

# **Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*: A Re-evaluation**

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## **Introduction**

In his essay 'Decline of the English Murder', George Orwell, the thematically and ideologically closest British writer to Chinua Achebe asserts: 'I do not think that one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development' (Orwell 1978: 182, cited in Dieng 1995) The present article will use this postulate, together with the novelist's context-sensitivity to re-evaluate Chinua Achebe as an interpreter of his Igbo society in his much-acclaimed novels of cultural revalorization, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, and his most popular characters, Okonkwo and Ezeulu. In other words, we will see whether the colonial context in which Achebe wrote his novels was not too tough to his African people to leave enough room for him to be on the fence in his description of his people's life as he wished it to be. On the other hand, the attitudes of the two chief characters of the novels will be scrutinized for the purpose of validating or rejecting their position as spokesmen for their respective communities.

## **Context-Sensitivity**

Born in 1930 into a Christian family, but also and mainly into the world of Chukwu, the Supreme God of the Igbo, a world characterized by the preponderance of traditional African culture and religion, Albert Chinualumogu Achebe (see Achebe 1988: 22) grew up at the crossroads of African culture and Western civilization. His parents' staunch relationships with the local missionaries and his big brother John's assistance afforded him the excellent opportunity to have a good education, down from elementary school

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up to the University College, Ibadan.

That institution played a paramount role in Achebe's intellectual and literary career. Like many other prominent Nigerian writers such as Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, etc., he graduated from Ibadan where he also created his first significant literary works, particularly 'Argument Against the Existence of Faculties', an essay in which he resentfully alludes to his reorientation from the Faculty of Medicine to the Faculty of the Humanities:

Why should one not obtain a degree in religious studies, applied mathematics and gynecology if he wishes to do so? The reason is simple. We live in an age that is in love with tags and labels. (Achebe, qtd in Melone 1973: 38)

This sarcastic and polemical tone unleashed against, not only the University authorities for their snobbishness, but beyond them, against British and Western standards and values, pervades almost all his later major works, be they novels or critical essays.

The rather loathsome colonial environment characterized by the daily victimization and humiliation of his Igbo people, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his contact with both good and bad British literature at Ibadan, greatly helped frame Achebe's set of mind and constructed his somewhat precocious Afro-centric awareness. At Ibadan he read some of the most outstanding British writers: Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, W. B. Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, etc. However, the writers who, in actual fact, triggered off his career as a much-admired novelist were no doubt the ones whom he considered to be bad writers, owing to their anti-African aesthetics, mainly Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary. In his novel, *Heart of Darkness*, the Polish-born writer eerily depicts the people of Central Africa in a tone and from a perspective that seriously denies them any advancement in humanity, as can be noticed in the following lines:

(...) We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run the river up and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell (...). We were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. (Conrad 1982: 95)

However, worse was still to come with Joyce Cary's novels, *Mister Johnson* and *The African Witch*, set in Achebe's *obi* itself, that is to say, Nigeria where he had worked for some years as a colonial administrator.

Having sketched next to savage characters little more advanced in humanity than baboons, and definitely much less endowed with brains than white children are and living in a prehistoric world, Cary insisted that they were real people of bone and flesh in a plain African world:

My book was meant to show certain men and their problems in the tragic background of a continent still little advanced from the Stone Age, and therefore exposed, like no other, to the impact of modern turmoil. An overcrowded raft manned by children who had never seen the sun would have a better chance in a typhoon. (Cary 1959: 12)

Achebe wouldn't put up with such a condescending and slighting attitude, for he understood that those existent characters were, in Cary's mind, his yam-eating and palm-wine-drinking Nigerian people. He certainly saw it as his historic and intellectual duty to pick up the challenge and redress the wrong, this misleading and disparaging representation of Africa and her culture by people who actually knew but very little about the Continent and her multifaceted realities.

On the other hand, seeing that, even though Conrad and Cary had written from the outside, they had nevertheless shot to fame, Achebe resolutely believed that he could gain much more recognition by writing about the same subject matter from the inside without any cant:

(...) I knew around '51, '52, I was quite certain that I was going to try my hand at writing, and one of the things that set me thinking was Joyce Cary's novel set in Nigeria, *Mister Johnson*, which was praised so much, and it was clear to me that this was a most superficial picture of-not only the country, but even the Nigerian character and so I thought if this was famous, then perhaps someone ought to try and look at it from the inside. (Achebe, interviewed in Duerden & Pieterse (Achebe 1972: 3)

### **Achebe's Attempt at Honesty**

However, in his effort to write about his Igbo culture from the inside, Achebe opts for the 'African personality' approach. Or so was his intention. In other words, he attempts to dispose of both the Negritude method of self-glorification coupled with the anti-West discourse adopted by Leopold Sedar Senghor and his friends on the one hand, and the blatant dishonesty that governs Cary's novels and Conrad's cynical aesthetics on the other. His approach is meant to be somewhat middle-of-the-road, as he endeavors to bring to light both the ups and downs of his Igbo culture and civilization. Which is why *Things Fall Apart* is a peculiar novel that brings both headaches and delights to the Afro-centric reader as well as to the anti-African reader, conferring upon it its relative neutral stance. Criticizing the over-glorification of Africa and her culture by Negritude intellectuals, the South African essayist, novelist and poet Ezekiel Mphahlele (1967), one of the most outstanding advocates of the 'African Personality' ideology, argues: "I feel insulted when some people imply that Africa is not also a violent continent".

Indeed, scenes of magnificent human achievements stand side by side with others of unthinkable human wickedness and baseness. The initial paragraphs of the second

chapter compellingly epitomize that quest for balance between good and evil, European victimization of Africa and African self-victimization, which is believed by some literary critics to be central to Achebe's writing technique in *Things Fall Apart*. In fact, the first-rate social organization of this democratic society—this is at least what, at bottom, the author would want the reader to see—, in which decisions are made at the market place that stands as some kind of super Parliament, by 'ten thousand men' (p.8), contrasts with the use of human skulls as recipients out of which commendable men like Okonkwo, in a self-aggrandizing way, sip their palm-wine in public, and the dumping of guiltless baby twins in the Evil Forest.

In view of all this, one would justly argue, with Achebe's most dedicated, though finest, biographer, Ezenwa Ohaeto (1997), his former student and protégé, that Achebe's method in *Things Fall Apart* is honesty; honesty towards his readers, African and European alike. He gives the impression of seeking neither to conceal the facts about his society, nor to devalue or over-value them. The novel sounds and looks as though the writer's concern is just to expose those facts and realities and then leave the final verdict to his sensitized multicolored jury, an attitude which Joseph Swann (1990) calls 'The objectivity of depiction in *Things Fall Apart*... '.

### Concealments and Exaggerations

However, one has to bear in mind that Achebe's ultimate purpose in *Things Fall Apart* is crystal clear. He definitely expects his now-edified multicolored jury to pass quick and fair judgment by admitting, peremptorily and for good, that 'African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans' (Achebe 1964: 157) and that Igbo society is nothing short of a human society with its antagonistic and complementary ups and downs. The ups - skillfully overwrought by the expert hands and brains of the author's people—are secretly meant by the author to be overwhelming, and crushing down the downs and probably concealing them from the jeering looks of the West, if need be. Therefore, on second thoughts, a new interpretation of Achebe's stance in *Things Fall Apart* must be seriously envisaged.

Considering his eagerness to gainsay all the defilers of Africa and her culture, including writers and so-called anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and what not from the conservative West among whom Africanus (1896 : 187 - 'The Negroes likewise leade a beastly kinde of life, being utterly destitute of the use of reason, of dexterity, of wit, and of all artes.'), could Achebe be a candid interpreter of all his people's social and cultural realities, no matter how despicable they might have been? In the 1950's, when writing *Things Fall Apart*, was Achebe not in actual fact unconsciously a profoundly prejudiced witness to his society's 'victimization' by European political and cultural dominance, doing his level best to bring his readers to see what he wanted them to see about his scorned society and culture, and not the following judgment? It is noticeable that the author pinpoints in his novel a good deal of the downs that run in his society. But

does he truly expose the most inhumane and compromising ones like the burial of blameless and life-loving servants with their departed masters and mistresses, a 'devastating' revelation made by a less Afrocentric writer than he is, Buchi Emecheta (1980), from Eastern Nigeria like Achebe, and before her by other rather Euro-centric anthropologists (Forbe & Jones 1962: 23): 'They (Igbo slaves) could not... marry free persons nor take part in councils. They could be offered as sacrifices and were often killed at the death of an important freeman. They could also be substituted for their master if he was punished for a crime entailing the death penalty.'

And if he does so, does he disclose those downs with the same buoyant enthusiasm with which he *shows* the ups, or does he only *tell* about them? A closer look at the way in which Achebe writes about the downs and ups in his society betrays some sense of partnership on his part. Indeed, whereas he devotes lengthy paragraphs to the positive aspects of his community, for instance the prevailing democracy, decision-making plenary meetings, pleasurable festivals, unfolding everything in detail and showing how such events are carried out, when it comes to the downs, Achebe gives the impression of being less effusive, more often than not merely alluding to the facts or shallowly *telling* about them. The only eye-catching exception is Ikemefuna's execution by Okonkwo and a group of villagers and whose horror the author describes to the readers with heart-rending details:

One of the men behind him cleared his throat. Ikemefuna looked back, and the man growled at him to go on and not stand looking back. The way he said it sent cold fear down Ikemefuna's back. His hand trembled vaguely on the black pot he carried. Why had Okonkwo withdrawn to the rear? Ikemefuna felt his legs melting under him. And he was afraid to look back.

As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, 'My father, they have killed me!' as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (Achebe 1996: 43)

On the other hand, when revealing to the reader the great aspects of his Igbo community, for instance the implied reign of democracy, not only does Achebe display overflowing enthusiasm, but there is every likelihood that he unconsciously, if not deliberately, over-estimates, over-values such aspects. In all probability with a view to convincing the anti-African white reader to accept as true that Igbo democracy is much better than European democracy; that Black is better than White, that African societies are more human (e) and far better structured than European societies, that Africans are keener on peace than any other people in the world. In other words, one can argue that the fictional democracy in *Things Fall Apart* may not faithfully mirror the actual democracy that probably existed in Igboland before the arrival of the white invaders. The narrator of *Thing Fall Apart*

argues that the plenary meeting in chapter two is attended by 'ten thousand men', and that 'many others spoke' before the final decision is taken regarding whether to wage war against the village of Mbaino a child of which has dared to kill a daughter of the village of Umuofia.

It is evident that there is here some smell of overstatement and embellishment with regard to the figure. In fact, what old man on earth can talk to ten thousand people without the help of an amplifier, a piece of equipment that did not exist in Igboland at that time? On the other hand, one is eager to know who, those 'many others (who) spoke', are. Are they solely titled and high-ranking men like Okonkwo and Ogbuefi Ezeugo, the master of ceremony, or just men from all walks of life, regardless of any class, gender or age consideration? We must bear in mind that, without any further comments, Achebe in some way tells the reader - or the reader reads between the lines and realizes-that there are no women at this critical meeting, whose order of the day is to make an important decision - war or peace with Mbaino - after an Umuofian woman has been killed at Mbaino. There is no mention of the woman's mother, sisters or female friends talking on behalf of her and the other women. Her husband seems to be the only close relative of hers who counts in the eyes of this male-dominated society. The least one can say rightfully is that women in this society are not held in very high esteem, despite the fact that the author seeks to convince the reader to the contrary by presenting Okonkwo's mother as the knight in shining armor of her distraught son even though she is no longer alive.

Achebe has devised other exaggerations in *Things Fall Apart*. Among these one can mention the superb concord that the author endeavors hard to establish among polygamous families. For instance, even though Okonkwo is no tender father or husband, there exists between his wives sisterly relationships and the first wife acts as the caring mother to all the children in the household. If it is true that harmony can possibly exist in African polygamous families, yet, more often than not, the opposite prevails: women contending with one another for everything and even seeking to destroy their co-wives' children by any manner or means available.

In reality, it is difficult for a committed novelist like Achebe, even when he uses an extra-diegetic and God-like narrator, as is the case in *Things Fall Apart*, not to choose sides. For he believes it to be his rightful duty to fight, annihilate, or at least castigate a foe (Western arrogance) on the one hand, and on the other hand to celebrate and safeguard an ideal (African culture and dignity).

Like many other committed novelists, Achebe had an unmistakably set agenda when writing *Things Fall Apart*, and still has one, and cannot write a single word that devalues the standards that prop up that agenda, especially when such standards are eternally or temporarily contradicted and discredited by other rival standards and agendas:

Although I did not set about it consciously in that solemn way, I now know that my first book, *Things Fall Apart*, was an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return

and homage of a prodigal son. (Achebe 1988)

In fact, an African writer with a Pan-Africanist agenda like Chinua Achebe cannot choose to bring to light the cultural and social elements in his society that would be harmful to the prestige of Africa and her culture. Subsequently, one should seriously question the so far much-defended and assumed point of view that *Things Fall Apart* keenly mirrors Igbo society in many respects. For instance Swann (1990), hooked by Achebe's strategy, asserts that "‘*Things Fall Apart* (...) is a picture of Ibo life at the turn of the century, when the white man came up the Niger". Innes also seems to have been too sensitive to her friend Achebe's clever appeal for respect for Africa from Westerners:

Whereas Mister Johnson shows only despotic and greedy native rulers with little concern for the welfare of the people they govern, *Things Fall Apart* portrays a group of elders sharing decision making, who are trusted by the people, and whose primary concern is the maintenance of a peaceful, prosperous and respected community for all. Moreover, their decisions are neither arbitrary nor individualistic, as Cary's novel asserts, but grow out of a long tradition and a finely interwoven set of beliefs-religious, social and political (Innes 1990: 24)

No doubt that both Swann and Innes are refined literary critics, but they certainly paid little attention to Zérafra's precious warning against the traps that are in any literary work:

(...) quand il compose son œuvre, l'écrivain s'insère nécessairement dans un système de production idéologique destiné lui-même à masquer le système concret de production, avec ses antagonismes et ses conflits. (Zérafra 1971: 47)

(When composing his/her work of art, the writer unavoidably inserts himself/herself into an ideological production system, whose main objective is to blur the real production system, with its antagonisms and its conflicts.) (Translation: mine)

Indeed, in his endeavor to sketch the Igbo society he wants the reader to see and appreciate, though using both fiction and facts, Achebe blurs, consciously - without being dishonest, though - or unconsciously, the road to his authentic culture and society. As can be noticed, the dominant theme in *Things Fall Apart* is undoubtedly the rehabilitation of African culture and dignity through the re-education of both the colonized and the colonizer.

In this respect, as already mentioned, this classic of African literature is a novel with a Pan-Africanist agenda continuing the cultural struggle started by the Harlem Renaissance Movement (1920-1940), the key watchword of which was 'Black is Beautiful'. A slogan revisited and rendered more affirmative by 'Negritude' writers and thinkers. In fact, if the Harlem Movement sought to lift the Black race and African

cultural values up to the level of the White race and Western culture through its 'Black is (also) beautiful' slogan, 'Negritude' crossed the Rubicon with its 'Beauty is Negro' slogan. Considering all this, even though he does not acknowledge it openly, Achebe seems to be more of a Negritude writer than anything else. This Negritude vein, which is perceptible between the lines of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, is also noticeable in his somewhat mild castigation of postcolonial African leadership in his novels of political disillusionment, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, compared to the violent attacks unleashed by other Anglophone African novelists like Ayi Kwei Armah (1968), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1977; 1982; 1989) and Tiyaambe Zeleza (1992).

### **Endogenous Weaknesses and Failure of Leadership**

This theme of cultural revival goes hand in hand with another one of import, i.e. the castigation of European political domination and exploitation of Africa, which is believed by many to have brought about the messy situation prevailing on the Continent at present. Yet, here also, if it is right that Europe's colonization of Africa is to blame for many of the tribulations Africa has experienced, one could also see whether the invader alone is to blame for all that has befallen Africa. For instance, the existence of outcasts in a society of people of the same black race is a flaw that can objectively drive that society to self-destruction. And that was the case with pre-colonial Igbo land.

It was not only the missionaries and the British administrators and soldiers who precipitated the collapse of Igbo independence. The social structure, which excluded many from the so-called human community, deserves also to be scrutinized. There are both endogenous and exogenous causes that account for the downfall of Igbo society. For, there are tangible reasons that have persuaded young men like Okonkwo's own son, Nwoye, and the Osu to choose to ally themselves with the missionaries and reject their fathers' and so-called masters' traditional order? There is no shade of doubt that the execution of his almost-brother and playmate, Ikemefuna, by his father Okonkwo and a group of men, has strongly shocked Nwoye to the point of making him secretly hold in abhorrence both his community and his own father, and find the white man and what he stands for more humane and more tolerant. It is not only because the white man has better weapons and more expertise in double-dealing that many in Umuofia scramble for seats in the white man's *obi*, the church.

The new social order the invader proposes looks, or sounds, more humane. Most of the young people in Umuofia no doubt side with the new religion because they believe, or are made to believe, that the long-established social order does not bestow upon them any freedom or responsibility, as all the local power lies in the hands of the older or richer sections of the population, and for the most part in the hands of hard-liners like Okonkwo. As for the Osu and the other outcasts like them, they also see in the invaders with a white skin, more humane persons than their African masters are; people with a human's heart able to restore to them their stolen dignity as human beings. Maybe the philosophy professed by



the missionary does not reflect the inner feelings and intrinsic philosophy of his people back home, but the mere impression is enough to make the locally victimized Igbo people choose sides. In fact, the Igbo of bone and flesh, who sided with the white missionaries for human rights reasons, were almost certainly right in doing so, but would they have even thought of it all had they been aware of the plight of other black people on the Continent of America and the ills of the forthcoming colonial rule?

The alliance of a great number of people in Umuofia with the invader with a lighter skin demands that the so-called hero of *Things Fall Apart* be re-evaluated. Okonkwo is believed by many literary critics to be the embodiment of Igbo culture, values and society. But, a closer and more detached look at the novel reveals that he only embodies and defends the values and interests of a socio-religious aristocracy, that of the rich and titled men of his community.

Indeed, the community itself does not condone the social order that Okonkwo seeks to perpetuate because it has been framed out by a selfish minority of privileged people. And the humility, humanism, and restraint shown by Okonkwo's friend, Obierika, and some other so-called people of value, testifies to Okonkwo's singularity as social character and his inability to speak on behalf of his community. Those like Unoka, Okonkwo's father, who are thought by that caste of privileged people to be worthless men, *efulefu*, and whose only crime is to have chosen to behave like normal human beings, playing music whenever they feel like, can be rightly viewed as closer to the genuine representatives of their African Igbo society. Indeed, it sounds rather strange to label musicians as worthless people in Africa where music is part and parcel of people's daily activities. These scorned people are, in actual fact, despite their own flaws, more human than their intolerant and arrogant defilers, as shown in the way in which Okonkwo actively participates in the grisly killing of his almost-son, Ikemefuna, just to show the other villagers that he 'can stand the look of blood.'

The above themes of cultural revival and castigation of colonialism are also central to *Arrow of God*, which, though published in third position in 1964, is actually Achebe's second novel, chronologically speaking. The third novel starts from where the first novel ends. The Chief Priest of Ulu, Ezeulu, the protagonist of *Arrow of God*, places himself above his own people and his traditional Gods. Yet, both Ezeulu and Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* are exceptionally swollen with pride. They are so proud of themselves and of their social positions that they have come to consider that they are the repositories of the values they think prop up in their respective communities. Yet, through their respective attitudes, both characters will betray the values and standards they pretend to stand for. By siding with the white man and the enemy village of Okperi against his own people just out of sheer self-pride and vengefulness, Ezeulu shows to what extent his Igbo society contributed toward its own downfall by putting the wrong ones in crucial public positions.

Seeing that life has no longer any meaning after the defeat of *his* people and his subsequent forthcoming reduction to the position of mere British subject by the white

man, in the case of Okonkwo, and after seeing that his own people no longer hold him in high esteem, in the case of Ezeulu, both central characters choose to take extreme measures: Okonkwo kills himself and Ezeulu somehow sides with strangers and enemies against his people, not because he has been convinced by their ideology and religious beliefs, but because he simply seeks to annihilate his local enemies, who have dared to contradict him, and beyond them, his own people whose supreme deity he has been elected to carry.

It is true that Ezeulu has very vicious enemies, such as the Priest of Idemili and his rich friend and supporter Nwaka who do not wish him well at all and who always find fault with whatever the Priest of Ulu does or thinks. But he should have understood, as carrier of the entire community's deity, that his enemies do not represent the village of Umuaro, and refrained from punishing a whole community for what a group of people have done to him. By first sending his own son, Oduche, to the white man's school, and later on by refusing to name the date of the New Year Festival with a view to punishing his rivals, Ezeulu precipitates his entire community and his heritage into the ditch, enabling the white man to conquer Igboland almost without a fight.

The action carried out by each of the main characters has turned them into anti-heroes from the Igbo point of view. Among the Igbos, suicide is an abomination, so is betrayal of one's own people. Furthermore, in placing himself above both his people and his gods, Ezeulu has made the most condemnable mistake in his community. For the Chief Priest of Ulu is neither a political leader nor a deity, he is a mere servant of the Gods acting for the interest of the entire community. By transgressing this ancestral principle, which has always propped up the Igbo community and secured all and everybody peace, happiness, freedom and prosperity, Ezeulu opens up a new era, which could only be conducive to the reverse side of the above-mentioned advantages. Okonkwo has done the same thing by killing the White man's special envoy.

We have seen that one of the most deeply rooted principles among Igbo people is their attachment to dialogue and negotiation, before any war is waged against neighbors or enemies, as it clearly shows in the way in which Umuofians handle their conflict with Mbaino over the murder of Ogbuefi Udo's wife. On the other hand, even though the husband is devastated, even though he is a titled man, he does not take the law into his own hands and attack alone the murderers of his wife. He is humble enough to understand that he is below his community and that it is incumbent upon that community to decide on war or negotiated peace with the village of Mbaino. The final decision has been made by the whole male community, and not by the victim's close relatives alone. Neither Okonkwo nor Ezeulu has that sense of humility and restraint. They both believe that they should make their communities do what they want them to do, or act on behalf of them as if they were the only ones capable of protecting these communities.

Much as they would like to appear as true patriots, venturing their lives for their respective communities, the two leading characters in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are unconsciously more highly concerned with their own personal fate and prestige

than with that of their communities. And their attitude reminds one of that of most political revolutionaries, who choose to sacrifice their lives for the assumed sake of their homelands, but whose selflessness is not to be taken for granted. One can never tell for sure whether they sacrifice their lives exclusively for their communities or simply for their own good names. So selfishness, and not genuine patriotism and self-sacrifice for others, is what guides the two main characters' actions in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In addition to that, their attitudes clearly show that Igbo society is also to blame for what befalls it: it holds the very seeds that catalyze its destruction. In fact, the society has, at different stages of its evolution, placed its destiny into the hands of two leaders, who, in actual fact, are no sane people at all. Neither is fit for leadership. Okonkwo has been so traumatized by what he believes to be his father's shameful failure to be a genuine Igbo man that he is no more in full control of himself: he is more of a lunatic than anything else. As for Ezeulu, he is believed, especially by his enemy Nwaka, to have inherited his mother Nwanyieke's madness on the one hand:

The man is as proud as a lunatic,' he (Nwaka) said. 'This proves what I have always told people, that he inherited his mother's madness. Like every other thing Nwaka said from malice this one had its foundation in truth. Ezeulu's mother, Nwanyieke, had suffered from severe but spasmodic attacks of madness. It was said that had her husband not been such a powerful man with herbs she might have raved continuously (Achebe 1969: 198)

On the other hand, he is too weak politically or demographically to carry the deity of the whole community, as he is from the smallest village in Umuaro.

### Conclusion

To conclude, Achebe's two novels of cultural renewal, that is to say, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, no doubt provide the reader with a great deal of cultural, sociological and anthropological information about the author's Igbo people and beyond it about African culture and societies.

Nevertheless, considering the context in which the novels were written, a context marked by colonization and anti-African propaganda nurtured and disseminated by some Western intellectuals and writers, even though he wanted to be as honest as possible and write about his community as candidly as possible, Achebe was naturally bound to be a biased translator of the realities prevailing in ante-colonization Igboland and Africa. He wrote very cautiously about his community, so as not to provide the defilers of his African heritage with the very weapons with which to carry on their denigration enterprise. Consequently, these two novels should be re-assessed and seen, not simply and exclusively as mirrors of Igbo culture, but also as potential blinkers blurring the road to that very culture. This is all the more true as the two main characters, Okonkwo

and Ezeulu, through whom the reader looks into Igbo culture and life, are actually lunatics, much more concerned with their own self-image than with that of their own people.

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