novel would be deemed as a critical examination of how aesthetics, cultural and social issues are

explored by reference to, or revision of, the stylistic elements of oral genres. Accordingly, Julien argues that references to orality in the African novel are less related to generic characteristics inherent in this artistic tradition than to specific narrative techniques for any writer. The incorporation of oral narrative stylistics to African novels, or other literary genres, as Julien emphasizes, is not a necessary formal device of this literature or a symbol of an enduring authenticity. In these terms, aspects of oral tradition are embedded in the written texts not because they carry the cultural background of the writer but because they display possibilities to realize issues of aesthetic and ideological dimensions: evoking and appropriation of oral genres serves to vindicate an author's narrative objectives and socio-cultural implications. The idea here is to move towards what Julien terms "a healthier textual practice" (1992,p.155). This suggests the need to read the imitation or modification of an element of verbal art not as a supportive sign of enduring and untransformed authentic forms or unsighted adherence to the conventions of traditional arts but rather as an essential literary preoccupation for accentuating the 'spirit of dialogue' between traditional verbal arts and the novel, both at the structural and thematic levels.

The appropriation of traditional verbal arts for imaginative implications represents then a fundamental component of the stylistic structures by which the writer builds up adequate levels of cultural connection between past and present. Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* tends to be particularly useful in this regard, characterized as it is by the complex conjunction of the oral forms and the conventional aspects of the novel, a functional literary mediation which reflects the different cultural convolutions attending the African twofold experience of tradition and modernity. In the specific hybrid text of *Anthills*, there is an unmistakable intention to make this form of literature rely for its thematic and rhetorical orientations on this artistic appropriation of oral art. In *Anthills*, the materials of the oral tradition and the narrative mode are consciously selected. They are used in Achebe's novel not because they stand as determinant features to embody an enduring cultural identity but because they provide the novel form with peculiar verbal devices and procedures with a view to reconstructing and reprocessing meanings that reveal the dense texture of the present socio-cultural reality. This hybrid structure of *Anthills* seems highly important, for it

demonstrates how the diverse forms of oral narratives can determine the totality of the novel's thematic interests and narrative stylistics.

Achebe's approach to the problematic of cultural renaissance is presented in the experimental technique of incorporating legends and myths as allegories within the narrative structure of his novel, which imply their discursive and artistic function in the whole act of imagination. For Achebe, as for many African writers or scholars who demonstrate an entrenched concernment with the fundamental issue of cultural identification and past retrieval, the deliberate return to myth or to other forms of archaic verbal narratives – conceived of as a collective cultural testimony from which to derive more meaningful truths and values – brings into light critical issues of cultural representation as they are determined and informed by complex factors of historical transitions and communal development. This leads us to inquire, for example, if Idemili the Igbo goddess who features as the prominent organizing emblem of Achebe's metaphoric narrative is merely a formal device in the novel's series of images, or an authentic cultural determinant for the writer's creative vision that serves to offer an alternative reassessment of the post-colonial problematic of cultural relations through invoking mythic narratives. But the polemical thrust of Achebe's intellectual views requires that we construe the presence or modification of some elements or form of traditional oral genres in the novel's main narrative not as an aspect of permanent and untransformed cultural heritage but as a form of a useful development in the formation of socio-cultural consciousness. It is crucially important to go through and interpret those adapted oral texts within Achebe's narrative to discern how those elements take on different connotations in the specific temporal and special setting of the novel's events.

In fact, one cannot adequately apprehend Achebe's creation of his complex characters in this novel without drawing on the specific features of Igbo mythology which endows the writer with an active template that holds the referential events together. Even though Achebe's intellectual characters appear to confine themselves to the secluded world of their abstract ideas, it should be noted that their self-conscious stories have to be read in terms much larger than the perceptible social contexts they dwell in. They are complex individuals who represent a cultural totality that combines

both the mythic and material levels of existence. Such cultural traits form the general fabric of the writer's characterization in *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God* in which the reader can construct a clear image about the Igbo culture through the abundant presence of the community's traditional verbal arts. However, the incorporation of this cultural legacy in the contemporary setting of *Anthills of the Savannah* through associating a modern character with a mythical figure carries important connotations, literary and cultural. For example, it is quite easy to discern in *Arrow of God* how the different social and spiritual conflicts which bedevil the life of Umuaro's inhabitants are directly related to the opposing spirits of the deities from whom the tribe's most potent priests derive their communal support and influence. That approach of overt reference to traditional forms of verbal arts is not plainly suggested in *Anthills* because of its modern background and because the total scope of its narratives are conveyed in a language of a poetic prose and intellectual self-reflected accounts that veil, in some way, the writer's traditionalist inclinations. Yet, metaphorically, Achebe's narrative escorts the movements of the characters' inner reflections from tentatively apprehended realities to the deep metaphysical dimension of cultural tradition. Like the complex characters of his rural novels, we find how the modern feminine character of Achebe's last novel, Beatrice, is constantly prompted to go through intricate metaphysical states of contemplation, especially in moments of personal anxiety and public predicament when intellectual and rational mode of thought proves unable to come out with the insights needed to deal with the prevalent bleak realities. Beatrice is an emblem of a transitional figure in these intellectual shifts. She is projected in relation to particular mythical stories of Igbo cosmology. Through the artful figurative process of deification, and through connecting her moralistic values to those of the goddess Idemili, Beatrice serves precisely as a cultural connection between the land's past heritage and the estranged post-colonial world.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe conjures the meaning and significance of tradition through the fancy world of Igbo myths. He creatively shifts the whole text into the metaphorical level and fuses the complicated mythical elements of the past with those confused and mishandled ones of the present times. For Achebe, traditional culture cannot be dissociated from its mythological genesis. Myth and social conduct

are interrelated. Taking as his example the Igbo myths and world-view, he argues that Igbo culture makes myth (and poetry) an appropriate form of thought to understand and co-exist with the demands of their lives. Accentuating this conception of belief, he writes that “since Igbo people did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought to explain the metaphor of myth ... anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way”. Achebe goes on to point out that “some of these ways are folk-tales, proverbs ... rituals and festivals”(1975,p.94). In the novel, he follows this mode of ritual and myths of his Igbo culture to present a lucid interpretation of the present conditions. He is well aware that his “ancestors”, as he posits it, “created their different politics with myths embodying their varying perceptions of reality”(1988, p.168); myths which, he believes, have to be explored and employed for the cultural emancipation of the African society. In this view, Isidore Okpewho, in his study of myth in African culture and literature in his book *Myth in Africa*, calls on the Africans to repossess their ancient heritage, and search for the means of advancement and self-understanding in the imports and substances of myth. He contends that “If Africans are to achieve true self-apprehension, the resources for this must be sought not from archival history but from myth, the living patrimony of the race and the capsule of its cultural essence”(Okpewho,1983,p.243).

As a complex blend of the real and the imaginary, myth is conceived of as an integral part of cultural evolution because it tends always to reflect real events which reveal codified patterns of the traditional institutions and rites of society and its relevant primeval activities. It is an intricate cultural mode of thought which can be examined and interpreted in several perspectives. Bronislaw Malinowski’s explanation of the functional value of myth presents an important corpus to this conception of myth. The meaningful myth “is a hard working, extremely important cultural force”, states Malinowski, it is made to function as “a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral craving, social submissions, even practical requirements”(qtd in Chase,1949,p.79). As such, myth constitutes a requisite function: it presents itself as a crucial cultural reference that expresses and posits accepted moral principles and relevant practices by which the present realities and activities of a given group can be organized. This archaic mode of thought is

deemed more appropriate to human tribulations than the trivial realities of the chaotic common world; its narratives are recognized as true, for everybody is well-versed in telling and recording them; and they function as a pragmatic system of conduct to maintain the purposefulness and convenience of social beliefs and practices. An intentional reference to this primeval narrative can take place when a given social event, practice, ritual, or ethical imperative requires “justification, warrant of antiquity, reality and sanctity”(qtd in Chase,1949,p.79)).

But far from being a purely functionalist integral facet of cultural development, myth is also perceived as a mode of interpretation in which the symbolic ideal and the objective reality interpenetrate one another. David Bidney offers a useful argument on this recognized relationship between the element of truth and myth. For Bidney, myth presents itself as a symbolic expression and a mediate explanation of an objective reality with a distinct mode of representation of its own. This induces us to relate the principle of truth to the mythic perception since it is based on self-created symbols that give expression to a unique form of objective reality. In this way, myth can be distinguished from art particularly in the view that the mythical thinking involves the principle of reality in its object. “The mythopoeic mind”, contends David Bidney, “does not regard myth merely as a symbolic expression or representation of some independent reality; the mythic symbols are identical with the reality. Hence mythical reality is accepted as given and is not subjected to critical evaluation”(Bidney,1966, p.11). This sets forth why the mythic mind does not necessarily make a distinction between the imaginary and the real; the symbol is itself the object of representation and for this reason the mythical mode of thought does not completely border on the ideal. It draws on symbolic representations but without distinguishing the symbolic meanings from the immediately given reality. This can be traced in all phases of mythological thought and is reflected quite clearly in the performances of mythical narratives in which the figure of the ritual is made to identify completely with the mythical symbol (god or demon) whom he incarnates. Hence, Bidney is ready to postulate that in the performance of social rites “the human actor” does not see himself as involving in simple banal depiction but as “becoming identified momentarily with the person of the mythical drama and exercising his powers”(1966, p.7).

What these perspectives accentuate is the significance of the factor of truth in the mythic system of thought. It is this mode of thought that particularly governs the general import of the oral narratives of Achebe's Igbo culture, in which the division between the people's secular lives and imaginative spheres is improbable. For a more valued interpretation of Achebe's philosophy of culture in *Anthills*, we need to relate it to the realities of Igbo mythology which provides the writer with an important body of discursive and aesthetic tools. Victor C. Uchendu evokes these elements very explicitly in his *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (1965). For Uchendu, the Igbo depend on the instructive devices of their folktales, mythology and other different forms of verbal arts to express their total view of the universe which is made to proffer a perpetual system of belief and conduct. In this view, he states that there "is a dual but interrelated phenomenon involving the interaction between the material and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible (...) the living and the dead"(1965,pp.11-2). Uchendu explains how the Igbo world, in all its different facets of existence (material and spiritual), is made comprehensible to the people by reference to the generic system of thought which organizes the sacrosanct core of their cosmology. For beyond its apparent focus on explaining religious and ritual practices, the Igbo cosmology constitutes a referential guide that its adherents can draw on in ordering their material life. Apart from being a metaphysical source which provides useful explanations about the origin of creation, as Uchendu argues, the Igbo cosmology includes in its general core the "dynamic factors" and "basic notions underlying cultural activities and define cultural goals and social relation"(1965,p.11). This cardinal combination of the metaphysical and the material areas of existence gives rise to a total mode of knowledge that animates the general order and collective life in this traditional society. It is the living value of such a functional ethos which Wole Soyinka appropriately describes as the "metaphysics of the irreducible."(Soyinka,1976,p.53).

It is only through recognizing this interesting connectedness between the real existence and the mythic spiritual sphere that one can appreciate the manner in which the various forms of the African verbal narratives were also used to achieve a particular influence on the collective consciousness. This expounds their cardinal symbolic function as instructive and illustrative narratives of the different facets of the

communal existence. In this sense, they are conceived of as “grand narratives”, in the specific connotation that Jean-François Lyotard has associated with this notion (1979, pp.35-43). Their explicative and illuminating functions concur with his notion of narratives as expressions of modes of knowledge. It is therefore instructive to adopt a more comprehensive outlook of the issue and to recognize the various forms of the African oral tradition as a body of expressive narratives that transcend the merely aesthetic to encompass the cognitive, ethical, and symbolic dimensions of awareness. This is especially true of Achebe’s Igbo culture in which narrative forms of various registers (myths, stories, proverbs and other oral genres) can present themselves as a total system of knowledge which allows particular elements of a given community to associate easily with one another on the ground of a shared set of principles and values about the general fabric of their worldview. When we postulate then that the complex narrative structure in Achebe’s novel is meant to ensure not simply the aesthetic level but the deep connotations of myth and identify it as a descriptive and explicative system of the society’s total existence, we are prompted to admit with Irele that “myths in those societies”, and certainly Achebe’s Igbo is one of them, “were fictions not so much to think with as to live by”(2001,p.104).

Achebe shows how this overriding perspective of the relevance of the question of truth to mythic belief is part and parcel of the ideological structure of his traditional culture and so essential to a proper elucidation of experience in the immediate socio-cultural context. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the context of Achebe’s last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, is that of an apparent turmoil characterizing the political situation, marked by entrenched and despotic regimes in Nigeria. Within this atmosphere, the novel presents a clear portrait of the complexities of the post-independence problem of communication between the state and its citizens in the context of opaque power systems operating in the despotic mode. Through his official language of brutality, His Excellency does not offer the members of his government and the ordinary people any space to articulate or discuss their views of the current circumstances of their country. To counteract this kind of language, its alternative expression should take the form of highly structured metaphors to envisage a possible world of speech subversive of His Excellency’s ‘plainness and bluntness’. This

situation entails a necessary resort to the symbolic meanings of myth which seem to be an appropriate form of expression at these particular times. At this level, myth and fantasy narratives essentially are intended to carry out an act of dissent by exhibiting an alternative approach of societal order and narrative construction. In these terms, the adaptation of these oral narratives genres is not merely a necessary feature of the novel's aesthetic but is, rather, a particular and purposeful one that expresses an imaginative solution to the novel's socio-cultural implications and the author's narrative goals.

Through Achebe's incorporation of verbal forms of expression into his text, myth is referred to as a narrative technique, an archaic narrative which is artfully made close to the realist narrative of the novel's events. Isidore Okpewho argues that any form of oral narrative can be called a myth "so long as it gives due emphasis to fanciful play"(1983,p.69). Okpewho's statement, in fact, does pinpoint the discursive and aesthetic difficulties that can arise when combining mythic criticism and analyses of literary texts. He explains that myths include specific elements of narrative in that the stories they present depend on a sequential line of events, as do realist narratives, but it is the mode of the open time intrinsic in those stories that lends myth a typical feature, one which influences the conventional structuring of sequential narrative and time in written texts. "Its principal virtue is that it tends to resist all constraint to time and experience to the end that it satisfies the deepest urges of a people"(Okpewho, 1983,p.219). Okpewho relates this to the fact that the time-scheme for the oral artist is not confined to the conventional aspect of "bondage to time" that one can usually observe in literary texts, but is to be determined by a particular occasion to highlight, and yielding to the narrator's impulses and fancies. The writer can succeed in transforming the myth(s) into a realistic material through contriving a convenient pattern of aesthetic composition, and by linking the symbolic import of the integrated myths to the novel's elements of representation, at the level of plot or character.

The chief difficulty, then, seems to lie in the need to recognize the relationship between literature and myth, while at the same time bringing to the surface Achebe's artful incorporation of both modes of expression in his last novel. Literature is analogous to myth, we have to postulate, and both serve to present an aesthetic

experience. This complex literary duality of literature and myth can be expounded through Richard Chase's *Quest for Myth* (1949). Chase examines a part of the intellectual background of the general aesthetic relations between the modern literature and myth. He focuses on the aesthetic function of myth, its link with other forms of cultural expression, and the possible formal ways in which myth criticism can be applied in interpreting and studying modern literature. Chase emphasizes the imaginative activity and the persuasive aspect as distinctive elements in both myth and literature. He connects the two, and defines myth as "the aesthetic activity of a man's mind"(1949,p.vii). As such, myth must be thought of as an aesthetic experience and should be studied in this sense. It can take the form of a prose narrative or poetic account; it is a literary mode of expression that presents itself "as an aesthetic creation of the human imagination."(Chase,1949,p.73) To achieve such function, literature should be linked to myth. Any critical theorization of the literary uses of myth would have, then, to underline its mediating function and would have to explore its symbolic narratives as any other mode of literary expressions rather than discount its aesthetic significance. For in one important sense, as Chase has emphasized, "there is no such thing as a myth, but only poetical stories which are more or less mythical"(1949,p.73).

To this important thought that is based on a stylistic composite of literature and myth, Richard Priebe's book *Myth, Realism and the West African Writer* (1988) must be considered a major contribution. In attempting to trace the realistic (ethical) and mythical modes in a number of West African novels Priebe comes to realize how some texts transcend the referential and immediate experience on which they draw, and employ a body of rhetoric that can combine through symbols, motifs and images the past sacred truths and the present transitional history. He examines the stylistic patterns of West African novels at the level of the mode of rhetoric that informs those works, particularly at the level of correspondence between the literary work and its socio-cultural context. By far the writer employs the different artistic elements of his text, such as characterization, narrative structure, language registers, and theme, to embody the consciousness of the real world that he attempts to depict.

Priebe's principle idea is that contemporary West African texts can be informed by two distinctive modes of rhetoric: ethical consciousness and mythic consciousness⁽¹⁾.

This is not simply a structural distinction, that is, a distinction between ‘verisimilitude and fantasy’, oriented only by the approach the artist has employed to conjure a given experience into an artistic work. Priebe also distinguishes between the two modes in terms of formal patterning, stylistic unities that characterize the rhetoric of each form of consciousness. The ethical message is informed by a realist mode; the writer adopts an explicit connection between his work and the real world he draws on. In these terms, his work tends to be historical in its specificity of temporal and special setting and unbroken in its clear construction of the stories’ beginnings and unfolding events. In contrast, the mythical is a figurative and inconsistent mode, setting up an implicit connection with the social reality from which it derives its material. It presents obscure and fragmentary realities from the inside in an “ahistorical, cyclical or disjunctive manner”, and frequently forcing on the readers inconsistent scenes where dreary images of death are escorted by those of resurgence and renewal. (Priebe,1988,p.xii) In this mode, the hero is estranged from the community in which s/he is portrayed, a self-conscious person who changes through the course of events to develop into a harbinger of social restoration. Yet the two rhetorics of writing can be combined in the body of the same text, argues Priebe. In relating to particular novels, he explains that the stylistic unities and patterns that inform the general formation of each mode of consciousness, “mythic” and “ethical”, serve to identify the different imaginative structures which contribute to sharpen the discursive impulses behind the writing of a given text. In general, African novels are structured along stylistic elements that are ethical and others that are mythic, and writers wittingly resort to such literary blend to assert a specific cultural background and define their unwavering relationship with it.

Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* is an appealing example of a West African novel which transcends Priebe’s contradistinction of the two forms of rhetoric. Beatrice’s narration of the nation’s story is directly related to her confusion of the two types of rhetoric. Achebe employs elements both of a mythic and an ethical mode of representation. While we can examine the novel in terms of the two modes of consciousness, we deem it necessary to focus somehow on the mythic mode since it appears quite clear that it is used by the writer to hone the novel’s thematic orientation. As the next part of this study will show, Achebe has employed myths within the line of

ethical (referential/realistic) consciousness, for his pervading didactic purpose has induced him to outline the general structure of his work in a specific way. In fact, Achebe has regularly resorted to the traditional myths of his Igbo culture to deal with certain historical and socio-cultural issues. In the complete chapter which is devoted to the myth of Idemili in *Anthills*, Achebe presents the myth in that mythic meaning of free time movement in an attempt to appease the community's experience of historical and cultural trauma. What is important is that many events are to be read and construed within the mythic mode of rhetoric in the sense that they are structured more in relation to the complex symbols and metaphors of myth than to the immediate referential mode of the ethical element. Achebe is aware of the importance of maintaining the appropriate link between specific cultural ethics and the significance of the aesthetic experience carried by the mythic rhetoric. Being re-enacted within this complex aesthetic experience, the Igbo myth of Idemili presents itself as an important referential narrative that would enable the writer to construct a brilliant juxtaposition of the real and the ideal by combining concrete objects with the marvelous motifs of the primeval reality.

Myth, as a mediating literary device in Achebe's novel, performs the all important function of projecting the conflicts and interactions of different socio-cultural and historical dispositions. The writer attempts to re-inscribe the traditional world of myth as an "aesthetic experience and imagination", to use Chase's words, a mediating device which can resolve the disturbances of convoluted attitudes and carry them into a meaningful and useful experience. In the novel, the artistic activity of story-telling and the anxiety to hold authority over words, all fundamental expressive elements within the text, are brought into a beautiful fusion with the hybrid structure of mythological narrative. Deliberate shifts in tenses and narrative voices, the Idemili myth told by the omniscient narrator, Beatrice's momentary spiritual experiences and the poetic-prose of Ikem's writings, all tend to present Achebe's novel as a close-knit narrative constructed around complex realistic events.

In this novel, the act of speech is completely under the repressive apparatus of power; the state president controls all the public means of communication. "He owns all the words in this country – newspapers, radio and television stations"(p.6). The

opportunity of factual communication is repressed and broken in an environment of fright and bounded liberties, which contrasts definitely with Achebe's desire for a common possession and unbounded exchange of language. When social and political dialogue is inhibited, all the different aspects of social order and relationships seem to have calcified; the novel therefore argues for the need to interpret the nation's experiences through the use of a language not contorted in an entrenched sphere of repression. This plain and explicit language is symbolized through the unrestrained medium of myth which unifies through factual reference and metaphor the main themes and issues. The novel, then, issues a call for an alternative mode of action to end the political disarray it describes. At this level, myth is presented as the proper mediating device to fulfill this objective. The writer invites us to perceive the myths he draws on not so much as a conventional stylistic element as they are a reliable system of thoughts and beliefs. In evoking Igbo mythological figures within a contemporary reality and setting, Achebe, quite deliberately, intends to make myth function in a particular way to the attainment of particular ends. It allows the writer to combine the personal and the communal stories, the recovered memories of the past and the emergent experiences of the present, and therefore represents, in the reconstructed stories it recounts, a more synthesized possibility of cultural experience which can even rise above the imaginary level.

The dramatic poem that Ikem titles "Hymn to the Sun" constitutes conceivably the text's most arresting element of figurative expression. It draws a meaningful analogy between natural devastation and political oppression. Ikem's reflections on the actual turmoil caused by the military junta of Sam leads him to the distressing recognition that in a nation where a collective predicament can no longer be bypassed and settled at individual level, the government is deemed as the people's last resort to solve it. Yet the most terrible scourge that can afflict any society is that of a government that turns into an apparatus of tyranny, unduly preoccupied with designing its plans of general control, and discounting in the process its people's pressing and fundamental needs. The poem's dreary verses sound like a condensed dirge that epitomizes the predicament of the symbolic drought-stricken province of Abazon. This constituency which does not yield to the government's autocratic calls to vote for his Excellency's

life-presidency is considered by this latter a rebellious region. By way of consequence, the authoritarian president retaliates by ignoring its calls for assistance when a drought befalls its lands.

Allusive and direct descriptions in the narrative present Sam, His Excellency, as the Sun symbol. In the context of the cabinet assembly, for example, Chris informs us that the temper of the President determines the general behavior of the ministers in the meeting. Chris's supporting view of the Abazonian region because of its drought crisis infuriates Sam and the trepidation in the cabinet space is apparent but soon after the president appears with a rejoicing mood for no apparent reason and Chris expresses it in this implied metaphor: "The fiery sun retires temporarily behind a cloud; we are reprieved and immediately celebrating"(p.3). Drawing on the same reference, the old man who leads the delegation of Abazon makes the appealing rhetorical statement in positing a poignant analogy between Sam and the Sun. In his influential rhetorical speech, he tells Ikem and the audience in the Harmony Hotel that his delegation has come to Bassa, the fictional capital, because some important activist individuals paid a visit to Abazon to record to them that: "Because you said no to the Big Chief he is very angry and has ordered all the water bore-holes they are digging in your area to be closed". The wise old man is painfully aware of the harming consequences of affronting the "sun". Hence he comes with his region's delegates to beseech the president's contentedness, and to express their complete allegiance so that they may eschew "the anger of the sun"(p.121).

The sun afflicts the Abazonian people with a terrible condition of drought which is made more serious by Sam's vindictive orders to stop the erection of the water bore-holes in the region. The two carry out the same brutal act in depriving the people of water. Such undue cruelty is illustrated in Ikem's figurative phrase: "silt(ing) up the canals of birth in the season of renewal"(p.28). Sam goes further in his vengeance when he gives an official order to detain the peaceful delegation from that region. Ikem, at the beginning of his "Hymn to the Sun" says to his people that their conditions will not be improved until they defeat "the wild sun of April"(p.25). These bleak ideas of the ravaging of the landscape caused by the sun are related not only to Ikem's oblique denunciation of the government's oppression in this metaphorical

representation but also to previous direct references in the novel that establish a symbolic link between Sam's despotic rule and the Sun's fierceness. It is clear that the writer depends on this analogy to produce an impact on the novel's thematic orientation. On the one hand, the petition of the Abazonian group functions so as to raise the events of the main conflict in the novel, on the other hand, the sub-story of the drought-afflicted Abazon is used by the writer to provide the adequate referential material for Ikem's prose-poem. The "Hymn to the Sun" itself constitutes an important sub-text within the novel's unstable narrative structure that is linked to the writer's self-conscious writing and that aims at strengthening the novel's discourse.

Accordingly, Ikem's poem presents itself as a contemplative moment which seeks to recapture a past of promise and to contrast it with a present of fatal impediment; at the post-colonial moment of narrative, the narrators must expose the unconvincing side of the nationalist longing for a cohesive reality and culture, and show with no form of reservation the fragmentation engendered by an authoritarian power. Ikem brings to light this figurative relationship by contriving an apocalyptic circumstance for the novel in his "Hymn to the Sun", written after being harassed in a lengthy traffic congestion. The poem is defined by its strong elegiac tone; it is an expression of grief for the death of the nation and the ordeal that has fallen over its people. This prose-poem seeks an explanation for the present affliction from the Sun; the Great Messenger of the Creator, and wonders why all the ample attempts at sacrifice and expiation have not mollified this state of anguish: "Look, our forlorn prayers, our offerings of conciliation lie scattered about your floor where you cast them disdainfully away; and every dawn you pile up your long basket of day with the tools and emblems of death"(p.28). The poem describes in hyperbolic terms the destructive aspects of the desiccating power of the sun in the region of Abazon. The whole land is turned into a waste and incinerated place where 'furnaces of heaven' are flung fiercely from the 'bulging eye of madness'(p.28). This is followed by a dreary account of the degeneration of the world as it is subdued to the rampant fierceness of the sun. Everything is exterminated: the land's trees and green fields completely dried up, the wild beasts go away, and even the Earth dreadfully burns itself to have retreat beneath its smoke.

This bleak evocation of degeneration scenes tells again of another decay and drought in the land's legends during which the rough soil "broke the hoes of the grave-diggers" and the smell of death spreads all over the dry land. Conducted by these dreadful legendary moments, the people were impelled to leave their land, "abandoning their unburied dead and even the dying", and searched for other lands that would provide them with safe refuge (p.29). Weighed down by scenes of death, the surviving victims moved to another region, assaulted its inhabitants, overthrew them, occupied their land and called it Abazon. The ominous people of Abazon are afflicted again by another drought and they have to look again for some sources of regeneration. The legendary revelations of the past anguish cannot be re-enacted because of the people's different submissions: "So they send instead a deputation of elders to the government who hold the yam today, and hold the knife, to seek help of them"(p.30). The Hymn, as a sub-text within the novel's main narrative, is thus about the maltreatment and oppression of power, a theme which is acutely developed by the writer both in its referential and metaphorical level. Everything in the land that withstands the fierceness of the Sun is devastated and this is a rationalized incentive for the people of Abazon in the legend to resort to force and to set upon passive people. The present victims of real Abazon appear powerless; they are denied even the possibility to express their needs.

But apart from mourning the death of the nation and its abandonment by the divinities, the 'hymn' is a form of tribute in which the poet evokes the power of memory to function as a critique of several contemporary forms of domination. In a poem marked by an ample use of metaphors and images of death and suffering, Ikem seeks a way of retrieving the past through memory, and for possibilities of going beyond the present decay and to look forward to 'the season of renewal'(p.28). His poem seeks to retrieve, on behalf of the Abazon delegation, the past of legend as revelations of traditions, re-collections of scattered identities, and an abiding source which allows the poet to fecundate the present experiences. Yet within this quest for remembrance, the poet recognizes the complex problematic of retrieving the past:

And now the times had come round again out of story-land. Perhaps not as bad as the first times, yet. But they could easily end worse. Why? Because today no one can rise and march south by starlight abandoning crippled kindred in the

wild savannah and arrive stealthily at a tiny village and fall upon its inhabitants and slay them and take their land and say: I did it because death stared through my eye.(p.30)

Ikem becomes concerned with evoking images of death and degeneration in an attempt to make them correspond to the loss of a collective morality and a sound tradition; he inquires whether the values that incited the people in 'story-land' can be adapted to the present needs. He comes to realize that the present experiences might lead to bitter results because the historical and cultural conditions in which the legendary quest happened have changed.

The only things in the landscape that can withstand the devastation of the sun or the "brush fires"(p.28) are the anthills which can survive to transmit this bleak story of the savannah fires to the budding grass (p.28). This is the novel's central symbol which is embedded within its title, an image which functions essentially to support in many ways the thematic orientation of the writer. The surviving anthills indicate the ability of the earth's feeble beings to resist the assaults of power and its fierceness; being the merely invisible element that escaped the rage of the Sun and its chastisement. The novelist endows the symbol with another more significant aspect, for beyond the mere literal meaning of endurance, then, the poetic metaphor of the anthills is meant to accentuate the communal value of remembrance, vindicating in this way the old Abazonian's view that "Recalling-Is-Greatest"(p.119). They recount of the big fires of destruction, expressed in the whole circumstances of how imprecation befell them and stand to warn the next generations.

Achebe presents these scenes of devastation and rebirth through a characteristic mode of textuality: Ikem's intellectual and poetic musing serves to depict the present general state of social and political upheaval, a condition which the writer attempts to deal with through evoking the sound legacies of the past in a complete chapter in the novel with the myth of Idemili. Achebe's general perspective seems to be that in the African context, political statements, such as those mentioned in his political essay *The Trouble With Nigeria*, do not in themselves display genuine possibilities of social or cultural regeneration. They should not operate with imitated ideas and experiences of foreign communities. It is through the figures of gods and rituals drawn from its own local cultures, that the growing nation can construe the present convolutions and

conceptualize meaningful truths – or as Beatrice puts it, “subvert the very sounds and legends of day-break to make straight the way”(p.104).

Indeed, Achebe has purposely constructed the events of his novel around a shifting narrative mode, transposing the nation’s complex existence into the medium of the imaginary and metaphorical. The way in which the traditional world of myth and its narratives are embedded within a modern literary genre is characteristic of Achebe’s artistic preoccupation: the intellectual debate of the artist is carried into a high realm of mythical consciousness, and the past is recovered in a new relation of mediation with the present. This is a significant narrative moment in the novel, when the realistic referential form is combined with the mythic, and Achebe’s linear prose gives way to the poetic and oracular, as he artfully conjures the imaginary power of oral narratives. At any rate, we are invited to attend to a world of higher meanings, constructed through the valuable interaction of diverse polarities – divine and human, male and female, authority and modesty, referential and metaphoric – which Beatrice, despite the inevitable impact of her family and educational background, is gradually learning to bring together. At the level of such kind of mediation, Chase explicates that literature accentuates the sense of reality and becomes mythic by submerging the ordinarily realities of the world with marvelous and extraordinary forces toward fulfilling certain objectives and needs. When literature interweaves these conflicting forces so that they can be combined to attain a higher meaning of reality, literature gropes after the mythical thought and aesthetic. Chase writes:

(M)yth is poetic dramatization of the conflicts and interactions of powers operating within the qualities and objects with which these powers seem identical. If these observations are sound, any narrative or poem which reaffirms the dynamism and vibrancy of the world, which fortifies the ego with the impression that there is a magically potent brilliancy or dramatic force in the world, may be called a myth.(1949,p.81)

According to this account, the poetic function of myth is primarily to recapture the conflicting forces of the world at the level of the imaginary. So, somehow, through this interplay between the referential and the mythical, the creative artist can endow his story with a richness of imagery through which an eminent quality of aesthetic experience can be contrived and reasserted towards fulfilling a particular discursive intention.

In this vein, Achebe advances the value of those grand oral narratives which may offer us a high level of imaginative expression and communal truth. In Ikem's apocalyptic prose poem, the Sun does not show value to the sacrifices of the people and continues to inflict on the earth and its dwellers an appalling chastisement, wreaking a dreadful state of devastation that no one can eschew. The poem's narrating voice informs us that this is the second time the Sun had persecuted the earth's inhabitants. However, instead of wreaking another hideous punishment on the people by the furious Sun as Ikem hopelessly tends to admit in his poem, the writer makes the Daughter of the Almighty, Idemili, interfere in the form of a dazzling Pillar of Water to mollify and even to counteract the anguish of the Sun. Significantly, Idemili is a prominent divine figure in Igbo traditional myths and Achebe projects it in an illustrative view:

In the beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty. (p.97)

The myth's narrating voice tells how she came down in 'resplendent Pillar of Water' ascending "majestically from the bowl of the dark-lake"(p.97) and linking earth to heaven. In the process she sent her springs and streams over the burnt lands, and makes her devotees diffuse through the spacious lands that comprise the borders of the big river, Orimili. But, subsequently her devotees began to inquire: how do we hold and foster her regulation in such remote spaces? The moral ethos that the Almighty's daughter is entitled to maintain in the earth won't be constrained despite man's paramount pretense to capture the magnificence of divinity and for this reason "the mystery of metaphor"(p.98) has to be displayed. Therefore the people's epic stories tell about the spiritual presence of the Almighty Daughter in countless shrines across the country, in the form of "a dry stick rising erect from the bare, earth floor"(p.98).

The Almighty's original determination was to grant power and authority to his creations, and to embellish both with morality. However, from the outset, the balance between the two spheres (material power and moral authority) was imperiled by hindrances and tribulations which are quite central in Achebe's persistent concern:

Idemili's worshippers augmented and reached all the parts of the country. But each time they reach many other distant places they find themselves confronted with the problem of maintaining the required conformity and steadiness between power and morality: "how could they carry to the farthest limits of their dispersal adequate memories of the majesty of the Pillar of Water standing in the dark lake?"(p.98) It is to this supreme symbol of the Daughter of the Almighty that any wealthy and strong man has to appeal to in order to offer his sacrifices and so gain access to "the powerful hierarchy of Ozo"(p.98). The myth carries and expounds a succinct account of the moral rules that the Almighty daughter uses in holding in check men's right of entry to power, indicated by achieving the fourth and supreme hierarchy of ozo. In the novel, we are informed that the dictatorial president can win the political support of three provinces but not of the fourth (Abazon region). In this way, he can attain three titles but is not granted the fourth.

According to Achebe's narrative it is Idemili's duty to give the Ozo title to those men who seek power and she reveals her unreserved derision towards man's unappeasable eagerness to hold dominance over his fellows at each phase of this rite. Idemili does not agree to glimpse at the face of the ambitious man and so a young girl of a fellowman must stand between him and the Goddess before he is granted admission to express his need (p.98). The man who appeals to her to get the title is required to sit on seven delicate pieces of chalk without breaking them. The fragility of these pieces of chalk denote the feeble nature of human beings and the man who holds power ought to be moderate so that none of his fellows are victimized or oppressed during the period of his authority. She gives them a provisional period of three years and those who abuse their authority are punished indirectly by her through death to "save her sacred hierarchy from contamination and scandal"(p.99). Idemili's principle is that power should always be tempered with moral values. In the novel, the president fails to discern the proper way of using his authority and disregards its consequences. In his oppressive dealing with the Abazon region, His Excellency has, symbolically, shattered one of the ritual pieces of chalk; this represents the key trial in Idemili's rituals of admission to the Ozo title. In the novel's closing events, the president dies because he has disregarded the proper way of handling power. The integration of this

major myth in the novel's main narrative is given significant purport through depending on an omniscient narrator instead of the first-person point of view associated with the referential sub-stories of the novel's main protagonists.

The material for such combination of myth and culture has found renovation in the painstaking and commendable study of gender, by the Igbo woman-scholar Ifi Amadiume, in the same area of Igbo region portrayed by Achebe's narratives. In Amadiume's research, Idemili was deemed as the "central religious deity" (2015,p.27) in the Igbo community. Associated with female sincerity, assertiveness and prosperity, the Goddess Idemili provides an overall administrative system, taking up "the organization of the periodic markets, the days of the week, and the seasonal festivals" (Amadiume,1997,p.149). And to better maintain the stability and strength of the social order, the Igbo carried out specific rituals and religious worship manifested in a goddess worshipping faith – with its firm moral and sacred power, organizing the community within the principles of "love, care, compassion, peace and respect, forbidding incest and bloodshed"(Amadiume, 1997,p.148). This functional divine morality is to be attached within the main principles which would drive Beatrice to embrace the nation's cause on behalf of the deprived people.

Achebe's reinvention of the Idemili myth within a contemporary context presents a conspicuous illustration of the complexities and hindrances which the African writer may encounter in his / her keen quest for bringing into a new prominence some of the suppressed truths of his / her community's past canon of beliefs and values. This complex discursive concern indicates the way in which fiction carries the communal realities into an area of tension and sometimes adaptation and balance projected through a productive mediation between the indigenous area of beliefs and the present emergent values. Achebe craftily realizes this cultural mediation through drawing on the Igbo myth of Idemili as being transliterated into the major narrative of *Anthills of the Savannah*.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe draws heavily on the cultural and religious truths which this myth encompasses to develop the story's main themes. The writer introduces Idemili as a male deity which is connected with the sky. The Idemili priest in elucidating the deity's name ("ide" which signifies "pillar" and "mili" "water") also

expounds the relationship between the origin of the deity and the behavior of its elected priest: “Idemili hold up the raincloud in the sky so that it does not fall down. Idemili belongs to the sky and that is why I, his priest, cannot sit on bare earth”(Achebe,1986,p.41). The frequent animosity which exists between this deity and the Earth deity, Ala, is illustrated in the Ezidemili’s divine description of the ancient and fabulous funeral rites arranged to the priest of Idemili: it is assumed that the Idemili priest has not to be buried in the earth, “because the earth and the sky are two different things”(Achebe, 1986,p.41). This can be realized by preserving his head in his shrine.

In Achebe’s fiction, the Idemili myth that we read about in *Arrow of God* is re-inscribed in the complex narrative of *Anthills of the Savannah*, and is constructed on the basis of some significant variations at the level of dominant themes and rhetorical aspects. Notably, if in *Arrow of God*, the priest of Idemili alleges that the origin of Idemili is dated to very moment of creating the world (1986,p.41), in *Anthills*, we read that Idemili is deemed as the child of the Almighty. Especially significant, in this novel, the writer presents Idemili as a female deity not a male one as it is in *Arrow of God*. Very relevant to the foregoing discussion of the Idemili mythopoeic trope, Ife Amadiume does not consent to the way Achebe handles the concept of divinity which appears to reflect male predisposition in the sense that God turns into a man and a father to Idemili. According to Amadiume, there is no form of linguistic evidence in Igbo cosmology to rationalize this transformation. She goes on to confirm her thesis by demonstrating that she finds no form of “cultural prescription” which would induce the writer to subordinate the “powerful divine goddess Idemili to this he-god”. According to Amadiume’s researches on this important Igbo myth “the female deity is usually given a husband, but not a father”(1990,p.152).

In *Anthills*, as in *Arrow of God*, the omniscient narrator mentions that Idemili is also connected with a pillar and with water and hence projected like an “indiscernible Pillar of water fusing earth to heaven at the navel of the black lake”(p.98). The image of fusing earth, represented by the Earth goddess Ani, to heaven or sky, which stands to Idemili, is an important shift of the old antagonistic relationship between the two gods in *Arrow of God*. Thus Idemili is carried to new contexts to set off the function of

the Earth goddess Ani /Ala in Achebe's artistic and cultural preoccupation in his fiction. Through Achebe's authentic stories of his Igbo world-view, one can discern the great reverence shown to Ala. As a great divine-mother in Igbo cosmology, Ala is deemed as the spirit of fertility. The people give her their praise and allegiance so that she raises the fecundity of the community and the productivity of the land. Also, as she is deemed as the custodian of the community's morality, Ala must take action and impose a set of punishments upon any form of individual action that can break the peace of the community.(Uchendu, 1965,pp.95-6)This role is proffered to Idemili in *Anthills*; the writer deliberately construes the water imagery of Idemili in terms of a ritual agent tempering man's use of power. In this view, Achebe sets up a different relationship between the Idemili myth and institutional rule and contrives in the course of this association a prominent status for the woman. This amounts to expounding his critical and rhetorical perspective towards that infinite range of imaginative and figurative principles that the Igbo oral tradition provided him as a generic cultural resource but which he can explore and employ on the basis of specific variations in an innovative quest for a new form of narrative that can project the convoluted circumstances of the time evoked.

The principal idea that emerges here relates to the relationship between the imaginative verbal narratives and social experiences in traditional societies. Abiola Irele informs us that the oral text is never fully fixed, its textual elements move through a continuous process of displacement and variations. "An oral text", states Irele, "is (...) open and mobile; what can be abstracted as the verbal content of a given work is perpetually recreated, modified as the occasion demands, and given new accents from one instance of its realization to another" (2001,p.34). This statement makes obvious the creative standards of textuality inherent in the mode of oral narratives. In its general mode, as Irele explains, the oral elocution is a form of rhetoric that obeys the principle of 'improvisation' that permits a great range of interpretations around a set of images and symbols posited by the collective culture and its structural functions. In this form of imaginative processes, the oral textual elements are more often used as the sketch of an oral account and as allusive details for the exploration of some thoughts and emblems, as evocative motifs in the narrative progression of a

discourse that is still in the making. A related element of this principle, according to Irele, is that of imaginative creation and adaptation, so even though the oral material is deemed unchanging in its functional value, it tends to be built up on the basis of an unbroken imaginative process of reconstruction and variations.

The argument that comes out here indicates the position and condition of the traditional verbal texts in what Irele has called “the organic mode of existence” (2001,p.36) as constituted by the contextual dimension of oral arts. Through this notion he means that the oral text in its immediate and contextual mode of communication and diffusion is not an abstract material cut off from the occasion of its reproduction and performance. The very act of its realization is related to the creative potentials of the human agent (the performer) who carries it, first in its preserved import in the memory and then in its vital expressive form in realization. In other words, the living forms of the oral experience means that the whole progression of its different imaginative phases – composition, preservation and transmission – conforms to the assumption of textual variations, as an effective imaginative experience of collective creation and appropriation. The major extended narratives of African oral literature represented in the form of myths and epics offer a constructive example of Irele’s idea of organic texts. Irele explains how these forms of oral texts are constructed and recorded along lines of variations on a specific set of themes and prevailing symbols. In these narratives which are conveyed to many generations in diverse versions, one can realize that the textual variations inherent in the same text are basically related to the aspects of collective memory and particular posture of the group’s story-teller who reconstructs them according to the particular conditions attending the occasion of their realization and transmission. For while the main content of the texts of myths and epics that have been transmitted is clear in each narrated or recorded adaptation, some of their details frequently differ from one account to another.(Irele,2001,pp.34-35)

The Idemili chapter in Achebe’s narrative presents a remarkable pattern of Irele’s organic texts. Recasting the material of the Idemili myth into a new mode of existence and different areas of fictional experience thus impels the writer to displace it from its authentic ground as well as adapting some of its textual images and ideas to the

specific imaginative impulses of the writer's discourse in the novel. The fundamental objective for Achebe is essentially to establish a link of continuity between the traditional myth in its authentic area of primary principles of orality and its new pattern as it is embedded within a different linguistic vehicle and rhetoric of expression. By re-inscribing the oral text into the critical framework of the novel, Achebe is also bringing into view some obliterated truths of his indigenous worldview, thus recognizing them as a living cultural resource. In this sense, the retelling of the Idemili myth can be read in terms of the generic prescriptions that originally characterized the transmission and diffusion of the different verbal forms within different times and contexts: every performer or story-teller in the culture is allowed to reconstruct the stories and to grant them new structural functions, new interpretations, and new connotations to cope with a given socio-cultural experience or event. But this principle of variation does abrogate the sense of originality in oral culture. Of course, traditional verbal arts hold their own form of originality. "Narrative originality", states Walter Org, "lodges not in making up new stories but in managing a particular interaction with new audiences and new situations" (1982,pp.41-48). Achebe is very aware that the originality or authenticity of the Igbo myths he draws on consists not in the introduction of new materials but in appropriating the expressive functions of that traditional material effectively to the unique cultural condition of the present and the structure of his literary consciousness as well.

According to the fundamental emblem of the novel's metaphorical language, in the anthills that endure after the sweeping fires of the angry Sun, Beatrice is the goddess and priestess who is appointed to conserve the unity of the surviving community. Indeed, one could infer that Achebe associates Beatrice with the proverbial anthill that got away from the past tribulation caused by the insuperable anger of the Sun to tell the tale of the drought, the ultimate witness to the terrible conditions of the nation. The Idemili myth is very pivotal to the general interpretation of Achebe's text not only due to its Igbo background roots, but mainly because Achebe makes the evident embodiment of the myth through a female intellectual as a key figure to projecting the post-colonial debate of culture. At any rate, through this sustained analogy, Achebe has a cause to reinvent the myth in *Anthills*. Through an appealing juxtaposition of the

referential and metaphoric narratives, he attempts to accentuate the power of myths infirming up and vindicating the cultural attitudes of traditional legacy within the patterns of contemporary imperatives.

Therefore in *Anthills* Idemili, the deity of water and fertility, chastises the common people because of the violent acts committed by the despotic president, Sam. In the metaphorical language of the novel, the writer relies on the goddess Idemili to rescue and restore the nation. Equally, Beatrice is intended to temper all the repressive practices dictated by the nation's leader. Noticeably, the writer consciously builds up a particular correspondence between the functions of Beatrice and Idemili: the mythical act of enfolding "a loincloth around power's waist" which is entrusted to Idemili is to be carried realistically by Beatrice who is expected to temper the political regime of her country which has turned into a purely repressive apparatus against its reforming opponents. She is seen as a good counselor for the president in defense of the nation's interests against the foreigners' imperial projects. She has a strong sisterly association with Ikem, and is the endearing fiancée of Chris. Even though she is presented as an important person who has a first-class degree in finance from the University of London, she can come to terms, more quickly and genuinely than her male friends, with the concealed facets of her indigenous cultural background. In many ways, Beatrice stands as the most memorable character in the novel: portrayed at the outset of the story as a civil servant who has to yield to the orders of the government leaders, and subsequently she is transformed by peculiar circumstances into a prophetess who can impose the mythic order upon the general upheaval of the present time. She dwells simultaneously in both the world of modern society and that of her traditional myth.

In relation to the functional value of poetic metaphors, poets or writers of prose fiction have shown us that there is always some implied aesthetic or discursive intentions when a character or an event is used for metaphorical functions, thereby connecting its intended significance with the general import of the whole text. This notion is explained by Paul Ricoeur's conception of metaphor as "a work in miniature" (1981,p.167). The principle idea that arises here is that the ability to understand and interpret the deep meanings of metaphors can function as a useful orienting pattern to understand the entire literary text. As cardinal figures of speech, those metaphors are

integrated and interconnect with the others elements of the text so as to reach a synthesized analysis and meaningful interpretation of the whole text and in this manner expound the literary mode of “being-in-the-world unfolded in front of the text”(Ricoeur,1981, p.140). For beyond the mere rhetorical and aesthetic value contained in this form of figurative language, when they are employed in literary texts, metaphors typically contribute to convey deeper meanings which are not stated explicitly in the entire text. So, viewed in the Ricoeurian poetics, metaphors play an integral part in explaining and interpreting the entire text which contains them: what Ricoeur aptly describes as “the power of metaphors”. He relates its power with

its connection, internal to the poetic work, with three features: first, with the other procedures of *lexis*, second, with fable which is the essence of the work, its immanent sense, and third, with the intentionality of the work as a whole, that is, with its intention to represent human actions as higher than they are in reality– and therein lies the *mimesis*. (emphasis original)1981,p.180)

To work through Ricoeur’s explanation of the power of metaphor, we would admit that many of *Anthills*’ events are constructed in the mode of metaphors with a view to project the nation’s happenings ‘as higher’ than they tend to appear in ‘reality’. Beatrice, metaphorically, is presented as a kind of a transitional figure to meet the writer’s intentions in debating the novel’s issues. The writer makes both the omniscient narrator and Beatrice (as a self-conscious narrator) use a mode of representation that takes in the referential mode of reality and the mythical, both forms of narration enable the writer to unfold the novel’s action with dynamism at the metonymic and the metaphoric levels. This mutability of movement at the level of narrative structure is more outstanding when the events center on Beatrice. The plurality and complexity of her role is revealed to us at different stages, frequently in the course of the narrative language that interweaves the immediate event and the metaphorical subtext represented as it is by the mythical pattern. On one such occasion which creates a moment of confusion and non-understanding, Chris, Beatrice’s friend, addresses her: “I don’t know what has come over you. Screaming at me like some (...) prophetess or something. What’s the matter? I don’t understand”(p.108). Beatrice’s clarification on this incident to Chris characteristically relates the experience of her priesthood with the Igbo culture, going through a process of incarnation in which she

feels herself as a character from Achebe's earlier novel: "You called me a priestess. No. a prophetess, I think (...). As a matter of fact I do sometimes feel like Chielo in the novel, (*Things Fall Apart*), the priestess and prophetess of the hills and the caves"(p.109). The important point here is that Chielo stands as the single woman who is granted a remarkable stature in that novel, and the only person upon whom the powerful Okonkwo entirely depends to heal his sick child Ezinma. On another circumstance in the novel's final events, Beatrice is described by her friends as "the priestess of the unknown god"(p.215). The substantial point is that Beatrice in her multiple roles is presented as the incarnation of the mythical daughter of the Almighty, Idemili, the priestess of the same goddess and also a traditional prophetess.

In fact, Beatrice is very aware of her spiritual strengths. On many occasions, we see her expressing her fears about the forthcoming violent events that will happen in the country. She confidently and bleakly tells Chris "I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you. We are all in it, Ikem, You, Me and Him"(p.114). The novel's main events develop just precisely as she envisages. This is a convoluted double act to happen, inducing her to switch from the banal and earthy details of urban malice to the high prophetic function, from obtuseness to good judgment, from confusion to resolution. Indeed, as we read in the novel, she functions as the vital figure in influencing the general order and in dictating meaning upon the final sequence of events in which all her male friends are fiercely killed and also upon what she describes as "the absurd raffle-draw that apportioned the destinies of post-colonial African societies"(p.175).

Achebe's fictional Igbo setting is the appointed terrain where the destinies of human beings and deities often come together. It is in *Arrow of God* that Achebe abundantly evokes the relation between the society and the divine world it invents or constructs for its well-being. For example, in the tribe's yearly celebration of "the New Yam" the narrator described this communal event as a revered meeting of humans and deities: "The festival thus brought gods and men together in one crowd. It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbour and look to his left and see a god standing there"(1986,p.202). This typical mode of beliefs

displays deep aesthetic connotations; certainly, Achebe would reject any form of disconnection between the mythical consciousness of the Igbo's spiritual world and the ordinary occurrences of its real existence. In stressing this profound link between the two spheres of Igbo's existence, Achebe expounds that in the anxious search to overpass "the great gulf between being and knowing, between his essence and existence, man has no choice really but to make and believe in some fiction or other" (1988,p.96). This explains the basically metaphoric inclination of Achebe's aesthetic orientations. Achebe contextualizes the cultural implications of this dialectic mode of Igbo beliefs in the momentary mythical events of *Anthills*: "That we are surrounded by deep mysteries is known to all but the incurably ignorant"(p.97), postulates the omniscient narrator of the novel's main myth.

At any rate, all the traditions and customs depicted in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are inherent within such rituals of folklore which mediate between the material world and the world of mystery. In these realms of spiritual or occult quality, women hold a valued position with their male counterparts. If one deems the medicine man that treats Ezinma's recurrent illness in *Things Fall Apart* a compelling feature of the spiritual power of the Igbo man, the abundant references to the competences of woman in the same cosmological ground also accentuate the supreme standing granted to women in the different facets of communal life.(pp.57-60) In *Arrow of God*, we read about the potent spirit in the market place at the big village of Okperi. The omniscient narrator sets forth that the inhabitants of Okperi could make their market the biggest one in the region because they had succeeded in constructing a powerful deity that would assure the growth of their market. According to the inhabitants of Okperi, this deity is a wise old woman, called Nwanyieke (p.19). For one who is familiar with the Igbo cosmology and its generic aspects which typically encompass the diverse details of the people's daily lives, marvelous characteristics of such social world-views are not restricted to mythical old women. We attend to such examples in *Things Fall Apart* where we see Chielo as an ordinary woman yielding to spiritual possession without having any form of conflict with her secular responsibilities.

The fact that Achebe is engaged to explore the appealing existence of his divine Igbo world in his last novel is not to be construed simply as a general use of socio-

cultural truths for artistic representation, but it is his artful manner of shortening the cultural distance between the world of his first two novels and the fictional post-colonial Kangan of *Anthills*. Beatrice yields to the mysterious experience of her appointment as the priestess of Idemili despite her initial alienation from the cultural conventions of her people: “(for) knowing or not knowing does not save us from being known and even recruited and put to work. For (...) baptism (understood by her people as Water of God) is not antidote against possession by Agwu the capricious god of diviners and artists”(p.100). It is noteworthy to observe that Beatrice, who is appointed to re-contextualize the ancient myth within the contemporary hindrances and challenges, exists in a world which allows no form of association with the rituals and practices of the divinities of primordial dispensation. In the Igbo cosmology, Idemili is seen as the divine agent that holds in check man’s exercise of power. Likewise, Beatrice performs that ancient requisite role in full knowledge of the present connotation of her mythic incarnation. This form of metaphorical projection as a substitute for the present condition of a dispersed society is a compelling device in the novel’s general structure.

At this point, just as traditional myth transmits the insight of the past into the present, so *Anthills of the Savannah* carries its own discourse of culture and tradition regeneration in appropriately figurative terms. In the main argument of Achebe’s text, the Idemili / Beatrice trope confirms itself as the vehicle of the novel’s main metaphor conferring a crucial role on women. This serves to bring to the surface an important issue: the status of Beatrice becomes the major constituent of debating the issue of tradition via the relation between symbolic transcendence and the presence of women. Significant emblematic elements appear in Ikem’s dense prose poem the “Hymn to the Sun”(pp.27-30) and the omniscient narrator’s meditation on Idemili’s power (pp.97-100). It is clear that the novel brings out such critical thematic implications: masculine images of power are juxtaposed with ‘feminine’ evocations of moralistic redemption and cultural reconciliation. From the initial act of having pointed Ikem in the direction of his progressive ideas on woman(p.91), through being symbolically described as a prophetess by Chris, we encounter Beatrice appointed as the updated existence of ‘the unknown god’(p.215) who would organize the present order by retrieved and

transformed ritual and emblematic cross-class and cross ethnic alliances. With her moral authority, goddess-like capacity for mediation and inspiration, Beatrice has recognizably become a daughter and Igbo priestess of her goddess Idemili. Whether these innovations are to be construed merely as a matter of aesthetic or technical implications, Achebe rather appropriately draws on the same constructive aspects of the Igbo tradition which yield to those conventions of female devotion and worship.

As the novel in Achebe's fictional works which gives considerable importance to women's role in social change, *Anthills of the Savannah* is a complex narrative which has received overriding critical readings from feminist scholars. This part deals with two main pivotal feminist studies of the novel which present different readings of the author's representation of gender relations. In fact, Achebe is constantly criticized for the obvious limitations inherent in his novels in relation to representing women's issues. Critic Elleke Boehmer, for example, is not persuaded that *Anthills* can rise above traditional premises of gender relations and discourses. She reckons that Achebe shows an undeniable limitation of positing some form of genuine resolution to the socio-cultural issues that the novel raises – a limitation to project a fully developed and practical role for women when he unpersuasively attempts to carry questions of nation formation and collective self-determination into a metaphoric level. According to Boehmer's feminist point of view, the novel's general explanation of gender issues reiterates many aspects of traditional thoughts to be deemed as a distinctive endeavor forward. In her main analysis, "certain traditional gender-specific spheres of influence appear to remain in force" (1991,p.108). In this view, women, particularly those who do not hold the power of 'book', carry on to wield power through the conventional role of temptation, whereas man continues to impose his control over the female sphere through the influence of the word (Ikem's poetry and ideas) and the power of personality (like Chris). Quite outstanding among the weaknesses Boehmer identifies is Achebe's associating the identity of Beatrice with the personality of a mythical figure. Giving this intellectual woman different divine images does not basically abate the prevailing discourses of gender representation. She argues that even though towards the resolving actions of the novel, Beatrice, as a woman, does influence the actions of the new-born community surrounding her, her divine manifestation occurs

only at a symbolic level, she remains entangled in that conventional image that women are constantly associated with in the grand narratives of the nations' histories. As she suggests, this hyperbolic projection seems always to border on idealistic and imagined implications: "As in more traditional evocations of Mothers of Africa, woman in *Anthills* is represented as mystical, in touch with the unknown, as mentor or genius of the (renewed) nation". (Boehmer, 1991, pp.108-9)

Another provoking feminist study of Achebe's last novel is presented by the Igbo scholar Ifi Amadiume in her essay "Class and Gender in *Anthills of the Savannah: A Critique*" (1990). As Amadiume expounds, Achebe's pronouncements and critical essays in the 1980s point out that he tends in the fifth novel to deal erroneously with the complex approach to women issues in African literature. The critic's controlling idea is that Achebe's pattern of building up his narrative is masculine, and that the story's main circumstances are entirely centered on unsympathetic relations of power between men. As Amadiume argues, many of the novel's events are unfolded and yet the few female characters are presented only as static figures. In the opening chapters, the despotic President is criticized and then opposed by two male intellectuals, Ikem and Chris, whose positions in the *National Gazette*, poet and editor respectively, show an immense manipulation of the public opinion. The novel's main issues are developed through the important political discussions that take place between these two distinctive young men and which sometimes engage them in unfriendly relationships. In her overall reading, the different personal narratives of Ikem and Chris which are intended to build up a dialectical view of the issues depicted fail considerably to reach a convincing level of analysis because of their male-biased milieu. In relation to this, the writer portrays women in secondary positions to the amplified exploration of the political strife perpetuated by men's conflicting relationships. With both Beatrice and Elewa, Amadiume argues, Achebe attempts to build up two outstanding female characters but who are positioned "in service relationship"(1990, p.148).

In opposition to the elitist character of Beatrice, The writer presents Elewa, "the shop girl", as an example of the simple refreshing world of the people. Although Elewa can have the respect of others because of her emotional association with Ikem,

this does not conceal her lack of knowledge and incomprehension of the complex sphere of the intellectual class. Yet she is the one who is entitled to give birth to Ikem's posthumous daughter who is described by the living friends of the struggle as the "shining path of Ikem" which symbolizes the birth of more hopeful communal prospects. Achebe himself recognizes this shop girl as a beautiful emblem of the throbbing world of the common people since she shows remarkable potentials for associating with them.(1987,pp.1-7) One agrees with Amadiume who expounds that Elewa's social strength and most uttered confidence vindicates the obvious idea that Beatrice's highly placed position in the government does not affect or distress her in any way. Here Amadiume deems it an oscillation on the author's mode of representation, in relation to both class and gender, which tends to undermine his intellectual and feminist thoughts.

What is more, for Amadiume, many of the novel's important incidents, regardless of Achebe's keen defense of the African woman in his different pronouncements, are determinedly constructed around the male intellectuals who influence the general course of the country's realities. Each time the male protagonists, Chris and Ikem, embark on their usual intellectual debates to rationalize their self-conceited attitudes and actions in relation to the matters of their nation, we see Beatrice standing silent. Both on the level of class and gender, the writer puts ample focus on developing the relationships between the three male protagonists, whilst Beatrice has no genuine contact with Elewa to have the interest to inquire where she lives. We see the two women prompted into a real empathetic association only in relation to the occasion of their grief on the deaths of their partners, Chris and Ikem.

This critical emphasis serves to display women's subordinate roles, given that in the different writings and intellectual pronouncements of many male writers, African women were projected in effect as diffident and passive observers who simply fulfilled their predetermined destinies without suspecting the rectitude of the social and religious structures that posit the functions they have to hold. These difficulties cannot be eschewed, especially as Achebe would want his novel to endorse his abiding vision of cultural revival in terms of a new order of gender relations. However, to criticize him for some inconsistencies of women representation is an utter failure to

painstakingly scrutinize his authorial intentions, as he so emphatically does to the redemptive power of narration and remembering, and the strong continuing cultural strength inherent in that art. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe does definitely communicate the important impulses of intellectual commitment and collective self-determination, combined with imaginative overconfidence of the land's shared sense of collective memory and enlightening living traditions. These ideas run powerfully through the novel to debate the issue of post-colonial culture through the themes of culture renaissance and gender. Characteristically, the author carries the intellectual reflection to higher meanings; myth and metaphor may confer a fulfilling means for going over the present social obstructions. As with other structural elements of this novel, the writer's dependence on the metaphoric representation in regard of gender has raised considerable divergences of opinion.

Generally, many of the feminist theorizations focus on the literary representation of women issues in ground of cultural relations between woman, land and nation. One aspect of this tradition that has faced abrasive criticism has been the submissive figure that the African male writer has associated with African women. Male writers have been reproached for their conventional tradition of frequently analogizing women to the virgin land of Africa, to the unchanging essence of African culture; as supreme mother, and as image for the inspired and nationalistic struggle of the whole continent. The feminists critics Juliana Makuchi and Nfah-Abbenyi maintain that "the majority of these men, (writers) have been accused of idealizing and romanticizing African women by positing as essentialist, beautiful, nurturing, marginal, and often submissive African women"(1997,p.35). This metaphorical projection does not abate the common facet inherent in those writings wherein women are portrayed as secondary subjects to the larger representation of man's stories, as possessing no genuine position of their own and therefore always geared up to yield to the will of their husbands and family under the most proclaimed allegations of ethical and cultural considerations. In their alleged insistence to romanticize African womanhood, some African writers disprove the real condition of woman in the continent. As supreme national emblems, women are usually endowed with those noble qualities of self- sacrifice and boundless devotion which are conventionally associated with the African mothers and wives.

These qualities unequivocally entitle them to be called upon to literally and figuratively regenerate the heritage of the nation's values. This image of nation or culture as a mother worked frequently to evoke implicit experiences of female helplessness, and gloss over the secondary status of women in the patriarchal socio-cultural traditions of some African societies. The figure of Mother Africa, for example, is generally employed in the literature of male writers as a symbol of resistance and cultural difference since the time of colonialism. "Such figures", as Ania Loomba writes, "can be imagined as abstractions, allegories, goddesses or real-life women" (2005, p.180).

The poets of the Négritude movement or those who wrote in the Négritude tradition were the first to develop such central themes about women and national culture. Their nationalist thoughts of the pre-colonial African culture were epitomized in the romanticized images of African woman, who is portrayed by Senghor in his poems as the emblem of African civilization, of cultural essence, and particularly as 'Mother Africa' (Senghor in Schipper,1987). Making a similar move, Kofi Awoonor makes the emphatic statement that the main celebrant of African heritage and existence is "the Black Woman, the Earth Mother, the anthropomorphic symbol of primal sensuality". (1975,p.155). The figure of the 'Black Woman' as a trope, and as a representative image function both aesthetically and thematically to idealize African culture. Men writers use the trope to counteract the racial discourses of cultural inferiority internalized in the African psyche by colonial institutions. One requirement here is that woman carries the writer's literary and intellectual act of retrieving the land's history and culture. This can be realized by analogizing woman to the land's traditions and values. As Awoonor comes to firm up this image in his 'Black Woman', so Okot P'Bitek identifies his protagonist Lawino in *Song of Lawino*, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Wanja in *Petals of Blood* with the legacy of African ideals.

Still with these same authors, the nationalist vision of resolving the cultural calcification and mending the schism in the historical range is continually offered to male narrators or protagonists. This makes some feminists critics like Florence Stratton inquire "whether the interest of these writers really lies in exposing the injustices done to women, for they seem to have been attracted primarily by the

metaphorical potential of the situation of women (...) metaphorically she is of the highest importance, practically she is nothing.” (Stratton,1994, pp.52-3) In one important meaning, the figurative depiction amplifies a gendered theory of nationhood and of writing, an artful rhetoric of writing that implicitly if not explicitly keeps women away from the imaginative construction of the national realities and literary narratives. As an alternative, woman herself is projected through conventional cultural images to bear the male writer’s artistic or ideological stands. As Soyinka so precisely expresses it: “Vision is eternally of man’s own creation”; women’s task is to “(collaborate) in man’s vision”(qtd in Stratton, 1994,p.51). Undoubtedly, no feminist critic may consent to Soyinka’s prejudiced pronouncement. For the author or artist is continually identified as male. He represents the writing subject, the creative artist who re-envisions hopeful futures for the land. On the other side, woman carries the aesthetic tools and meanings of the creative male artist. As she herself stands to be a kind of virgin earth and ideal, the female character is frequently employed to serve as a manifestation of the conditions of the nation – its real and its prospective or imagined condition. She is particularly the embodiment of the shifting history of the nation both as it has been subjected, despoiled, dispossessed down through the colonial period and as it is reconstructed and imagined by male characters or writers – a form of a regenerated and restored earth. In other words, the male writer is an innovative hero, and the female character is the embodiment of his quest. Yet, these very nationalist images, in their most pretentious meanings, also serve to perpetuate the gender relations of domination.

Nevertheless, Achebe is far from using the trope of his female character to elaborate a romanticized gendered theory of nationhood or culture. “Human society is a work of art to Achebe”, as David Richards states, “inasmuch as it ‘ritualises incongruity’ into the ultimate order of mythology” (1991,p.136). When Beatrice undergoes a transformation into the village priestess, this act of metamorphosis is not to be construed simply as an abstract literary metaphor. Conventional ideas of character development are being juxtaposed sometimes stressfully with a given aesthetic mode based on reincarnation and transmutation to accentuate a significant cultural experience of mediation and dialogue. This is the particular course of

Achebe's development of his main themes. Time movement, as a basic constituent of narrative, is interrelated with the mythic pattern. Achebe's insistence upon mythical time offers a new inquiry into the form of narrative as a means of apprehending and structuring fictional patterns within the referential set of events. The writer artfully condenses the variety of social, political and cultural narratives the novel includes into the larger range of archetypal narrative. At any rate, such reading is distinctively vital and optimistic since myth becomes a means to order the nation's complex and disordered circumstances into coherent stories. At this juncture, the context of political turmoil continues and gets worse under despotic rule, but particularly in this novel the ostensibly confused sequence of incidents of a similar experience to *A Man of the People* is elaborated within the high standpoint of mythic consciousness. In *Anthills of the Savannah* the writer lays emphasis on the strategic importance of diversity but essentially vindicates the value of the mythical narrative to restructure the community's historical experience and to sharpen the writer's fictional tools of representation. This explains how myth serves "not only (as) the means by which we read the signs", but also as "the means by which social justice is enacted." (Richards, 1991,p.136)

In the early sections of the novel, committed writing and rhetorical speech are thought to be the only expressive tools which can serve to subvert the government brutal language, as Ikem's editorial writings demonstrate. Achebe makes the significant point that Ikem's myth of entreating the sun's compassion, his prose poem, is not presented for publication; it is discovered with other writings after his death on the floor of his room by Chris. The apocalyptic poem of Ikem is not published to bring about change or stimulate the people's anger against their leaders, but appears as a private surrealist meditation upon the country's political turmoil. Ikem's poem is a modern myth of the cruelty of the post-colonial rampaging power, an unspoken admonition of its detrimental consequences, including self-destruction, and a delineation of its violent tools which imposes its orders only through spreading death, dearth and bloodshed to the land. These disturbing images of dreariness and despair prevailing in Ikem's male myth are counterbalanced by revealing scenes of hope and

rebirth which are carried in the female myth of Idemili, a persistent maintainer of the body of morality that has always to accompany the sphere of authority.

Since the solemn and magnificent world of divinity cannot be grasped by the simple perceptions of man, Idemili is ritually deemed as “a mere stream, a tree, a stone, a mound of earth, a little clay bowl containing fingers of chalk”(p.98). Those symbols may look absurd and unreasonable, suggests the author, but the people’s belief in the controlling powers of the goddess is always strong and entrenched. Even the rituals of entering the male “powerful hierarchy of Ozo society” can be initiated only through sacrifices to the goddess Idemili. The connotation of all this will become more noticeable when we come to learn that in Igbo religious belief, Chukwu, the Great God, is also called Agbala. Significantly enough, the same word is used in the language of this community to mean woman. (Uchendu, 1965,p.65). Now what do all these have to do with Achebe’s argument on the issue of tradition within the question of gender?

No kind of study of Achebe’s texts based on Igbo culture can pretend to arrive at adequate interpretations without highlighting the discursive and artistic link between the writer’s critical perspectives and the Igbo world view. In fact, one aspect of Achebe’s character-portrayal which places the novel firmly in the main-stream of West African writing is his subtle absorption of traditional cultural material into the essentially modern frame-work of his novel. The story in *Anthills* does not move entirely on the referential level but also in the concealed grounds of the character’s self-conscious narratives, so that in the imaginative movement between the two areas of representation there is a complex level of a symbolic and continuous relationship between past and present. More specifically, Achebe draws on his Igbo traditional culture with which he elaborates his modern characters. If we look closely at the portrayal of the character of Beatrice, it becomes clear that the novelist is not just looking for general surface resemblances or more fictional representation, but is searching for deeper levels of cultural correspondence. Meanwhile, let us recognize a gender balancing mechanism in place within the culture of Igbo society.

Challenging the received orthodoxies of social anthropology, Ifi Amadiume argues that in pre-colonial society, male and female relationships were organized along

flexible patterns of gender principles. In her reconstruction of traditional African women's organizations in Igbo society in her *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (1997), Amadiume showed how a moderate use of gender relationships contribute to set a constructive system which made it possible for men and women to share roles and status in the community's different fields without being entangled in biased aspects of sexual asymmetry. This embodies a "dual system of social organizations based on what seems on the surface a sexual division of labour, but is in practice a flexible gender system, and a third non-gendered classificatory system mediates the apparent dualism"(Amadiume,1997, p.129). With this specific principle of a non-gendered socio-cultural system, women are permitted to generate their own wealth and hold positions of power. Correspondingly, pre-colonial African women had no crisis with gender relationships, since they are themselves an integral part in the social structure of difference. "They had a collective neutral gender that could mediate this difference for role and status fulfillment in the course of social relations, with the result that their social system was not based only on an indefinite separation of the sexes"(Amadiume, 1997, p.115).

Focusing on a specific rural Igbo community, Nnobi in Eastern Nigeria, Amadiume examines the character of gender politics around the indigenous social structure and economic patterns which showed the organization of labour activities according to mediated gender principles. For example, women could have a complete management of the different phases of their economic activities, and could form their own communal groups and organizations as a means to attain a certain level of autonomy to their various activities and proceeds. Their contribution to the development of their villages and towns leads to their recognition as an integral social group with identified economic and ritual force. For example, economically successful women could be possessed by a devoted follower of the Goddess Idemili to make her spiritually prepared to take the title of Ekwe which was associated with Idemili. This would entitle them to put on "a string anklet" like their male counterparts (Amadiume, 2015 (1987),p.43) and be recognized as members of the Women's Council. Needless to say, in Igbo cosmology spirit possession is not an aspect of subordination for the person's

will because of the alien spirit's influence, but a divine appointment for roles of leadership and supreme rank.

With this mediated structure of gender relationships, women carried out specific religious rituals which seemed to express the community's goddess-worship religion – “with its strong moral and spiritual force, binding members in love, care, compassion, peace and respect, forbidding incest and bloodshed within the group”(Amadiume, 1997,p.148). Amadiume expounds how these institutions set forth the “predominance of matriarchy symbolism in myths and goddess-worship” from which the Igbo heritage of oral tradition has inherited its abundant material of “goddess religious myths, legends and folktales”(1997, pp.147-164). The goddess Idemili represents this functional matriarchal principle which serves to complement the other communal male lineage groups like the one embodied in “the cult of ancestral spirits (Achebe's egwugwu)”(Amadiume,2015,p.53). At the same time, it should be noted that the moderate qualities associated with Idemili provided women with adequate possibilities for political and economic achievements. This explains Amadiume's titled book “male daughters” and “female husbands”⁽²⁾ – women who, through heritage or self-made riches, attained high rank and authority like their male counterparts.

In one way or another, the issue of gender relationships in *Anthills* is a genuine attempt to revive the significant role of woman in Igbo society. This concurs with the behaviors of the male protagonists, Ikem and Chris, who do not yield to the rigid logic of gender and class divisions. Ikem shows no vacillation in getting engaged with a market girl. Even though he possesses a high academic degree and holds a prominent social status, he finds no embarrassment in developing a genuine emotional relationship with Elewa who can only speak in Pidgin English. Chris's relationship with Beatrice is carried to significant metaphorical meanings; he seems to yield completely to the spiritual strengths and orders of the priestess that is embodied in the figure of Beatrice. He resorts to her shrine every time for spiritual regeneration. The impulse inherent in such social associations is probably not different from the specific connotations behind the Igbo most proclaimed avowal that “Mother is Supreme”. This socio-cultural belief reflects the eternal high status of woman, the unreserved dependence on woman as the one who can always confer sustenance and protection

when all other possibilities and plans appear futile. In *Things Fall Apart*, Uchendu, who is an elder in Okonkwo's mother land, attempts to mollify his sense of humiliation for being exiled from his tribe. He explains to Okonkwo that a man belongs to his fatherland when his conditions are good. But when he goes through sorrow and mishap, he may find solace and refuge in his motherland. (pp.94-5)

Woman, therefore, is viewed in her conventional communal function as a moderator of the hostile behaviors of men. It is the same orienting ethic that vindicates the level of moral constancy and consciousness in Achebe's major female character. Likewise, Beatrice, the restructured version of the Igbo woman in *Anthills*, and as a potent traditional priestess, is consciously presented as a means of intercession between her revolutionary male friends and the despotic leader. Achebe is concerned in this novel to complement the partial narratives of the two self-conceited and individualistic male characters with a self-conscious narrative of his righteous female character. Beatrice is granted the opportunity to handle the act of narrating her own experiences and hence providing us with a moderate and impartial perspective on the fragmented history of the nation. Along the course of their involvement in the nation's turbulent realities, we see how both Ikem and Chris have distinctive relationships with Beatrice. She is near to both of these steadfast intellectuals so that she can try and bring together the two different mental worlds they represent and, more importantly, to hone their proffered solutions for the problems besetting the nation. Unlike her male friends, Beatrice does not consent to their one-sided narrative of the nation's history. Instead, her story is characteristically constructed around disjointed personal experiences, weighed down with diffidence about her capacity to inscribe her own version of the nation's collective story. Within such wavering impressions, she begins by evaluating and setting forth her role as an observer and agent of historical memory. She comes to recognize that she may not be able to postulate the fundamental experiences that have given rise to the political uproar she writes about, but she is herself a vital member of the different circumstances of that experience and has really proved her capacity to record the past that has given birth to the present moment. In fact, this reflection runs powerfully through this novel. Beatrice's anxious need to narrate the past is presented as an important attempt to expound Achebe's

concernment to build up a fundamental connection between the powers of narrative and memory.

Beatrice's hybrid upbringing and education allow her to apprehend the dispersed reality of the post-colonial world which cannot be carried in a coherent relationship of meanings; she hence deems writing as a useful expressive means to enable her to bring together the "broken pieces" of the present dreadful experiences (p.78). In spite of her important position in the government, Beatrice is shown only in her supporting tasks for her male superiors or leaders. This secondary position makes her begin her moderate narrative by calling attention to the difficult task of conjuring appropriate beginnings and development of her story and how to render it as an essential part in the nation's collective story – "Anything I tried to put down sounded wrong – either too abrupt, too indelicate or too obvious to my middle ear"(p.78). Beatrice realizes the useful task of projecting her self-image beyond the different stereotyped images that have predetermined her status as an "insignificant female"(80). In the course of her indirect involvement in the embittered history of her nation, she comes to understand the impossibility of depicting the tragic circumstances that mark the daily life of her community without embedding her personal story with the different experiences she draws on. Speaking from her position as an intellectual woman, she knows the urgent need to come to terms with her inappropriate public image and counter the conventional reductive discourses of woman's position in the nation's present conditions. In these terms, Beatrice has to achieve an adequate understanding of her social position as a female by questioning a set of oppressive conditions inherent in the colonial heritage and the post-colonial context, a context that locates her intellectual criticism beyond the rigid dichotomies of radical feminism.

The writer makes it clear that the Western high schooling she gets and the Christian background in which she was brought up have alienated her from the traditions and legends of her people. Beatrice's foreign education and knowledge do not introduce her to the history of her forefathers "and the divinities with whom they had evolved. So she came to barely knowing who she was"(p.100). Her early background as a marginalized female in her father's Christian house predetermines her future subordinated function in the public field. Her father, who was a firm Anglican

Church instructor, was so insistent on confining his wife and daughters within the rigidified convictions of women subordination. She was not received with happiness by her parents because she was not a boy; she was simply their fifth daughter. As such, she was given the traditional name Nwanyibuife, a symbolic name which carries the reductive sense ‘female is also something’ – as an allusion to her parents’ overt dissatisfaction.

Her resentment and disapproval of her Igbo name is linked to her recognition of that male-biased order by which her parents live, an order of gender constraints predicated upon some shallow social convictions which dictate the behaviors and upbringing of girls by the citation of flattered patterns of female behaviors: “Sit like a female!” or ‘female soldier which he called me as he lifted me off the ground with his left hand and gave me three stinging smacks on the bottom with his right hand the day I fell off the cashew tree”(p.82). Through the most rigid masculinist role of Beatrice’s father, Achebe attempts intentionally to set forth the deep-seated effects of colonialism and its hardened attitudes of male dominated structures which were instilled in the African communities through many decades of the Christian instruction. For it appears that the Anglican Christian father has totally failed to live through the earlier indigenous gender-integrated socio-political system in which women assumed vital functions. Here, Achebe makes the very important point that colonialism was, definitely, a turbulent event of history that had distorted, to some extent, the local core of the African peoples’ cultures. This posits the argument that the ex-colonial people can never retrieve the original value of their indigenous cultural traditions, and any attempt here to vindicate a different thought, as Benita Parry argues, is to maintain a state of “aboriginal and intact condition (s) / tradition (s) from which a proper sense of historicity is occluded”(1997,p. 85).

In a related issue, Leith Mullings contends that African women were often deprived from the social and economic benefits they were used to hold in the traditional community, when the European colonizers firmed up their own system of gender constraints in the local people (1976). Without attempting to exalt gender relations in pre-colonial Igbo societies, it must be indicated that most of the moderate gender relations that Amadiume has documented were abated during the colonial phase, and

because of this imposed rule, all ideas of women subordination have turned out to be part of the post-colonial pattern of social relationships in African communities. According to Amadiume's research in the issue, it was the general heritage of Christianity and Western teaching in Africa which imposed thorough transformations through the colonial prejudiced principle of male authority. Amadiume explains that this "male-biased" principle was applied in the field of legislation, estate rights, naming the family after the father, and the general moral values which control the female conduct in society.(1997,pp.111-2) These rigid principles of male domination presented as a form of nineteenth century European principles of social conduct were introduced within the other colonial institutions into the subjected African societies. In view of this, the introduction of the British social manners and principles, in particular, into the Igbo region by the missionaries and the educationalists led to subvert women's established autonomy in the different social facets, and increasingly relegated them to the confined private sphere.

Furthermore, Amadiume indicates that among the most traditional institutions which were affected by the European rigid perceptions of gender were indigenous religious beliefs and practices. This vital system of thought which held in check the community's different institutions was the first facet of the whole traditional ethos the British colonizer prohibited in the areas they dominated. "In Nnobi", she mentions, "the worship of Idemili was banned, and the new converts to Christianity exercised their new found power in attacks on ancient religious symbols"(1997,p.150). With the sweeping spread of Christianity, the land's potent goddesses were abandoned and dethroned. Women were no longer able to hold the spiritual functions of the deities that had the right to pass judgments upon all cases of malpractices committed by the tribe's individuals. With other forms of institutional changes brought about by colonialism, there were complete mutations in the systems of women's organizations and groups which were predicated upon social status and religious titles. The upshot of this is the gradual loss of many privileges, social and economic, to which women were entitled under traditional order.

In this manner, then, colonial institutions which disrupted local culture in general are also deemed as the source of estrangement for Beatrice from her cultural roots. She

had been brought up, as she self-consciously writes her memoir, “completely wrapped up” in the rigid milieu of her father’s mission-house, itself enfolded tightly within the alien values of the Anglican Church teachings (p.80). Her living space projected the different cultural imbalances and restrictions that structured the ex-colonial society, as noticeably recited in the Biblical prayers of her father: “World inside a world inside a world, without end. Uwa-t’iwa in our language”, a statement which carries obvious ideas of inclusion and multiplicity on which she would rely to “mould all kinds of thoughts”(p.80). It was a persistent refrain that escorted her family’s morning and evening prayers and that she turns into a “childish hymn of thanksgiving: uwa-t’uwa! Uwa-t’uwa!” (p.81). For Beatrice, the liberating vigor of her thoughts and narrative is contained in the mixture of the memory of a child’s activity and her sense of ‘friendship with strange words’(p.80). The beautiful genuineness of this peculiar and familiar recollection is linked, as in relation to movement of time, to the purpose of structuring her narrative. Beatrice creatively projects her autonomous cultural space and individual retreat out of the recurrent thoughts accumulated in her isolated memories. Beatrice’s subdued thoughts are all built up out of these “building blocks”(p.80) in a way which concurs with T.S. Eliot’s fascination with the “faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments” as he wonders: “Why for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion? ... Such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer” (Eliot, 1934 (1975),p.91). The beautiful impact of such symbolic value of particular memories and the beautiful truths they can confer are grasped throughout the novel’s interwoven stories as emblems of the many influences roused in the process of interaction of many worlds which Beatrice endeavors to comprehend and conciliate and which the novel’s different events are foregrounding through the “infinitely replicated” narrative voices.

The writer projects this memorable female figure as the improbable prophetess of a retrieved tradition. She is guided by some mysterious and potent powers that make her closer to the native heritage of her people. In the long processes of her self-reflections she finds that her father’s Anglican prayers and principles had no effects on her spirit because they make no place for her traditional roots from which she draws her peculiar

powers to deal with the present political upheaval. In her accumulated memories, Beatrice writes about her imaginary experiences with alien spirits. Her innocent childish wish to be possessed by the spirit is related to her resentment against her cruel father and his brutal treatment of her mother and a silent wish to chastise him: “It always made me want to become a sorceress that could say ‘Die!’ to my father and he would die as in the folk-tale. And then, when he had learnt his lesson, I would bring him back to life and he would never touch his whip again” (p.82). However, Beatrice, who warmly attempts to console her mother on one such hurtful incident, is led to learn that she was the symbol of that frustrated hope for her mother who had endured many pregnancies just to have “a boy”. This gender disposition is articulated in the way her parents name her: Nwanyibuife (‘A female is also something’). In fact, in Achebe’s native culture all names have a semantic as well as a socio-cultural value related to it. Naming is not done at random: every name wears an emblem that expresses the conditions that surround the birth of a child. According to the study of Isingoma, B. on the Igbo culture and language, names have semantic practices and orientations, i.e. they “have clear descriptive meanings”(2014,p.87). One of these semiotic markers, according to him, is the point that personal names reflect the parents’ communication of their feelings impressions towards their born child. In her narration, Beatrice informs us that her mother used to bear her shrill ‘grudge’ for the mere reason that she is her fifth girl. The figurative traditional name she was given, and which carries with its deep connotation her parents’ unconcealed discontent, is shown to be an ironic one since she can defy the biased principles inherent in this name as she herself is turned into the most memorable female figure who vitally influences the nation’s present realities.

The manner in which the frequent despising of her traditional name that is turned into a position of supremacy and influence is characteristic of Achebe: he used her traditional name “Nwanyebuife” to title the part that presents her first action of defiance towards the nation’s authorities and her unreserved refusal to follow the recommendations of His Excellency. Rather than giving her only a Western name, Achebe makes a very important point when he endows her with a traditional name. He intentionally employs it as the title of the section that displays her initial association

with her people's legends and past. But because of her family upbringing in a "world apart" she stands totally unfamiliar with the cultural world of her forebears. So she is conscious only at certain momentary and unusual experiences of her life of 'being two different people'. Affected religiously by an estranged family, and subjected to a schooling system that obliterated her cultural background, Beatrice finds herself entirely wrapped up inside two different personalities; attempting to go beyond this compound state and reach an adequate condition of coherence. It is her male friends, Chris and Ikem, who first observed the manifestation of those prophetic and priestly qualities in Beatrice's character:

Chris saw the quiet demure damsel whose still waters nonetheless could conceal deep overpowering eddies of passion that always almost sucked him into fatal depths. Perhaps Ikem alone came close to sensing the village priestess who will prophesy when her divinity rides her abandoning if need be her soup-pot on the fire, but returning again when the god departs to the domesticity of kitchen or the bargaining market-stool. (p.100)

Surely the passage reflects the complex structure of the novel's narrative, a text that is composed along the mythical pattern. Achebe sets forth the importance of keeping the functional relation between particularized elements of the myth and the aesthetic whole of the novel's narrative. In fact, myth is used as the indispensable substructure and sub-text in the novel's main-stream narrative whenever we encounter his female character Beatrice. It has developed into a generic system on which the novel's main narrative can be based on to bring forward the major discourse of the writer. To achieve his designed task, Achebe "must recapture a certain magical quality, a richness of imagery, a deeper sense of primeval forces, a larger order of aesthetic experience." (Chase,1949, p.110)

This aesthetic orientation towards multiple references, metonymic and metaphoric, is central to the whole representation of Beatrice's character. Within the referential level, she holds an important position in the Ministry of Finance. She is, as His Excellency describes her, the only member in this service who has a first-class degree in English. Surely, it is not a naïve intention that Achebe endowed Beatrice with a high position in a ministry of economy. For much of the text significance is connected to the writer's conscious exploitation of the mythical traditional legacy. Achebe realizes the artful juxtaposition he contrives by combining careful metaphorical references to

concrete objects or contexts. To rely again on Amadiume's study of the Igbo gender structure, we find the strategic dependence on a dual-sex organizational standard to classify the economic activities of men and women. In fact, the agricultural production was not profitable in Igbo lands because of the weather conditions. This had prompted the community to develop a sexually-based division of labor: women are granted a central place in governing the land's resources (economy), while men are given authority over the ritual order and general labour control. As such, diligence, firmness, and the quest for success, "were gifts women said to have inherited from the goddess Idemili" (Amadiume, 2015, p.27).

In inheriting those qualities of perseverance and prosperity from her goddess, Beatrice can hold many influential roles, rather than figurative labels predicated upon mythical appointments. She is presented as a metaphorical story-teller, goddess, prophetess, and priestess; these cultural embodiments are used by the writer to enhance her socio-political position. In view of the apathy, cruelty and dissatisfaction portrayed in the novel, Beatrice is called upon by the Almighty to firm up hopeful features of social and political conduct – those of graciousness, dignity and discerning reflection. In fact, Beatrice possesses a congenial personality. In addition to her clear-sighted attempts to reform the intellectual stands of her male friends, she also demonstrates through her own social behaviors the helpful effects of the human values of tolerance and forbearance. Her ability to develop good relationships with both the highly positioned intellectuals of her class and the less fortunate people of her community (her housemaid, Agatha, and half-literate shop girl, in the figure of Elewa) presents a better insight into the values that characterize this memorable heroine.

She succeeds in bringing together the ideas of the two male protagonists, each of whom advocates different intellectual stands. During the different political tensions which threaten the lives of her male friends, we see Beatrice getting close to them, obliquely orienting their actions and increasingly influencing their intellectual attitudes towards the nation's realities. The writer draws our attention to Beatrice's role as prophetess through her support of the novel's male characters: while Ikem and Chris persistently attempt to appease the 'embittered history' of the nation, Beatrice is portrayed as the one who can predict the nation's future circumstances through

momentary experiences of spiritual possession as she herself sets forth, illuminating moments of possession which “comes and goes, she imagines”(p.109). She bleakly discerns the outcome of her friends’ stories from the beginning of their disagreement with Sam’s despotic policy: she senses that Chris and Ikem are under the threat of His Excellency and advises them to better alleviate their tensions with him. Beatrice’s incarnation of the traditional Igbo prophetess is fully demonstrated when she foretells the passing away of both Ikem and Chris: “I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first.(...) He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you”(p.109).

The conditions of Beatrice’s determined separation from Chris stimulate more and more her priestess-like qualities. He had observed her mysterious powers during “the very moment she had walked in that evening that she carried with her a strong aura of that Beatrice whom he always described in fearful jest as goddess”(p.191). Isidore Diala rightly describes Chris’s experience with Beatrice as a “pilgrimage, a veritable ‘mystical’ experience of illumination” (2004,p.163). Achebe’s narrative at this level artfully combines the real and the mythic, dismantling in the process the world of unilateral authority depicted in its authoritarian and paternal forms, and fostering the possibility of retrieving some proper alternatives coming from the living legacies of the primeval order. Achebe contrives the whole experience in a mythic moment: Beatrice, as goddess seeking to appease the rampaging conditions of the present order, entices Chris in a revealing scene in which the narrative language fuses once again the referential context and the metaphorical text:

(S)he uttered a strangled cry that was not just a cry but also a command or a password into the her temple. From there she took charge of him leading him by the hand silently through heaving groves mottled in subdued yellow sunlight, treading dry leaves underfoot till they come to streams of clear blue water. More than once he had slipped on the steep banks and she had pulled him up and back with such power and authority. (p.108)

This momentary shift to the metaphorical level of the mythical mode of expression lends the text deep connotations and meanings which may not be easily created through the highly-structured stylistics of rhetorical and poetic language. The writer carries the novel’s cultural subject matter into certain beautiful images which embody certain moral and metaphysical speculations. The process is put in a compelling

description that is made similar to a conventional quest, an initiation into a more inclusive and complementary realm. The particular portrayal of Beatrice's potent sexual powers during a moment of possession by her god endowed Chris with a profound spiritual enlightenment; women's conventional role as a seductress and manipulator still exercises its legendary influence to bring on a momentary subjection of man's conduct: "Oh holy priestess, hold me now. I am slipping, slipping, slipping. And now he was not just slipping but falling, crumbling into himself"(p.109). Two relatively incompatible but ancient images of the woman are set forth in this episode. First, in reciting her potent amulet, Beatrice is presented as a seducing figure: "just as he (Chris) was going to plead for mercy she screamed an order: 'OK'! and he exploded into stars and floated through fluffy white clouds and began a long and slow and weightless falling into deep, blue sleep"(p.109). Chris asked if she would stay awake, Beatrice answers in a most solemn tone:"Priestesses don't sleep" (p.109).Second, Beatrice is carried to the supreme status of a traditional mother: "he woke like a child cradled in her arms and breasts her eyes watching anxiously over him"(p.109). And as all Chris' behaviors and attitudes are brought under the complete command of her own peculiar rites, Beatrice takes her place without motion "as a goddess in her shrine, her arms across her breasts"(p.188).

Chris' observation and recognition of Beatrice's divine status, as a prophetess, finally induces him to play an influential part in the development of the novel's conflicting events: Gradually, under Beatrice's skilled resuscitation he begins to rally his moral and intellectual strengths. She had made another zealous supplication to make him agree to resolve his intellectual differences with Ikem. So, instead of continuing with his unmoving despair and sarcastic detachment as we first observe him at the novel's raising actions, Chris relies on his good knowledge of the government interior conditions to help Ikem by warning him about the probable consequences he can confront if would carry on in his public reproaches of His Excellency's system. Ultimately, the President's fierce reaction against Ikem's public activities impels Chris to dissociate himself from the government repressive circles and espouse his friend's just cause and ideas. Chris begins to take on hopeful alternative motives, different socio-cultural associations, and alternative impulses for

social identification and involvement. And as he becomes pursued by the government's security forces, Chris begins to capitulate to his priestess's resuscitations, and to overtly support the communal activism of Braimoth and his fellow taxi drivers, the student leader, all of whom have turned to be integral part within the nation's rampaging conditions besides the elite group.

Ikem also comes close to realizing the goddess-like essence in Beatrice's character. Before being arrested by the government military force, Ikem visits Beatrice to introduce his complex and critical new thoughts that he has included in his "Love Letter", an essay in which he questions and goes over his previous different revolutionary ideas. In this incident, we are made to see how the writer deliberately distances the realistic narrative and introduces once again the mythical form. Ikem comes to Beatrice's shrine to display his genuine allegiance and to offer his abundant praises to his Goddess, Idemili. After having recited his "love poem", which he perceives as the endowment of discerning thinking, Ikem takes leave of Beatrice, and both realize that they will not see each other again. Unequivocally, Ikem goes to comply with the recommendations and orders of the goddess, yielding as it were to the divine supreme determination.

Ikem's impressive last meeting with Beatrice formed the opportunity of his zealous adoption of the need for alternative convictions for contemplating the woman issue and devising substantial parts for her. The first thought presented in the novel about Ikem's social and intellectual relationship to women is somehow dubious and unpromising. As Beatrice will expound, Ikem's idealistic social activism is blemished by his failure to envision a well-identified position for women in the imaginary community that he zealously used to project in his editorial essays. In fact, his speculation on the question of women is as intriguing as it is problematic. In the second incident in which Ikem is presented in the novel, we observe his rough behavior with his girl-friend, Elewa: he sends her home at midnight, under the high-minded pretext of not appreciating the fact of seeing her staying the night in the government residence and so viewed as a cheap girl. The truth is that after having had some good time with her, he wishes to devote the remainder of the evening to his idiosyncratic, surrealistic moments of writing, during which time he may think

aesthetically about some issues to mention in his national magazine. When we come across this example of Ikem's conceited behavior, we understand Beatrice's criticism of his inadequate and pretentious ideas, for "the great activist", as she calls him, and the custodian of the oppressed "doesn't think (women) have enough brains"(p.60). The inadequacy of Ikem's social and political thinking, as Beatrice has continually admonished him about, is that he doesn't project a clear role for women and he doesn't appear to figure out this limitation in his intellectual activism. Promoting the status for women in politics and viewing their exclusion from the different fields of leadership as a serious obstruction for the nation's development become significant in the novel for both Ikem and his creator.

Ikem responds to the accumulated force of Beatrice's criticism and indictment by suddenly showing a complete yielding to her views, apprehending the complex nature of women's subjugation. There is here also an important correspondence between the evolution of Ikem's thinking on women as expressed in his "strange love-letter" and Achebe's preoccupation about this issue in his characteristic construction of the novel's most outstanding female character, Beatrice. Through Ikem, Achebe typically sets forth his recognition of the power of myths to entrench and perpetuate human attitudes as well as the predominance of prejudiced patriarchal myths in the different historical civilizations in spite of the probable local variations. We are actually given an amplified exposition of different mythologies in which Ikem links two conventional thoughts regarding women that had been designed to exclude them from the vital fields of social activities. Ikem posits, first, an analogy between the Biblical Eve and the traditional myth of the Woman who separated Sky from Earth; then, secondly, a form of correspondence at the level of cultural status between the Virgin Mary and the pretentious traditional belief that Mother is supreme. Ikem expounds how in the Old Testament as well as in the Kanganian creation legends, women are primarily rendered as subjects of men because she propelled man to perpetrate his first sin (p.92). The New Testament rhetorically overturns this straight prejudice through the idealistic stature of Mary. This concurs with the Kanganian "more enlightened, more refined strategy"(p.93) which projects Woman as the Mother of God. Within this projection, however, women are dislocated from the practical decisions of leading the world and

relegated to ineffective roles as she was in her pitiable old days. The same representation finds its equivalent image in the 'independently parallel subterfuge' in Ikem's surrealistic world where Woman is figuratively granted the epic role of 'Saviour of Last Resort': "as the world crashes around Man's ears, Woman in her supremacy will descend and sweep the shards together"(p.93). Yet, all such analogies appear to be inadequate, in Ikem's reviewed outlook, and should give place to alternative reforming ideas even though he rejects the idea of postulating categorically what women's contemporary position will be.

But why does Achebe make Ikem draw an extended treatise on comparative mythology about the issue of woman in a work that appears to be deeply embedded in the legends and stories of the Igbo world-view? Chimalum Nwankwo rightly points out that "the Igbo woman does not trace her ancestry to Eve. The Igbo Supreme Being, Chukwu, is neither man nor woman"(2001,p.79) At any rate, the experiences and histories of women in general will remain different despite certain western trends which allegedly insist on universal slogans as the so-called "globalness of sisterhood". In this view, it may be relevant and useful to look at the representation and development of Eve in Achebe's thought in relation to the ideas of feminism in the Western tradition. In fact, Achebe's novels have never drawn on the western ideas of Eve when the writer's interest is to evince the Igbo woman's character. The author himself has repeatedly vindicated this argument: "This is what I have set out to do: to reconstruct our (Igbo) history through literature. This reconstruction of history has been meticulously executed by the un-Eve-ing of the woman"(qtd. in Nwankwo, 2001, p.80). This statement presents an obvious reflection of Achebe's refutation of the feminist thoughts and the undeniable racist qualifications inherent in its Eurocentric traditions.

Post-colonial women's movements of different thoughts have tried to defend the value and particularity of their indigenous cultures and histories and thus subvert the common intellectual assumption that the trends of women's rights in the post-colonial world are only a direct replication of the highly developed women's movements in the West. Most of its activists support a form of feminism that makes an overall distinction between the different complexities and specificities of women's

experiences of oppression, and demythologizes the universal principle of feminism restricted to specific gender issues, which reservedly privileges a particular Western group of women and gloss over the issues that directly affect other women, especially black women. This has impelled women of color to remake and repossess certain fundamental elements in their indigenous traditions, reconstruct the meanings of specific pre-colonial symbols and mythologies that they can carry into their specific feminine discourses of representing contemporary life. It is in this ground that many African women writers and critics utterly refuse to see their works or ideas interpreted within the Westernized separatist feminist notions. Buchi Emecheta elucidates this in a very poignant tone which evinces her cultural belonging:

I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African woman I know. I didn't know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with small f. (qtd, in Makuchi & Abbenyi, 1997, p.7)

Emecheta's poignant pronouncement underlines the complex ground of intellectual totalizations inherent in feminism for other women in the world and particularly for themselves as African women. This argument puts forth a number of issues. African women disapprove, and even eschew, the intellectual term "feminist" because of the feeble and suspicious assumptions that they believe are often inherent in western movements and their sudden ideational reversals. Emecheta questions the different aspects associated with the origin of "feminism" as an intellectual thought – generated as it were within European contexts and through knowledgeable, developed and prosperous advocates. By refusing to yield to the Western women's pretentious universal definitions, Emecheta is laying emphasis on the fact that some African women writers and critics tend to perceive feminism as a tool of cultural imperialism disguised under gender principles, an imperialism that is deliberately directed to distance African women from the historical specificity and the vital strengths of their indigenous heritage. It is then the recurring plans of neo-colonial systems that these theorists and writers deem as inherent in the western feminist ideas that they are unreservedly disapproving.

Particularly, African writers express their complete rejection of a feminism which posits futile distinctions between male and female concerns. African feminists bring together the realities of the collective community and the particular conditions of women in Africa with a carefully stopped consideration of gender-specific relations. As such, one can observe no form of incompatible relations in the African community, but particular relations of socio-cultural positions to be reconstructed according to the changes of the community's conditions. They postulate the specificity of an "African feminism"; an integrationist activist movement that draws effectively on the specific histories and conditions of the whole community to posit social, cultural and theoretical basis for the fundamental issues that tend to preoccupy the interests of African women in general. So, instead of being identified by the separatist principles of Westernized gender-relations, Ama Ata Aidoo relates African Feminism to particular traits: originality, holistic harmony and communal allegiance. In her words:

African women struggling both on behalf of themselves and on behalf of the wider community is very much a part of our heritage. It is not new and I really refuse to be told I am learning feminism from abroad (...). Africa has produced a much more concrete tradition of strong women fighters than most other societies. So when we say that we are refusing to be overlooked we are only acting today as daughters and grand-daughters of women who always refused to keep quiet.
(1988,p.183)

One can infer from this poignant statement that African feminists dedicate themselves completely to the general cause of the whole society. They rightly focus on the traditional collective aspect of general order. In these terms, women's status and sense of communality are inherently connected with the different issues that preoccupy the useful interests of the African man. Aidoo advances the significant point that before feminism developed into an influential movement with a global political importance, African women were playing a vital role in the progress of their small communities, and hold specific economic and social positions as their male counterparts, although no paradigmatic theorization was posited to authenticate the historical background of the active functions held by these women in the different facets of their communities' growth. Ifi Amadiume vindicates such assessments in her inaugurating study of gender relations in Igbo society. She demonstrates that the militant tendency of feminism which is deemed as "a comparatively new phenomenon in the Western world",

characteristically constitutes “a constant reality for women in traditional Igbo societies”(2015,p.10). As we have seen in the section of Amadiume’s study, the efficient presence of the Nigerian women in the diverse facets of communal life did not commence with the embittered colonial contact. Let us hasten to accentuate that the pre-colonial African societies have fostered harmonizing gender relations, rather than hierarchical ones, and, at this level, Achebe’s Nigerian society is a good pattern which displays much flexibility between communal and private spheres, thus to promote more constructive social relations.

Alice Walker, writing about the specific conditions of Black women in the US, adopts the term ‘womanist’ to signify all women and specifically women of color who organize themselves in militant movements to connect with other activist practices in the struggle towards a general reform and development of the whole community (1983,p.xi). Making a similar move, Gayatri C. Spivak’s critical debate in “Three Women’s Texts and Critique of Imperialism” (1985), opens up an important ground of studying the intellectual contradictions intrinsic in Western feminism. This essay demonstrates the obvious absence of the woman of color within the liberal feminist literature which is deliberately honed to sustain the representation of the rising “female subject in Europe and Anglo-America”(Spivak,1985,p.243). Spivak sets forth that Western feminism has always been restrained in its unreserved approbation for individual female triumph. A scrutinized reading of the history of women’s movements evinces that the general development of feminism in the West was wholly predicated upon the notion of “female access to individualism.” (Spivak,1985, p.246)

While African feminists, writers and critics, lay emphasis on the particularities and complex facets of feminists’ experiences of oppression, they contend that their specific form of oppression at the level of color and race cannot be examined or resolved by means of the simplistic separatist tendencies of Western feminism. For them, feminism in its single-toned intentions towards the issue of gender cannot present good patterns of social organization for black women who design the contours of their political and social programs according to the crucial needs of their communities. For Clenora Hudson-Weems, Africana womanist writing on behalf of women of color in the US, the zealous efforts of the African women to reduce the effects of poverty in the

continent during the colonial and post-colonial periods constitutes the fundamental preoccupation of their intellectual struggle, political and social. This poly-dimensional form of activism vindicates also the communality of purpose between men and women in counteracting colonial and imperial influences. It stretches its activist contours to take in the community's different issues, including illiteracy, food crisis, drought, poverty, and pandemics. Hudson-Weems stresses the important task of developing a complementary society, a congruent communal order which recognizes the useful association between male and female domains if social regeneration is to be genuinely realized (1998,p.149).This illustrates why many local women movements in several post-colonial communities would sustain most earnestly anti-imperialist movements or nationalist struggles than showing an unsighted allegiance to the pretentious images or concerns of liberal feminism. A great number of women devotedly took part in the armed forces of anti-colonial struggles as simple fighters and also as memorable leaders. Their poly-dimensional feminism recognizes the social value of women without making them oscillated between the specific feminist issues they are preoccupied with and those of the whole community.

Following this useful distinction between the African and the Western woman, Achebe insists that the development of women in Nigeria (Africa) can be attained through efficient plans of reform predicated upon the land's traditional culture and the present conditions of the budding society. To lay emphasis on this argument Achebe calls upon the Nigerian women to build up their activism within "a real understanding of our situation and not just from a copying of European fashions". For it is only "out of our traditions" that they can manage "to work out a new role for themselves" (Achebe, 2002(1992),p.54). An illustration of the innovative role for Achebe's woman is exhibited by Beatrice's memorable role of conjuring the mythical visions into the present world. Beatrice's complex position within the unfolding actions of the novel as an emblem of her cultural roots and an influential Western educated woman allows her to take part in the turbulent circumstances besetting her nation as she experiences and chronicles them through her relationship with the diverse groups of Kangan's people.

At any rate, Achebe's conscious projection of Beatrice as goddess and priestess enhances her secondary role of supporting women's issues. In addition to her

intellectual disposition, the writer makes Beatrice's association with her forebears' cultural legends as the crucial factor of her influential role in society. In this rendering, Achebe's fundamental intentions are to retrieve and repossess through Beatrice's multiple images some older roles and background. As a moderate character standing between her male friends' importunate quest for power and the spiritual values of her traditional cultural background, Beatrice appears reluctant to meddle in the affairs of the state. When the writer works through the high meanings of the traditional myth of power his interest is not to empower Beatrice as a woman in her professional milieu; rather, he tries to present her as both a symbolic and genuine overseer to the whole world of man's power. Beatrice herself has written in her self-conscious account that she "couldn't be ambitious" because she has never attempted to be involved in matters which are beyond her "own puny powers". (p.83) This expounds Achebe's deliberate intention to eschew exploring the character of Beatrice in her prestigious job in the Finance Ministry.

Observing that Achebe generally deals with the memorable actions of men in a realistic mode and those of women in metaphorical level of expression, Catherine Bicknell is prompt to discern in Achebe's treatment of the women issue the principle of balance, rather than the norm of equality between male and female. Deeming the goddess Ani as the symbol that stands for that sense of balance (in *Things Fall Apart*), Bicknell points out: "Ani represents the female principle acting as a restraint on the male principle. Crimes of violence (...) are abominations to the earth goddess. Women, then, is seen in her role as peacemaker, as moderator of the aggressive impulses of men"(1996,p.266). Within this dimension of balance, even though Beatrice is determined to help her male friends in their challenge against the despotic leader, she refuses to believe that she holds a leading role in the nation's history. While the writer presents the novel's ramified events through the different narratives of his story-tellers, the reader can discern that the novel's main cultural discourse is more displayed in Beatrice's feminine perspective which is used to balance and moderate the ideas of the novel's male protagonists, Chris and Ikem. Rather than assuming a more important position than the novel's female narrator, their intellectual

stands and militant roles concur and accentuate Beatrice's balancing viewpoint and the cultural function she is brought to hold in the nation's history.

Achebe indeed highlights Beatrice's efforts to subvert gender-related hierarchies and exigencies through making her associated with her land's stories and beliefs. Very often, the writer resorts to the metaphorical mode of expression to set forth the significance of Beatrice's role. When this highly intellectual woman receives a special invitation to the presidential palace, her primary thought is that she is being sent for by the state's first leader to hold a harmonizing role in the uncomfortable conditions of his government. At this special diplomatic gathering, however, she comes to realize that she has been summoned to be shown as an example of the nation's achievements, as she represents Kangan's intellectual women, and in view of the fact that Miss Cranford of the American Press is visiting Bassa as a foreign expert who is intended to prepare encouraging reports about the nation's conditions (p.70).

During this important party, Beatrice witnesses how the militarized tendencies of Sam's behaviors are absolutely divested by Miss Cranford who can very easily develop familiar relationships with the government members and receive even the President special hosting. She notices also the political elite's contemptible excitement with which they wish to attract the admiration of the white masters. Beatrice is very disappointed to see how the strange American journalist can easily have the opportunity to see the country's revered figures, while the country's people are always kept away from the enclosed corridors of the government. In advising the government to maintain its policy of foreign debts, the American visitor appears to be less concerned about sustaining the interests of the government to which she has come allegedly as a consultant on foreign relationships than with perpetuating Western dominance over the region's resources. The whole scene exhibits a poignant image of the African neo-colonialist states and their corrupt leaders who have been implicated in many of the suspicious plans of Western imperialism on the continent. Beatrice raises a very distressing issue: the dependence on the imperial plans and pretensions that function to perpetuate more and more the state of economic and cultural dependency that rendered the African leaders as puppets that rule their countries according to the dictations of their Western masters.

Characteristically, the narrative voice draws on the mythical pattern of the incident: Beatrice's intellectual and priestly responsibilities against all forms of Western imperialism are clearly revealed in her rough tone with the unknown visitor. In constructing the scene of Beatrice's encounter with the foreign female journalist, the writer seeks to pay tribute to Beatrice's juxtaposition of her "womanist" activism and the plight of her nation. The encounter is centered on the momentary circumstance of Beatrice's possession and therefore presents it as a facet of her cultural disposition. Beatrice herself admits that she is not fully cognizant of the connotation of those spiritual experiences, but she accentuates that "(s)omething possessed (her) as (she) told it"(p.76). She relates her shrill hostility to the American journalist with those brief moments of some marvelous powers inherent in the incantation of her priestly duties: "But I seemed not to be fully in control of my responses. Something tougher than good breeding had edged it aside in a scuffle deep inside me and was imparting to my casual words the sharp urgency of incantation"(p.71). In her brief dialogue with Miss Cranford, Beatrice does not approve of her allegation that they debate the significance of "the woman's angle": the attachments deemed essential to Beatrice's intellectual orientations are cultural, rather than arguing for the construction of the international sisterhood trend of the women issues. She recognizes that she is invited to that special dinner to function as an emblem of modern African women, intended to provide the American journalist with a female's perspective on Kangan's conditions. The word "incantation" implies that the incident is one of those momentary appealing experiences when Beatrice is possessed by some potent spirits of her goddess. In this moment, one can also remark that in view of the American's endeavor to influence and entice Sam, Beatrice embodies an adversary goddess as generated by the narrator's voice portraying the American journalist's eyeballs as "popping out of her head like the eyeballs of a violent idol" (p.101). Now she is a wrathful goddess who defends the land's culture against its enemies.

In this way, the novel makes it apparent that the writer draws on the general theme of gender to connote more than simply women issues. His Excellency's important dinner is projected as a high ground of resistance to different modes of despotic forces which beset the nation. Beatrice's anxiety over the mode of her attempt to defend the

head of the state expounds in some way her limits as a woman moved by her forebears' legends in front of the deep-seated influence of the imperialistic agents on the government's affairs. She associates her attempt to seduce Sam with her goddess' act of punishing him. She shifts the incident into the mysterious space of the dark lake, the hallowed waters from which goddess Idemili ascends. Here, Beatrice is making her prophesy of the goddess' expected chastisement of the lascivious leader through the python:

(T)he king was slowly but surely responding! (...) The big snake, the royal python of a gigantic erection began to stir in the shrubbery of my shrine as we danced together closer and closer to soothing airs, soothing our ancient bruises together (...). And I took him then boldly by the hand and led him to the balcony railing to the breathtaking view of the dark lake.(p.76)

What is presented in this appealing episode is a creative re-enactment of the ancient legend, the ancient details are located within new contexts but their substantial meanings are artfully grasped by the narrative voice. In this incident, Achebe seems to combine the mythic and the realistic ideals to bring forward a specific meaning at the level of the surfacing story; though one can find a mistake in the improper behavior of Beatrice (seducing Sam), the narrative's focus is directed to evince the divine and the spiritual side of her self-sacrificing attempt in defending the revered emblem of her nation. Although Beatrice does not succeed to make Sam recognize his malpractices, she can envisage the bleak circumstances that will lead to the death of her male friends, including Sam. In this way, the amulet of the myth is fully realized when he is murdered during the military coup. Sam not only fails to see in Beatrice the figure of Idemili's priestess trying to warn her people against future threats, but he also disgraces and humiliates her when he chooses the company of the American expert and sends her home. His dispute with her is an allusion to his imminent downfall as a corrupt leader.

Yet the reality of the political upheavals that have led to the death of her male friends torments Beatrice and renders her dumb. Yet, within that very affliction Achebe has constructed a soothing sense of a promising resurgence: "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?"(p.211), queries Beatrice during her silent grief about Chris's death. The answer is grasped in Beatrice's crucial moment of articulation after a long period of silence; "the ending of an exile" that her new

companions recognize is clearly the recovery of speech “to the sceptical priest struck dumb for season by the Almighty for presuming to set limits to his omnipotence” (p.211). Her abrupt return to conversation is once more appreciably construed by her surviving friends as a part of an unexplained incident of priesthood. Beatrice is guilty because she doesn’t demonstrate a genuine faith in the redeeming influence of her god. For that cause, and specifically during that period, she finds herself incapable of expression after the calamitous death of her intimate friends, Ikem and Chris.

Beatrice’s repossession of the power of words is the recovery of the benefaction of her god. By means of faith, she comes back with the appropriate understanding of a faithful priestess. Recovering from the sadness of the death of Chris and Ikem, she regains her strength from both her sense of being deemed as prophetess and her own recognition of the social transformations attending the nation’s present history. Her speech and renewal are marked by the “slow thawing”(p.219) of her repressed anguish into the soothing tears of ultimate understanding and approval of the “unbearably beautiful insight” (p.222) realized in Chris’ sacrifice for the dignity of an ordinary woman. It is a vindication of a truth that the three main protagonists – Ikem, Chris, Beatrice – had been espousing, a vindication which abates the complexes of the self-contained ‘I’ which had definitely confined them with the narrow space of authority, and which is now substituted by the collective and integrated ‘We’, after realizing and embracing the reality of the estranged world of the dispossessed people. Beatrice’s outstanding postulation ‘truth is beauty’ is a suggestion of carrying the real and material life into higher levels of meanings. This assertion is a useful adaptation of the doctrine of aesthetic appreciation to a complex truth and reality, where, as Achebe has also accentuated, myth and all forms of oral narratives continue to be integrated with the present culture as “living presences”; as “beauties of ceremony” to be repossessed for their grand sense of truth and reality, as much as for the communal feature of their “patterned form”(Achebe, 1987,p.4).

Through Beatrice, Ikem’s vehement quest for coherent and inclusive community has become realized in an agreeable association of the “small community”(p.211) of survivors who make use of her flat as a regenerating communal space. In a metaphor consciously suggested to abrogate its usual connotations of gender relations, Beatrice

is described by her new associates as “a captain whose leadership was sharpened more and more by sensitivity to the peculiar needs of her company”(p.220). Like the traditional goddess, Idemili, who moderates men’s use of power through yielding to moral responsibilities, Beatrice stands also to carry out the same function towards her community; to reform the political milieu and call for more ethical and moderate form of authority. In this view, the writer sets forth that the task of mollifying the embittered experiences of the political turmoil is to be carried by Beatrice as the woman who resumes her priestly functions in the naming ritual for Elewa’s and Ikem’s child.

In the minor events that accompany this ceremony, Beatrice’s dwelling turns out to be a symbolic sphere of a small nation which is regenerated by the determined sacrifices of two leading intellectuals: her friend, Ikem (detained and then killed because of his committed writings) and her fiancé, Chris (killed because he tries to rescue a poor girl from being raped by an officer). Beatrice is eventually convinced that she must not yield to the literal connotations of this inclination of sacrifice and connect it instead with a higher value of a fundamentally revolutionary achievement. In fact, the African individual perceives death as a way from the constrained material world into the higher realm of spiritual life where the individual is given a complete access to grant strength and will to his living associates and kinsmen. Richard Priebe explains how characters as well as specific aspects of imagery can be drawn on to endow the writer’s narrative with “a tendency toward the inversion of normal order, toward ambiguity rather than definition”. To this end, “(d)earth is taken ultimately as the basic symbol of that which breaks continuity and insures change.(...) Death, decay and insanity are presented as processes that insure rather than deny the vitality of society”(Priebe, 1988,p.168). Read in this context, the incidents of Ikem’s and Chris’s death are meant to serve as the catalyst that generates a diverse and balanced company around Beatrice, which, thereafter, proffers the possibility of an alternative order of communal relationships. Emmanuel, the student leader, admits that his commitment to the cause of reforming the nation was stimulated by Ikem’s ideas set down on his editorial newspaper.(p.214) The memorable political stands of both Ikem and Chris give rise to a hopeful socio-cultural interaction between the friends of the nation’s turmoil. Their sacrifices are venerated in communion rites that bring out the land’s

vital sense of the collective memory within a new beginning of cultural relations. This gathering is accompanied with both the christening and the traditional naming ceremony of Ikem's and Elewa's daughter, an important alliance upon which the body of the new-born community must be patterned. The incident of Amaechina's birth in a turbulent condition of the nation's history through a beautiful association between a prominent intellectual and a daughter of a market woman set forth the generation of a new model of community that fulfills Ikem's ideas of nation formation.

Beatrice too has started to associate herself more and more with the ordinary people. She has become the center of her people's growing expectations, affording a congruous socio-cultural space and an intellectual foundation for the debates of Emmanuel, the student activist, Braimoh, the poor taxi-driver and his wife who hide Chris during his flight; Elewa, the half-literate mother of Ikem's child, and Elewa's old uncle and mother, both stand as emblems of traditional culture. These ordinary individuals accompany Beatrice in her grief upon Chris – a small community considerably more varied in terms of class and cultural background than the highly positioned associates of the government sphere to whom she had been familiar. Through the formation of such miniature community, the novel defies all forms of notions which yield to narrow classifications. This is expressed in Beatrice's emblematic statement: "Well, if a daughter of Allah could join his rival's daughter in a holy dance, what is to stop the priestess of the unknown god from shaking a leg?"(p.215). This is a significant part of Achebe's solution to the continual anxiety of needing to transcend the cultural conflicts that plague post-colonial Nigeria – a hybrid society that accepts the diverse origins of its members and encompass all their particular expectations. The novel's last event displays how this principle can generate a useful pattern of cultural interaction in which differences can be used as a source for general progress and not antagonism.

In one way or another, the writer has used the naming ceremony to conjure an audacious experience of historical and cultural relations as conceived in the very symbolic act of the naming ritual: past and present are brought together in this cultural event. Achebe himself describes this incident as a "challenging" one. (2002, p.52) In fact, all the secondary events that intervene in this incident function so as to embody

not only a means of reconnection with valuable facets of authenticity, but, more important, a repossession of the past dispensation within the nation's present conditions. In this view, Achebe asserts that "the very idea of a world of separate identities, of isolated or separable and self-sufficient cultures (...), has been obliged to yield to a variety of paradigms designed to capture these different but related forms of relationship, interconnection and discontinuity" (Hall,2001(1996),pp.252-3). In the same vein, the naming ceremony ritual that Achebe projects in his narrative is central to his society insofar as it serves to uphold the land's cultural order. The omniscient narrator points out that the old people attending this present occasion do not appear to prevent the young individuals from initiating some changes in some of the ceremony's rituals. Elewa's child symbolizes Ikem's conviction of a community that stands as the living testimony of a union that surpasses all social and cultural barriers, and as Elewa's uncle and the whole gathering excitedly submit "the daughter of all of us"(p.219). Ikem's posthumous female baby is named Amaechina, a traditional Igbo boy's name denoting May-the-path-never-close- which is construed as the enlightened path of Ikem's reforming ideas as they would orient the struggles of other committed individuals. In endowing the baby with this local name, the celebrants express their entrenched association with the cultural heritage of their forebears.

This metaphoric name forms the novel's most vivid preoccupation to bring about an eventual transformation at the socio-cultural level. The baby girl has not a father to name her, as the people's traditions require, and so she is named by the several celebrant mothers of the symbolic miniature community. In fact, Beatrice's appropriation of a traditionally male role in the naming ceremony presents a daring orientation for the novel's cultural connotations. Beatrice does not prevent the men from attending the ceremony. She reminds the gathering that their people's traditions grant the father the right to name the baby child. "But the man who should have done it today is absent (referring to Ikem)"(p.213). Yet, it is Beatrice who is entrusted to hold this role; her position as a rightful priestess of her miniature community allows her to carry out the traditional rites of naming. Characteristically, the traditions of naming are subjected to change substantially by the priestess, the daughter of Almighty who is herself the emblem of tradition. This exemplifies Achebe's overt

approval of the aspects of resilience and transformation around which the Igbo order is constructed. In his words: “It stands to reason, therefore, that new forms must stand ready to be called into being as often as new forces appear on the scene”(1988,p.43).

This indicates the writer’s unconcealed disavowal of essentialist traditions and his unwavering assertion of a system of thought and behavior that is progressive. The naming ceremony tradition lives on as it yields to new values and behaviors, and the emergent realities are perceived within the valuable interplay of the ancient and the present cultural experiences. The old man, Elewa’s uncle, for example, whose traditional task is to initiate the performing rites of the naming ceremony, addresses the celebrants in a jocular manner: “I did not hear of bride price and you are telling me about naming a child”(p.217). He is aware that the people’s ways of life have changed, and thus does not find it necessary to impede Beatrice from carrying out the naming custom. By deliberately placing the traditional ceremony in the hybrid post-colonial society of Kangan, Beatrice opens up new links with her forebears’ traditions and bends them to new conditions. Beatrice’s act is an important example of the regeneration of the community’s self-defined consciousness as it is adapted to the exigencies of a modern world. An adequate perception arises directly from this line of explanation: Achebe’s narrative carries out the issue of reviving traditional culture within a dialectical and progressive apprehension, an all-encompassing position that recognizes the differences and cultural transformations of the post-colonial time as a necessary experience for the creative development of African communities.

So, traditional culture, in the form of myth and the accommodation of some of its rites, provides the post-colonial society with the optimism of release from the different narrow discourses, colonial or imperial, that have destabilized the general fabric of the indigenous order. When the writer introduces different details and meanings in the Idemili myth that he embedded in his novel’s main narrative, he artfully contrives the opportunity for employing, reasserting and sometimes adapting the land’s cultural principles to useful social needs. *Anthills of the Savannah* thus brings to the fore the moralistic and the aesthetic function of myth; the writer’s concern with the idea of retrieving the past cultural traditions propels him to project the ordinary reality through the fanciful aesthetics and the canon of values intrinsic in the mythic mode of

expression. In the grander temporal and special setting in which he envelops the events of his novel, Achebe has combined his notion of the didactic function of imaginative writing with the unconstrained imaginary horizons of mythical consciousness: giving the trivial modern reality some meaningful value by the creation of a more adequate order of reality and truth.

It is therefore important to infer that when the writer draws on the Idemili myth for the construction of his female character and the novel's contemporary events, he is not only using it as a pattern of traditional oral art but he is also attempting to work out a mediating literary vision which can release the past stories, and hence indigenous culture, from the negative impact of the different stereotyping discourses of the Western forces. The writer defends the value of his African culture through extending his literary affiliations to the past grand narratives of his people, enacting in this way a genuine cultural movement towards a new experience of self-identification and cultural repossession. In combining the oral and literary modes of imaginary expression in his novel, Achebe reasserts his firm interest in subverting all forms of severance between the primordial legacies and the present socio-cultural experiences of his people. In this sense, *Anthills*' entire debate on feminism is to be viewed as only a part of the writer's concern with re-defining the idea of traditional culture and historical transition, for the novel's thematic orientation is related less to the gender issue than to the Achebean abiding concern with the question of cultural revival. The idea of portraying Beatrice as a priestess and a goddess to appease the embittered realities of her disordered community displays that "traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals"(Okpewho, 1992,p.293). Her figurative mythical role is not a naïve reinvention of some archaic stories; it serves essentially to bring out the writer's literary and ideological intentions. For in one sense, Achebe's narrative sets forth the aesthetic experience by which the ordinary reality is transliterated into the imaginative essence of metaphor, accentuating, hence, Chase's significant conception that myth is not a mere "canon of behavior or thought", but rather a beautiful projection of "life grown literary"(Chase, in Vickery, 1966,p.71).

Notes:

- 1- It should be clear that in using the phrase “mythic consciousness”, Priebe is not attempting to examine the recreation of myth processes in written narratives. He is essentially concerned to discuss the symbols and images used by the West African writers within the context of imaginative myths and epics associated with the oral tradition of their societies. He argues that these writers were particularly preoccupied with reconstructing traditional myths and not of contriving new versions. In fact, the aspect of imagination is a crucial part in the artistic process of transmitting such verbal narratives to different generations, “but ascendance”, as Priebe writes, is given to the aspect of conscious communal interpretation over private creativity.” (1988, p.14)
- 2- Amadiume’s titled book “*Male Daughters, Female Husbands*” is a direct connotation of the high status of women in Igbo society. Amadiume expounds that rich or powerful women could be patrons and masters by holding the duty of paying the bride-wealth for a man’s marriage. In such situations, the man and his hard work would remain related to the woman patron. A barren woman could also maintain her husband’s honesty through woman-to-woman marriage. First daughters especially could resort to this aspect of woman-to woman-marriage when their parents did not give birth to males. (Amadiume,2015,p.72)

CONCLUSION _____

This study has delved into Chinua Achebe's treatment of societal and cultural issues in his prose fiction, focusing on his post-independence novels. In his narratives, the writer renders an intricate composite of cultural disintegration and renewal, a combination of some residual aspects of traditional culture and a new set of values generated by the potent imperatives of the colonial experience. His novels stand as a committed process of cultural production. They do not only reproduce common realistic circumstances but constitute important analysis of post-colonial issues as they represent "a discursive stance, an epochal condition distinguished by the entry into metropolitan cultures of other voices, histories and experiences, and an achieved transition"(Parry,2005,p.4). Yet the writer appears to set forth that this is not a simplistic view of the community's cultural transition from an old traditional order to a totally different system of life. This unique cultural experience, as Obiechina explains, presents itself as "a composite" of diverse cultural worldviews rather than "a unified picture (where) elements of the old traditional culture exist side by side with those of the modern industrial culture, the oral tradition with the literary and the traditional village with the modern town"(1975, p.260). Indeed, Achebe's texts depict many socio-cultural scenes in which the community's indigenous culture has maintained many of its aspects despite the imposed or adopted colonial culture; its values and the enlightening truths deriving from it subsist in uneasy juxtaposition with those of the hybrid urban culture. The social predicaments and confusions which sometimes take place because of the individual's dependence on particular set of values in inappropriate social context allow the novelist to ponder critically on highly complex situations of cultural confusion and hybridity.

Achebe's novels thus present a particular unity of imaginative discourse oriented towards both a constant evaluation of the land's cultural legacies and a determined engagement with narrative as a fundamental mode of expression to create alternative ways of understanding the present realities. For rather than probing uncritically for the past cultural traditions, Achebe's novels stretch out not only between the clear-cut historical boundaries of the past and present; they move within the different modes of imaginative expression, narrative forms, poetics of space, and movement of time, all of which are put into a constant procedure of renovation and adaptation. The writer

incisively embodies the cultural tensions of the communities he writes about through his experimentation of the literary structure and narrative form of his novels. The latter defy and deconstruct definite categories of identification as they undermine many of the discursive dichotomies that are conventionally associated with colonial myths of cultural representation. The distressing conflict between the adopted Western values and Nigerian traditional world-view is carefully brought together and synthesized into a unique inclusive sphere of hybrid culture.

Both *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* focus very closely on the issue of cultural disintegration and confusion, and the difficulty of disentangling the self-contained world of the individual from the convoluted realities of the community. The reader encounters communities estranged from the genuine value of their traditional ethos and turn out to be ineffectual by their helplessness to hold control over the malpractices of their individuals. In *No Longer at Ease* Obi's isolation from his family and clansmen reaches its dramatic stage as he finds himself required to repay the scholarship that the Progressive Union had offered him, and to adapt his mode of life to the prestigious exigencies of his European Civil Servant status. When he succumbs to bribe taking his people do not discern the ethical dimension of his malpractices nor do they show any genuine intention to understand the social and cultural factors which impel him to yield to the temptation of bribery. Even Obi's white director, Mr. Green, fails to view Obi's corrupt act in relation to its determinant conditions. Through his discounting view of the African individual and community, Mr. Green is presented as unable to perceive the fact that Obi's personal predicament reflects the incompatible cultural forces he faces; the colonial administrator could not discern that the residual values of the Western mentality and its harsh clash with the indigenous subdued culture would result in an immense confusion and an incoherence in values to the local community. The use of the introductory scene to depict Obi's trial incident serves precisely to provide a complete narrative that presents a counter discourse to the satirical statements of Mr. Green on African's corruption, a set of premeditated statements which are oriented to place the ex-colonized "in the context of that history of physical and cultural dispossession"(Innes, 2010,p.58).

In one important sense, Achebe contrasts the static restrictiveness of Mr. Green's colonialist discourse with the narrative elaboration of the complex cultural factors causing Obi's succumbing to corruption. The ethno-centric bias of Mr. Green's criticism of the African individual underlines the unsighted immersion of the Western scholar in the conventional simplistic perceptions which form the general mechanisms of colonialist discourse. When the writer satirically ends the novel with direct comments on his pretentious knowledge of African's mentality, he aims to draw the reader's attention to the apparent schism that separates the white man's prejudiced knowledge from the entire narrative that evinces the incompatible values and state of general confusion which have entangled Obi and his society. Achebe consciously exposes the European's racial tools of cultural representation to criticism and indictment in order to bring to the surface the African insider point of view. His "inside stories" of his people's values and order of things have made explicit his abiding preoccupation to disavow the different distorted images and perceptions that the colonial agent had tried to firm up in the native's mind. This self-conscious tendency of writing back is what many post-colonial theorists come to describe as a "balance of stories" which expresses a critical transaction between two contesting discourses.(Walsh,2004) The immediate intellectual impulses that one can discern behind this approach of "balancing stories" constitute the subject of Achebe's pronouncements and narratives, his fundamental literary motivation for drawing on the ancient and present stories of his people, which constantly orient the critical reading tools of his works. Achebe's most articulated intentions to reclaim an epistemological alternative that emanates from and enhances an Afro-centric pattern of interrogating both the past and present historical experiences is a clear illustration of the post-coloniality of his novels. "For colonized and postcolonial cultures traumatized by colonialism", writes Benita Parry, "a fiction that recuperates Africa's autonomous resources and recuperates the fragmented colonial subject makes an active contribution to the collective aspiration of regaining a sense of direction and identity"(2005, p.29). It is within this process of forging a meaningful historical correspondence between the present cultural identity and the regenerated cultural tradition that Achebe's last two novels, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, contribute "to assist the

subjects of postcoloniality to live with the gaps and fissures of their condition, and thereby learn to proceed with self-understanding”(Gandhi,1998,p.8).

So to propel his intellectual characters to act within this devoted tendency towards self-understanding and belonging to their community, Achebe resorts to new formal concerns that he depends on to support the novels’ other artistic elements including that of characters’ position in the nation’s history. In *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe shows an important apprehension of the determining connection between individual characters; notably intellectuals, and the vivid socio-cultural events of their society. In these novels which border on the tradition of realism, Achebe’s protagonists are completely bound up with the different social forces of which they become a vital part: all the individuals’ states of dilemmas, worries and aspirations are depicted to us along scenes of communal interaction. Odili, Chris, Ikem, Beatrice are all self-contained intellectuals with certain individual traits and principles and yet the writer makes it clear how their critical perception of themselves and the larger community has come to be influenced and even changed by their nation’s realities. Gradually, these characters learn to be profoundly implicated in the sphere of the ordinary people, and devote themselves to difficult roles that answer the cultural expectations of the heterogeneous nation. These intellectuals are eventually governed by a deep-seated conviction in which the quest for a meaningful truth of cultural perception and belonging is rendered as the substantive virtue. Hence the complete fabric of Achebe’s narratives is constructed along the course of these characters’ progression from cultural estrangement to cultural identification, from individual disaffection to communal strength, and from cynical estrangement to vital incorporation within the nation’s diverse social frame and inclusive idea of culture.

In *No Longer at Ease*, we see how society goes through an unsettling state of cultural confusion as much as its perplexed intellectual members. Even the wavering disposition of Obi Okonkwo and his subsequent fall is a direct reflection of the rampant confusion which marks the general core of society. It is true that this clairvoyant intellectual shows a keen moral awareness and usually builds up a perceptive criticism of his newly-independent community but he expresses no genuine intention to construct any substantial endeavor to identify himself with his people’s

cultural world-view which he views sometimes with contempt. In *A Man of the People*, we have seen how Odili's reflection on the decrepitude of some traditional values, and his disdain for those intellectuals like Nanga and Max who deliberately take on their local language and folk culture to get the allegiance of their people, articulates Achebe's basic concern for the nation's condition of culture. Odili's gradual but complete involvement in the political milieu initiates him into more enlightening experiences in which he learns to orient his cynical moralistic stand and individualistic tendencies towards realistic and collective concerns. He comes to recognize the existence and importance of the village communal values, as discrete from some wretched customs that he utterly disavows, and many others which capture his admiration and even reverence. Through his matured critical reflection which takes on more clear and reliable approaches, we are made aware of Odili's increasing esteem for the people. His important decision to return to his village to found a new type of school, displays a new understanding and adoption of the communal world of the village and the grand values it stands for.

In *Anthills of the Savannah* we are offered a highly complex form of narrative. Achebe fictionalizes the condition of post-colonial culture and his intellectuals' quest for cultural identification through Bakhtin's notion of multiple points of view and consciousnesses in the polyphonic novel. The writer has artfully combined narrative structure and characterization to achieve specific literary and discursive effects similar to those intended by his thematic concern. Through this study we have argued that Achebe's novel is polyphonic in character as it represents a cultural world which is constituted within multifaceted and dialogic meanings; the novel's tensions between Achebe's apprehension and employment of his people's traditional culture and his recognition of the forward movement of history is well handled through the novel's multiple narrators. Undeniably Achebe is keen to avoid presenting an essentialist view of the cultural tradition of his society. His intellectuals function as dialogic subjects; they learn how to incorporate the viewpoints of other social and cultural elements into their critical consciousnesses, and they can potentially challenge the repressive acts of the military junta which works to silence all the dissident voices. Through his main voice, Ikem the artist and poet, Achebe presents a mediating vision that addresses the

different discursive ramifications of post-colonial culture. In his interaction with the market milieu and its common people, and his cultural meeting with the Abazon elders, Ikem can commit his surrealist and utopian public writings to more authentic social issues. Like his author, Ikem takes on the Igbo dynamic relationship between opposites, and its unyielding conviction about the idea of dualism, for no form of reality or truth is fixed and complete for them. The thought “I am the way” and “the Truth” is utterly insignificant in Igbo system of thought.(Achebe,1971, p.65) Out of this resilient mode of belief arises Achebe’s relative and dialectic standpoint of culture and tradition, persistently rejecting all forms of biased intellectual discourses that are well-versed in reducing truth and reality to serve some designed intentions. Achebe shifts this discursive dialectic into the imaginary in *Anthills of the Savannah* both at the level of themes and in respect of form, insisting in this way on the importance of rejecting bigoted and absolute thoughts in religion, culture, and also imaginative literature.

Especially poignant, *Anthills of the Savannah* expands Achebe’s examination of the intellectuals’ quest for cultural identification through the gender perspective. The novel elaborates extensively on the necessity to create a distinct female character as a central figure and narrating voice who can carry the strengths of her traditional culture and community but who also serves to call attention to the necessary changes that these two important elements ought to yield to. The writer locates the issues of gender and cultural tradition in a relative and critical view, a more dialectical position that encompasses both the levels of cultural transformations and revival intrinsic in the African cultural experience in a new intellectual consciousness and imagination. In one important sense, the writer examines gender issues in relation to nation formation and writing in a symbolic form, an alternative tradition of imaginative creation oriented towards building up a moderate system of thought and criticism that attempts to present woman as an embodiment of the writer’s literary and discursive ideas. Achebe’s novel, as Stratton rightly states, “signal(s) an important new departure in contemporary African literature”, for the multi-dimensional character of the main female figure in this novel is meant “to transform the status of women from that of object to that of subject”(1994,p.158). Achebe’s ideological and imaginative intentions

with regard to the moderate role of his central female character are related to genuine engagements with gender issues. His pattern of African feminism is displayed by the multiple positions granted to Beatrice, as a highly-positioned intellectual and as a traditional goddess / priestess, a multi-stranded position that we can grasp at various narrative points, particularly via the device of language movement between the referential actual events and the metaphoric subtext. Through her figurative position, Beatrice is called upon to resurrect the ancient cultural repositories of her ancestors' legends. This conscious metaphorical incarnation of traditional mythical elements in the figure of a British-trained Civil Servant works to resolve the state of cultural obliteration and distortion engendered in the African communities by the prejudiced ideas of the colonial racist theories. For the conscious romanticized image of Mother Africa, embodied through tropes of goddesses or memorable historical female figures, has continually and cogently been referred to as a symbol of cultural identification and uniqueness. The writer makes it evident that in drawing on his Igbo traditional culture to outline the novel's events and characters, we are made aware that he is not just looking for specific stylistics of fictional presentation but is intentionally attempting to work out meaningful relationships between the subdued legacies of the past and the emergent culture of the present.

Beatrice's major position in the novel as an intellectual and representative figure of her people's culture allows her to be involved in the events of the country's political crisis as she experiences and records it through her relationship with the different members of the larger community. The writer makes us follow the processes of her self-conscious narration and reflections as she attempts to rally her strengths to come to grips with the different contradictions inherent in her private and public life. The narrative shows how she is able to interweave the multiple, shifting, and sometimes contradictory worldviews that mark her post-colonial society, both at the level of class and gender. Through her moderate perspective, Beatrice demonstrates how these same inconsistencies can give rise to important and sustaining means essential to abrogating gender-related hierarchies and exigencies, ramifications and inconsistencies that are paramount in bringing to the surface African women's post-colonial condition. In the context of Achebe's novel, as the study shows, there is no separation between gender

issues and social interests; they are interpenetrating communal issues which constitute an imperative concernment for the African female intellectuals.

Much of Beatrice's concernments are centered on questioning an accumulated set of repressive principles that are related to colonial and post-colonial background, a background that locates women's social and political activism beyond the history of Western radical feminism. Her accounts of her father's patriarchal principles and her secondary position in the government's affairs provide us with functional contexts within which to comprehend the diverse constraints and challenges attending the lives of African women. Despite her upbringing in a Christian compound and her schooling in a Western University, Beatrice is able to build up meaningful associations with the culture of her forefathers and which she defends against the different Western pressures. The writer makes it obvious that her ideas of social equality and cultural belonging are not derived from her foreign education; they are rooted in the urgent needs and conditions of her society. In this sense, she does not find a tension between the circumstances that surround her life as a highly positioned intellectual and the little happenings of the ordinary people of her community. Her initial alienation from the market women, such as Elewa, and her conceited attitude to her maid Agatha is amended through the many violent events which she witnesses with these women after the death of both Ikem and Chris. Although these women do not seem to understand well the intractable tensions in the country caused by the inexperienced military rule, they are depicted as vital members at the very centre of the political turmoil that afflicted Beatrice and her male friends. The commitment of these women to each other during their moments of anguish suggests the required tools and ideals for a meaningful socio-cultural change, regardless of educational degrees, social status, and gender biases.

Especially poignant is Beatrice's impulse to write and embed her feminine narrative of the nation's history into that of her male friends. Her aim is not related to some radical individualistic feminist tendencies, but rather to moderate and soften the male narratives in their depictions of the miserable realities of their people. At this level, as Stratton demonstrates, Achebe "acknowledges the existence of a female literary tradition" (1994,p.165).The writer manifestly allocates the pressing need to appease

the nation's embittered conditions to both his male and female narrators: Beatrice and her male friends carry out the writer's devoted inclination to interpret and revise the land's multiple stories. At any rate, Beatrice's feminine thoughts vindicate the common nationalist discourse that serves to undermine the different forms of imperial pressures exerted on the African countries. She is portrayed as a self-conscious intellectual positioned as she is to explore and perceive her indigenous roots and thus challenge the assumption that post-colonial women's movements are only a simplistic replica of its Western feminism. In an interview, Achebe propels the African women "to speak from a real understanding of our situation and not just from a copying of European fashions, women's lib and things like that, but out of our own traditions to work out a new role for themselves" (Achebe, in Wilkinson, 1992, pp. 53-54). This is how Achebe pointedly describes Beatrice's condemnation of gender-based principles and imperial influences in relation to her Igbo background and the "core reality" of her society. His in-depth depiction of her encounter with the American female journalist is meant to underline her juxtaposition of the African "womanist" activism and the realities of the present condition. As being observed with Ifi Amadiume's study of gender in Igbo society, the modern militant ideas of feminine status in society have been always a living experience for women in traditional Igbo culture where the principles of social conduct are directly connected to the land's myths of goddess worship. Achebe's reference to the myth of Idemili is not naïve; the metaphorical role of Beatrice is intended to illustrate the notable prevalence of matriarchy imagery in myths and religion from which the Igbo culture has constructed its resilient system of gender relations. This serves precisely to reveal the crucial role of woman in Achebe's Igbo traditional culture.

Yet Achebe's thematic intention goes beyond positing an idealized and essentialist female figure. This has propelled, as the study shows, the writer to re-write his pre-colonial Igbo tradition and its indigenous mythologies before identifying them with his modern heroine. Most evidently, Achebe's socio-cultural vision of woman's development borders on the progressive mode. His ideas contribute to endorse the African feminist thoughts which defend the status of women without advocating a separatist principle in relation to the general welfare of the whole society. Beatrice, as

an embodying figure of her Igbo legends, is intended by the writer to function both formally and thematically to recover woman's potent status of the pre-colonial dispensation to restructure the past cultural values within the emergent truths of the present. The figurative incarnation that appears to determine the thematic orientation of many of the novel's events serves precisely to boost Beatrice's secondary ideas of feminist activism. This is an integral argument in the novel's major discursive orientation: Achebe's intention is not only to draw new challenging roles for women but also to reclaim and reconstruct some indigenous legacies. The very metaphorical act of making Beatrice embody her ancestors' legends sets forth that the feminine in this novel signifies more than simply the conventional issue of gender: the development of Beatrice's cultural consciousness turns out to be the major element of exploring the issue of culture and tradition regeneration through the Idemili metaphor. Notably, through this unique imaginative experience the writer establishes an epistemological level of negotiation between the past and present. Beatrice's appropriation of a traditionally male role in the naming ceremony of Ikem's and Elewa's child implies the writer's rejection of essentialist traditions and his belief in a culture that bends to constructive factors of development. Beatrice introduces an aspect of change into the naming ceremony when she adopts the role of the father in naming the child, a right approved by Elewa's elder relative. This traditional event continues to live as it is adapted to new cultural meanings, and is, thus, perceived within the community's current history, in connection with its deepest and most resonant heritage.

This synthesis of cultural values and traditions on the part of Achebe's intellectuals is a realization in a preeminently aesthetic or imaginative level, a pattern that requires in the long run a crafty control of the writer's materials and narrative techniques. The study at this level is structured along the lines of two critical approaches to Achebe's novels, that is, the one through the examination of themes and the other through a close study of the author's adequate use of form. This artistic interplay is inextricably an intrinsic element of imaginative expression in the writer's tradition of writing. In this view, and in opposition to the purely sociological and anthropological discourses attributed to the African imaginative writings, the study of Achebe's fiction can

certainly be approached in relation to the developed themes and literary aesthetics. Here one may consider Fredric Jameson's critical view of the "reappropriation" of form in "discontinuous historical situations". For the writer's experimentation with the novel's form, argues Jameson, is essentially an attempt to contrive "a generic message which coexists – either as a contradiction or, on the other hand, as a mediatory or harmonizing mechanism – with elements" which can be taken from different social and cultural situations (1981,p.141). Any critical study of Achebe's narratives must thus deal with the generic fabric of their aesthetics and form as a "mediatory mechanism" and as a well-structured body of meaning. As a form of commitment, Achebe's narratives are propelled by the impulses and historical transitions which lead to the development of a particular form of discourse and aesthetic. Achebe is well aware that in seeking to construct appropriate narrative forms for reinventing or reconstructing the African cultural standards, he must also consider the possibility of recovering African aesthetics that emulate the adopted Western literary mode of narrative. In view of such a persistent commitment to the idea of culture, Achebe's anxieties are centered, on the one hand, on the possibility of the transposition of the real happenings into the imaginative realm, and, on the other hand, on proffering the possibility of the evolution of the traditional forms of aesthetics towards a new form of reality and expression. Achebe's artistic comments on this argument are pointedly categorical; for him any narrative has to be constructed around "the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destiny of its people"(1975,p.7).

Indeed the study of the issue of cultural identity in Achebe's post-colonial novels has proved useful in several points and has impelled us to consider his appropriate experimentation with imaginative modes of expression through employing the oral genre in the novel form. So in the course of our study, we have attempted to analyze how Achebe's intellectual quest to examine post-colonial issues of cultural identity is aptly projected by a conscious adaptation of the oral narrative genres into the general structure of his work. The complex makeup of his narrative displays most critically a constructive model for a new post-colonial conception of culture and imaginative mode of expression. In *Anthills*, the story and myth genres are not merely artistic verbal narratives corresponding to authentic elements but are important representations

of the writer's main concerns. The writer seems to contend that this relationship of expression and function between orality and script offers not only an innovative process of imaginative creation but also a reassertion of the vital idea of the African imagination, one that presents literature as a voluntary artistic act to reclaim one's own authentic culture.

Anthills of the Savannah demonstrates that traditional oral narratives can perfectly strengthen and sustain the imaginative experience of literature both in terms of discursive mode and textual form. Achebe sets forth that tradition cannot be applied as an immediate pattern for general conduct, but he asserts that it continues to present itself as a viable cultural material for his imaginative and stylistic perspective as it proposes different modes of formal organization and alternative directions of thoughts; in one important sense, it provides the writer with adequate devices to realize his intellectual intentions at the level of the imaginary. Bakhtin's notion that the novel integrates other literary genres to use them as devices of representation, to adapt them to new social contexts, is clearly exemplified in the complex structure of *Anthills of the Savannah*. The novel combines different registers of literary genres, complex narrative structure, and shifting time movement, each of which is submitted to a designed process of continual artistic adaptation. This hybrid narrative shows that the inscription of mythical elements in the most systematic mode of the novel need not discount the latter's artistic value or influence the unity of its organization, nor preclude the reader from appreciating the novelist's artistic theorization of his indigenous culture. Achebe compellingly appropriates the structure of his people's myths and alters some of their elements to present a narrative whose discursive focus is higher than the apparent experiences of the narrow social sphere he presents to us. The general fabric of his narrative mode seems, then, to be dictated by the complex conditions of cultural transformation that compel him to depend on a new tradition of imaginative expression to substantiate a particular thematic orientation.

Achebe's novels display how reference to oral narratives as a mode of expression is not a naïve act to romanticize the writer's traditional background, but is as intentional for the writer as is the conventional dependence on some specific rhetorical devices. Particular elements of the oral tradition, as of the verbal forms of expression, are not

purely reproduced; they are selected to serve a cultural and literary act. They are employed in Achebe's novels not because they embody an essentially cultural authenticity but because they propose possibilities to sharpen the writer's thematic and aesthetic concerns in the novel. In *Anthills* the writer does not conceive of oral tradition or cultural tradition as a determinant source of authenticity to be preserved and revered without involving it in some inevitable conditions of reconstruction and transformation. What Achebe tends to reinforce in the hybrid narrative of this novel is that we should not approach his works, or even contemporary West African literature, as texts whose general meanings are determined by their association with some generic elements of orality. Achebe's hybrid text proffers a good inducement for more inclusive aesthetical orientations in literary analysis than the conventional sparring dichotomy between orality and writing. Achebe himself disavows all forms of dogmatic dichotomies: he admits his sturdy attachment to the traditional oral narratives, and at the same time he perceives the novel as an important genre which can be used to engage vigorously with the complexities of the present realities. With this in mind, Achebe's hybrid text comes close to point toward the fundamental idea in the critical studies of narrative form: the connotations of the incorporation of different forms of narratives in the novel advocate in the long run a possible reconciliation between diverse historical memories and cultural worldviews.

The significance of *Anthills*' literary aesthetics thus appears to the surface in the general progression of the main narrative, which allows us to follow the full connotative meaning and rhetorical mechanism of the shifting narrative; between the referential and mythical. This is a novel that is presented through different narrative forms, which moves between unsteady chronologies of history. It debates the same themes that are at the center of other Achebe's works, but it develops them through stories and myths. In this sense, it illustrates that oral traditions, involving their inseparable link with one's own culture and history, are not to be read as fixed forms of imaginary expressions. Achebe employs myths within the line of his Igbo system of thought which shows an integrated relation between the material and the symbolic functions that various forms of oral narratives display. Through such thought we are made aware of how the mythical consciousness is to be comprehended not as a mere

form of imaginary representation which borders on some inexplicable or obscure truth, but as an integral mode of intellectual expression that presents a remarkable stimulating potential, giving rise to new ways of theorizing culture and social realities. This liberating perspective designates the importance of the feature of truth to the mythic system of beliefs in the Igbo worldview. It is this characteristic relation between the ideal and the real that is so well evoked in Achebe's inscription of Igbo myths in his narratives. The latter presents myths which go beyond the general descriptive theories about the common stories of man's creation, and border on more higher meanings of self-identification that proffer "basic notions underlying cultural activities (...) cultural goals and social relations"(Uchendu, 1965,p.11). The general medium that Achebe has found lies in his Igbo myths, a poetic archetype that proposes concepts and patterns which the writer may employ to dramatize the post-colonial condition. Many elements of traditional legends and myths are presented as an integral part in the novel's stylistic and imaginative scheme that the reader is intended to accept, and to refrain from submitting the reconstructed mythical material to any form of rational treatment. It is within this perception that the writer propels us to read the Idemili myth as a generic structure of knowledge, or what Gikandi has specifically called "the Igbo epistemology"(1991b,pp.31-38).

As discussed in our study, the mythopoeic factor is inherent in Achebe's narrative process and answers a basic discursive and aesthetic function. Recognition of the metaphorical relation between the traditional myth of Idemili and the artistic elements of *Anthills of the Savannah* discloses important discursive aspects of Achebe's novels that many critical studies have oversimplified. Capturing aspects of myth presents a greater accuracy and form to our reading of the unique structure of literary texts. This explains how the employment of the mythological elements in literature reveals assorted dimensions: rhetorical or semantic, and discursive or cultural. Through a synthesized and extended employment of these dimensions – as Chase's *Quest For Myth* analyses – myth criticism has helped us establish a link between formal study, whether metaphorical, semantic, or archetypal, and the ideological, basic intentions of the literary artist. At the level of literary genre, Achebe combines the hero of myth – who endows his / her society with redemption – with the character of realistic fiction

who struggles to come to grips with the nation's conflicts. The hybrid condition attending the new community impels Achebe's heroine, Beatrice, to embody both roles; the archetypal and the realistic figure. She is entrusted to balance the metaphorical crossing between the human ordinary world and the divine ideal realm, between verbal and literate cultures, between present exigencies and traditional legacies. At this level, the fantastic forms the template of the novel's larger narrative: our appreciation of the presence of a mythical consciousness blends the extraordinary events with the details of the ordinary conflicts occurring in the novel. The details of Beatrice's autobiographical account borders on the conventions of realistic fiction. But the connotation of those metaphorical scenes when Beatrice tells of her being possessed by "the priestess of the unknown god" follows the structure of the tradition of fantasy narration. In recognizing the original myth, the reader / critic is able to interpret the mythic features employed beneath as well as on the surface of the narrative and so relate them to the unique features of the mainline narrative. The employment of the Idemili myth within contemporary circumstances and figures entailed both shifting it from its archaic setting and re-actualizing its mode of truth to answer the writer's basic thematic intent in the novel. This consists not in the creation of "original narratives" or "new stories", but in constructing an effective "interaction" between the traditional materials and the writer's "new audiences and new situations"(Org, 2005,p.48). This leads the writer to create a new version of the old myth to support the aesthetic tools he intends to use in his narrative. The emerging synthesis of the embedded myth and the complex narrative of the novel would compel the reader to discerningly ponder on the full import of a newly appropriated story, to interpret it as a mediatory artistic technique that determines the general structure of the novel's entire meaning.

Obviously, Achebe's narratives achieve their literary merits by the combination of both the individual artistic consciousness and the collective cultural consciousness emanating from communal traditions. Stories of the writer's land are transliterated to the novel form and give it a unique aesthetic unity, "transforming its structure and extending its scope and making it a dynamic vehicle for exploring historical, social, cultural ... themes"(Obiechina,1992,p.228). The main characters are presented as the

writer's surrogates, they handle his cultural preoccupation to tell the story of the land "from the inside"(Achebe, 1972,p.4). The self-conscious narratives of his characters are consciously drawing upon a group rhetoric of communication and narration as a means for depicting the immediate history of their community, vindicating thus the "populist impulse in art and life" (Obiechina, 1992,p.201). In Achebe's novels, the employment of the art of story-telling within the narrative mainline structure serves to sharpen our perception of the novels' epistemological material, narrative form, and the character's cultural traits. Having been well-versed in the oral arts of his traditional culture, Achebe is discerningly conscious of the uses of the story as an enlightening and explanatory communal form that goes beyond the general impulses of formal poetics and entertainment to contain larger cultural issues. Leopold Sédar Senghor writes about this unique function of artistic and communal interplay inherent in the traditional African stories in a very poetic statement. For him, "the traditional African narrative is woven out of everyday events". Its events are not simply "of things taken from life. (For) all the events become images, and so acquire paradigmatic value and point beyond the moment." (Senghor in Obiechina,1992,p.202)

This fundamental standpoint recognized by African writers towards the function of traditional narrative further expounds its ample presence in the context of the 'oral-written' interface such as we read in the hybrid narratives of Achebe's novels. Achebe's concern with the knotty problem of post-colonial culture and past regeneration is related to the particular form of the first person-point of view mode of narration used in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. In these novels, Achebe transliterates the model of storytelling into the realistic form of his narratives to suggest an alternative tradition of writing in the Anglophone West African novel. This tradition of literary imagination leads its audience / readers to intervene and make their interpretation in the very moment of reading, and which also replaces the detached omniscient narrative voice of earlier colonial writings with multiple narrative voices to suggest in this way more liberating potentials both at the level of story genre and the narrator's understanding.

In relating his narratives to his people's tradition of story-telling Achebe contrives his unique form of West African 'dialogic' novel, to use the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the traditional stories are evoked and re-evoked in different artistic modes and social zones not only by the elder of Abazon who embodies the voice of tradition, but also by young intellectuals who can record the stories of their people, so that the reader is allowed to take part in the critical experience of evaluating the relationship between the individual's social disposition and the community's consciousness. The narrative is structured through first-person narrators, Christ, Ikem, and Beatrice. They are intellectual voices who self-consciously present the stories of their involvement in the circumstances attending their country, and with the author adopting the role of an omniscient voice to grant himself some critical space to arrange the novel's multi-voiced stories. In *A Man of the People*, the writer builds the story's discursive relationships and textual structure in a relatively different mode of narration by presenting the novel's events through an unreliable narrator, Odili, and inviting the reader in many incidents to sympathize with his limited growth towards socio-cultural identification. The narrators of the two novels are made to carry the communal function of the traditional story-teller into the complex context of their present time. Each of them is engaged in presenting a specific and an authentic story of the nation's happenings, and getting to some sense of self-identification through telling his/her personal stories that reveal contentious collective concerns. The firm impulses to arrive at meaningful experiences of knowledge which generally propel the first-person point-view narrative and the deep engagement of their narratives with the pressing needs of the larger community constitute an attempt to firm up, for the reader, a perception of genuine social experience.

So as we have seen in our study, Achebe presents a complex narrative mode in *A Man of the People*. In this novel, the story teller is an unreliable narrator through whose lenses the reader is introduced to the novel's incidents and situations. This narrative method requires us each time to re-examine the story's events and to take on an analytical position in order to discern fully the text's total meaning. Such uses demonstrate the presence of certain socio-cultural aspects in the text and their undeniable effect on the creative process. Achebe's novels vindicate his abiding artistic viewpoint that texts stand as reflections of the context or world on which they draw. In this sense, the writer makes it clear that the external factors of the literary text

may be a better guide to his thematic representation and the very fabric of the text's narrative form. Achebe's novel reproduces the complexity of the new community not only in what it portrays but in the very structure of narration in which it displays the unresolved inconsistencies and nebulous interpretations of the first-person narrator, Odili. As the study shows, Odili's confused intentions towards his society and people are exposed to the reader's critical readings even though he proves to possess more morality than his political and private associates. The writer depends on the irresolute attitudes of this narrator to depict the hypocrisy of some characters and the absurdity of the incidents they are involved in, although in many revealing situations this story teller appears to be utterly unreliable. He attempts eagerly to come to grips with the high ideals he defends, but despite his idealistic impulses towards social reform he is often entangled in complex situations which reveal his insincerity and helplessness.

In *Anthills*, the writer makes his intellectual protagonists share the conditions of those who have been expelled from the circles of representation. Ikem is initiated to the ordinary world of his people and traditional culture when he encounters the elders of Abazon, where in one of the most memorable incidents in the novel, he is invited to listen to the strong oratory speech presented by the Abazonian leader on the value of storytelling. Significantly, locating this elder in the symbolic modern context of Harmony Hotel to present a speech on a specific cultural issue to a socially-varied audience, including the intellectuals, the writer tends to build up an important cultural correspondence between a disintegrated present condition and an enlightening indigenous order. The old man sees stories as a crucial repository of the people's past; it is a whole canon of beliefs and behaviors from which later generations can benefit. Achebe's presentation of Ikem, a poet and a writer, as tremendously fascinated by the imaginative strength and deep connotations of the elder's oral art is a beautiful analogy of historical interaction between the custodian of the community's legacies and the new agents of culture. Crucially important, in the final act of his political activism, Ikem conjures the elder's allegorical story of the leopard and the tortoise, but, as the occasion entails, this happens in the modern circumstance of a written lecture and in the prestigious modern milieu of knowledge and social enlightenment; the university lecture hall. Through this symbolic scene the writer succeeds to substantiate how the

present circumstances of the community can be perceived in the background of a society's history and culture. Achebe's narrators /story tellers present stories that carry the collective experience in its authentic image, relying hence heavily on the rhetoric of traditional verbal art as a form of cultural essence to be reproduced and continued in new imaginative forms of expression. By means of this integrative technique, the writer is deliberately displaying his own artistic and discursive apprehension of the intricacy of the post-colonial condition through combining his narrative technique with the art of story-telling as an aesthetic device for analyzing character, themes, action and form.

In the final analysis, the interaction of the novel form with the traditional oral narratives in Achebe's novels, and his development of a mode of expression whose basic objective is both the assertion of cultural distinctiveness and its re-inscription in new discursive contexts, have inevitably defied the simplistic assumption of the novel and oral narratives as unrelated imaginative categories. In this conscious interplay of different literary genres, Achebe's novels testify to a unique stylistic totality that consists of building up a tradition of writing appropriate to delineate the confused values of the post-colonial hybrid worldview, which functions therefore in such a way as to sharpen the novels' content and thus to endorse the novelist's constant theme of cultural reclamation. It is with regard to this artful integrated device of form and theme that Achebe's novels can be said to have proposed different directions of thought to deal with the African cultural experience and conferred a broader range of imaginary material to a distinctive mode of literary production. Then, in literary terms, Achebe has offered a more forward-looking literary outlook on some conventional notions of narrative structure, an outlook which has presented an unequivocal affirmation that imaginative forms of expression cannot be explained in terms of definite characteristics. This has given rise to different devices of structuring the novel's artistic elements, and "insisted on the inclusion of many forms of performance art in any effective cross-cultural discussion of the structure and form of narrative." (Ashcroft et al., 1989,p.179)

Indeed, Achebe's novels are constructed around a set of socio-cultural experiences reflecting the apparent realities of his referential contexts that are implicitly

reproduced in their imaginary fabric and their mode of narrative. As he comes to expound in his essay “Truth in Fiction”, the indispensable function of good story telling stands in the minor detachment it allows the reader or listener to take when he / she is confronted with the vital truths embodied in its imaginary material. Literature has to “insist upon its fictionality”, continually encouraging its readers to conceive it as simply an artistic projection of some trivial stories, though an engaged one, for only with that perspective are they afforded diverse possibilities of evaluation, learning to identify with the complex and confused condition of the surrounding world, while refusing to yield to the common dogmatic perceptions which engender distressing experiences of intolerance in the different facets of social relationships. Achebe’s texts show the ability of literature to open up useful directions of thoughts that allow us to comprehend the perplexing realities of our existence without succumbing to the pretentious allegations of “orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition”. For Achebe, imaginative literature starts generally as a quest for “self-discovery”, but it offers at the end a wide space of “wisdom and human conscience.”(1988,p.105) Indeed, his novels rightly vindicate the high connotations of this statement.

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الملخص:

إحياء التراث و الشخصية الثقافية في الروايات البوستكولونيلية لشينوا أشيبي: لم يعد هناك إحساس بالراحة،

رجل من الشعب، كئيب النمل في السفانا

تعالج هذه الأطروحة الإشكالية البوستكولونيلية لإحياء التراث و الشخصية الثقافية في الروايات الثلاثة الأخيرة للكاتب النيجيري شينوا أشيبي: لم يعد هناك إحساس بالراحة، رجل من الشعب، كئيب النمل في السفانا. روايات أشيبي تعبر بقوة عن فهمه للإشكالية الموجودة بين الفرد و المجتمع، و المرتبطة أساسا بالتجربة الثقافية المعقدة التي نتجت عن احتكاك الفرد الإفريقي بالثقافة الغربية. فقد لمسنا في رواياته كيف أن الأدوات الجمالية و الأنماط التعبيرية تصوّر بشكل كبير التجارب الاجتماعية و التاريخية التي تقوم بسردها. هذه العلاقة القوية بين النص و السياق الواقعي المسرود هي خاصية واضحة و مميزة في روايات أشيبي، فالعناصر الفنية لرواياته مثل تمثيل الشخصيات، المواضيع المعالجة و البنية السردية كلها تعكس التوجهات الموضوعاتية و المواقف الاجتماعية الثقافية التي يحاول تسليط الضوء عليها فكريا و أدبيا. فقد بين الكاتب في كل أحداث هذه الروايات مكانة الثقافة الشعبية في إعادة تنظيم الواقع البوستكولونيلي، موضحا بذلك تأثير الثقافة الغربية و نماذجها التعليمية في تحديد توجهات الفرد الإفريقي في بناء هويتها.

ففي دراسته للعوامل المختلفة التي أثرت في جوهر الثقافة الإفريقية، قام الكاتب بمراجعة الخطاب الاستعماري المحجف الذي حاول بكل الطرق الإساءة و تشويه الصورة الثقافية و البيئة الاجتماعية للمجتمعات الإفريقية، و في المقابل سلط الضوء على القيمة الروحية و المادية لخطاب الهوية الثقافية عند الفرد الإفريقي. فكتابات أشيبي عن الأمة الإفريقية النامية هي محاولة لتقديم حكايات مرتبطة بثقافة شعبه التي شوّهتها الخطابات الاستعمارية و الامبريالية. فمن خلال نصوصه، يصّر الكاتب على أن السردية الروائية يمكنها أن تقدّم مفاهيم بديلة لصورة الثقافة الإفريقية السلبية التي تقدّمها السردية الاستعمارية و الكتابات الغربية بصفة عامة. فقد ترجم الكاتب هذه القضايا إلى رسالة اعتزاز عن طريق رواة و شخصيات واعية و الذين يحاولون أن يندمجوا مع الثقافة المحلية لشعبهم و أيضا مع اعتماد موقف ناقد نحوها. و في هذا النحو، عمد الكاتب إلى تقريب شخصياته المثقفة بفن السردية الشعبية الشفوية، حيث قدّم الثقافة كوسيلة أساسية للتنوير الاجتماعي أين نجد فن القصص و الأساطير عبارة عن شهادة حية للإرث الثقافي الشعبي.

ففي رواياته الثلاثة الأخيرة، حرص أشيبي أن يدمج كتاباته الأدبية بقصص مجتمعه، ينهل من الذاكرة الفردية و الجماعية من أجل إحياء و كذا مراجعة ماضي أمته. فقد عالج الكاتب إشكالية إحياء التراث من زاوية جدلية و نقدية، آخذا بعين الاعتبار كلاً من قيمة الثقافة التراثية و الزمن الحاضر بدون تغليب أحدهما على الآخر. و في هذا الإطار، قام الكاتب بنقل قضايا الصراعات الثقافية إلى مجال الخيال و المجاز، حيث أبرز دور الأدوات السردية و الجمالية في الربط بين نظريته لإحياء التراث و البنية الهجينة للنص. فقد استحضّر الكاتب قصص و أساطير ثقافته الشعبية و أدمجها بالعناصر الفنية لرواياته الأخيرة، كئيب النمل في السفانا، و أكسبها بلاغة أدبية مميزة، جاعلا بهذا البنية السردية لروايته أداة أساسية للخوض في المواضيع الثقافية و الاجتماعية. فتوظيف السردية و الشفوية لم تبرز فقط كظهر محدّد للثقافة الشعبية لرواية أشيبي، و لكن أيضا كظهر تعبري أساسي الذي يبرز التوجهات المختلفة لتجربة الكاتب الفنية و الإيديولوجية. و عبر هذا التداخل الفني بين الفنون الشفوية و فن الرواية، حاول الكاتب أن ينقل إشكالية الثقافة البوستكولونيلية الهجينة إلى المستوى الأدبي، و كذا تقديم رواياته كأدوات اتصال جمالية و اجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشخصية الثقافية، شينوا أشيبي، لم يعد هناك إحساس بالراحة، رجل من الشعب، كئيب النمل في السفانا، الأدب البوستكولونيلي.

