

**A Colonial, Postcolonial, and Existential Sense of Self-
destruction of Igbo Characters in The Narrative of Chinua
Achebe**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the
Department of European Languages and Cultures**

One Volume

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September 2020

Abstract

Taking Sartre's existential theories as a point of departure, this thesis examines the theme of self-destruction as a phase resulting from the loss of identity among Igbo characters, both during and after British colonisation. Mainly concerned with colonialism and its aftermath, this thesis focuses on selected novels by the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, especially *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, set during the British colonial era, and *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, set in a post-colonial context. I contend that this theme of self-destruction can not only be examined from colonial/post-colonial perspectives, but also from an existential angle by focusing on the absolute freedom of choice or free will of self-aware characters, who can make and take responsibility for their own decisions, and whose 'authentic existence' plays a major role in their decision-making. Consequently, the most important questions explored in this thesis include the following: To what extent can the self-proclaimed superiority of white colonisers over the 'inferiority' of colonised blacks lead to the latter's self-destruction? Moreover, what is the impact of self-awareness on the decisions made by colonised people, which eventually result in their self-destruction? Likewise, how does the representation of self-destruction vary from one character to another? And finally, how can the investigation of self-destruction help colonised people to decolonise their own country and resist the effects of colonisation?

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Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been completed without the inestimable support of a group of people to whom I am deeply indebted. First, I would like to extend warm gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Charlotte Baker and Dr. Amit Thakkar, for their invaluable academic feedback and patience. The academic skills and educational experience that I gained at the Department of European Languages and Cultures have provided me with a life-changing opportunity to pursue my academic goals. There is no doubt that my supervisors' scholarly knowledge and expertise have helped strengthen my project. I am therefore eternally thankful for their critical comments and vital guidance throughout the preparation and writing up of my thesis. Similarly, I must not forget the contribution made by all staff members in the Department.

In addition, I would like to extend special thanks to my dear sister, Basema, for her emotional and financial support, as well as to my mother (with her endless tenderness), brothers, sisters, and extended family. I am also deeply thankful to my loyal and supportive wife, Muna, for her great patience and steadfastness in the face of the struggles that we encountered, due to the difficult circumstances encountered during my PhD studies. I am eternally grateful for her encouragement and willingness to bear with me, as I pursued my studies abroad. Furthermore, I am extremely thankful to Ms. Gwennlian Park for her invaluable professional feedback. Finally, I owe special thanks to my best friend, Rashed al-Rasheed, for his great emotional encouragement and support during my time as a PhD student, as he constantly reminded me to "keep going and never give up".

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the soul of my father.

Chapter One: Introduction

Hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. [Rather] [h]ybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that *reverses*¹ the effects of the colonialist disavowal. (Bhabha, 1994, p.114)

Okonkwo was popularly known as the 'Roaring Flame'. As he looked into the log fire he recalled the name. He was a flaming fire. How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? Perhaps he was not his son. No! he could not be. His wife had played him false. He would teach her! But Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Unoka, who was Okonkwo's father. He pushed the thought out of his mind. He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a woman for a son? At Nwoye's age Okonkwo had already become famous throughout Umuofia for his wrestling and his fearlessness. (Achebe, 1958, p.56)

Nigeria's colonial history is one of struggle, racism, and ethnic and cross-cultural conflict. Post-colonial African writers, especially Nigerians, have been obliged to position themselves within their country's colonial history and its accompanying ethnic and cultural clashes. In particular, their contribution has generated a new Igbo literature of liberal and cultural concern, which has attained international profile. I consequently argue that some of the characters that appear in Igbo literature are portrayed as physically and spiritually destroyed. Out of this arises the theme of self-destruction and identity crisis, with the implication that Nigerian identity, especially amongst the Igbo people, has failed to achieve stability, whether during or after British colonisation.

One of the most prominent African writers to address colonial, post-colonial and cultural concerns is Chinua Achebe.² Despite the many African writers who preceded him, such as Peter Abraham (1919-2017), Thomas Mofolo (1877-1948), and Amos Tutuola (1920-1997), Achebe is considered as the father of modern African literature (Gikandi, 1991, p.2). In my opinion, what distinguishes his work from other African fiction is that most of his novels are predominantly concerned with the disastrous end that befalls his characters. Thus, the overarching theme of self-destruction in his work plays a major role in highlighting the identity crisis experienced by his protagonists in colonial, post-colonial and existential contexts, whereupon they *subjectively* and *freely* determine their own fate under these difficult conditions. As a result, they must bear full responsibility for the consequences of

¹ Italics added for emphasis.

² Chinua Achebe (Albert Chinualumogu Achebe) (1930–2013) was a Nigerian novelist, whose work explored the effects of cultural change in modern Africa. In his highly acclaimed debut novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), he depicts life in an African village before and after the arrival of missionaries. Other works include *Arrow of God* (1964) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989 (*Oxford World Encyclopedia*, 2014, 'Achebe, Chinua').

their free choices and actions. To exemplify this point, a synopsis of four novels by Achebe, selected for this study, is outlined below.

Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart* tells the tragic story of the downfall (through suicide) of the overzealous and impetuous Okonkwo and his arduous experiences before and after the arrival of the white colonisers in the 1890s. Meanwhile, on the verge of Nigeria's independence (in the late 1950s), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) highlights the ironic theme of inevitable corruption in Nigeria by revealing how Obi Okonkwo,³ a young, Westernised Igbo man, comes to accept bribes on repeated occasions, despite his Western idealism. Later, going back into the heart of the colonial era (during the 1920s), Achebe (1964) skillfully depicts the effect of colonialism on colonised peoples in *Arrow of God*, particularly in terms of religion and the internal conflicts within Igbo society. At the end of this narrative, Ezeulu, the strong-minded chief priest to the god Ulu, is abandoned by his people for preventing them from harvesting their yams, which he achieves by deliberately failing to announce the right time to do so. Ezeulu's will is broken and his passion extinguished, while his people naively embrace the new religion, brought by the colonisers (Christianity) (Owusu, 1991, p.460). Conversely, *A Man of the People* (1966) is the only novel by Achebe to be set in an unnamed location, although clearly during Nigeria's post-colonial era.⁴ Odili, an idealistic young teacher, "fails to live up to his idealism," confronting harsh experiences in a highly corrupt city, which witnesses a dramatic military coup at the end of the novel. Indeed, this fictional coup proved to be prophetic, because after the novel was published, Nigeria witnessed a serious military coup (Owusu, 1991, p.463).

Another characteristic of Achebe's fiction is the way in which he chronicles Nigeria's colonial history, whereby his novels serve as a mechanism for rewriting the nation's precolonial, colonial and post-colonial history. His narrative "portrays three stages of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial contact world of Africa representing a history of colonialism" (Sadeghi, 2014, p.51). While *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God* are set in the precolonial and colonial eras, *A Man of the People* is post-colonial and describes a real military coup. As already implied, however, the chronological order of Achebe's novels is not commensurate with the fictional settings. Based on Sadeghi's statement, cited above, it could be said that *Arrow of God* is misplaced in this order, simply because after *No Longer at Ease*, one would strongly anticipate a novel in a post-colonial setting, especially since the events in *No Longer at Ease* take place on the verge of Nigeria's

³ Okonkwo's grandson.

⁴ Compared solely with the novels included in this thesis, and not with Achebe's entire oeuvre.

independence. However, Achebe published *Arrow of God* instead, taking the reader back to 1920s' colonial Nigeria.

The themes and perspectives expressed by Achebe point to the importance of social, cultural and political representations of history in fiction. As revealed in his novels, Achebe's narrative is mainly concerned with the Igbo People's personal struggle for liberation; affirming their deeply rooted identity in Igbo society, where their culture and strict adherence to tradition are often in stark contrast to the new religion of Christianity that is imposed by the white colonisers. Graness (2016) brings this historical element to the fore, contending that "it is the history of a struggle for conceptual and institutional liberation as well as the self-assurance of one's position in the context of world history" (p.144).

Commenting on another significant feature of African literary history, which she characterises as fragmented, White (2015) proposes that an understanding of specific works requires a comprehension of their historical context. In 'Introduction–Suitcases, Roads, and Archives: Writing the History of Africa after 1960', White (2015, p.144) explores Africa's post-colonial history, posing the question: "Can we use fragmentary sources to [re]write the history of the fragment itself – the separatist movements, the reinvention of pre-colonial forms, and non-national politics?" Such fragmentary sources, the contexts of which have a direct impact on the literary portrayal of self-examination in African nations, may also lead to the perception that African identities are fragmented and unstable.

After gaining its independence in 1960, Nigeria endured many periods of racism, violence, racial tension and political turmoil, and the literature that subsequently emerged from this was heavily influenced by both the colonial and post-colonial periods. In their analysis of this phenomenon, some critics see African literature as merely a thematic continuation of world literature, because they fail to recognise its historical specificity (Sadeghi, 2014, p.53). Approaching literature from a historical perspective is distinct from approaching it from an exclusively thematic one. I believe that the combination of historical and thematic aspects in African narratives, particularly in the case of Achebe, could in critical terms, give rise to a new and multifaceted African identity. This would manifest in complex expressions of self-destruction and identity crisis, both physically and spiritually. In this present account, I understand this notion of identity to have laid the foundations for a controversial and unconventional examination of self-destruction.

Thus, the challenging questions that arise here concern how and to what extent the struggle for liberation has led to the downfall of certain Africans under the influence of European colonisation. Moreover, are there different representations of tragedy in African

literature and if so, what are they? Additionally, what role do colonisation and cross-cultural conflict play in emphasising the complexity of a collapsed African identity through literature? Finally, to what extent could this collapsed identity differ from others? I believe that the first step towards answering these questions is to examine Nigeria's colonial history and its impact on African literature overall, and on the conceptualisation of the complexity of Nigerian identities before and after British colonisation. Ethnicity and racial tensions are especially important here, as it would seem impossible to understand Achebe's fiction and non-fiction, without taking Nigerian history into account.

Given that the four novels by Achebe that are analysed in this study span Nigeria's precolonial, colonial and post-colonial history, they help pinpoint the difference between colonialism and post-colonialism through an investigation of their nature and the ways in which they possibly relate to other literary and philosophical movements. It is from the point of view of this relationship that the sense of self-destruction among Achebe's protagonists can be critically discussed. In short, colonialism alludes to critical and literary review during the colonial period, mainly characterised by the dominance of European countries over parts of Africa and the Middle East. Conversely, post-colonialism relates to influences and consequences that emerged after the end of colonisation. Hence, this current study of post-colonialism investigates the period that followed colonised nations gaining their independence.⁵

In *Beginning Postcolonialism*, McLeod (2000) examines the significance of the relationship between post-colonialism and various critical and philosophical approaches by indicating that "readings of postcolonial literatures sometimes are resourced by concepts taken from many other critical practices, such as poststructuralism, feminism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis" (p.13). However, I consider it important to add existentialism⁶ to the potential list of critical practices. This literary and philosophical movement refers to absolute freedom of choice and individual responsibility. As such, the protagonists in Achebe's novels play a pivotal role in determining their ill-fated destiny.

⁵ For more information regarding these two terms, see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's (2008) *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, and Loomba's (1998) *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*.

⁶ A European philosophical trend that flourished in the mid-20th century, although partly prefigured in the 19th century by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. However, this was not a school with an agreed doctrine, but one that incorporated both broad contemporary and divergent atheist and Christian thought; Heidegger and Sartre leading the former camp, and Gabriel Marcel the latter. Emphasis was placed on individual uniqueness, freedom and responsibility, as opposed to various forms of determinism. Its name was derived from the principle that 'existence precedes essence': that is, human choices are not dictated by a determining essence or fixed human nature (Birch and Hooper, 2012, 'Existentialism').

In a lecture delivered in 1945, entitled, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’, French existentialist philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre⁷ stated that there were two kinds of existentialism, declaring: “on the one hand, [there are] the Christians, amongst whom I shall name Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholics; and on the other the existential atheists, amongst whom we must place Heidegger as well as the French existentialists and myself” (Sartre, 1996). As suggested by the terms applied to these kinds of existentialism, atheistic existentialists discuss the conditions of human existence based on the belief that ‘God does not exist’, while Christian existentialists frame their discourse according to the ‘existence of God’. Accordingly, for atheist existentialist philosophers, with which this thesis is concerned, man is the master of the universe and as such, he alone is responsible for shaping his destiny and character.

In contrast, religious existentialist philosophers explain human freedom and experience from the point of view of ‘God as a radical factor’. They describe man’s existential universe as a mere separation from his spiritual ‘nature’ which is essentially ‘God-like’. Christian existentialist thinkers therefore focus on the firm spiritual connection between man and God, based on the conviction that man and God are unified; arguing that, “man bears within himself the image which is both the image of man and the image of God, and is the image of man as far as the image of God is actualized” (Bigelow, 1961, p.177).

However, despite a clear distinction between these two kinds of existentialism, they share several similarities, including, man’s freedom of choice, responsibility and excessive concern with the true nature of man, questioning, ‘Who is man?’ rather than ‘What is humanity?’. Finally, they are both concerned with man’s uniqueness and subjectivity (Bigelow, 1961). For Sartre, what they specifically have in common is “the fact that they believe that *existence comes before essence*” (Sartre, 1996, p.20). In simple terms, this means that man is first brought into the world and then starts to develop his personal nature and characteristics by making free choices, for which he is solely responsible. In Sartre’s words, “What do we mean by saying that *existence precedes essence*? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world — and defines himself afterwards” (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.29). Therefore, for Sartre, existentialism can never be controlled by

⁷ French writer and philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a leading proponent of existentialism. His debut novel, *Nausea* (1939), depicted man adrift in a godless universe, hostage to his own angst-ridden freedom. Sartre fought in the French Resistance during World War II and during that time, began to write plays, such as *Huis Clos (No Exit)* (1944). His main philosophical work was *Being and Nothingness* (1943). After the war, Sartre began writing a trilogy of novels, entitled *The Roads to Freedom* (1945-49) and in 1945, founded the philosophy review, *Modern Times*. His complex relationship with Marxism is explored in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) (*Oxford World Encyclopedia*, 2014, ‘Sartre, Jean-Paul’).

determinism. Consequently, it is man who forms his own character and determines his choices and destiny in life, not vice versa.

In sum, from an existential perspective, man has sole responsibility for the consequences of his own free choices, without any kind of external intervention or force, whether divine or human (Pierpaoli, 2011). Although the focus of this thesis is on man's absolute freedom of choice and responsibility, a brief comparison between the two extremes of 'determinism' and 'existentialism', with regard to the controversy over whether man's course of action is *predetermined* or *determined* may be helpful in further elaborating on this topic. Determinism⁸ is a philosophical doctrine, where human beings' actions or choices are absolutely *predetermined* by divine intervention or pre-existing external forces. As a result, individuals are not responsible for their own actions. Conversely, existentialism⁹ is a philosophical and literary movement, which strongly asserts that man's course of action and choices are *determined* by his own absolute free will and subjectivity. In turn, these choices will decide the very nature and quality of what one will become in future, without any external forces or influences. Thus, human beings are wholly *responsible* for the consequences of their own actions, choices and well-being.

In atheist existential thought, it is clear that fundamental to the prevailing concept of the existential human condition, is the absence of a belief in God amongst atheist existential thinkers. Instead, they consider man to be the master of the universe, with complete freedom of choice. They strongly assert the role and importance of one's own individuality and subjectivity, which Sartre sees as 'the starting point', with man consciously defining himself and his world through action. Hence, it is man himself who decides what he will become. Therefore, atheist existentialists believe that man alone is responsible for the consequences of his choices and even for shaping his very nature.

Although there is already an extensive body of scholarship on Achebe's fiction, I believe that what makes this thesis distinctive is its discussion of the theme of self-destruction and identity crisis amongst Igbo characters in Nigerian literature, not only from a colonial or post-colonial perspective, but also from an existential one. To put this another way, most of Achebe's novels are associated with dreadful endings, in which the exercise of free will by the main characters, their consequent choices, and their responsibility under the

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary* (2018), 'Determinism'. Oxford University Press.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Existentialism'.

influence of British colonisation, play a major role in consciously or subjectively determining their self-destruction, both physically and spiritually.

Along with his preoccupation with the philosophy of existentialism within the concepts of an individual's absolute free choice and responsibility, Sartre was also greatly concerned with the political, anticolonial, and antiracist movements. In effect, it was the German invasion of France during the Second World War (1939-45) that inspired Sartre's commitment as an intellectual to the theory of anticolonialism. Sartre made use of his personal postwar experiences in an effort to support Africa's and "Third-World" antiracist, anticolonial, and liberal movements, "developing preoccupation with resistance to colonialism in his work and in his own personal political activism." (Young, 2001, p. viii) The complexity of Sartre's philosophical and anticolonial critique influences the thought of some prominent Francophone intellectuals and thinkers, most notably, Frantz Fanon¹⁰, Léopold Senghor¹¹, and Albert Memmi, to name a few. In relation to his contributions to "anticolonialism" and "antiracism," Sartre wrote on inflammatory and revolutionary works written by unique Francophone iconic writers. He articulated, for example, the prefaces to: Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Senghor's collections: *Anthology of the New Negro and Malagasy Poetry*, entitled "Black Orpheus" (1948), and Memmi's *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (1974), in which he argues for African black people's identity, liberation and "decolonisation," and against racism and "oppression."

Sartre's (1964) *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, a book collected as a group of critical essays including the three prefaces mentioned above, tackles the issues of colonial and neocolonial discourses and their severe effects on the colonised from the one hand, and

¹⁰ French psychologist and theorist of colonialism, born in French Martinique, Fanon studied medicine and psychiatry in France after the Second World War. His *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952, tr. as *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967), analysed the deforming effect of colonialism on both black and white peoples. His best-known work, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961, tr. as *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1964), legitimises the violence necessary to overthrow the established structural violence of colonialism, and had great influence on the emerging black radicalism of the following decades (Blackburn, 2016, 'Frantz Fanon').

¹¹ Senghor, Léopold (1906–2001) Senegalese poet and politician. Regarded by many as one of the most important intellectuals in Africa in the twentieth century, Senghor was the first president of Senegal, following its independence from France. Prior to that he was, like his friend Aimé Césaire (who represented Martinique in the same period) Senegal's representative in the National Assembly in France. Senghor met Césaire as a student in Paris. The two of them, along with fellow student Léon Damas, from French Guiana, founded the literary review *L'Étudiant noir* (The Black Student), which was one of the first serials to give critical attention to black writers. It was in the third issue of this journal that the word with which his name would become most closely associated, namely *négritude* (blackness), was used. Coined by Césaire, but rapidly adopted by Senghor, *négritude* is an early example of the strategy gay rights activists would later deploy to good effect, the adoption of a negative or derogatory term and its transformation into a positive. In 1948, Senghor compiled and edited a volume of Francophone poetry called *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, (*Anthology of New Black and Malagasy Poetry*) which was introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre's now famous essay 'Orphée Noir' (Black Orpheus). Buchanan, I. (2018). Senghor, Léopold. In *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. : Oxford University Press.

asserts “the necessity of decolonisation” from the other. (Haddour, p. xx) The book reveals Sartre’s specific theoretical strategies in analysing and illustrating his antiracist and anticolonial engagements in each essay he wrote. For instance, in Senghor, Sartre’s “Black Orpheus” explains the politics of the Blacks’ “negritude” movement as a response to the Whites’ European dominance and racism by reconstituting the relationship between the “for-itself” and “Others.” Whereas, in Fanon, Sartre’s anticolonial engagement represents the voice through which Sartre challenges the French colonial violence and “reading public” by recognising “Fanon’s tricontinental perspective not only as a revolutionary liberationist doctrine but also as fundamentally a new epistemology.” (Young, 2001, p. ix) In Memmi, however, Sartre emphasises the “self-destruction” of the colonialist system that holds within itself the very roots of its own self-destruction. In his introduction to Memmi’s book, Sartre describes the relationship between the “coloniser” and the “colonised” as a “relentless reciprocity” that links them both together, ending up confronting a quality of a colonial drama. (p. 15) He argues that the focal point of that book is the claim that the “logic of colonialism” not merely results in the self-destructive nature of the colonialist regime, but also in the emphasis on the native’s “national selfhood.” (Haddour, p. xxi)

Despite these diverse anticolonial engagements, what characterises, however, Sartre’s unique anticolonial and antiracist position is his frequent analytical view of the colonial world as a “Hegelian dialectical” “Manichaeic world,” in which a mutually exclusive worldview including, “torturer and tortured, racist and victim, colonizer and colonized, the empowered and disempowered” is always in an inevitable mutual violent struggle. Paige Arthur comments on Sartre’s anticolonial struggle in her book *Unfinished Projects: Decolonisation and the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (2010) by stating that, his “works repeated almost inevitably the Manichean view of a hierarchical world divided between forces of revolution and counterrevolution for which Sartre was famous.” (p. xii) Moreover, Arthur notes that Sartre’s antiracist philosophy questions the discursive power of colonialism and European mindset by making use of “racism” and “violence” of the colonised blacks by the coloniser whites (ibid, p. xxiii). The analysis of Sartre’s colonial and anticolonial theories, adds Arthur, mainly draws on two major aspects: “materiality” and “oppression.” While “the former consists of, for example, the appropriation of land, an occupying army, and a lack of equal juridical status for the native population; the latter consists of racism.” (ibid, p. 25) Regardless of such a difference, both aspects eventually, I assume, lead to severe cultural and racial tensions, dehumanisation, submission, inferiority complex, and an identity loss of the black colonised people.

To further illustrate this assumption, one might think about the Manichaean worldviews in which Sartre articulates the prefaces to the works of Fanon, Senghor, and Memmi. Sartre uses colonial and anticolonial theories in an attempt to confirm African blacks' colonial struggles against the French imperialism. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, especially chapter one "On Violence," Fanon begins to define "decolonisation" by referring to the "Manicheanism" and by coherently linking its achievement to "violence." In other words, he explains "decolonisation" by splitting it into two counter-worlds: the coloniser world and the colonised world. Fanon declares that:

Decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one "species" of mankind by another...Decolonization is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces...Its definition can, if we want to describe it accurately, be summed up in the well-known words: "The last shall be first." Decolonization is verification of this. At a descriptive level, therefore, any decolonization is a success. In its bare reality, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives. For the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists. This determination to have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up (too quickly, say some) the famous echelons of an organized society, can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence...Decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men. (p. 1-33)

Commenting on the inevitable importance of "violence," Fanon stresses that "decolonisation" and "freedom" of an African nation can only be achieved by, as he puts it, an "out and out violence." The colonised man, adds Fanon, "finds his freedom in and through violence" only. In this regard, Fanon seeks to illustrate the inevitable status of violence as the only means of liberating the colonised by defining decolonisation as an "always violent event." In 1956, when Guy Mollet¹², a resistant, politician and the 94th Prime Minister of

¹² Mollet, Guy Alcide (b. Flers, 31 Dec. 1905; d. Paris, 3 Oct. 1975) French; secretary-general of the SFIO 1946–69, Prime Minister 1956–7 of modest origins, the son of a textile worker, Mollet read for a degree in English at the University of Lille and taught English. He wrote an English grammar and knew England well. He was mobilized in 1940, captured, and released. He joined the Resistance in 1941 in Arras and was elected mayor in 1945 at the Liberation and then returned as deputy for Pas-de-Calais. He was a rising star in the Socialist Party (SFIO) but, paradoxically, opposed the modernizers, the old leadership around Léon Blum and Daniel Mayer with a sectarian Marxism demanding a close alliance with the Communists. He was elected secretary-general in 1946. The onset of the Cold War imposed a reversal of the policy of alliance with the Communists and the Socialist Party became a buttress for the Republic against the challenges from the CP on the one side and de Gaulle on the other. Minister five times and Prime Minister once, Mollet became an important facilitator or coalition bargainer in the Fourth Republic and managed to get himself a name as a visionless machiavel who cynically manipulated behind a dogmatic Marxist rhetoric; he almost seemed to personify the Fourth Republic in which he was highly influential, but he remarked that he would rather have been SFIO secretary-general than Prime Minister. However, Mollet kept the Socialist Party in the centre of things and accomplished a major raft of social and foreign policy measures (including the launch of the European institutions) and kept the Republic in being against extreme challenge. Mollet's grip on the SFIO leadership was, it seemed unshakeable, and he presided over a party with dwindling membership and diminishing influence. Moreover Mollet was never forgiven for a number of policies during his brief premiership including the decision to prosecute the Algerian war vigorously. It was the Mollet government which in 1956 lost control of events in Algeria and started the long slide to civil war which ended with de Gaulle's return to power—in which he played an important role rallying socialist support for the General. In

France, surrendered to the French authorities in Algeria, the National Liberation Front¹³ (FLN), symbolically reveals Fanon, stated what Sartre calls a “relentless reciprocity” as “colonialism only loosens its hold when the knife is at its throat.” (1963, p. 23). Explaining the true inner feeling and trait of the Algerian people with respect to their anticolonial reactionary violence, Fanon strongly affirms that “it is naked [colonist] violence and only gives in when confronted with greater [colonised] violence.” (ibid, p. 24)

In his foreword to Fanon’s book, “Framing Fanon,” Homi Bhabha argues that such an opposing dualistic worldview (Manicheanism) drives the violent “bipolar tensions” of the Cold War to the forefront which, in turn, divides the colonial world into two major political movements, that of; “communism” and “capitalism.” Cold War, adds Bhabha, “repeats the Manichaeian structure of possession and dispossession experienced in the colonial world.” (p. xxvi) Like Fanon, Bhabha believes that “decolonisation can truly be achieved only with the destruction of the Manicheanism of the Cold War.” (ibid, p. xiv) Based on this premise, one comes to recognise that once decolonisation carried out, “new humanism,” a liberated subjectivity of the colonised, thus, comes into being.

Sartre’s existentialist fixation still apparent despite the occasional shift from the critique of “phenomenology of consciousness,” illustrated in his *The Transcendence of the Ego* (at an individual level), to the “sociology of social being,” (Collective Otherness) illustrated in “Black Orpheus.” Moreover, Arthur argues that despite the conditional situations, in which man might be thrown into, such as “racial and religious” societies, Sartre strongly stressed toward the end of his treatise *Being and Nothingness* that such “contingent situation” can never lessen “the free spontaneity of consciousness, which can ultimately [in turn] choose itself no matter its lot.” (p. x-xii) Another existentialist verification can be seen in Sartre’s language as phenomenological Marxism. Although Sartre agrees with Marx’s theory in terms of proletarians human rights robbed by Capitalism, he denies Marx’s debate

1958 Mollet rallied to de Gaulle, was one of the authors of the constitution of the Fifth Republic, and was a Minister of State from 1958 to 1959. However, Mollet did not have a place in the Gaullist Republic and went into opposition. In 1962 he organized the left's cartel des non and took the first steps towards alliance with the Communists. In 1965 Mollet at first supported the candidature of Pinay for the presidency and then Mitterrand's but sabotaged that of his colleague Defferre (who would have supplanted him in the party). However, he fell out with Mitterrand, who was rapidly dominating the left and during the foundation of the new Parti Socialiste manoeuvred to retain power backstage (he did not stand as leader). In 1971, when Mitterrand took over the party in a ‘coup’, he formed La Bataille Socialiste to oppose the new leadership.

¹³ Nationalist movement during the Algerian War of Independence and the only legal political party in independent Algeria between 1962 and 1989. The National Liberation Front (FLN) was established in 1954 and its armed wing, the National Liberation Army, led nationalist forces in the War of Independence against France. The FLN became the only legal political party after Algerian independence in 1962 and evolved into a one-party state. The FLN was a fusion of nationalist and socialist values in a variant of Arab socialism, but started to introduce free market reforms in the 1980s. The introduction of multi-party politics in 1989 saw the Islamic Salvation Front eclipse the FLN in local and national elections that contributed to the outbreak of the Algerian Civil War in 1992.

that man's consciousness is defined by the materialistic world, strongly affirming instead that man's subjectivity and essence are determined only by his/her absolute free choices that individually constitute human being's true nature and essence away from any external interventions or imposed situations. (Young, 2001, p. x)

In light of this existential perspective, Achebe's protagonists display existential responses to the huge changes witnessed in Nigeria during and after British colonisation. As representatives of their native Igbo society, they freely respond to these changes in diverse ways, in an attempt to make an existential choice. Some resist these changes, unsuccessfully trying to live according to older and more traditional standards (for example, in the case of Okonkwo and Ezeulu). Meanwhile, others try to adapt to the new rules imposed on traditional African societies (illustrated in the character of Odili). Finally, a third group reject the old way of life completely, fully embracing the new rules and culture (as in the case of Obi). These diverse free responses and choices illuminate Achebe's narratives, in that both traditional and cross-cultural characters throw a spotlight on existential self-destruction and identity crisis under colonial and post-colonial conditions.

The second and third responses are reminiscent of the concept of 'hybridity',¹⁴ which Buchanan (2010) describes as basically "a mixedness of cultures, races, ethnicities, nations, and so on". In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said¹⁵ points out that "cultural experience and indeed all cultural forms are historically, radically, quintessentially hybrid" (p.58). In

¹⁴ A term used in contemporary Postcolonial Studies to theorise and to some extent, celebrate a global state of mixedness — a mixedness of cultures, races, ethnicities, nations, and so on. Interestingly, in the colonial and imperial discourse of the 19th century, the term 'hybridity' bore negative connotations and was primarily used to signal what the 'white' races had to fear if miscegenation was left unchecked. Its meaning has effectively been reversed. In part, this is because an alternative affirmative use of the term is available in the work of Russian literary critic and theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it in the development of his key concepts of the carnivalesque and dialogism. Today, the term is probably most closely associated with Homi Bhabha, in stressing the interdependence of the coloniser and colonised. Bhabha argues that no one can claim to have 'pure' racial or national identity; instead, all identity forms in a kind of third space, 'in between' the subject and their idealised other. However, the term is not without its critics, even from within the field of Postcolonial Studies: Aijaz Ahmad (1992), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), and Benita Parry (2004) have all offered critiques of the term on the grounds that it is idealist and fails to accurately reflect the reality on the ground (in other words, it does not pass what Toni Morrison (1992) wittily refers to as the 'taxi test' (i.e. a hybrid identity might be fine in theory, but will a taxi still stop for you?). These critics rightly point out that hybridity is far too often used simply to describe a state of being, rather than critically analysing it. However, Canclini (1995) also offers a utopian account of this term, which suggests far greater depth than Ahmad, Parry, or Mohanty are prepared to credit. Mollet, Guy Alcide. In Kavanagh, D., & Riches, C. (Eds.), *A Dictionary of Political Biography*. : Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ An American critic, born in Jerusalem to Christian Palestinian parents. His works of general literary theory, namely *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975) and *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983), display the influence of Foucault (1926-1984). In *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that Western writers and 'experts' have constructed a myth of the 'Orient'; it is a founding text of modern Postcolonial Theory, complemented by the essays collected in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In *Out of Place* (1999), he records his memoirs (Birch and Hooper, 2012, 'Said, Edward').

contrast, Bhabha,¹⁶ moving away from cultural concerns to give closer attention to the effect of colonisation on hybridity, describes it as the contemporary outcome of colonialism, or what colonisation has left behind. He sees it as a new emergence; a mutual reliance between the coloniser and colonised. He highlights how new Western cultures have invaded the identity of those who were previously colonised, rather than considering it as an impact that is locked in history. He defines the complexity of ‘hybridity’, stating that it

is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. [Rather] hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that *reverses*¹⁷ the effects of the colonialist disavowal. (Bhabha, 1994, p.114)

Consequently, although hybridity is widely known to include biracial and bicultural components, in the reversal of the effects of colonialism, Bhabha sees it as a ‘recursive’ and ‘subversive’ pattern, through which the colonised ‘other’ resists the presence of the coloniser. He appraises this phenomenon as the ‘repetition’ of the effects of discrimination, proposing that “hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” (ibid., p.112). Furthermore, by highlighting its importance in terms of ‘diaspora’, hybridity “displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (ibid., p.112).

In the same vein as the three different responses mentioned above, Barry comments on the examination of hybridity by other critics. In his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (2002), Barry defines “the double or hybrid identity” as “what the postcolonial situation brings into being” (Barry, 2002, p.196).

¹⁶ An Indian-born, American-based literary critic and theorist, Bhabha is one of the three most prominent post-colonial theorists of recent times, along with Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. Of Parsee descent (an Indian minority group that originally migrated from Persia in the 8th century), Bhabha was born and raised in Mumbai, where he later graduated from the University of Mumbai, before going to Oxford to complete his DPhil on V.S. Naipaul. He subsequently taught at the University of Sussex for a decade before relocating to the USA, where he has since held a series of prestigious appointments, culminating in his decision to join Harvard in 2001. However, he is very far from being a prolific author: to date, he has only published one monograph: *The Location of Culture* (1994), a collection of published essays. Aside from this, other works are said to be pending. Nevertheless, despite his comparatively meagre output, Bhabha's work has had an astonishingly broad impact. His writing is also famously difficult, but his combination of Poststructuralist Theory, postmodern sensibility and post-colonial themes resonates strongly with contemporary critical concerns. His basic argument, tested via the interrogation of a rich variety of literary and artistic texts, is that culture can no longer (and perhaps never could) be conceived in terms of monolithic terms. Instead, it should be considered in terms of ‘hybridity’. Culturally, by dint of the movement of peoples, ideas, capital and commodities, facilitated by globalisation, ‘we’ are never wholly of or in one place. Our sense of self and location is a product of a combination of factors, which are never entirely local or ‘native’ in origin. To cite just one example, more than two thirds of all toys and clothing that are sold in the USA today are manufactured in China, even though these items are not recognisably Chinese in either form or design. For Bhabha, this hybridity is ambivalent: it means that power is always limited in its ability to determine identities and control representations. Therefore, he criticises Said's orientalism thesis for portraying the effects of power as singular and inexorable, and for failing to account for the postmodern subject's ability to mimic and therefore transmute what is expected of them (Buchanan, 2010, ‘Bhabha, Homi’).

¹⁷ Italics added for emphasis.

Moreover, he divides this intercultural hybridity into three transitional phases: adoption, adaptation, and becoming 'adept' ('adopt', 'adapt' and 'adept'). He explains that in the 'adopt' phase, a character will assume characteristics from another culture. He claims that there will be an attempt "to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity" (ibid., p.196). Meanwhile, in the 'adapt' phase, the character will endeavour to make culturally appropriate changes or to mediate between the original culture, and the new cultural characteristics that have been assumed. In the case of African writers, this process is likely to consist of adapting "the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre" (ibid., p.196). Finally, Barry views the 'adept' phase as one where the character endeavours to declare independence from the newly adopted culture by replacing its values with those of his or her original culture, or with a newly contrived set of values, "since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent 'adept' in the form, not a humble apprentice, as in the first phase, or a mere licensee, as in the second" (Barry, 2002, p.196).

However, Barry is clearly critical of the first two of these phases, referring to the character who 'adopts' as "a humble apprentice", while the character who 'adapts' is "a mere licensee" (ibid., p.196). Conversely, he is encouraging of the final phase, describing the character who becomes 'adept' as "an independent" (ibid., p.196). For example, with reference to Achebe's work, he suggests that Okonkwo's 'adept' phase is more important than either his 'adopt' or 'adapt' phases, because it consists of Okonkwo's reaction, response and complete rejection of his situation. However, this variation, according to Barry (ibid.), places a "stress on cross cultural interactions [which can be considered as] a fourth characteristic of post-colonialist criticism".

In a comparison between their elaborations on hybridity, both Barry and Bhabha advocate the independence and liberty of the individual. That is to say, while Barry supports the 'adept' phase, referring to those who operate within it as 'independent', Bhabha asserts that others deny the dominant discourse, stating that

other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition. Again, it must be stressed, it is not simply the content of disavowed knowledge - be their forms of cultural otherness or traditions of colonialist treachery - that return to be acknowledged as counter-authorities. (Bhabha, 1994, p.114)

Furthermore, the above commentators' elaborations on hybridity continue to function with respect to embracing/adapting the 'other' culture. Barry investigates this process in terms of the 'adapt' and 'adopt' phases, whereas Bhabha examines it as a phenomenon of

‘mimicry’,¹⁸ whereby a colonised people will attempt to imitate the colonisers by adapting and taking on their culture, behaviour and lifestyle. Consequently, the similarity between these critical perspectives, despite the different terms used, serves as a theoretical foundation upon which those who deny or embrace the white man’s new rules can be discussed.

Achebe’s fiction is projected through the free will and experiences of characters who encounter various kinds of distressing end. Even Okonkwo and Ezeulu, who choose to completely deny the presence of the white man and his new religion, meet different fates. The question that arises here relates to the ways in which the diverse responses of these unique characters differ from or resemble each other. What do they have in common? How do their different choices lead them to disastrous ends? Moreover, does the historical era, whether colonial or post-colonial, have an influence on their willingness to accept the changes imposed by colonialism? Finally, how can such conclusions enlighten our understanding of the culture and literature of other nations in similar circumstances, or which share a similar history?

From an historical perspective, Nigeria was subjected to indirect colonial rule, where “British and traditional rulers worked in close alliance” (Isichei, 1983, p.380). However, this policy created severe internal conflicts within Nigerian society, between those who were willing to ally themselves with the British colonisers and those who completely rejected such an alliance, especially the Igbo people. As a result, Nigeria was categorised into three main linguistic and ethnic groups: the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo (Achebe, 2012, p.47). After Nigeria’s independence in 1960, several decades of political instability led to severe ethnic tensions and significant loss of life, such as the coup in 1966 and the Biafran Civil War from 1967 to 1970.¹⁹ The legacy of this civil war can be seen in the serious ethnic tensions that still exist between the Igbo on the one hand, and the Hausa and Yoruba on the other (Oloyede, 2009, p.13). More elaborately, in *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012), Achebe strongly emphasises “the common resentment of the Igbo” by both the Hausa and Yoruba people, as the “Igbo man [was given] an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots [the Hausa and Yoruba people] in securing credentials for advancement in Nigerian colonial society” (Achebe, 2012, p.74). Moreover, Achebe asserts that the Igbo are distinguishable from both the Hausa and Yoruba with regard to religion and hierarchy, noting that “unlike the Hausa he [the Igbo man] was unhindered by a wary religion, and unlike the Yoruba he was unhampered by traditional hierarchies” (ibid., p.74). The

¹⁸ “An act, instance, or mode of copying or imitating; a product of imitation, a copy” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017, ‘Mimicry’).

¹⁹ For more information on these events, see Isichei (1983, pp.380-474) and Achebe (2012).

controversial question that presents itself here is that while Achebe appears to assert the distinctive merits and values of the Igbo, especially with respect to ‘religion’ and ‘hierarchies’, why does he portray his Igbo characters as converts to Christianity, especially in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*? Moreover, in one interview, Achebe himself states that “this is the generation who accepted the missionaries. That seemed to me requiring some explanation. Why would anybody leave his father’s belief and go for some foreign religions?”²⁰

Following this lead, one of the most important and controversial points to highlight here is the power and critique of language in African literature, in respect with the dialect that: either to use the coloniser’s language (English) or the colonised’s language (African). To further illustrate that, I suggest that one must refer to Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1986) book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* as a primary resource. Based on his own autobiographical and educational experiences, Thiong’o’s central statement in this book is that African nation’s culture, portrayed in literature, should be explored and written in that native nation’s language. Thiong’o strongly believes that African colonised traditions, norms, and culture can only be truly expressed by the very native’s language and not by the coloniser’s English language. In a sense, he starts by affirming that, “the language of African literature cannot be discussed meaningfully outside the context of those social forces which have made it both an issue demanding our attention and a problem calling for a resolution” (p. 4)

In 1962, Thiong’o examined the “question of the language of African literature” by participating in a “Conference of African Writers of English Expression.” In doing so, he demonstrates that only African novelists and writers who have already published their works written in the English language, most notably Chinua Achebe, are qualified for joining conferences whose main inquiry was “what is African literature?” (ibid, p. 5-25) In an attempt to reveal the reason behind why “African literature” should not be portrayed in English, Thiong’o contends that, the coloniser’s English “language is the means of spiritual *subjugation*,” destroying the African culture and thus could never consciously describe the true nature of an African identity that should be depicted in the African language rather.

²⁰ This was Achebe’s response to the interviewer, Ed Pilkington, when the latter discussed the autobiographical trends in his Trilogy (*Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*) and the way in which these three novels tell Achebe’s own story; with Okonkwo representing his grandparents, Nwoye (Okonkwo’s son who converted to Christianity) representing his parents, and finally Obi (Okonkwo’s grandson who is sent to England to study) being Achebe himself. In reference to the chronological order of this Trilogy, Pilkington reflects on his own interview question: “Part one became *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and his next novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), following Obi to London, was part three of the story. The middle volume remains unwritten. Why is that, I ask him?” Achebe (2007).

Conversely, continues Thiong'o, the native's African language, "Gikuyu," is a tool of "communication" among his native "peasant" people. He says: "Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture." (ibid, p. 9-13) Toward the end of the book, Thiong'o sums up the argument that, for African culture is inseparable from its own native language, the former, strongly believes Thiong'o, can never be represented by English literature, even written by African native writers.

On the other hand, however, Chinua Achebe offers the coloniser's English language as a means with which he challenges the British colonial powers. Such a challenge will be thoroughly examined and discussed in the subsequent chapters, especially Chapter three, in which the question of language is differently investigated by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gikandi.

The significance of Achebe's novels basically lies in "their role as cultural texts" (Gikandi, 2003, p.11) and in the fact that "African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity" (Achebe, 1964, p.158). However, Achebe does not appear to idealise his Igbo characters; rather, he sometimes reveals their less desirable characteristics and their naivety in abandoning their own beliefs and traditional religion by converting to Christianity. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, Enoch's conversion to Christianity totally uproots him from his Igbo origins, to the extent that he becomes violently opposed to his previous religion. He therefore audaciously unmask an *egwugwu*, or person deemed to have a holy spirit, during an African religious ceremony: "Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion" (Achebe, 1958, p.60). Another example is Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, who converts to Christianity and is "now called Isaac" (ibid., p.59), despite his father's extreme and rigid denial of the new culture and religion imposed by the white coloniser. Nwoye's Christianity continues to bear upon events in Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, wherein Nwoye suffers due to his son, Obi's Westernised mentality and rejection of his father's God, just as Okonkwo suffered as a result of his son, Nwoye's conversion to Christianity. In *Arrow of God*, however, the Igbo people of Umuaro are depicted as easily and naively leaving behind their own traditional religion and embracing Christianity, just so that they can harvest their yams.

Nevertheless, Achebe does not demonise his white Western characters in his novels. In the essay, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', he strongly criticises Conrad's racist portrayal of African natives as neglected, barbarian savages, primitive, half-naked and brutal, who merely serve as slaves to white Europeans. Achebe

consequently accuses Conrad of ‘racism’ against black Africans; proclaiming that “*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as the other world, the antithesis of Europe, and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (Achebe, 1975, p.15). However, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe does not demonise Mr. Brown, a white missionary. Instead, he views him as an understanding, rational and exceptional representative of the white colonialists and racists. More specifically, through an interpreter, Mr. Brown shares cross-cultural and religious arguments with Akunna, an African leader in the clan, without insults or outrage, but rather with mutual respect. Although this friendly discussion between Mr. Brown and Akunna may be observed as Achebe’s quest for more reliable interchangeability and harmony between the new religion of ‘Christianity’ and Igbo religious beliefs, Okonkwo, unlike many of his clansmen, completely denies this in a recognition of the real danger and consequences of such harmonious relationships. He therefore drives the Christians away, despite the flow of money into Umuofia from the assumed prosperity and ‘trading stores’ introduced by the white man (Achebe, 1958, p.58).

Another harmonious relationship can be found in *No Longer at Ease*, developing between Obi and Mr. Green’s secretary, Miss Tomlinson. Although Obi is very careful in his dealings with her, he later begins to see her as a kind person:

Obi felt like a clumsy schoolboy earning his first praise for doing something extraordinarily clever. He begun to see Miss Tomlinson in a different light. If it was part of her tactics, it was really a very clever one for which she deserved credit. But it did not look clever or forced. It seemed to have come straight from her heart. (Achebe, 1961, p.85)

Moreover, Mr. Green, Obi’s British boss, “pays school fees for his steward’s sons” (ibid., p.104), although his old colonial mindset perceives the British as ‘civilised’ and therefore as ‘educating’ the Africans, who are “corrupt through and through” (ibid., p.3). Consequently, it would seem that Achebe, unlike Conrad, neither idealises his black African characters, nor demonises the white Westerners in his novels.

Aside from this avoidance of idealising his African characters and refusal to demonise his Western characters, Achebe’s unique and fluid approach displays dual facets, comprising two main foci of interest. First, the interaction between the binary concept of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ is a sign of his reluctance to demonise his white characters and is therefore an indication of the harmonious relationship between his white and black characters. Second, the ‘internal disorder’ within Igbo society (Stratton, 1994) and the phenomenon of Igbo conversion to Christianity are indicative of Achebe’s avoidance of idealising his African

characters, most notably the educated Obi and Odili. Although these two aspects are clearly discordant, they implicitly converge in the struggle and conflict caused by colonisation, which eventually results in the characters' ill-fated end. Nevertheless, the main concern here is not Achebe's unique approach, as mentioned previously, but rather a closer examination of the protagonists' different experiences of self-destruction.

In fact, the main concern of this thesis is to examine the theme of self-destruction and identity crisis, as encountered by the protagonists of Achebe's first four novels, specifically from *three* perspectives: colonialism, post-colonialism and existentialism. In truth, my plan was to examine this theme from just two angles in three of Achebe's novels, namely from colonial and existential perspectives in *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*. However, based on wider reading on the topic of Nigeria's colonial history, I became more eager to explore its post-colonial context, or the legacy of colonialism. This would reflect on Achebe's true place in post-colonial literature, and on whether post-colonial history imposes any coincident themes on his novels, where the characters still exercise their free choice and are entirely responsible for their own actions. As a result, this thesis is also concerned with Nigeria's post-colonial history and the way in which these four novels can serve as tools for revisiting this heavily loaded history.

Based on the plots of the above-mentioned novels, the reader comes to realise that there are just two possible perspectives of their main themes. On the one hand, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are largely concerned with the theme of (external) cross-cultural conflicts between the white coloniser and the black colonised, and the theme of (internal) social conflict within Igbo society. In contrast, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* basically address the theme of corruption. However, in more general terms, the essence of all four novels is encapsulated in the themes of conflict and corruption. In brief, the novels set during the British Colonial era are mainly concerned with conflict, whereas the narratives that unfold after the collapse of British colonisation mainly centre upon the theme of corruption.

Consequently, this study aims to investigate the complex nature, development and tragic end of the protagonists in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966). To achieve this, I will thoroughly examine the protagonists' interactions with their environment throughout the changing nature of their lives, specifically from colonial, post-colonial and existential perspectives. Since the novels explored in this study are profoundly concerned with cross-cultural conflict and are associated with both the colonial and post-colonial eras, I will apply

Postcolonial Theory as my critical approach to the texts; referring to the contributions of Said (Birch and Hooper, 2012) and Bhabha (Buchanan, 2010) as primary sources of critical inquiry. Furthermore, I will elaborate on the way that the protagonists of these four novels demonstrate their existential free will to make choices in response to their colonial and post-colonial contexts. Thus, the second main source of theory adopted here are the contributions of French existentialist thinker, Jean-Paul Sartre, while also acknowledging that further critical theories may be added, depending on the various experiences of the protagonists in each novel. This analysis will be linked with Nigeria's colonial history, since it is impossible to understand either Achebe's fiction or non-fiction output in isolation from Nigerian history.

In addition to an Introduction and Conclusion, this study is divided into four chapters, each critically examining one of the selected novels. The discussion will trace and debate the various developments that unfold in the protagonists' self-destruction and identity crisis, their reactions, and the various existential choices that they make in response to their colonial and post-colonial environments. Finally, the Conclusion will bring the four novels together in an effort to make critical comparisons between them; outlining the result of this complex development and identifying the various existential ends of the protagonists under the impact of their colonial and post-colonial environments.

Chapter Two: Okonkwo's Downfall as a Multi-faceted Conflict in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, an Existential and Post-colonial Crisis

Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog..." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words. (Achebe, 1958, p.68)

The effect of mimicry on authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For in 'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms [...] It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixed the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. (Bhabha, 1994, p.86)

The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. It is the inbetween space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (Bhabha, 1994, p.38)

2.1 Introduction

Chinua Achebe's debut novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), has given rise to numerous critical controversies since its publication. One of the most significant themes of these controversies is the tragic fate of the impetuous and overzealous Okonkwo. The complexity and richness of *Things Fall Apart* in its exploration of the reasons behind Okonkwo's downfall highlight critics' controversial examination of his tragic flaw. Before exploring these reasons, it is important to clarify the difference or relationship between 'tragic flaw' and 'downfall' as literary terms; the former being the "character flaw that brings about the protagonist's downfall in a tragedy".²¹ From this definition, it becomes clear that 'downfall' is the result of this tragic flaw. For example, while Okonkwo's excessive zeal to gain absolute power and titles for his clan represents his 'tragic flaw', his suicide represents his 'downfall'.

The disagreement over Okonkwo's tragic end is between critics who attribute his downfall to Western colonial powers and those who rather cite the weaknesses and

²¹ Oxford Reference (2020) 'Tragic Flaw: Overview', *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Available at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803105239176>

inconsistencies of the colonised Igbo community (Nnoromele, 2000). Meanwhile, Stratton (1994) attributes Okonkwo's tragic end to both the British colonial power and the 'internal disorders' and conflicts within Igbo society itself. He observes that "Achebe presents the collapse as being due not solely or even primarily to British military superiority, but also to an internal disorder" (ibid., p.32).

The interest of this chapter, therefore, is to investigate Okonkwo's tragic end or downfall from different critical perspectives, including the influence of Nigeria's precolonial and colonial history on our understanding of his tragic experiences in the story, the impact of *cross-cultural conflicts* between white Europeans and Igbo black Africans, the *internal conflicts* within Igbo society, Okonkwo's *personal conflicts* within himself, and finally the effect of his existential free will and subjectivity on his choices, which determine his ill-fated destiny.

Things Fall Apart centres upon Okonkwo's tragic flaw, which eventually results in his downfall. Deeply problematic social and cultural circumstances befall him before and after the arrival of the white man, who brings with him the 'new religion' (Christianity). This religion is presented as the most significant theme, as it destroys the culture, moral codes and traditional religion of Igbo society, wherein Okonkwo faces his tragic downfall. More elaborately, Christianity's major role is to civilise 'primitive' Africans people by causing them to leave behind their traditional 'superstitious' religion, in favour of converting to Christianity. In *Things Fall Apart*, Christianity is the first 'colonial' step, which mentally 'colonises' rather than 'civilising' Africans.

In his influential book (1992) *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-state*, Basil Davidson's main central argument is to emphasise that European paradigm and presence as a "nation-state" has been always intruder to the African history. He skilfully chronicles Africa's tripartite history as "pre-colonial," "colonial," and "post-colonial" events. In an effort to examine the influence of the European colonialism upon the structure of the African society and its history, Davidson attributes the well-structured outlook of the pre-colonial African societies, in which African natives enjoys a peaceful, united, and even a "prospered" life, to their wise and law-abiding leaders and to their fraternity and mutual support. Later, this self-settled structure has been converted into a self-protected "tribalism", a social and cultural human armor disrupted by the European colonial dominance and power, resulting in a dramatic and fatal ending of the African communities. (p. 53-77) Remarkably, Davidson offers great significance to the African history and inherent identity by presenting it as an obstacle against the European dominance and

development with respect to the colonial assumption that, “nothing useful could develop without denying Africa’s past [and] without a ruthless severing from Africa’s roots.” (Davidson, p. 42) To a great extent, Frantz Fanon believes in Davidson’s argument, in a sense that, to colonise a nation is to exterminate its history and culture first. By illustrating the connection between colonialism and history, Fanon argues that:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (2004, p. 149)

As a debut novel, what characterises *Things Fall Apart* is the fact that it is the only novel to depict precolonial as well as colonial Nigeria. This perhaps explains why Achebe divides the novel into two parts. In the first, the precolonial stage, he metaphorically presents the social integration and ceremonies of the Igbo people and their society, before the arrival of the British colonisers. In one of his descriptions, he observes how “two teams danced into the circle and the crowd roared and clapped. The drums rose to a frenzy. The people surged forward. The young men who kept order flew around, waving their palm fronds” (Achebe, 1958, p.15). In contrast, this integration begins to break down in the second part, the colonial stage, i.e. after the arrival of the British colonisers: “the arrival of the [white] missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta. There were six of them and one was a white man” (Achebe, 1958, p.47). However, this does not mean that Okonkwo had no struggles in the first, precolonial stage of the novel’s events.

I believe that the various cultural and social dilemmas leading to Okonkwo’s downfall are heated topics of critical controversy. As his struggles against British colonial power destroy him, the internal conflicts within his own Igbo community corrode his familial bonds. His violations of his own tribal values and customs, due to his impetuosity before the arrival of the white coloniser, foreshadow his tragic end by alienating and exiling him from his Igbo community: the Umuofia clan. Hence, in addition to the struggles and conflicts arising from British colonial powers and internal disorder within Igbo society, these violations reflect Okonkwo’s own inner conflicts. Despite his ultimate power within his clan, and the many honourable titles that he attains, Okonkwo cannot achieve harmony, either within himself, or with his own family, due to his reckless behaviour.

To elaborate on the above, before the arrival of the white man, Okonkwo had already violated the principles of the Earth Goddess and the strict traditional rules of his clan, the Umuofia, on more than one occasion. For example, he gives his youngest wife, Ojiugo a

severe beating during the sacred ‘Week of Peace’, when all work and physical punishment have been completely prohibited by Ezeani, the Priest of the Earth Goddess. Furthermore, he nearly shoots Ekwefi, his second wife, before the New Yam Festival. Moreover, despite being warned by Ezeudu, the clan’s oldest and wisest leader to refrain from participating in the execution of Ikemefuna (Okonkwo’s adopted son), Okonkwo breaks the Oracle’s rules and kills Ikemefuna, because he does not wish to appear weak or sentimental before his clan. Finally, Okonkwo is banished for seven years to his motherland of Mbanta, because he accidentally kills Ezeudu’s son, a sixteen-year-old boy. I believe that these violations, which mainly take place during his exile, are pivotal events that lead to Okonkwo’s tragic end. Surrounding these personal and social conflicts, however, Okonkwo continuously receives news from his closest friend, Obierika, concerning the huge social and cultural changes that send the Umuofia clan into a turmoil, following the arrival of the white man.

Conversely, regarding the controversial reasons behind Okonkwo’s downfall after the arrival of the white man, the ‘new religion’ imposed by the British colonial powers plays a major role in creating ‘internal disorder’ within Igbo society overall. In this regard, the spread of Christianity is represented as an intellectual tool or even weapon through which British colonial power breaks down and destroys the core values and customs of the Igbo people, splitting them into two factions: those who dissent from this new religion and those who conform to it. For example, Okonkwo and his son Nwoye represent an extreme case of familial conflict and the impossibility of achieving conformity between the two religions and cultures. From Okonkwo’s perspective, Nwoye therefore becomes an outcast, while Okonkwo even considers him to be an *agbala* [woman] and therefore unfit to be called an Igbo.

Consequently, although it may be legitimately assumed that Okonkwo’s suicide mainly results from the arrival of the white man, this does not mean that his violations of his tribal values and customs before this period had no part to play in his tragic downfall. Thus, Okonkwo’s tragic end would appear to relate to two main phases, which unfold before and after the arrival of the white colonisers. His violations prior to British colonisation foreshadow his downfall by highlighting his identity crisis, namely alienation, while the power imposed by the British colonisers and the resulting internal disorder within his society destroy him both culturally and socially.

From an existential perspective, Okonkwo is aware of what it means to be colonised and controlled by British colonial powers and prefers to die liberated, rather than living under this colonial control. In this sense, it is his self-awareness that determines his ill-fated

destiny, in that he commits suicide. It leads us to consider Sartre's maxim of "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, 1996, p.20), where the absolute free choice of human beings is not predetermined by divine or any other type of external higher authority, but is rather inherent within human free will, which ultimately determines our destiny.

2.2 Conceptualising Okonkwo's Identity as Unstable: A Sociological Perspective

With regard to the dramatic social and cultural changes taking place within Igbo society during the period covered by *Things Fall Apart*, specifically amongst the Umuofia clan, and the effects of these changes on the various reactions and decisions of Okonkwo and other characters, the dilemma is concentrated in whether to assume or reject the new rules and changes introduced by the white man and the consequent need for the Umuofia to unravel the complexity of their identity. This is especially relevant in the case of Okonkwo and his mutability and adaptability in the face of these immense changes from both sociological and existential perspectives. In addition to revealing his identity as unstable, these changes have much to do with the controversial reasons behind Okonkwo's tragic end.

With reference to the sociological contribution, when attempting to clarify notions of an identity, identity theorists disagree over the conceptualisation of identity, especially regarding its stability and flexibility. These notions are therefore divided into two main opposing types: Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory.²² In Identity Theory, scholars such as Stryker and Burke (2000) "focus on how cross-situational *stability* of identity content emerges" (cited in Leary and Tangney, 2003, p.74), whereas social identity theorists like Tajfel and Turner (2004) "focus on [the] cross-situational *malleability*"²³ (ibid., p.74) of an identity. In particular, Social Identity Theory "predicts that in each interaction, people take on a different identity" (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012, p.74). In contrast, commenting on the importance of retaining the form of an identity, Moore and Underwood (1981) argue that "the issue of consistency [regarding a person's identity] is one of the most controversial and most fundamental issues for the future of personality" (p.784). These discordant investigations suggest that the process of determining whether an identity — in this case, Igbo identity — is stable or mutable, is a topic of intense critical controversy. However, this paper attempts to prove that the stability of Nigerian Igbo identity was doomed to failure by British colonisation.

²² The focus in this section is on Social Identity Theory, which helps define the identities of Nigerian characters as fluid and mutable. Therefore, they can never be stable, due to British colonisation and its impact on the varying social and cultural experiences of Nigerians.

²³ Italics added for emphasis.

Elaborating on what other critics have stated, concerning the differences between Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory, Hogg, Terry and White (1995, p.262) invoke ‘roles’ as the main focus of Identity Theory and ‘norms’ as the main target of Social Identity Theory. They explain that roles shape individual behavior, as well as an individual’s self-perception within Identity Theory, whereas social interactions and within-group/out-of-group norms and social ‘categorisation’ constitute the interpretive framework within Social Identity Theory. However, each of these models acknowledges the relationship between the individual and society as the main driver of behaviour and self-formation. Nevertheless, while one theory centralises the *self* as the force behind identity, the other correspondingly centralises *social relationships*.²⁴ Regardless of the focus of each model, the environment and society remain dominant factors when examining the stability and mutability of this identity, and the ways in which individuals interact and behave.

Consequently, Okonkwo’s identity and his reaction to the changes imposed by British colonial forces may be viewed through the lens of Social Identity Theory and according to ‘norms’, because neither Obi’s identity nor his interactions with others can ever be stable. Instead, they are rather changeable and mutable due to British colonisation. This ‘malleability’ may best be clarified by the differences between Okonkwo’s interactions and experiences before and after the arrival of the white man. More specifically, his attitude to this colonisation gradually escalates across two transitional phases in the narrative: precolonial and colonial, whereby the portrayal of Obi’s identity changes in accordance with these two phases. In a broader sense, his concerns also change significantly over the course of the narrative. For example, in the first phase (precolonial), Okonkwo is the farmer and the exiled, whereas in the second phase (colonial), he becomes the protester and the ‘vanished’. Hence, Okonkwo’s identity transforms from that of a powerful individual, affiliated with his community, into a socially alienated and disempowered entity.

This gradual decline clearly highlights the ‘cross-situational’ instability of Okonkwo’s changeable social identity as a result of British colonisation. It drives us to examine the complexity of the controversial reasons behind Okonkwo’s suicide or downfall, especially in the final phase of his life. In discussing this in depth, it is too easy to assume that what causes Okonkwo to commit suicide is his complete rejection of British colonisation, as well as his sense of alienation, especially when he realises that his clansmen will no longer stand with him in the fight against the British colonisers. Therefore, he decides to die liberated, rather than living colonised. However, from a sociological perspective, the reason behind

²⁴ Italics added for emphasis.

his suicide requires recognition of the difference between the self and identity. For example, the self is determined by the way that human beings construct their inner nature, while identity is constructed through the cultural and social development of the self in a specific society. This difference “become[s] a basis of how one sees oneself as a social entity as well as a means for developing an identity” (Dunn, 1997, p.693). More profoundly, in ‘Self, Self-Concept, and Identity’, Oyserman, Elmore and Smith define the (self) as “an important motivational tool because it feels like a stable anchor”, whereas identity “is dynamically constructed in context” (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012, p.70). However, the above authors represent the self from two different aspects: ‘memory structures’ and ‘cognitive capacity’ (ibid., p.71). They dispute that in terms of memory structure, “the *me*²⁵ aspect of self has existence *outside* of particular contexts and social structures”, but rather argue that from the point of view of cognitive capacity, “the *me* aspect of self is created *inside* of and embedded within moment-to-moment situations” (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012, p.71). By considering ‘motivation’ as a stable and fixed aspect of self, they contend that what is stable in the self “is not recalled content but rather the motivation to use the self to make meaning” (ibid.).

Regardless of these different definitions of self, however, it becomes clear that ‘motivation’ — where “Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his obi [telling] them stories of the land... masculine stories of violence and bloodshed” (Achebe, 1958, p.17) — is primarily associated with the stability of self, because it explains one’s behaviour and reactions to a specific incident. Based on this motivational aspect and its relation to the stability of self, I consider that the motivational aspect of Okonkwo’s self can be seen as a central or stable point, which shapes his unwavering attitude to British colonisation; whereas his mutable identity, transforming him from a man of power into a lifeless body, can never be seen as a central point, but rather as a marginal and unstable one, due to the change through which it is dynamically brought about in his society. This arguably suggests that what led to Okonkwo’s suicide was the struggle between the motivational aspect of the stability of his self and the instability of his identity, due to British colonisation (Dunn, 1997). By completely denying and rejecting British colonisation, Okonkwo seems to have developed an overwhelming internal struggle within his self and identity. In this context, Okonkwo attempts to restabilise his identity by stabilising his self through motivation but

²⁵ According to George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), the American philosopher and sociologist, the objective ‘Me’ aspect of the social self is what is gained while communicating with others — more specifically, society — whereas the subjective ‘I’ aspect is an individual’s response within interaction. For more detail on the distinction between these two terms, see Mead’s (1934) *Mind, Self, and Society*, pp.173-214.

fails to do so.²⁶ It is as if his identity, which has already been torn apart by British colonisation, drives him to self-destruction through suicide.

Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog..." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words. (Achebe, 1958, p.68)

Hence, the change in this transitional identity, which has been disrupted, creates an unsteady situation that may be marginal, but still corresponding to the inner self, which suffers no disruption.

In *Mind, Self and Society*, Mead²⁷ mainly attempts to define the 'social self' by examining individuals' behaviour in a specific society, while also distinguishing between the nature of two aspects of the 'social self': the 'me' and the 'I'. He argues that 'self' is not initially created, but rather "arises in the process of social experience and activity" (Mead, 1934, p.63). In his view, the complexity of endeavouring to conceptualise the nature of both the 'me' and the 'I' lies in recognising the objective 'me' aspect of the social self as what is acquired while communicating with others, while he views the subjective 'I' aspect of the social self as a response to what people have already acquired or adopted by communicating with others, stating:

The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me,' and then one reacts toward that as an 'I' (Mead, 1934, p.81)

Although the 'I' correlates with 'me' and the two elements complement each other to produce an action as an outcome of human conduct, Mead examines this relationship, enquiring: "where in conduct does the 'I' come in as over against the 'me'?" (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012, p.70). As long as these two aspects differ and can never be the same, "the 'I' is not a 'me' and cannot become a 'me'" (ibid, p.70); they represent dissimilar behaviours — 'subjectivity' as opposed to 'objectivity'. To be more precise, in Mead's investigation, this discrepancy relates to the 'I' either opposing or becoming aware of 'me'. Although Mead is mainly concerned with defining the self as a social entity and the way that

²⁶ In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I will examine Okonkwo's experiences of adapting, adopting and becoming adept in his identity, applying Barry's theory, as presented in his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (1995), wherein it will be demonstrated how far this theory applies to Okonkwo's changeable identity.

²⁷ Mead, George Herbert (1863-1931), an American philosopher and social psychologist, who established the paradigm of pragmatism under the influence of John Dewey. Mead studied the mind, self and society. His studies of the behaviour of individuals and small groups led to the sociological theories of symbolic interactionism (see *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016, 'George Herbert Mead').

it behaves and interacts with others from a social perspective, identity also seems to have much to do with the various ways in which individuals behave; as mentioned previously, it “is dynamically constructed in context” (ibid, p.70).

Based on Mead’s contributions, the ‘I’ and ‘me’ aspects play an important role in the examination of Okonkwo’s identity. More specifically, how can Okonkwo’s identity be defined as an ‘I’ or ‘me’? How do these apply in an analysis of his tragic downfall? I consider that Okonkwo’s experiences may be structured into three parts, which have a great deal to do with Mead’s theoretical and social approach concerning the subjectivity of ‘I’ and the objectivity of ‘me’. For instance, in the second part of the novel (i.e. after the arrival of the white man), in addition to Okonkwo the protester, we see Okonkwo’s identity as an objective ‘me’, wherein he communicates with his clansmen about the arrival of the white man, gaining many experiences that determine his rigorous reactions and attitudes to British colonisation. Conversely, in the final part of the novel, in addition to Okonkwo the ‘vanished’ and dead, we see his identity as a subjective ‘I’, whereby he acts out what he has already achieved in his ‘me’ identity. He therefore expresses his negative reactions and responses to British colonisation, which may be considered as one of several controversial reasons for his final downfall. According to Mead, “the nature of the ‘I’ that is aware of the social ‘me’ seemingly determines and controls the social ‘me’, because it carries out what has already been gained by the ‘me’ in Okonkwo’s case.

By focusing on the distinction between the ‘me’ and the ‘I’, Mead, away from metaphysics,²⁸ questions the significance of this distinction “from the point of view of conduct itself” (Mead, 1934, p.81). Based on this belief, it becomes clear that an individual’s behaviour and conduct are the most important factors for defining the ‘social self’. Thus, it follows that Okonkwo’s interactions with others in his society, as well as the continuous reports of recent events in the serious turmoil that occurs in Umuofia, as delivered by Obierika during Okonkwo’s exile in his motherland of Mbanta, define or represent his ‘me’ in Mead’s terms. In contrast, his response to the change and turmoil brought about by the white man, combined with his free choice to commit suicide, define or represent his ‘I’ in Mead’s terms. However, despite Okonkwo’s identity undergoing a ‘me’ phase, it can only be considered from an ‘I’ perspective, due to his very decisive response in committing suicide. Nevertheless, in this sociological context, whether Okonkwo’s identity is

²⁸ The branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things or reality, including questions about being, substance, time and space, causation, change, and identity (which are presupposed in the special sciences but do not belong to any one of them); theoretical philosophy as the ultimate science of being and knowing (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017, ‘Metaphysics’).

represented as an 'I' or 'me' aspect, his ill-fated destiny seems to be already predestined by "the nature of the 'I' which is aware of the social 'me'" (ibid, p.81).

By comparing the representations of the 'me' aspect of the social self in their critical and sociological contributions, Mead (1934) and Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) view the 'me' aspect very differently. For example, Mead views it as what is gained while communicating with others in a specific society, while Oyserman, Elmore and Smith present it outside personal contexts in the 'memory structures' of the social self, and in moment-to-moment situations in the 'cognitive capacity' of the social self. Another difference lies in their contribution to the definition of the 'self'. Whilst Mead defines the self as it "arises in the process of social experience and activity" (Mead, 1934, p.63), Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012, p.70) define it as "an important motivational tool because it feels like a stable anchor". Regardless of these differences, these scholars implicitly agree that human existence, as well as Okonkwo's interactions with others, is built as a social construct that determines his identity. Therefore, Okonkwo's societal interactions form the basis for defining his identity, which collapses at the end of the novel.

2.3 'Adopt', 'Adapt' and 'Adept': An Identity Crisis

It is evident that *Things Fall Apart* is mainly about Okonkwo's tragic end and the inconsistency between Western culture (the colonisers) and traditional Igbo culture (the colonised). This inconsistency and conflict create tumultuous political, cultural, religious and social changes in Igbo society. The acceptance or denial of these critical changes by Igbos is undoubtedly a highly controversial matter, which clearly highlights social and internal disorder within Igbo society itself, especially in terms of the spread of Christianity as a new religion or faith. The crux of this section is therefore to critically discuss this disruption by focusing on Okonkwo's extreme denial and reaction, not only against the British presence, but also, it may be assumed, against 'civilisation' or Christianity, which he is convinced will destroy his own culture and society, rather than civilising it.

More specifically, even as the arrival of the white man destroys Okonkwo's culture and society, the spread of Christianity ignites internal conflict amongst the Igbos, especially where conversion takes place. As a reaction to this colonial change, some characters in the novel reject these changes, unsuccessfully trying to live according to the older, traditional way of life. Meanwhile, others try to adapt to the new rules, which are imposed on their traditional African way of life. Finally, a third group completely abandon the old ways, embracing the new rules of Western culture. I believe that these completely contrasting

responses or choices lay the foundation for a complex cultural hybrid and the existential components of an identity crisis.

Despite the fact that Barry (1995), in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, discusses the sense of hybridity amongst African writers by highlighting three main phases of this process: adoption, adaptation and becoming adept, I contend that these phases can also be used to examine the characters created by these writers, representing their journey, especially where these characters are autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, as in the case of Achebe's novels. Thus, as mentioned previously, since the characters' reactions to colonial change vary wildly, I argue that it is helpful to discuss their responses in light of Barry's theory of identities and hybridity, encapsulated in the transitional 'adopt', 'adapt' and 'adept' phases. Moreover, although the focus in this chapter is on Okonkwo's response to and complete denial of British colonial power, the reaction of other characters in the novel is crucial in discussing his downfall. Furthermore, by focusing on Bhabha's criticism in terms of hybridity, I will elaborate on the ways in which Okonkwo's hybridity is doomed to failure, as he embraces 'independence' or the 'adept' phase of hybridity.

Having passed through just one phase, namely the 'adept' phase, Okonkwo's identity is in constant turmoil, with his self-representation transforming throughout the story. More elaborately, although his life, especially at the beginning of the story, seems simple within his Igbo community, where he works very hard on harvesting yams, enjoys drinking palm wine (Achebe, 1958, p.5), and participates in traditional ceremonies, the complexity of his experiences in the novel, especially at the end of the story, emerges from his failure to achieve hybridity, because his identity has already jumped to the final phase, without passing through the other two that are mentioned above.

Consequently, in the case of Okonkwo's identity, neither the 'adopt' nor 'adapt' phases are clearly defined, because he does not appear to accept the adoption of new rules, imposed by British colonisation, nor does he accept any adaptation. Therefore, instead of sequentially passing through the three phases of 'adopt', 'adapt' and 'adept', Okonkwo's identity leaps forward into what is usually the final phase of becoming 'adept'. The textual illustration of how Okonkwo's experience relates to this theoretical order is most evident after the arrival of the British colonisers. By completely rejecting the white presence in his clan, Okonkwo, "a man of action, a man of war" (Achebe, 1958, p.3) feels no inclination to 'adopt' values or characteristics from another culture. Instead, as if predestined, he is born in the 'adept' phase, where he is obliged to struggle with what he has inherited by birth. He has no inherent

hybridity, because his biological origins lie in a black father and mother. In other words, his being starts and ends in the same phase, which becomes highly complicated for him. Furthermore, according to the order or sequence of these three phases, as opposed to Achebe's narrative technique, *Things Fall Apart*, like most epics, begins *in medias res*, which means that both the 'adopt' and 'adapt' phases are over before the story begins. This may be the reason why the novel reveals nothing of Okonkwo's childhood and past.

As generally agreed, conflict is a major characteristic of fiction and it is crucial to a successful plot. Here, Achebe clearly depicts conflict between two cultures. The controversial point is whether he has introduced cultural hybridity in the form of adoption, adaptation and 'mimicry' (to use Bhabha's term), especially in the case of Okonkwo and Mr. Brown (the latter being the first Christian missionary to Okonkwo's clan). If this were the case, he would undermine the conflict and consequently, the novel. Therefore, Achebe does not allow Mr. Brown to continue with his peaceful mission and replaces him with the strict District Commissioner, who, unlike his 'Brown' predecessor, is purely 'white', thereby introducing the theme of cultural conflict. Hence, it could be said that in *Things Fall Apart*, hybridity is not only projected through Okonkwo's 'adept' phase, but also through Mr. Brown, whose name also suggests hybridity.

This 'cultural hybridity' is likewise evoked by some of the other characters in the 'internal disorder' that is created by Christianity within Igbo society. An example of this may be seen in the character of Enoch, whose conversion to Christianity totally uproots him from his Igbo origins, to the extent that he 'adopts' a violent attitude to his previous religious beliefs. He therefore audaciously unmask an *egwugwu* or 'holy spirit' during an African religious ceremony: "Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion" (Achebe, 1958, p.60). Okonkwo and his son Nwoye similarly represent an extreme case of conflict and the unbridgeable gulf between the two religions and cultures. By leaving his own religious belief and embracing the white coloniser's new religion, Nwoye therefore becomes an outcast in the eyes of Okonkwo, who goes so far as to call him an *agbala* or woman, which renders him unfit to remain in Igbo society. Consequently, for the purpose of elaborating on the complexity of hybridity — Okonkwo's failure to achieve it and the cultural hybridity attained by others — Achebe enables his characters to belong or express affiliation to either the 'Self' or the 'Other', but never to both. In this context, as confusion arises, hybridity may be defined as "the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life" (Bhabha, 1990, p.314).

Meanwhile, ‘mimicry’, to use Bhabha’s term, is the goal that Nwoye is trying to reach. However, Bhabha argues that mimicry is “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p.86). This means that there is always a difference between the ‘signifier’, who is colonizing, and the ‘signified’, who is being colonised, even if this ‘mimicry’ is achieved perfectly. Thus, Bhabha adds that mimicry is “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘*appropriates*’ the Other as it visualises power” (ibid, p.86). In contrast, he ventures that

mimicry is the sign of the *inappropriate*, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, [which] intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers. (Ibid., p.86)

Again, if Achebe had allowed any sense of cultural hybridity or ‘mimicry’, especially in the case of Okonkwo, he would surely have undermined the conflict in the story, which is a fundamental characteristic of fiction. In this context, as Okonkwo has never ever had any desire to mimic the white coloniser’s culture, he reflects the ‘inappropriateness’ of mimicry and “poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (ibid.). In fact, concerning Okonkwo’s experiences, *Things Fall Apart* features many shifts within the ‘adapt’ or second phase, whereas there is very little evidence of the ‘adopt’ phase in the novel. Achebe makes it clear that Okonkwo is a man who feels a deep affiliation with the values and customs of his clan. The fact that this is evident throughout so much of the novel makes it easier to understand why he cannot ‘adopt’ or ‘adapt’. As such, the reader understands that his thinking is too embedded in the values of his clan to be able to make that shift, especially the most extreme values of fighting and defending his “inherent authenticity or purity” (Bhabha, 1994, p.58), which is why he kills Ikemefuna, his adopted son. It could be argued that this incident foreshadows his own tragic end, in that he cannot accept any impurity within himself either. When making himself impure becomes his only option, he chooses to die; preferring death as an independent entity over living colonised or controlled. Another incident that foreshadows Okonkwo’s death is his full awareness that none of his clan will resist the white colonisers. Thus, he will fight alone and certainly pay the price with his life. His own life is of no consequence to him, as he prefers to die ‘independent’ in the ‘adept’ phase, rather than living colonised in the ‘adopt’ or ‘adapt’ phase of his developing identity.

[Okonkwo] knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. (Achebe, 1958, p.67)

These shifts can also be attributed to British colonial authority spreading the new religion of 'Christianity', to which some of Okonkwo's clansmen converted. This 'new religion', although it was considered as an extreme obstacle to Okonkwo, reinforces his 'adept' or final phase through his complete denial of Christianity and British colonial authority. Therefore, he soon moves into another manifestation of the 'adept' phase by deciding to detach himself and drive out the British colonisers. Hence, it would appear logical to assume that another reason behind Okonkwo's self-destruction through suicide was his inability to detach his identity from his 'adept' phase. The following lines summarise Okonkwo's excessive and long-desired 'adept' phase, rather than any other form of adaptation:

The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop. In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body. The waiting backcloth jumped into tumultuous life and the meeting was stopped. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. (Ibid.)

Bhabha critically explores the complexity of "ideological correlatives of the Western sign-empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism (to use Edward Said's term) - that sustain a tradition of English 'cultural' authority" (Bhabha, 1994, p.150). However, it could be argued that the coloniser, or the West, is the power behind Okonkwo's 'adept' opposition to Western culture and as a result, it is the West that vanquishes him.

In light of the concept of hybridity and its three phases, Okonkwo actually lends himself to direct cross-cultural and post-colonial analysis, because of the fluidity and complexity of the hybridity that he experiences in his life and which he eventually confronts in his downfall. In this regard, it would seem that in one way or another, Achebe attempts to illustrate that hybridity is highly problematic. In the case of Okonkwo, its stages are prematurely aborted, as he dramatically fails to move through the loop of these three phases, as if their end is connected to the beginning in a cyclic manner. Thus, Okonkwo fails to engage with all three of Barry's transitional phases. In fact, it could be argued that Okonkwo is so entrenched in the values of his clan that it makes his downfall all the more certain, as he strongly declares his independence by strictly embracing the 'adept' phase; completely rejecting the presence of the white colonisers, even as self-proclaimed civilisers or missionaries. Hence, Okonkwo's failure to achieve hybridity, as compared to the success of other characters in this process, point to an inadaptability/adaptability critique in *Things Fall Apart*. As shown above, the clash between adaptability and inadaptability reveals what is problematic about the complexity of hybridity in the novel. This clash appears as one of the controversial reasons behind Okonkwo's tragic end. In this respect, it could be argued that Okonkwo meets his downfall, not only by failing to substitute European British values for

those of his original African culture, but also by trying to destroy the cultural ‘mimicry’ that is adopted by his clan.

Nevertheless, although the focus here is on Okonkwo’s ‘adept’ phase, it does not mean that the other two phases are not important or functional. This significance lies in the difference between loss of stability and self-destruction. Hence, while the ‘adept’ phase mainly manifests as Okonkwo’s downfall or self-destruction, the other two phases (‘adopt’ and ‘adapt’) highlight his loss of stability due to ‘mimicry’ or the white colonisers’ culture and religion being embraced in Igbo society, leading to ‘internal disorders’. In this regard, Nwoye’s successful transition towards hybridity throws Okonkwo’s failure in this area into sharp focus. I consider that this loss of stability, which incurs self-destruction, plays an important role as the flipside of Okonkwo’s free choice, during the third phase of self-identity: the ‘adept’ phase. Thus, Okonkwo’s instability arises from the phases of adoption and adaptation, which Okonkwo chooses not to embrace, and it is this loss of stability that serves as the primary factor in his downfall.

Finally, Fanon argues that for colonised people to find an identity, they must “reclaim their own past” (cited in Barry, 2002, p.193). However, in light of Okonkwo’s experiences and struggles in Achebe’s narrative, I consider that reclaiming the past precisely involves entering the ‘adept’ phase, which Okonkwo actually achieves in an attempt to reclaim his past and African identity as an ‘independent’ Igbo character. Tragically, this reclamation soon collapses, because his shift towards the past and his childhood does not even take place in the novel, at least not in any distinct way, due to the use of *in medias res*, whereby the ‘adopt’ and ‘adapt’ phases are unclear, or have already taken place before the start of the narrative. This is probably why the novel lacks any direct references to Okonkwo’s childhood or past. Okonkwo’s ‘adept’ phase is initiated, but never completed, because of his decision to commit suicide. As he encounters this final phase, he tries but fails to resolve the ‘internal disorders’ ‘created by the ‘adopt’ phase. This is best represented in the relationship between him and his son, Nwoye, whose adaptation and adoption robs him of his manliness and bravery, according to Okonkwo:

Okonkwo was popularly called the ‘Roaring Flame.’ As he looked into the log fire he recalled the name. He was a flaming fire. How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? Perhaps he was not his son. No! he could not be. His wife had played him false. He would teach her! But Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Unoka, who was Okonkwo's father. He pushed the thought out of his mind. He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a woman for a son? At Nwoye's age Okonkwo had already become famous throughout Umuofia for his wrestling and his fearlessness. (Achebe, 1958, p.56)

Okonkwo is very firmly attached to the values and purity of his clan, which he sees as fearless and combative, in which no 'foreign' elements (i.e. from other clans) can be permitted. Okonkwo wants such purity within his own family and so he cannot accept either his father's weakness and shame or Nwoye's adaptation to Western culture, since it dilutes his image as a courageous warrior. All of this demonstrates his inability to face even greater challenges and changes, and when these do come at the end of the novel (in the form of British colonisation), he fails to adopt, adapt or even continue in his adept phase. Consequently, the evolution of his identity is terminated in a mysterious manner when he commits suicide, irrespective of what actually causes his death.

2.4 Okonkwo's Experiences before the Arrival of The White Man: Violations, Struggles and Exile

The metaphorical implications of Okonkwo's self-destruction vary in their significance, before and after the arrival of the white colonisers. For instance, while Okonkwo's violations against the Earth Goddess, his struggles within himself to gain the highest honours in his clan and finally, his exile, take place before the arrival of the white man; his experiences and physical struggles after colonisation overwhelm and destroy his lifestyle to the extent that his "machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body" (Achebe, 1958, p.67), whereupon he commits suicide by hanging himself from a tree. Consequently, *Things Fall Apart* is mainly about Okonkwo's physical self-destruction. At the same time, I argue that these different interpretations of destruction bear a symbolic significance that goes beyond Okonkwo's overt nature. To clarify this further, I consider that Okonkwo's violations of strict tribal rules and his sense of dissatisfaction before colonisation form the prologue to his tragic end after colonisation. Whilst Okonkwo's struggles and death after colonisation will be discussed in the next section, this current section focuses on his experiences before colonisation, specifically his violations of the rules of his own tribe, his internal struggles, his intense desire to win the highest honours ever in his clan, and finally his exile to his motherland, where he does not feel that he belongs.

Okonkwo's demise is both physical and personal, representing the disaffection and existential crisis of a relatively privileged black warrior in a society that has yet to heal its racial wounds due to colonisation. More specifically, his death represents cultural and social dissolution and subjugation under the influence of a new, more powerful and more ruthless culture, which arrives through colonialism, with the main goal of gaining power and colonising, rather than 'civilising'.

Before the arrival of the white man, Okonkwo has already endured many trials. For example, he has suffered due to his own breaches of his tribe's religious and moral codes, he has been tormented by conflicts within himself, and he has experienced alienation through exile. Since social responsibility is prominent in his society and a great deal of this responsibility is borne by other individuals in his clan, Okonkwo is forced to abide by rules over which he has little control, just so that he can assert his superior strength in the clan. In other words, due to Umuofia's strict rules, Okonkwo appears to have limited control over his fate. Social and cultural forces and traditions limit his ability to act independently, because there are certain rules and social expectations that he is obliged to fulfill and abide by. However, there are numerous instances where he violates these rules. Such violations and infringements, due to Okonkwo's recklessness, determine his attitudes to the values and beliefs of his clan, the Umuofia. More elaborately, he violates the commands of the Earth Goddess and the strict traditions of his clan on more than one occasion: first, he beats his youngest wife, Ojiugo, severely during the sacred 'Week of Peace', where work and physical punishment are completely prohibited by Ezeani, the Priest of the Earth Goddess. Second, he nearly shoots Ekwefi, his second wife, before the New Yam Festival. Third, despite being warned by Ezeudu, the oldest and wisest leader of his clan, not to participate in killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo breaks the Oracle's rules and commits this murderous act, because he does not want to appear weak or sentimental before his clan. Fourth, Okonkwo is banished for seven years to his motherland of Mbanta, because he accidentally kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son. Although this act is unintentional, the incident is viewed as a violation of community values, bringing a curse on the clan: "Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart" (Achebe, 1958, p.41). The following lines summarise Okonkwo's violations of the rules of his clan:

No work was done during the Week of Peace. People called on their neighbours and drank palm-wine. This year they talked of nothing else but the nso-ani²⁹ which Okonkwo had committed. It was the first time for many years that a man had broken the sacred peace. Even the oldest men could only remember one or two other occasions somewhere in the dim past. (Achebe, 1958, p.9)

Okonkwo's existential choices could be regarded as a type of rebellion, not only against the constraints of Igbo society, but also against his own challenge to be the greatest warrior, worthy of "the highest titles in the clan" (Achebe, 1958, p.57). In this sense, Okonkwo may be considered to be restricted by inherited customs, but both his adherence to and occasional violation of these traditions seem somewhat irrational, rather than being premeditated and fully thought-out choices. Aside from this, he has to struggle with the very powerful external

²⁹ Disobedience against the Earth Goddess, Ani.

force of colonialism, which robs him of his individuality and defines him as a mere component of a so-called *backward culture*, which needs to be either eliminated or redefined as 'Christian'. Thus, his suicide appears to fulfil an inevitable cultural and personal destiny, which would arguably have occurred anyway, whether directly or indirectly. Consequently, it is important to consider the constraints and social circumstances under which Okonkwo behaves existentially in his respective communities. The story of his life and demise illustrates how an individual's relationship with the wider society affects personal choice and therefore, the possibility of withdrawal, rebellion or ultimate self-destruction.

Regarding Okonkwo's story, it could be stated that he is undergoing an existential and *transitional* crisis in his life. This changes him from "the greatest wrestler in the nine villages" (Achebe, 1958, p.2) into a dead body 'dangling' from a tree, as if his self-destruction supersedes his self-determination. To elaborate on this, before he starts to create problems for himself by violating his clan's strict codes of behaviour, his life appears to be undramatic, especially at the beginning of the novel, where it is slow-paced, simple and therefore typical of his clan. As he is uneducated, but mainly concerned with farming yams and winning the 'highest titles' ever, Okonkwo is "a wealthy farmer [with] two barns full of yams" (ibid, p.2). Therefore, "although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time" (ibid, p.2). As a result, in the first part of the novel at least, Okonkwo seemingly has a stable life, which many people would aspire to. However, the reader gradually gets a sense of his boredom and disaffection and in turn, his voluntary choices. This signals that he is always seeking more and is never satisfied with the monotony of ordinary everyday life, or even with an above-average quality of life. This very stability seems to sicken him, because it leaves him with very little to strive for. He is dissatisfied with his lack of purpose in life, which is where his existential crisis originates.

Okonkwo is therefore disaffected by his humdrum existence and the lack of conflict or tension. It is this condition of 'everyday life' that, according to Sartre, is defined by "what it is not" (Sartre, 1943, p.268) or "its negation, by forces and structures limiting freedom" (Snedeker, 1984, p.278). In contrast to the ordinariness of everyday life, Sartre states that man is always projecting into the future; constantly making decisions about that future. Moreover, he starts to create his identity as soon as he is thrown into the world, beginning with 'consciousness' or, to use Sartre's words, 'subjectivity', which is "our point of departure" (Sartre, 1996, p.40) from 'facticity' into the future. Given that man starts from nothing and is engaged in this continuous process of choosing or projecting into the future, he (whom Sartre refers to as "being for itself") "is not what it is" (Sartre, 1943, p.138).

Consequently, man is at odds with the condition of everyday existence; the state with which Okonkwo is never satisfied.

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre explains the distinction between ‘being-in-itself’ and ‘being-for-itself’. He views the former as an unaware and unconscious being (object), which has no ability to change or choose: a “non-conscious Being. It is the Being of the phenomenon and overflows the knowledge which we have of it. It is plenitude, and strictly speaking, we can say of it only that it is” (Sartre, 1943, p.629). Conversely, he regards ‘being-for-itself’ as conscious and aware, with the ability to both change and choose. What distinguishes the ‘being-for-itself’ from the ‘being-in-itself’ is that “by bringing nothingness into the world, the For-itself can stand out from Being and judge other beings by knowing what it is not” (ibid.). Through this characterisation, the ‘being-for-itself’ becomes what it is. In simpler terms, once man is thrust or born into life, he starts from *nothing* to construct himself through his free choices and actions. Thus, “man is *nothing* other than what he makes of himself” (Sartre, 1996, p.22) and so he cannot be what he is. In Hegelian terms, “freedom is the negation of the negation” (Snedeker, 1984, p.278) and man or the ‘being-for-itself’ becomes what it is.

In Kosoi’s (2005) essay, ‘Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings’, the notion of ‘nothingness’ is investigated by highlighting Sartre’s views on it as a product of human *consciousness*. She argues that, for Sartre, “nothingness is a nonbeing, a negation of all the entities in the world, which comes into ‘existence’ through human consciousness” (Kosoi, 2005, p.21). As long as “nothingness is also an affirmation of beings as it is the limit [end] imposed on all beings” (ibid., p.22), it could be said that what constitutes or shapes Okonkwo’s ‘existence’ as an isolated being, specifically at the end of the story, is his existential sense of ‘nothingness’. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s self-destruction through suicide emphasises his existential ‘free will’ to make choices, wherein he prefers to die free from control, rather than staying alive amongst the colonised. This sacrifice or voluntary choice is the essence of the ‘nothingness’ that ‘follows’ death. However, according to some critics, such a decision is still controversial, whether intentional or ill-fated. In ‘Okonkwo’s Suicide as an Affirmative Act: Do Things Really Fall Apart?’, Friesen (2006) contends that “if we assume that Okonkwo’s suicide was an affirmative act, [and thus], a conscious decision” then “another interpretation presents itself” (p.1). More elaborately, instead of seeing Okonkwo as a ‘tragic hero’, his decision to commit suicide “can be seen as his last attempt to remind the Igbo people of their culture, values, and identity in the face of

impending colonisation” (ibid., p.2.). This highlights Achebe’s contribution to the preservation of his own Nigerian (Igbo) culture.

In Igbo culture, the *Chi* is an individual’s ‘personal God’ (Achebe, 1958, p.8), who controls and determines one’s fate. In this light, the controversies surrounding the reason for Okonkwo’s suicide can be discussed further. However, despite stating that “a man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi” (ibid., p.43) and so “nothing happens to the individual except his Chi consents”, Ebeogu (1983, p.74) contends that the relationship between an individual and his enigmatic Chi is ‘manipulative’, claiming that

Paradoxically, the Igbo folk think that the individual can somehow manipulate this personal enigmatic force called chi, and that one’s chi is always inclined to consent to one’s wishes. The relationship between the individual and his chi is thus manipulative. (Ibid., p.74)

This is because conformity with everyday reality does not offer what Okonkwo desires. Thus, he recreates his life by seeking an existence that is founded in his imagination. He wishes to be somebody else and therefore walks in the ultimate power that is a product of his own mind and imagination. He is in fact seeking ultimate authority. As Said (1978) explains in *Orientalism*, along a straight course, the quality or nature of authority is to establish, form and control canon and values. Moreover, Said argues that the specific ideas upheld by this authority cannot be perceived as absolutely true, noting:

there is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. (Said, 1978, pp.19-20)

Therefore, in purely seeking ultimate power, Okonkwo strives to comply with aspects of his society that drive him towards certain behaviour. This may be considered as the reason why he violates the strict rules of his clan (in particular, the murder of Ikemefuna).

In short, Okonkwo’s hands are tied at social and cultural levels, since his ability to act and express his personality is greatly diminished by traditions, customs, social stigma and shame. However, while it could be said that he is restricted by society, Okonkwo is uniquely motivated by the desire for absolute power. His issue is therefore not simply the fact of being restricted and denied individuality by society, but rather his extreme individualism, which eventually consumes and destroys him. He already leads an individualistic life, but the severe social restrictions around him are too extreme for his taste. He has some level of freedom, but he longs for more. It is this desire, I believe, that causes his downfall.

Okonkwo lives in a culture that values collective and tribal identity more than anything else. A person's worth is essentially defined by his wealth, ancestry, compliance with customs, and ability to exhibit qualities that are traditionally associated with masculinity. A person's worth in his clan is also partly inherited from parents and the environment, unlike in Western culture, which places more emphasis on a person's individual abilities and self-development. Okonkwo therefore bears some of the shame of his deceased father, Unoka, who was infamous for his persistent poverty and irresponsible nature. As a result, Okonkwo feels a social burden to prove to his community that he is unlike his father, since shame is a communal concept, which individuals are left to contend with. Achebe consequently explains: "and so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion — to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (Achebe, 1958, p.4). This means that Okonkwo feels pressure to act responsibly and to demonstrate to those around him that he is the type of 'man' that his community can depend on. Failing to do so will mean continuing in his father's footsteps, perpetuating the cycle of shame and failure. This would be an additional burden for Okonkwo, imposed upon him by accident of birth.

In some ways Okonkwo was born disadvantaged, but he is also privileged in other ways. Nevertheless, he is dissatisfied with his life. For example, he was born into poverty and into a social underclass, so he is obliged to strive towards making a decent living for his family, as well as to achieve a respectable social status in the tribal community of the Umuofia clan. However, to achieve this status, it is not sufficient for Okonkwo to accumulate wealth and commodities like yams and cattle, in order to secure a comfortable existence for his family; he must also adopt the role of a dominant male to assert his masculinity in his community, because the community is always watching and ostracising men who fail to demonstrate their manhood in this way. The outcome of this is that Okonkwo is constantly looking over his shoulder out of fear of being seen as weak. Being perceived as poor or effeminate mean social death in his culture; a fate that Okonkwo wants to avoid at all costs. He is therefore determined to prove his manhood to the clan, as well as to create a legacy for himself as someone whose male offspring only exhibit traditionally masculine traits. However, in this, he is disappointed. As clarified in the narrative, with reference to Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, bravery and fearlessness are highly desirable traits in one's sons:

[Okonkwo] 'was a flaming fire.' How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? Perhaps he was not his son. No! he could not be. His wife had played him false. He would teach her! But Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Unoka, who was Okonkwo's father. He pushed the thought out of his mind. He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a

woman for a son? At Nwoye's age Okonkwo had already become famous throughout Umuofia for his wrestling and his fearlessness. (Achebe, 1958, p.59)

This illustrates some of the superstitious beliefs of Okonkwo's traditional, close-knit community. Being strong and fearless is necessary for survival. The presence of very masculine members of the tribe will not only enable the clan to survive harsh conditions but will also defend it in conflicts with its neighbours, against whom the Umuofia occasionally go to war. In contrast, shame and weakness constitute social contagion in Okonkwo's tribal culture. Their effect is not only limited to the individual, but also extends to the family and wider community. In conditions that require perseverance and survival, the tacit assumption seems to be that the community is only as strong as its weakest members, which is why this tribal society seeks to eliminate its proverbial 'bad apples'.

In response to this, Okonkwo suppresses his emotions and compassion for others by demonstrating a heart of stone, in order to appear to be the strongest male member of his clan, where the rules governing masculinity are very strict. A conflict subsequently arises between the pressure to appear 'masculine' and his emotions and compassion, which must be suppressed. As mentioned before, this struggle can best be seen in Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna. When 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, 1958, p.19). However, this act is followed by deep remorse on the part of Okonkwo, who cannot eat for days: "Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna" (Achebe, 1958, p.21). The reader therefore comes to recognise the struggle or change in Okonkwo's feelings towards Ikemefuna, with the assumption that sometimes, men are forced to act against their feelings, i.e. against their free will.

In fact, Okonkwo is totally convinced that emotions are only for women, who depend on men for survival. An effeminate man is dependent on other men, which makes him a burden to the tribe. In spite of this, the reader eventually discovers that Okonkwo does indeed have an emotional side; this should come as no surprise, given that he is a central character, whom Achebe seeks to humanise. However, as long as Okonkwo suppresses his emotions and pretends to have a heart of stone, he will succeed in proving to his community that he is a very strong male clan member, worthy of respect. The shift in Okonkwo's character, where Achebe portrays him as a man of power becoming a man of emotions is indeed critical and controversial. It is illustrated in Okonkwo's relationship with his natural son, Nwoye, and his adopted son, Ikemefuna. The significance of these relationships must be taken into consideration. For instance, Okonkwo's relationship with Nwoye is in stark contrast to his

relationship with Ikemefuna. Okonkwo needs his natural son to appear as strong as he is, but this does not happen, because of Nwoye's conversion to Christianity. However, he deals with Ikemefuna emotionally, which is especially evident when he kills him, despite being warned not to do so.

The following lines summarise Nwoye's developmental achievements, which Okonkwo realises are due to Ikemefuna: "Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son's development, and he knew it was *due to Ikemefuna*. He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors" (Achebe, 1958, p.17). The failure and weakness that Okonkwo fears so intensely are inherently very close to him, because they are associated with his own family: his father Unoka and his son Nwoye.³⁰ Thus, the source of Okonkwo's shame is that the masculinity he wishes to see in Nwoye's character is rather captured in Ikemefuna and even in his daughter, Ezinma, but never in Nwoye. He therefore mocks his natural son, stating that "where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies? If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit" (Achebe, 1958, p.21).

Ikemefuna's tragic story proves to the reader that Okonkwo's struggle between masculinity and compassion has finally been resolved, indicating that his masculinity has superseded his compassion. His compassion is frequently evident in the novel, but the society that surrounds him forces him to suppress it. However, if Okonkwo's reason for killing Ikemefuna is considered from an existential perspective, a deeper insight can be gained into Okonkwo's mind, where his 'subjectivity' takes control of his 'being' or 'objectivity' and therefore his decision-making. In sum, his existential free will takes over and he makes a free choice to kill his adopted son. This is despite the fact that Ezeudu, the oldest man in the Umuofia clan, warns Okonkwo not to "bear a hand in his [Ikemefuna's] death":

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death. Okonkwo was surprised, and was about to say something when the old man continued: "Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father. (Achebe, 1958, p.18)

³⁰ For example, his father, Unoka, had been jobless and idle. He never paid back his debts. Meanwhile, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, does not like to sit with Okonkwo to listen to his macho rhetoric, with tales of war and bloodshed. Instead, he prefers to sit with his mother, listening to her folktales. Therefore, Okonkwo calls him an *agbala* [woman]. Finally, Nwoye converts easily to Christianity and Okonkwo therefore considers him to be a traitor.

The contradiction is that while Ezeudu warns Okonkwo not to participate in killing Ikemefuna, an event that Okonkwo surely finds hard, the clan members make fun of the “effeminate men who had refused to come with them” (ibid.) and seek to kill Ikemefuna. This is clearly another burden and responsibility that render it harder for Okonkwo to reveal his true inner feelings and compassion for the victim, or to compromise his ‘masculinity’. Therefore, he kills Ikemefuna. The controversial questions that arise here concern the real reason why Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna, and whether it is the society that he comes from and his tribal customs that take him over and control his ‘being’ and thus, his free will. Finally, how can this event, i.e. Ikemefuna’s demise, lead to Okonkwo’s self-destruction? The complexity of these two questions can be resolved by combining them. Hence, it is due to the heavy tribal influence of Okonkwo’s clan, especially in terms of the concept of masculinity, which determines and controls his ‘being’ and it is this that finally takes over his existential free will, whereupon Okonkwo decides to kill Ikemefuna.

However, the assumption — whether based on the tribal influence of his society or his crucial conscious decision — points to a single conclusion, which is that “the fear of failure and of weakness” (Achebe, 1958, p.4) dominates Okonkwo’s whole life, rather than the gods, notions of evil, or magic:

It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion - to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (Ibid., p.4)

In other words, as his masculinity supersedes his compassions, fear of failure supersedes any paternal feelings he might have for Ikemefuna. In examining Okonkwo’s existential challenge, posed by Ezeudu’s warning not to participate in killing Ikemefuna, Nnoromele (2000) explains that in an Igbo community, a man’s feelings for his family should not interfere with or disrupt the already established interests of that community. “Since Okonkwo’s passion was to be a hero”, Nnoromele continues, “he felt his manliness might be called into question; therefore, he defied his friend’s [Ezeudu] admonition and accompanied the procession into the forest” (ibid., p.151). This creates double and

contradictory struggles, which allow Okonkwo to prove to his community that he is capable of controlling his emotions. Paradoxically, it is evidence that he is afraid of social stigma.³¹

By commenting on the final struggle faced by Okonkwo before colonisation, the theme of exile, which follows the scene in which Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son and is consequently "condemned for seven years to live in a strange land" (Achebe, 1958, p.44) reveals another burden on Okonkwo. Despite this,

Okonkwo was given a plot of ground on which to build his compound, and two or three pieces of land on which to farm during the coming planting season. With the help of his mother's kinsmen he built himself an obi and three huts for his wives. He then installed his personal god and the symbols of his departed fathers. Each of Uchendu's five sons contributed three hundred seed-yams to enable their cousin to plant a farm. (Ibid., p.43)

However, "work no longer had for him the pleasure it used to have" (ibid.). It is possible that he fails to take the same pleasure in his work, because he does not believe that he should develop himself in his motherland, but rather in his fatherland, where his masculinity would be reinforced. However, when Uchendu, the eldest member of the clan in Mbanta, asks Okonkwo what is meant by 'Mother is Supreme', Okonkwo does not know the answer. The following lines answer this question by highlighting Achebe's portrayal of women, which is not only limited to cooking and ceremonies, but also to compassion and feelings of sorrow. Uchendu states:

It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. (Achebe, 1958, p.44)

Exile, on the other hand, not only deprives him of the honour of receiving titles in his own clan, but also of the privilege of participating in resistance to the white colonisers, in an attempt to drive them out of his clan: "A sudden fury rose within him and he felt a strong desire to take up his machete, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang" (ibid., p.50). Furthermore, what makes his exile worse is his son, Nwoye's conversion to Christianity. Again, by arousing internal disorder within Igbo society and especially in Okonkwo's family, the introduction of Christianity destroys any sense of social or familial cooperation and connection between Nwoye and Igbo society, to the extent that Nwoye

³¹ A mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarded as impressed on a person or thing; a 'brand' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017, 'Stigma').

disowns his father, Okonkwo. The following conversation between Obierika and Nwoye clearly reveals this clash with the family:

What moved Obierika to visit Okonkwo was the sudden appearance of the latter's son, Nwoye, among the missionaries in Umuofia. "What are you doing here?" Obierika had asked when after many difficulties the missionaries had allowed him to speak to the boy. "I am one of them," replied Nwoye. "How is your father?" Obierika asked, not knowing what else to say. "I don't know. He is not my father," said Nwoye, unhappily. (Ibid., p.47)

Consequently, after this illustration of Okonkwo's violations of his own tribe's strict codes and rules, the extreme lengths to which he is prepared to go to become the most powerful member of his tribe and the very difficult circumstances that he endures during his exile before colonisation, may be regarded as a prologue to his tragic end after the arrival of the white colonisers.

2.5 Okonkwo's Experiences after the Arrival of the White Man: Alienation, Social Death and Physical Death

Okonkwo's struggles and trials prior to the arrival of the white colonisers having been described in the previous section, I now wish to move on to the different kinds of struggle that he endures after colonisation. These may be categorised into three main types: alienation as an exile or through isolation from others, social death as a result of losing one's role, status, respect and title in society, and finally, physical demise.

Despite being exiled to Mbanta, i.e. away from Umuofia, Okonkwo's way of life tragically changes after the arrival of the white colonisers in Umuofia. Along with his sense of alienation in his motherland, this change severely affects his interaction with others, resulting in fractured relationships. For example, his son, Nwoye's conversion to Christianity elicits an emotional eruption from Okonkwo:

Nwoye turned round to walk into the inner compound when his father, suddenly overcome with fury, sprang to his feet and gripped him by the neck. "Where have you been?" he stammered. Nwoye struggled to free himself from the choking grip. "Answer me," roared Okonkwo, "before I kill you!" He seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit him two or three savage blows. "Answer me!" he roared again. Nwoye stood looking at him and did not say a word. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in. (Achebe, 1958, p.50)

This illustration not only highlights Okonkwo's extreme denial of the new religion, but also highlights severe conflict within the family, where the bonds are doomed to snap. Another example of Okonkwo's troubled interaction with others is his disappointment at his fellow clan members' poor resistance to the white colonisers. He has a deep sense of regret over

what has happened to the Umuofia clan in becoming what he perceives to be so soft and weak; he therefore mourns for its strong, warlike and aggressive, men:

Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women. (Ibid., p.59)

As the turmoil and consequently, the damage to the Umuofia clan worsens, Okonkwo and certain other members of his tribe are abused and dehumanised by the white colonisers, especially during their imprisonment. Okonkwo becomes enraged and swears ‘vengeance’. He therefore kills the lead messenger of the white colonisers: “In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body” (Achebe, 1958, p.67). Finally, after this public slaughter, Okonkwo commits suicide.

In reality, despite his courage, endurance and power, Okonkwo is terrified of ‘failure’ and ‘weakness’ (ibid., p.4) and of social death,³² which would mean the end of his role in society and the loss of status, respect and title in the clan. Nevertheless, his immoral acts and violation of his clan’s customs and rules bring about all that he fears, leading to his self-destruction; his community eventually banishing him, for the sake of preserving its long-standing traditions. Hence, the society that surrounds him imposes itself strongly, which implies that its members are expected to abide very carefully by these social rules. For example, as mentioned before, Okonkwo is banished for the perceived need to protect and respect the clan’s strict tribal customs. Since social responsibility is predominant in his society and authority mainly lies in the hands of other members of his community, Okonkwo is forced to conform to rules over which he has little control, if he is to fulfil his ambition to be seen as the strongest member of the clan.

More specifically, some of these rules are irrational and superstitious, although this makes them all the more appropriate for Okonkwo, as he embodies the literary tragic hero through his suicide. In this sense, fate plays a key role in determining many of his actions and reactions in relation to his violations. For example, one of the incidents leading to Okonkwo’s exile and loss of status involves his accidental killing of a boy during a funeral. Although this is unintentional, the incident is seen as a curse and a violation of community values. The controversial question that arises is that although the two incidents are clear violations of the Umuofia clan’s rules, the reader may wonder why Okonkwo is exiled for

³² The subjective experience of an individual who feels invisible because they are abandoned, ignored, or excluded by others (Chandler and Munday, 2016).

seven years for *accidentally* killing a sixteen-year-old boy, whereas he is not banished for *deliberately* killing his adoptive son, Ikemefuna, despite being warned not to do so. The answer to this lies in the fact that the sixteen-year-old boy belongs to the same tribe as Okonkwo, while Ikemefuna was adopted from another tribe, and the rules only apply to members of the Umuofia clan. However, in a moral sense, Okonkwo has still violated the rules of his own tribe and deserves punishment, regardless of the nature of his violations. In this regard, I consider guilt to be relative and socially constructed in *Things Fall Apart* and understanding the representations of guilt in the novel is crucial to understanding Okonkwo's actions and reactions. More specifically, despite the irrational belief system that prevails in *Things Fall Apart*, based on superstition and implying very little accountability and responsibility on the part of Okonkwo, the protagonist eventually lives up to his responsibilities by observing the very strict rules of his clan. Consequently, guilt is ultimately presented as a social concept, which is only validated by a corresponding code of conduct.

Thus, based on the premise that guilt is socially constructed, in the sense that Okonkwo conforms to the rules (superstitions) of his clan, it follows that his self-destruction is brought about by his dual responsibility, namely to the rational beliefs of the colonisers and the irrational beliefs of his community. Conversely, Okonkwo is convinced that the new religion, i.e. Christianity, and the concept of the Trinity are irrational; therefore, "he shrugged his shoulders and went away to tap his afternoon palm wine" (Achebe, 1958, p.48). Nevertheless, the Christian missionaries continue to believe that their European heritage, including their religion, is the only trustworthy doctrine to believe in. Achebe skillfully demonstrates through this juxtaposition that rationality — as opposed to illogic and the absence of reason, which is objective — can be a highly subjective and culturally determined concept. Because the Christian missionaries could never embrace the apparent irrationality of Igbo superstition,³³ a discourse of 'Self' versus 'Other' begins to destroy the indigenous African community, due to the extreme contradiction between the social inferiority of the Igbo community and the imposed superiority of the Christian missionaries, who believe their Christian identity to be the only acceptable value system.

Another point that the Christian missionaries fail to understand is the role played by indigenous culture in helping to secure communal ties, social cohesion and collective survival, before the arrival of white colonialists. The impact of this contradiction upon

³³ For example, when the leaders of the clan would assemble to discuss and pass judgement on a matter. Those leaders have been replaced by the courts since the arrival of the white colonialists. Another example of this is when the clan decide that Ikemefuna must be killed, in order to avoid bloodshed and war with a neighbouring clan.

Okonkwo is to make him more determined to defend his cultural beliefs and homeland, especially on returning from exile. Five months after his return to Umuofia, he is extremely shocked that his own son, Nwoye has converted to Christianity and is “now called Isaac” (Achebe, 1958, p.59).

As Said (1978) illustrates in *Orientalism*, the language of the European enlightenment can be divisive when it fails to take into account the cultural specificity of colonised communities. He explains:

‘Our’ values were (let us say) liberal, humane, correct; they were supported by the tradition of belles-lettres, informed scholarship, rational inquiry; as Europeans (and white men) ‘we’ shared in them every time their virtues were extolled...For every idea about ‘our’ [heritage]...another link in the chain binding ‘us’ together was formed while another outsider was banished. (Said, 1978, pp.227-228)

Thus, due to this European language, the legacy of the Self versus the Other, and the inability of the European colonisers to understand Igbo culture, Okonkwo gradually approaches his demise through self-destruction. In other words, Okonkwo’s outright rejection of the white man in his own land, his complete refusal to accept the conversion of his own son, Nwoye to Christianity, and his outrage at the apparent weakness and failure of his own clansmen in the face of the colonisers (“worthy men are no more”) (Achebe, 1958, p.65), he feels unable to return to Umuofia, especially as he realises that his fellow tribe members will no longer fight with him against the white invaders: “He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they [his fellow clan members] had let the other messengers escape” (Achebe, 1958, p.67).

The term, ‘pacification’, as used in the title of a fictional book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (which a colonial official declares he will write after observing Okonkwo’s actions in *Things Fall Apart*) refers to the infantile nature of subjugated African communities, who have been weakened to the extent that they have no experience of defending themselves or attacking others. Similarly, Reverend Smith, also in *Things Fall Apart*, perceives the Igbo Umuofia community to be both barbarous and ‘childish’ and therefore like a group of children, who can be easily driven and controlled by a pacifier. Said describes this type of disregard as ‘existential weightlessness’ (Said, 1978, p.247), which is the ‘nothingness’ assigned by white colonisers to the black colonised. It is anthropological thinking that regards the Other as ‘the childish primitive’ (ibid.). In this regard, power and status are to be consumed by the hand of the white coloniser, whereas weakness and worthlessness are to be consumed by the hand of the black colonised. Therefore, a society that gives up its power structure to another (in this case, a European

colonising community) will no longer be able to function normally. Since Okonkwo has already lost his community, wealth and status, due to his alienation, his suicide at the end of the novel is a physical representation of the social death he has already suffered in his community. By its very nature, suicide is a free choice, but in Okonkwo's case, it is motivated by values and forces that are beyond his control.

By highlighting Okonkwo's social death, the arrival of European culture and Christianity almost renders his physical death symbolically redundant. In other words, the arrival of the white man already signifies a death sentence for Okonkwo and his culture. This adds to his rejection from his own community, especially when most of his fellow clan members 'defect' to the culture of the white colonisers. Another social death in the story can be seen at the hands of Reverend Smith, an extreme racist who oversees the missionary work and bears severe disdain for the native Igbo population and their religious beliefs; he "[sees] things as black and white. And black [is] evil" (Achebe, 1958, p.60). He considers African culture, especially Igbo culture, to be a phenomenon that should be dissected and fully comprehended by 'rational' colonialists. This perception could go hand in hand with Wordsworth's 'The Tables Turned' (1798),³⁴ a poem in which the poet states: "We murder to dissect." According to Wordsworth, the true beauty of nature has been spoiled by its brutal 'dissection'. Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart*, the dissected Umuofia community is treated scornfully, as though it is invisible, with no real presence in the world. By referring to the way that Reverend Smith looks upon the Igbo people and their culture, and Wordsworth's comment on the decay and damage perpetrated upon nature by man, we may conclude that both processes ultimately lead to dissection, with extreme impact in each case: the tarnishing of nature's beauty and the disintegration of Igbo culture.

In an examination of the final phase of Okonkwo's struggles after the arrival of the white British colonisers, two primary observations strike the reader concerning the manner of his suicide, since it carries cultural significance that transcends its material circumstances. First, suicide is a grave and unforgivable sin in Igbo culture: "It is against our custom" states one member of the clan, "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth" (Achebe, 1958, p.68). Okonkwo's suicide therefore indicates that he has reached a stage where he no longer fully adheres to the social or moral conventions and values of his tribe. He has exhausted his capacity to prioritise his concept of identity, within the parameters of his community, over his concept of the individual Self. It is as if his destiny

³⁴William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was an English poet, associated with the British Romantic Movement. For an insight into his intertextuality and main themes, where mankind is considered to learn more from nature than from books, it is recommended to read his poem, *The Tables Turned* (1798).

is to be part of something greater than himself. Throughout his life, he has sacrificed his emotions and personal preferences for the sake of his community and to please the elders, who keep demanding more sacrifices. When his community disintegrates and abandons him, it is no longer possible for him to give his social identity precedence over the Self. Therefore, the relationship between these two constructs is irrevocably terminated. Because he is a warrior, his body goes through the motions of his social function to guarantee the physical survival of his clan. It is therefore merely a vessel for his identity. The absence of a communal identity, which would enable him to fulfil a dignified and privileged social role, means that he now views his body as disposable flesh.

The second observation regarding Okonkwo's suicide concerns his disillusionment over the apparent betrayal and cowardice of some of his fellow tribesmen in the face of the Christian missionaries. Although his community has utter disregard for his individualism, Okonkwo does not defect to the European side, despite European culture claiming to advocate individual choice and responsibility. Okonkwo eventually perceives both cultures (Western and African) as an affront to individual choice. His suicide is therefore a definitive statement of pride and personal choice, irrespective of the mandates of cultural forces that compete for the minds and souls of Africans. Neither his own society nor Western colonisation can give Okonkwo the sense of worth that he thinks he deserves, which is why he dissociates himself from both cultures with his suicide. Although suicide is considered by some to be a cowardly act, I believe that in Okonkwo's case, it represents the reclamation of personal worth, or a desire to define the worth of his Self, without any affiliation to an identity construct that is mandated by others.

2.6 Conclusion

Okonkwo incorporates different identities by undergoing three major transitional phases in the novel. He begins as a farmer and becomes a protestor, but is ultimately extinguished, indicating an unstable identity. Thus, the first point that may be drawn from this exposition is that Social Identity Theory, which "predicts that in each interaction, people take on a different identity" (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012) appears to be more applicable than Identity Theory, which purely concerns an individual's social circumstances.

Furthermore, in light of the final phase of Okonkwo's developing identity, it becomes clear that distinct cultural and social circumstances determine his self-destruction. That is to say, rigid tribal traditions and customs have not only controlled his life but also his death. While these traditions and customs have judged Okonkwo's acts and found them to violate

the rules and principles of the Umuofia tribe, relegating him to exile, they equally condemn his suicide an unforgivable sin, whereby “his body is an evil” (Achebe, 1958, p.68). This highlights the assumption that under Umuofia’s strict codes of behaviour, Okonkwo’s suicide is not seen as a sacrifice, but rather as a sin: “a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen” (ibid.).

Okonkwo contributes to his self-destruction, regardless of his level of guilt, violations, and role in his own downfall. In this case, the Self gradually takes precedence over the collective identity, irrespective of the differences between the transitional phases of his identity. After the loss of his social structure, family ties deteriorate and he is reduced to an alienated state, sinking into human abjection. He is merely a body, devoid of social worth and isolated from his society. Okonkwo embodies this state as an ironic representation of a tragic hero, since his flesh is not even worth disposing of according to the customs of his people — his flesh is now part of the earth itself, devoid of subjective or socially sanctioned value.

Another conclusion lies in Sartre’s notion of ‘everyday life’, which would help explain Okonkwo’s self-motivation. To elaborate on this, as a great warrior, an analysis of his self-destruction would reveal his social status and existential crisis as dissatisfaction with the state of normalcy in his life, especially at the beginning of the novel. The harmony of Okonkwo’s life includes the specific religion and customs of his tribe, and the social obligations and expectations that accompany these customs.

Near the barn was a small house, the ‘medicine house’ or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children. (Achebe, 1958, p.4)

As the plot of *Things Fall Apart* concerns the dominance of whites over blacks, Said’s cultural critique of colonial rhetoric in *Orientalism* may be cited, in which Said illustrates how the essence of European culture is its dominance over other cultures; the notion that European identity is the only applicable value system. Said therefore contends that:

Indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. (Said, 1978, p.7)

This illustration allows for a more accurate assessment of Okonkwo’s desire to commit suicide than the customary perception that this is a self-inflicted choice. In contrast, the reader may conclude that Okonkwo is “a man of action, a man of war” (Achebe, 1958, p.3),

who attempts to cling to 'superiority' and the "Self" rather than 'inferiority' and the concept of 'Other'. It is as if Achebe is in some way striving to reverse the pattern of black peoples failing to achieve 'superiority' and the 'Self'. Despite his attempts to retain his sense of 'superiority' and 'Self', however, Okonkwo decides to die as an independent entity, rather than remain alive as a colonised one, especially when he realises that his fellow Igbos will no longer fight with him against British colonisation. Finally, we can conclude that African identity may at best be 'existential' but can never be 'stable'.

Chapter Three: Social Alienation - An Existential and Post-colonial Sense of Self-destruction in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

Umuofia is an Ibo village in Eastern Nigeria and the home town of Obi Okonkwo. It is not a particularly big village but its inhabitants call it a town. They are very proud of its past when it was the terror of their neighbours, before the white man came and levelled everybody down. Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves) who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners. (Achebe, 1961, p.4)

If, however, existence truly does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. (Sartre, 1996, p.23)

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities, mostly in conflict with each other, all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian. (Said, 2012a, p.5)

3.1 Introduction

Set in the late 1950's on the verge of Nigeria's independence, Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960) highlights a topic of cross-cultural and critical debate by juxtaposing the relationship between two extremely different cultures: British and Igbo. In particular, the spotlight is projected onto this relationship, in order to examine the cross-cultural influences and tragic consequences that eventually lead to the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo's self-destruction. This is an educated young man, caught between the two contrasting cultures. However, in this chapter, I explore a different type of self-destruction: the 'double heritage' that falls between the two cultures, wherein Obi finds himself to be an 'outsider' in his own home country. This is caused by a unique and dramatic culture shock, and the ensuing spiritual self-destruction is profoundly influential on the way in which Obi's identity is destabilised; socially alienated as a result of his education abroad.

The character of Obi, a young educated Igbo man in England, embodies many aspects of cultural ambivalence and displacement. Ironically, his education in England provides him with neither wisdom, nor the solid financial and social status that he needs to fight for idealism in the face of corruption in Nigeria. Rather, it imposes many different financial burdens on him, ultimately leading him to accept bribes, despite his Western idealism. These financial obligations include paying his scholarship debts back to the Umuofia Progressive Union, paying his younger brother's tuition fees, ensuring a respectable standard of living for his impoverished parents, and finally, accepting a bribe that he has previously rejected.

Another factor in his sense of alienation is religion. Born to strict Christian converts, Obi is less conservative than his parents, especially his father, Isaac Nwoye Okonkwo. His father, Nwoye, is the eldest son of Okonkwo, the tragic central character of *Things Fall Apart*. This religious conflict between Obi and his parents introduces the third domain in which Obi experiences a huge social and cultural gap within his own society, namely marriage. Here, Obi is prevented from marrying his girlfriend, Clara, because she is an Osu, which means that she is descended from outcasts. Moreover, despite Obi's especially close bond with his mother, Hannah, particularly in her love of traditional storytelling, as Obi loves listening to these folktales, it is his mother who threatens suicide if he marries Clara.

Although the focus of this chapter is on *No Longer at Ease*, a comparison will be made with its prequel, *Things Fall Apart*, in terms of the historical background of each novel; the effect of British dominance over Igbo society being a crucial factor. Thus, while *Things Fall Apart* centres upon the disappearance of traditional Igbo values as a consequence of British colonialism, *No Longer at Ease* addresses the struggle between the ability or inability of local communities to deal with this newly imposed culture. The question that arises for the reader is therefore whether *No Longer at Ease* is about cultural contact or cultural conflict. To critically discuss this polemical point, I contend that the difference between who Obi freely desires to be and whom he is forced to be emerge as a key theme, regardless of whether the novel is about cultural contact or cultural conflict. By examining his relationship with Clara, his education in England, and various other aspects of his life, I will attempt to show the complex ways in which his life is marked by both contact and conflict. In the sense of cultural contact, Obi's insistence on marrying Clara, the girl with whom he is in love and wishes to marry, despite his parents' intense resistance to the idea, because she is an Osu, is a sign of reinforced internal African integration, which has been destroyed by British colonisation. As a result, it is Obi's existential free will and responsibility that motivate him to marry Clara. Conversely, his strict parents and culture prevent him from doing so. Another example is Obi's education in England, where he makes the autonomous decision to transfer his study area from Law to English Literature, despite the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union wanting him to study Law, so that he can "handle all their land cases against their neighbours" (Achebe, 1961, p.7). Thus, this change in his educational direction may be viewed as a sign that such 'land cases' can be resolved by strengthening and supporting cultural contact and integration within Igbo society, rather than by engaging in cultural conflict.

Nevertheless, there are many indications in the novel that Obi's journey towards change in Nigeria is about conflict rather than integration. There is also the notion that this conflict is repetitive and beyond the boundaries of culture. One of the best examples of this is Obi's wonderment that "he should be put up in proper fashion at a hotel" (Achebe, 1961, p.35). Furthermore, when Obi asks his friend Joseph about sharing a room with him, as he had done previously, before leaving Nigeria, he is shocked by Joseph's enquiry, which points to Obi's separation from his native community: "What will the people of other towns say when they hear that a son of Umuofia returned from England and shared a room in Obalende?" (ibid., p.36). A further illustration of Obi's lack of contact is his relationship with Clara, where he is bewildered that she does not allow him to inform his parents about their love affair: "Why did Clara insist that he must not tell his people about her yet? Could it be that she had not quite made up her mind to marry him?" (ibid., p.44). In this sense, the topic of sexuality, which is the most intimate and powerful of human affairs, alerts the reader of a new angle on this encounter.

Aside from the above, Obi and Clara, despite their common national origin, share neither the same culture nor interests: he loves treading T.S. Elliot, while she loves watching films. Additionally, despite the fact that they have both studied abroad in England and therefore, their tastes have been Westernised, there are many paradoxes between them, as mentioned earlier. In this regard, a shared background involving Western education and adaptation appear helpless to enhance their love affair or cultural contact. This assumption provides strong impetus for the reader to reflect on whether Obi is suffering a form of 'social alienation' that already existed in his society before colonisation, or due to 'colonial alienation', caused by the British colonial presence.

Commenting on this sense of pre-existing social alienation in Umuofia society, critics such as Frank (2011, p.1089) attribute Obi's isolation, not only to his "racially based colonial alienation" and Western education, but also to this 'social alienation'. Frank argues that it precedes the alienation caused by British colonisation. At a deeper level, Obi's alienation does not consistently result from either his education in England or British colonisation. Rather, Frank disputes that at least in historical terms, it is the outcome of separate states being created by force in Nigeria; a nation comprising many different tribes, each with its distinct language and culture (ibid., p.1096). Gikandi (1991, p.8) also claims that "the nation in Africa is an arbitrary and often a fictional colonial creation". This is a likely explanation of why the Umuofia clan "see themselves as foreigners in the national community" (ibid., p.85). Achebe himself refers to this in *No Longer at Ease*, when the president of the Umuofia

Progressive Union declares: “we are strangers in this land” (Achebe, 1961, p.6). However, what is perhaps more worthy of analysis is Achebe’s portrayal of the Umuofians as ‘strangers’ and ‘sojourners’ in their own society.³⁵

As a continuation of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe skillfully depicts the ultimate power and integration of the Umuofia tribe, which totally collapses after the arrival of the ‘white man’ in *Things Fall Apart*. Hence, in *No Longer at Ease*, he attributes the weakness and disintegration of the Umuofia (their sense of being ‘strangers’ and ‘sojourners’ in Igbo society) to British colonisation, clarifying that

Umuofia is an Ibo village in Eastern Nigeria and the home town of Obi Okonkwo. It is not a particularly big village but its inhabitants call it a town. They are very proud of its past when it was the terror of their neighbours, before the white man came and levelled everybody down. Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves) who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners. (Achebe, 1961, p.4)

Seemingly, while Frank and Gikandi attribute this sense of ‘social alienation’ amongst the Umuofia tribe to history; in *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe offers an alternative interpretation by attributing it to the *impact* of British colonisation and Western education, rather than to the mere fact of colonisation itself, as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*. Furthermore, *No Longer at Ease* focuses on Obi’s own sense of alienation by illustrating an internal African clash between Obi and his native society, especially when he returns from England. This eventually results in his tragic self-destruction and downfall.

Stressing the importance of ‘tragic choice’, rather than the conflict between two extremely different cultures, Singh (1989) argues that *No Longer at Ease* is clearly centred upon the clash between British Western culture and Igbo traditional culture, as an effect of colonisation. Nevertheless, Singh adds that what is less apparent and more controversial is Obi’s ‘tragic choice’ between ‘opposing values’ and the ones that he ultimately chooses to embrace. This ‘tragic choice’ reveals Obi’s dilemma, arising from a ‘double heritage’, not only in his relationship with his beloved Clara, but also in his broader plight of ‘idealism’ versus ‘corruption’, or in his acceptance or refusal of a bribe, which is completely at odds with his idealistic journey towards change by the end of the novel (Singh, 1989, pp.159-65).

Other critics, thriving on textual polemics, often regard *No Longer at Ease* as one of the most important African novels to explore cross-cultural identity: “a result of both the intrinsic nature of Igbo society and the advent of [British] colonialism” (Gandhi, 2012, p.55).

³⁵ Again, as hinted at in Chapter One of this thesis, it is another instance of Achebe’s refusal to idealise his characters.

However, the novel not only reveals Obi's experience, caught as he is between the British culture that is instilled in him during his education in England, and his own native Igbo values, but also the rift with his strict Christian convert parents, whereby Obi feels like an 'outsider', a stranger in his own society rather than in England. Such a claim corresponds to well-established theories in the field of cultural identity, as in Said's (1993) comment: "it is also true that in the main we have rarely been so fragmented, so sharply reduced, and so completely diminished in our sense of what our true (as opposed to asserted) cultural identity is" (Said, 1993, p.319). This is what generally characterises the relationship between a previously colonised nation and a coloniser.

Stripping it of its cultural and post-colonial provenance, Brown (1972) views Obi, in his problematic sense of social alienation, "as the graduate of a British university [who] has been sufficiently westernized to feel alienated from the old dispensation of his Nigerian background" (p.25). By comparing Obi's sense of alienation in *No Longer at Ease* with that of his grandfather, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, the reader will recognise that this phenomenon is part of a cyclic 'historical perception'. Hence, Obi's education, individualism and adaptation to the West sets him apart from his own family and society, while Okonkwo's severe impetuous enthusiasm causes a clash between himself and his fellow members of the Umuofia clan. Thus, Achebe's narrative in *No Longer at Ease* recalls and reincarnates the tragedy of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Furthermore, although both novels are set in different colonial periods, and Achebe switches his historical concern from pre-colonial Umuofia, as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*, to the post-colonial Umuofia of *No Longer at Ease*, both novels share a similar central theme: the tragedy of men seeking change.

Critically speaking, what appears to be worthier of analysis is the brand-new impact of British dominance (colonisation) over Igbo society (the colonised) in *No Longer at Ease*, presented as a sense of estrangement and 'double heritage', falling between two stools. This impact exceeds the limits of mere inconsistency and aggressiveness, as depicted in *Things Fall Apart*; becoming a portrait of social alienation and struggle within Igbo society in *No Longer at Ease*, as a result of Western colonisation and Western education. Consequently, from a predominantly historical and colonial perspective, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* implies that the successful integration of Igbo society is ultimately impossible and doomed to failure, even if it sometimes shows certain consistencies.

The questions that arise here are: What is the true cause of Obi's sense of estrangement from his society, his Western education/adaptation, inculcated within him in England, or the

colonisation that already existed before he left Nigeria, as some critics assume? To what extent does education abroad, religion and a cross-cultural gap influence Obi's tragic end? How can Obi's idealism serve as a tool against corruption? What thematic message is Achebe attempting to convey, especially to young educated Nigerians? What is the true reason behind Obi's acceptance of bribes, despite his initial rejection of them? Finally, how can Obi's existential experience of free choice and responsibility be seen as extended and universal, rather than merely individual in light of Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946)? In the following sections of this chapter, an attempt will be made to answer³⁶ these questions by concentrating on specific thematic issues in the novel, including cross-cultural juxtapositions in the journey towards change under a 'double heritage': idealism versus corruption, the influence of education abroad, the eventual downfall, cultural and social mistakes, financial crises, and existential struggles. These struggles are connected with man's absolute freedom, which implies a universal responsibility, as opposed to a purely individual one.

3.2 The Influence of Western Education: The Irony of Helpless and Hopeless

Integration within Igbo Society

Very often, novels set in post-colonial Africa present the relationship between the white coloniser and black colonised as one of conflict, characterised by struggle and violence. However, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, set in the late 1950s' on the verge of Nigeria's independence, suggests another reading, solely to provide grounds for other controversial perspectives, namely the internal struggles within Igbo society itself, including marriage to an Osu, and Western idealism and morality in the face of corruption.

Despite the novel containing many white characters who stand for the presence of British colonisation in Nigeria, such as Mr. Green, Obi's arrogant and prejudiced boss; Miss Marie Tomlinson, Mr. Green's talkative secretary, and Obi's colleague, Obi's intense cross-cultural and troubled relationships and disparities are with members of his own society, including his beloved Clara, his parents, his close friend, Joseph, and even with himself. Such tense relationships illustrate Obi's spiritual self-destruction: his sense of being a 'stranger' and therefore 'no longer' belonging to his own society in either cultural or social terms.

³⁶ Answering these questions would involve explanation and discussion, rather than a series of points.

By focusing on the influence of Obi's education in England and his Westernised mindset, this section will endeavour to reveal Obi's sense of alienation and the failure of his relationships with fellow Africans, especially with his girlfriend Clara and his Christian convert parents. As a cause-and-effect relationship, the impact of Obi's education and his Western adaptation in England highlights some of the struggles and paradoxes that he faces in his own society; eventually resulting in his tragic spiritual self-destruction. These struggles include cultural and social gaps, social alienation and a failed love affair.

In fact, it is not difficult for the reader to trace the paradoxes between Obi and his fellow Africans, who have never visited England. For example, the conversation between Obi and his close friend, Joseph concerning his intended marriage to Clara, an Osu, illustrates such apparent inconsistencies, which make Obi seem like a 'stranger' in his native society.

“Look at me,” said Joseph, getting up and tying his coverlet as a loincloth. He now spoke in English. “You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an osu is? But how can you know?” In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country - the most painful thing one could say to Obi. (Achebe, 1961, p.72)

Nevertheless, what is more difficult to trace, and therefore requires attention here, is the relationship between Obi and Clara, which is basically a manifestation of Western culture being absorbed due to education and physical displacement. It reveals the complex inconsistencies between the thinking, cultures and respective societies of these characters, even though they both come from the same country. Thus, even though Obi applies all his strength to maintain an intimate and enduring relationship with Clara, his parents terminate it abruptly and forcibly, due to internal cultural and social conflicts within Igbo society. This occurs to the extent that his mother threatens to commit suicide if he marries Clara: “if you do the thing [marriage] while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself. She sank down completely exhausted” (ibid., p.136). To the astonishment of the reader, the education and Western adaptation of both Obi and Clara, combined with their open-mindedness, fail to save their marriage in Umuofia.

Consequently, although Clara's pregnancy may initially delude the reader into presuming that social integration is possible within Igbo society, or at least gives hope of a new generation, it transpires that Achebe challenges notions of British colonisation; instead, depicting Igbo society as one with its own culture and values. Therefore, it was not the British who introduced culture and values into Umuofia. In fact, the Umuofia's strict customs and deep-rooted values override Western education, Western open-mindedness and

even pregnancy. This is perhaps why Achebe includes Clara's abortion in the plot. Commenting on rigid and powerful African ties and values, even the open-minded Christopher, a young Igbo who has also studied in England, comments:

You may say that I am not broad-minded, but I don't think we have reached the stage where we can ignore all our customs. You may talk about education and so on, but I am not going to marry an Osu. (Achebe, 1961, p.144)

Metaphorically speaking, Clara's abortion is intended to symbolise the abortive relationship and disaffection from Igbo society, rather than making a literal statement about abortion. Due to colonisation and imperialism, the failure to integrate two black educated and Westernised characters into a very strict African community echoes one of the most significant proclamations made by Said (1993) in *Culture and Imperialism*, which assumes that the injustices of empire have created a common sphere of historical experience:

One of imperialism's achievements was to bring the world closer together, and although in the process the separation between Europeans and natives was an insidious and fundamentally unjust one, most of us should now regard the historical experience of empire as a common one. (p.xxii)

To a great extent, *No Longer at Ease* depicts no integration, neither between 'Europeans' nor 'natives' in Igbo society, to quote Said. Instead, what seems more significant in describing disintegration, especially in relation to a society where native Africans feel like outsiders and that they no longer belong, either physically or spiritually, is Said's *Out of Place* (1999).³⁷

Achebe's socio-political criticism is projected through the irony of Obi and Clara's education in England. To elaborate on this further, just as their Western adaptation fails to preserve their marriage, which Igbo society completely prohibits, the subjects of their studies in England fail to save them from their predicament in the narrative. Thus, Clara's training as a nurse does not help her with her abortion and neither does Obi's English Literature degree support him in his Western idealism and open-mindedness. Consequently, he is unable to marry Clara and cannot fight corruption in his society.³⁸ The reader becomes aware of this irony later in the novel, due to Achebe's flashback narrative technique, as the novel begins with the events that occur at the end of the plot. This unusual narrative technique and sequence of events is not intended to play down the conflict between British culture and traditional Igbo values, but rather to intensify the conflict between them, so that it becomes

³⁷ I will refer to this point in subsequent sections, where I will endeavour to show how Said's 'double perspective' and Bhabha's 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' help elaborate on Obi's identity as an outsider in his own society, due to the effect of both colonisation and Western adaptation.

³⁸ Again, Said's comment, cited earlier, is also relevant here, since injustice is a common legacy of colonialism.

impossible to resolve. However, at first, Mr. Green is to some extent sympathetic to Obi in his tragic downfall, stating:

Mercifully, he had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life. The two events following closely on each other had dulled his sensibility and left him a different man, able to look words like 'education' and 'promise'³⁹ squarely in the face. (Achebe, 1961, p.2)

Nevertheless, the following conversation that takes place between Mr. Green and a British Counsel representative in a bar, where they discuss Obi's bribery trial, reveals the uncompromising and reluctant conflict between the British (coloniser) and the Umuofians (colonised). Here, the two characters claim that it was the British who introduced education and idealism to the Africans, but according to Mr. Green, Africans are "corrupt through and through":

I cannot understand why he did it," [...] "I can," said Mr. Green. "What I can't understand is why people like you refuse to face facts." Mr. Green was famous for speaking his mind. He wiped his red face with the white towel on his neck. "The African is corrupt through and through." [...] "They are all corrupt," repeated Mr. Green. "I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won't alter facts." "What facts?" asked the British Council man. [...] "The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically.⁴⁰ We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?" (Achebe, 1961, p.3)

Achebe's ironic sociopolitical criticism successfully conveys to the reader that Obi's English Literature degree has not equipped him with the ideals that he needs to fight corruption in Umuofia. Therefore, one wonders why Obi changed his degree subject from Law. Alternatively, it is even more ironic that Obi's Law studies in England do not help with his defence in the trial. Therefore, he is unable to come to an arrangement that could resolve his problem or at least reduce his penalty. Achebe's autobiographical narrative may have influenced the inclusion of this change, because Achebe himself transferred from medicine to English Literature at university. Regardless of the underlying reason for this detail, however, Achebe ironically portrays Obi's 'Western education' as powerless and ineffective.

³⁹ The power of words in themselves on the mind is interrogated here, since 'education' and 'promise' are associated with the West, with Europe.

⁴⁰ This is the classic approach to non-European corruption, which is based on the assumption that it is something to do with the undeveloped 'character' of a given country, with corruption being able to flourish in such an environment, as if colonisation had nothing to do with it. For more on this debate, see van den Bersselaar and Decker (2011).

By skillfully employing irony to show that any attempt at compromise or accord in Igbo society is doomed to failure, due to imposed Western culture and education, Achebe goes further by building and then deconstructing hope. Thus, *No Longer at Ease* lacks optimism or any sense of joy, most significantly at the beginning of the novel. Unlike any other of Achebe's novels, what distinguishes *No Longer at Ease* is the use of a flashback technique, whereby readers are told about Obi's tragic downfall at the very beginning, rather than at the end. This is in contrast to the tragic end of Obi's grandfather in *Things Fall Apart*. If Achebe had not used this technique, the reader would have nurtured the hope that Obi's goal of combating corruption in Nigeria through the spread of Western idealism had been successful. Distinguishing between 'conventional' and 'real' tragedy, where the latter is completely 'hopeless', Obi states that it is an issue that will "never [be] resolved":

Real tragedy is never resolved. It goes on hopelessly for ever. Conventional tragedy is too easy. The hero dies and we feel a purging of the emotions. A real tragedy takes place in a corner, in an untidy spot, to quote W. H. Auden. (Achebe, 1961, p.39)

The most notable examples of hopelessness in the novel and therefore, unattainable compromise within Igbo society, lie in Obi's idealism and marriage. Whilst idealism is indicative of his own personal struggle with himself, his intended marriage to Clara reveals his struggle with his native Igbo society, especially with his parents. Obi, who is completely immersed in Western idealism, due to his education abroad, displays an extreme contradiction between his integrity and his eventual actions; most notably, his willingness to accept 'bribes'. However, the reader is made patently aware of Obi's independence and self-reliance throughout the narrative. For example, he chooses to take out a bank loan, rather than borrow money from Clara, even though she insists on giving him money when she finds out about the loan. Another example of his overall transparency and integrity is his request that the Umuofia Progressive Union allow him a four-month window before he begins repaying his scholarship loan, where he explains:

I have one little request to place before you. As you all know, it takes a little time to settle down again after an absence of four years. I have many little private matters to settle. My request is this, that you give me four months before I start to pay back my loan. (Achebe, 1961, p.81)

Moreover, an indication of Obi's moral and self-reliant nature is his loan of thirty pounds to Charles, a courier in his department. He lends this money; despite being financially broken himself. In light of these illustrations of Obi's character, the reader may well wonder why he takes bribes later in the novel, especially given his education and proven integrity. He had even previously rejected Mr. Mark's offer of a bribe on behalf of his sister, who needed

scholarship funds to study in England. If we attribute the reason for his corruption to his relationship with Clara, as claimed by one member of the Umuofia Progressive Union: “We paid eight hundred pounds to train him in England, but instead of being grateful he insults us because of a useless girl” (Achebe, 1961, p.5), then we strike at the heart of the controversy in the novel. However, due to the sequence of events in Achebe’s narrative, the reader is made aware of Obi and Clara’s broken engagement before learning about Obi’s first bribe. More specifically, while Chapter Fifteen of the novel describes the final rupture of the engagement, Chapter Seventeen recounts Obi’s first attempt to receive a bribe. In this sense, the reader comes to understand that Obi has nothing to lose or care about anymore. This alone introduces ambiguity and controversy, leading to the assumption that Obi’s struggle is purely due to an intense and hopeless sense of alienation, like nothing that he has ever experienced before. Finally, through his ironic sociopolitical criticism, Achebe highlights a particular influence of Western education and adaptation on Igbo society, namely that of disintegration, social alienation, conflict and tragedy, rather than integration.

3.3 Obi’s Unstable Identity: Foreshadowing a Tragic End

The previous section of this chapter revealed Obi’s tragic spiritual self-destruction, stemming from his sense of being a stranger in his native Igbo community. This pivots on the influence of his Western education, his process of adaptation, and his relationships with specific characters in the novel. In this section, the effect of social alienation on Obi’s identity will be examined, drawing upon Said’s literary critique in *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999) and *Representations of the Intellectual* (1993), as well as Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994).⁴¹ Based on cause and effect, I would argue that what was an *effect* in the previous section becomes a *cause* in this one. In other words, Obi’s Western education and adaptation cause him to become a stranger, with the effect of socially alienating from his native society, as shown in the previous section. Consequently, the crux of this section is to build on this schema by examining the influence of such strangeness and social alienation (the cause) on Obi’s hybrid and unstable identity (the effect). In so doing, I will endeavour to identify the cultural and social challenges that he faces within his society by exploring the difference between his *intrinsic* African identity and his *adopted* Western identity. By drawing upon existing literary criticism and critical theory, especially Said’s concept of

⁴¹ Two of the most prominent intellectuals in the field of comparative literature and cultural criticism, whose works mainly address the influence of adopted Western culture (the Self) on foreigners or strangers (the Other), especially on how they come to behave as a result of such an adaptation.

'double perspective' and Bhabha's 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence', this paper will illustrate the extent to which such a difference can become a struggle within Igbo society.

The contributions of both Said and Bhabha are indeed helpful in examining Obi's hybrid and fragmented identity, as well as his tragic experiences; not only as a result of his adopted Western culture and education abroad, but also due to the imposed Western culture that already exists in Umuofia due to British colonisation. This difference, i.e. the struggle between an imposed culture, which is primarily manifested in Obi's *adopted* Western thinking and behaviour and *imposed* religion (Christianity), reinforces his sense of alienation from his own people by widening the cultural and social gap, wherein his identity appears torn and lost. Critically speaking, the reader will clearly recognise the clash between Obi's mindset and that of the characters who have never visited England and who therefore embrace a different culture. Most notably, these characters include his strict Christian convert parents and Joseph. However, what will astonish the reader is the controversial depiction of a clash between Obi's mentality and that of other educated characters in the novel: characters who have also studied in England and whom one would expect to be as open-minded as Obi, most notably, Clara and Christopher. This conflict burdens Obi even further, rather than mitigating his struggles, especially in relation to his intended marriage to Clara. Likewise, although Christopher is apparently open-minded due to having studied abroad, he is completely opposed to the idea of Obi marrying Clara, an Osu, declaring: "you may talk about *education* and so on, but I *am not going* to marry an Osu" (Achebe, 1961, p.144).

Although the British presence portrayed in *No Longer at Ease* is not as influential as in *Things Fall Apart*, Christianity remains a prominent feature of imposed British control over Igbo society in both novels. Here, the effect of religion on social and domestic struggles within Igbo society are highlighted, especially the irreconcilable conflict between Okonkwo and his converted son, Nwoye in *Things Fall Apart*, and the wide religious gap between Nwoye and his Western-educated son, Obi in *No Longer at Ease*: the latter "had read his verses so badly at prayers that evening", using the Igbo language, but Nwoye assumed that this was because the Bible Obi recited from in England was "written in the English language" (ibid., p.57). In this regard, Nwoye (who is now Isaac Nwoye Okonkwo, a Christian convert) embodies a close-knit family link between the grandfather, Okonkwo and the grandson, Obi Okonkwo. Hence, although Obi is the main focus of this current chapter of the thesis, the portrayal of Isaac Nwoye Okonkwo as the continuation of a religious theme must not be overlooked when exploring the difference between Obi's intrinsic and adopted identity.

It is therefore clear that the adoption of British culture through education is more prominent in *No Longer at Ease* than in *Things Fall Apart*. However, Christianity is portrayed as a shared theme, imposed by British colonisation in both novels. Here, I will begin to explore the effect of Obi's sense of social alienation, resulting from his Western education and adaptation, whereby his identity is split into a 'double perspective' (Said, 2012b, p.60). This introduces what Bhabha (1994, p.85) describes as 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence'. Such critical terms and ideas can serve as helpful tools in unravelling the complexity of Obi's identity as a native Nigerian with an adopted Western identity, further complicated by the influence of a religion imposed by British colonisation. This complex, culturally hybrid identity lies at the core of *No Longer at Ease*, due to the coming together of two dramatically contrasting cultures in Igbo society, which has its own strict traditions and customs.

Obi's identity is elucidated in Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture* and Said's (2012a) *Out of Place*, as well as in an essay by the latter, entitled 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals', which is included in *Representations of the Intellectual* (Said, 1012b). I venture that what makes Obi's partly Westernised identity stand out in comparison to the identities of either Clara or Christopher is his 'double perspective', 'ambivalence' and 'mimicry' of the West. Moreover, this not only indicates social alienation from his native society, but also foreshadows his tragic downfall. The following paragraphs will gradually introduce, define and explain how these terms relate to Obi's tragic sense of having two identities (inherent and adopted), ultimately leading to his identity crisis.

Okonkwo, Obi's grandfather (the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*) and Obi himself in *No Longer at Ease* have different reasons for their physical remoteness. While Okonkwo is obliged to deal with physical displacement due to his seven-year exile, Obi's physical remoteness is due to studying abroad for four years. As a result, Obi's physical remoteness highlights his social alienation and struggles within his society. Therefore, his identity can never be seen as stable, but rather as fragmented. He typifies the social alienation of Achebe's main characters, especially in the trilogy: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*. Nevertheless, what distinguishes Obi's identity from that of the other characters in these novels is the notion that his identity is *no longer* attached to his society and this connection was lost due to his education abroad. Unlike his grandfather, whose physical displacement through exile does not sever or even weaken his attachment to Umuofia, but rather strengthens and enhances his loyalty to it, Obi's separation from his clan is portrayed in numerous instances of social alienation in *No Longer at Ease*, illustrating that

he is *no longer* attached to Igbo society. For example, his broken engagement to Clara and her abortion are symbolic of separation, compounded by the death of his mother, the vast religious gap between him and his father, the cultural and social gap between him and even the educated and open-minded Christopher, and numerous other incidents in the narrative. All these point to his socially isolated identity. These incidents invoke the most painful feelings that man can ever endure, according to Said (2012a), as they result in a person being kept ‘in motion’ over long periods of time. In *Out of Place*, Said states:

Nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages environments that have kept me in motion all these years. (Said, 2012a, p.217)

Obi is neither in ‘exile’, nor is he an ‘expatriate’, but rather an African native, who feels as if he is in exile in his own country. He appears to experience the same struggles (consequences) as a person in exile: social alienation, where he even finds himself to be a stranger in his own country. More precisely, in ‘Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals’, Said (1993) comments on a character from a novel by V.S. Naipaul,⁴² whose social alienation (strangeness) makes him feel like a stranger in his country of origin, where there is growing unrest due to political turmoil. Said declares that “even the natives have become exiles in their own country” (Said, 1993, p.56), contending that this creates a ‘double perspective’, whereupon the person who experiences this kind of ‘exile’ inevitably finds him or herself to be ‘in-between’ the past and present: the country of origin that has been left behind, and what is going on ‘here and now’ in the new country. Due to this ‘double perspective’, adds Said, the person in exile cannot envisage new experiences in the isolation of the ‘new country’, but links and compares all experiences there with their equivalent in the ‘old country’:

Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. (Said, 2012b, p.60)

The combination of two different cultures explains why the dilemma of Obi’s cultural hybridity is in a constant ‘median’ or ‘in-between’ state, in that he does not feel as if he is in either the ‘old’ context of Nigeria or the ‘new’ European context of England. Consequently, he finds himself ‘*out of place*’. The outcome of this, according to Said, is either to be ‘nostalgic’ or become an ‘adept mimic’:

⁴² Salim is the protagonist and first-person narrator of Naipaul’s (1979) novel, *A Bend in the River*. He is an African-Arab of Indian descent. Twice colonised, Salim loses his identity and self-definition in his own country, which is, according to him, a ‘half-made’ society in the heart of a post-colonial Africa.

The exile therefore exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting, nor fully disencumbered of the old; beset with half-involvements and half detachments; nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another. (Said, 2012b, p.52)

The effect of this ‘double perspective’ on Obi’s identity reinforces his sense of social hybridity by establishing a “complicated, dense web of valences that [is] very much a part of growing up, [and] gaining an identity” (Said, 2012a, p.xii). In critical terms, as long as hybridity arouses social and cultural conflicts due to diverse cultural influences, Said stresses that the desire for *one* definite/single identity will prevail, even if this is an “all-Arab or an all-Western” identity, rather than the ‘double’ cultural hybrid identity that results from Obi’s education overseas:

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities, mostly in conflict with each other, all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian. (Said, 2012a, p.xii)

In highlighting its disadvantages, Obi’s sense of having hybrid ‘double perspective’ identities (Igbo and Western) reveals the ‘median state’ and ‘in-between’ cultural gaps and dilemmas that he endures in his society, which is excessively strict in its African way.⁴³ This aggravates such gaps, as his native African culture completely rejects all other cultures. Thus, Obi’s sense of social alienation and of being a stranger run into two extremes: Igbo and British. Alternatively, Obi’s complex and contradictory behaviour concerning the *advantages* of having a hybrid ‘double perspective’ identity should also be considered. For example, the mutually exclusive relationship between his Western *idealism* and *awareness*, through which Achebe portrays Obi’s unstable and ‘ambivalent’ identity, display ambiguous patterns. On the one hand, awareness is what enables the educated Obi to show his integrity by pitching his adopted Western idealism against the African corruption in his society; for instance, his repeated refusal to accept sexual and financial bribes in exchange for a scholarship to England. Another example is his resentment when the lorry driver who moves him from Lagos to Umuofia gives him ‘ten shillings’ as a bribe, so that the police officer overlooks a problem with his driving permit (Achebe, 1961, p.42). Conversely, it is this very same awareness that empowers him to receive bribes on several occasions, even though he has previously rejected them. However, Obi still recognises his potential to eliminate corruption from his society by instilling the Western idealism that he has acquired in England into the minds of Nigeria’s educated youth, in particular:

⁴³ This is to emphasise that his strict Igbo society imposes a second burden on Obi, as his mindset and thinking have become European, influenced by a completely different culture.

Obi's theory that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities was first formulated in a paper read to the Nigerian Students' Union in London. (Ibid., p.38)

Nevertheless, he ultimately discovers that his financial crisis can only be resolved by taking bribes, rather than through his Western idealism or the education that was supposed to enable him to repay his debts⁴⁴ by ensuring him a 'European post'. Obi finds that he cannot even fulfil his duties towards his family/⁴⁵ This has finally "woken him up to the real nature of his financial position".⁴⁶ Hence, he deliberately and repeatedly takes bribes until it becomes habitual (Achebe, 1961, p.99).

All that stuff about education and promise and betrayal *had not taken him unawares*. He had expected it and rehearsed this very scene a hundred times until it had become as familiar as a friend. (Ibid., p.2)

Through the mutually exclusive relationship between Obi's Western *idealism* and *awareness*, the direct relationship between the *authority* that he has in work and *corruption* comes to the fore. If Obi had attained "a European post in the Civil Service" (ibid., p.7), he would not have had the opportunity to take bribes and he would have "paid off his bank overdraft and his debt to the Hon. Sam Okoli" (ibid., p.169). Commenting on corruption in Nigeria in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe (1983) emphasises the scale of corruption in his country, plainly professing: "my frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country" (ibid., p.37). He sees the 'failure of leadership' as a key point in all Nigeria's inherent troubles such as corruption, tribalism, injustice and lack of discipline. In contrast, he believes that 'true leadership' can be achieved through 'responsibility' and 'personal example', attributing the reason for leadership failure in Nigeria to "the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership" (ibid., p.1). However, Achebe also sarcastically comments that keeping an 'average Nigerian' from corruption is like trying to prevent a "goat from eating yam" (ibid., p.38).

Emphasising the kinship and social ties of the average Igbo tribe as a close-knit community, Smith (2001) also specifically attributes the reason for corruption in Nigeria to the involvement of 'average Nigerians', which perpetuates the interdependent cycle of

⁴⁴ Debts to the Umuofia Progressive Union and to the Hon. Sam Okoli, Minister of State, who lent Obi the cost of Clara's abortion.

⁴⁵ Such as his brother's tuition fees, refurbishing his family home, and giving his father money every month.

⁴⁶ This does not mean that Obi's financial crises were the reasons why he took bribes on numerous occasions, as revealed later in Achebe's complex flashback technique; in fact, the real reason for Obi accepting bribes is ambiguous and uncertain.

'patron-clientism', reinforcing corruption as a result. The exploitation of 'kinship' and other racial ties, adds Smith, are considered reasonable attempts by ordinary citizens, especially amongst the Igbo, to engage in corruption, rather than this being merely the province of powerful 'leaders' and 'elites' (Smith, 2001, p.347). Regardless of the actors involved or their aims, however, the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria persists at all levels. People in positions of power and the ordinary man on the street are described as "corrupt through and through" (Achebe, 1961, p.3). Achebe gives a clear example of this widespread corruption in the novel, where Obi refuses Miss Mark's offer of sexual and financial bribery and subsequently has an important conversation with his close friend, Christopher, who asks: "What happened to her in the end?", whereupon Obi replies, "Oh, she is in England. She got the scholarship all right" (ibid., p.120). This strongly implies that even though Obi rejected her offer, somebody else accepted it. Obi continues: "The girl was going to be interviewed, anyway" (ibid., p.121), which highlights Achebe's objection to the endemic corruption in Nigeria.

Given that Obi's Western idealism fails to combat corruption in his society, his willingness to accept bribes repeatedly points to a state of 'ambivalence' between his intrinsic Igbo identity and his Western adopted identity. In his African identity, he is aware that accepting bribes (corruption) is inevitable if he is to resolve his financial problems, but in his Western identity, he is aware that corruption can only be eliminated by instilling idealism into the minds of his people, especially amongst the youth. To reconcile Said's 'double perspective' with Bhabha's 'ambivalence' in Obi's dual identity, both his 'in-between' and 'median-state' identities influence each other, producing 'ambivalence'. This results in his transformation from an esteemed and educated young man into an alienated and lost being in his society, where neither his idealistic Western identity nor his corrupt African identity belongs. Hence, he is disaffected from both identities.

In a similar vein, Said is conscious that neither his Western nor his Eastern identity "is watertight [and thus] each influences and plays upon the other" (Said, 2001, p.379). As a result, he is forced to face the consequences of his strangeness in both contexts (East and West), to which he no longer belongs. Thus, he is unable to locate his true identity. This confronts the reader with the complexity of a hybrid identity, where the "question is not either-or" (Gaski, 1997, p.151), but rather an 'in-between' question, which enables the individual (in this case, Said) to see things from a 'double perspective':

Consequently, self-consciousness enables both Achebe and Said to express a culturally hybrid I am a Palestinian Arab, and I am also an American. This affords

me an odd, not to say, grotesque, double perspective. In addition, I am of course an academic. (Said, 2001, p.379)

Consequently, self-consciousness enables both Achebe and Said to express a culturally hybrid identity, which poses questions that vary from one investigation to another, especially in a post-colonial context. Kobena Mercer (1990) suggests that identity cannot be a notion, unless it is attached to a crisis. Even if it is “something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable.” Mercer claims that it will be ‘displaced’ by a sense of ‘doubt’ or ‘uncertainty’ (1990, p.43). Another school of critical thought promotes the search for ‘true identities’, especially in multicultural countries, whereas others replace the old concept of a ‘self-sufficient’ identity with the new and more complex concept of unsettled ‘floating identity’ (Zhou, 2015, p.13). Despite the differences in these investigations, they share an ‘in-between’ state, where a hybrid identity sees things from a ‘double perspective’, the consequences of which are often associated with strangeness.

In No Longer at Ease, although awareness and idealism can be seen as positive qualities in culturally hybrid identities (for example, in putting an end to corruption), Said highlights that the problem of instilling such hybrid identities into the mind of the ‘Others’ does not take into consideration the fact that hybrid identity is not ‘God-given’, but rather culturally constructed. He notes that

The problem with the inculcation of cultural, national, or ethnic identity is that it takes insufficient note of how these identities are constructions, not God-given or natural artifacts. (Said, 2012b, p.13)

Such a problem reveals Obi’s fault, if not a tragic flaw, of forgetting or failing to consider that his Western adopted identity can never replace his African ‘God-given’ identity, especially in a society where its members “are corrupt through and through” (Achebe, 1960, p.3). This is one of the most important reasons why his adopted Western idealism fails to help eliminate corruption in his society.

Another indication that the reason for this failure is attributed to irrevocable African corruption lies in Achebe’s satirical ‘ambivalent’ style of Western discourse, whereby the propaganda for extending authority and power is not only achieved through colonisation and a physical presence, but also by destroying the ‘Others’ (colonised) culture and then denying them education. Famously, the following lines, taken from Clarke’s (1991) *Africans at the Crossroads: Notes for an African World Revolution*, reveal Clarke’s rejection of the idea that black colonised people are prevented from learning by white colonisers, claiming that “Powerful people [colonisers] cannot afford to educate the people they oppress [colonised] because once you are truly educated, you will not ASK for power you will TAKE it”.

Even though England does provide Obi with an education in Achebe's novel, he does not 'take' the 'power' that he needs to fight against corruption in his home country. Instead, he 'takes' bribes on several occasions. This strongly suggests the uselessness of Obi's Western education once he returns to Nigeria, and the failure of his journey towards eliminating corruption in his society. The irrelevance of his education adds another reason why Obi's journey towards reforming his society is doomed to failure. Rather than gaining power, Obi has merely brought back Western 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' in his manner of dress, speech and thought. However, this *never* promotes idealism.

Bhabha's notions of 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' allow us to show how these two helpful critical terms dissect Obi's unstable (African) identity. I will especially concentrate on Obi's behaviour, particularly his physical and intellectual imitation of Western culture. Imitation, according to Bhabha, is "almost the same" (Bhabha, 1994, p.86) but never exactly alike and so I will examine Obi's 'ambivalences', in which he contradicts his strict Igbo values and customs. Furthermore, this paper will investigate the importance of Achebe's textual strategy, namely the use of a flashback technique in *No Longer at Ease* as a means of conveying open-ended irony, where it turns out that Obi's sense of guilt and his true purpose in accepting bribes are ambiguous.

By stressing the importance of 'borders' to 'in-between' or 'intermediate' locations, Bhabha (1994) describes the 'beyond' as "find[ing] ourselves in the moment of transit where *space* and *time* cross to produce complex [binary] figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (p.1). As these 'in-between' and marginal borders often produce hybrid identities, especially in multicultural societies, they are full of 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence'; they "separate and join different places" (McLeod, 2000, p.217). More elaborately, binary opposites often suggest differences and 'ambivalences', at the point where space and time cross, including past/present and inside/outside. For Bhabha, however, these dichotomies no longer show separation; rather, they present combination or integration due to intermediate borders, with multiculturalism playing a major role in creating hybrid identities. The combination of Obi's two extremes (Igbo and Western) produces a hybrid identity.

While post-colonial literature tends to address the issues left behind by colonialism, such as race, hybridity and identity crisis, it would be helpful to assume that the consequences of the *imaginative* 'borders', as portrayed in fiction, are similar to the consequences of *physical* borders. Metaphorically speaking, Achebe records the imaginative borders (thoughts) in Obi's mind through the physical remoteness (education abroad) that

he experiences in England. Bhabha's words shed new light on Obi's physical remoteness, wherein the importance of space and time shape his 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence'. Although the interest here is to explain how these two critical terms affect Obi's identity, I will initially focus on the way in which Bhabha defines these terms from a *colonial perspective*.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994, p.86) defines 'mimicry' as a "subject of a difference that is almost the *same*, but not *quite*". In other words, due to colonisation, 'mimicry' is the way that 'Others' (the colonised) largely copy the coloniser in multiple ways, such as in their dressing, speaking, thinking, traditions, customs, marriage, and even religion. This imitation, argues Bhabha, can never be *exact*. However, I argue that what is more significant to consider in this notion is the assumption that 'mimicry' is a sign of colonised people's powerfulness or powerlessness. An example of their submissiveness is portrayed in Naipaul's novel, *The Mimic Men* (1967). Yet, by denying such submissiveness, Bhabha "refuses the defeatism in Naipaul's work and offers a much more positive, active and insurgent model of mimicry" (McLeod, 2000, p.55). Instead, he sees the power of 'mimicry' as a direct threat to Western control and discourse, describing it as "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (Bhabha, 1994, p.85). In exploring how 'mimicry' menaces to reveal the 'ambivalence' of the colonial discourse, Bhabha uses the English language as a means of addressing the colonised Indians, who have been forced by the British to learn English so that they can serve the coloniser in India. In Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, away from his origins amongst a colonised people and despite being proficient in the coloniser's language and cultural behaviour (both physically, in his casual dress, and intellectually, in his open-mindedness and idealism), Obi does not look English and neither is he recognised as such, especially not by his Christian convert parents or racist Boss, Mr. Green (McLeod, 2000, p.54). Although Bhabha's view of English as a threat to the 'ambivalence' of colonial discourse does not work with Obi, it clearly supports his definition of 'mimicry' as "almost the same, but not quite", based on the argument that "to be Anglicised is *emphatically* not to be English" (Bhabha, 1994, p.87).

Commenting on its effect, Lacan (1977, p.99) views 'mimicry' as an appearance of 'camouflage'; arguing that 'mimicry' exposes an artificial image that is 'distinct' from itself (reality). He likens it to the strategy of 'camouflage' that is adopted in human warfare, whereupon nothing is visible to the enemy except the 'camouflage', thereby misrepresenting true identity. In turn, this creates 'ambivalence' and contradiction. Thus, 'camouflage', adds Lacan, is not a matter of going with reality, but rather a matter of going against it. He states that

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled - exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare. (Lacan, 1977, p.99)

While Lacan views the impact of ‘mimicry’ as ‘camouflage’, Bhabha sees it as ‘ambivalence’. Moreover, Lacan perceives ‘mimicry’ as remote from reality, whereas Bhabha recognises it as “almost the same” but not exactly like it. Despite these different terms and diverse descriptions of their impact on colonised people, the influence of Obi’s ‘mimicry’ of Western culture includes both Lacan and Bhabha’s explanations. In other words, although Obi’s ‘mimicry’ of the West is “almost the same”, he finds himself very remote from both Nigeria and England. Consequently, the impact of ‘mimicry’ on Obi’s identity is subversive, as it ultimately leads him to frustration, self-destruction and a tragic end.

However, as an advantage of its impact, Bhabha suggests that ‘mimicry’ can be helpful, where a colonised people are able to protest against the violence of Western colonisation; inciting rebellion, achieving ‘emancipation’, and liberating themselves from such a cruel and racist presence (Sealey, 2018, p.163). In this case, Bhabha (1994) adds that ‘mimicry’ succeeds in “reinscrib[ing], across differential power relations, both colonizer and colonized” (p.96). By contrast, Sealey rejects Bhabha’s identification of ‘mimicry’, pointing out its failure to address the “loss of belonging” and enhancing this loss in hybridity. Instead, Sealey states:

I am critical of this naming of mimicry as enabling a possible liberation from colonial violence not only because it fails to address the loss of belonging that significantly marks the experience of being so violated, but also because it seems to intensify this loss in the hybridity and fragmentation that it celebrates. (Sealey, 2018, p.163)

In Obi’s case, ‘mimicry’ is seen as a subversive aspect, as it drives him to self-destruction, especially when generating ‘ambivalence’ and conflict between what he perceives to be Western, idealistic, open-minded thought (extrinsic) and what he encounters in his very strict but corrupt Igbo society (intrinsic). More specifically, his insistence on marrying Clara, an Osu, is one of the most important examples of cultural ‘ambivalence’. It reveals his cultural error in failing to consider that his Western hybrid and open-minded identity is not African, strict or ‘God-given’, but rather the construction and merging of two completely different cultures (to quote Said). Another example of Obi’s ‘mimicry’ as a destructive impact is his *failure* to impose the Western idealism, which he brings back with him from England, on his own, totally corrupt Igbo society. What makes this failure all the more catastrophic is that

he finally gives up trying to do so, due to extreme psychological and financial crises. Hence, despite his Western idealism, his willingness to repeatedly accept bribes is a clear indication of his ‘ambivalence’ and the contradictions, not only with the society around him, but also with himself. In this regard, ‘mimicry’ does not lead colonised people to their ‘emancipation’ or liberation (to quote Bhabha), but rather to their tragic end. Nevertheless, this does not negate Bhabha’s claim that the impact of ‘mimicry’ on colonised people can be helpful for gaining liberation from colonial force. Neither does it support Sealey’s argument that ‘mimicry’ does not acknowledge a ‘loss of belonging’. Rather, my aim in this chapter is merely to critically examine ‘mimicry’ and its impact, specifically on Obi’s tragic experiences in *No Longer at Ease*.

Conversely, Bhabha not only describes the ‘ambivalence’ of ‘mimicry’, copied by colonised people, but also the ‘ambivalence’ of Western colonial discourse. He views the ‘ambivalence’ of this discourse as “often speak[ing] in a [snake-like] tongue that is forked” (Bhabha, 1994, p.85). Such a definition plainly draws attention to the hypocrisy of Western colonial nations, whose main aim was to *colonise* and *appropriate* land belonging to others, as a means of gaining more power and authority, rather than to *civilise* uneducated and primitive people (Africans, in particular), as they claim. Based on this premise, Western colonial discourse is also seen as one of the most “elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (ibid.). The following lines explain this ‘ambivalence’ of Western discourse by revealing the true goal of Western colonisation, namely to appropriate and seize the property, land and even identity of ‘Others’, thereby expanding Western power:

The sign of a double articulation [most notably coloniser versus colonised]; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power. (Bhabha, 1994, p.86)

By examining the significance of the above quotation in relation to the novel, the reader will come to notice the presence of British colonisation and appropriation, despite any direct reference to it in the narrative. For example, Obi’s conceited and discriminatory boss, Mr. Green, who loves to scorn and condemn Black Nigerians by repeatedly stating that “they are all corrupt” (Achebe, 1960, p.4) symbolises the colonial presence of the British and their control over Nigeria. Another illustration of this is the British-owned restaurant that is mentioned in the novel, signifying the Nigerian property and social hierarchies that have been appropriated through colonisation. This restaurant, which is supposed to be owned by a Nigerian, is rather owned by a bad-tempered “British old lady” (Achebe, 1960, p.35). Achebe sarcastically criticises the way in which the British have seized Nigeria’s resources, describing their ‘creaking’ like “old machinery gone rusty from standing in the rain” (ibid,

p.35). Had not England colonised Nigeria, this restaurant would have been owned by a Nigerian. Moreover, the restaurant is an indication of imposed class discrimination, wherein “no decent restaurant serves Nigerian food” (ibid, p.34), and more especially, as it is frequented by “a *dozen* or so *Europeans* and [only] *three* Africans” (ibid, p.33).

Obi’s firmly instilled Western thought is the primary centre from which all his ‘mimicry’ and ‘ambivalence’ arise. *No Longer at Ease* depicts many of his ‘mistakes’, while attempting to copy Western culture, whether intellectually or physically. However, I will be focusing on the most important of these errors, which foreshadow his downfall, including language, appearance, desires and idealism. For example, his ‘casual appearance’ turns out to be Obi’s ‘first mistake’ during the reception arranged by the Umuofia Progressive Union on his initial arrival in Lagos:

Everybody was properly dressed in *agbada*⁴⁷ or European suit except the guest of honour [Obi], who appeared in his shirtsleeves because of the heat. That was Obi’s *mistake Number One*. Everybody expected a young man from England to be *impressively* turned out. (Achebe, 1960, p.35)

In his (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon lucidly states that, “the black man who has lived in France for a certain time returns home radically transformed.” (1967, p. 17) He describes the phenomenon of assimilating a new European language different from that of the Black African inherited one as an “evidence of a shift and a split.” This “split,” asserts Fanon, results in a sense of “inferiority complex” experienced by a black man, “especially evident in the educated black man who is constantly trying to overcome it.” By quoting Professor Westermann’s *The African Today*, Fanon states that:

The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements. (qtd in Fanon, 1967, p. 21)

By inspecting its relation to both “race” and “culture,” Fanon considers the white coloniser’s “language” a lead to racism and to an “inferiority complex [that] has taken root” in the identity of “all colonised people”. (ibid, p. 17) For him, language highlights culture. By struggling against racism, inequality, and insult, Fanon differentiates between those who are non-French people when speak French. He contends that, when someone (non-French and non-Black) speaks French, they would be seen as merely “adopting” the French traditions and customs and culture. However, when a non-French black man speaks French, adds

⁴⁷ A long, wide-sleeved flowing gown, often embroidered, worn by men in parts of West Africa, especially Nigeria (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018, ‘Agbada’).

Fanon, “they will say with the utmost contempt.” (ibid, p. 18-25) In this regard, Fanon declares that black people’s mentality is constantly being instilled in a sense of inferiority and of uncivilisation. To put it in his words:

To speak gobbledygook to a black man is insulting, for it means he is the gook. Yet, we’ll be told, there is no intention to willfully give offense. OK, but it is precisely this absence of will—this offhand manner; this casualness; and the ease with which they classify him, imprison him at an uncivilized and primitive level—that is insulting. (ibid, p. 25)

In an attempt to present the power of language as a means of assuming the European culture, Fanon argues that, “to speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture.” (ibid, p. 29) However, Fanon employs such an “appropriation” to highlight “racism” and the racial tension between white and black people, which results in a kind of an existential crisis, that of a sense of “alienation” experienced by the colonised black people. For Fanon, this sense of alienation is not processed on an individual level, but rather on groups. Therefore, interracial conflict between white and black societies is a matter of major concern, according to Fanon. He defines the “intellectual alienation” of the black man as an emotional state undergone by people belonging to a middle-class society, in which rigidity and fixation in a “predetermined” structure prevent any progress, development, and evolution while alienating an “Other.” He characterises “alienation” as:

a creation of bourgeois society. And for me bourgeois society is any society that becomes ossified in a predetermined mold, stifling any development, progress, or discovery. For me bourgeois society is a closed society where it’s not good to be alive, where the air is rotten and ideas and people are putrefying. And I believe that a man who takes a stand against this living death is in a way a revolutionary. (ibid, 143)

To put it simply, Fanon expresses an entire denial of a European community that persists with racism and racial clashes in an effort to alienate the “Other” in an African community that, as a result, could no longer get improved and increased. More precisely, readers come to recognise that, to expand the conflict between the white and black societies is to constantly prompt racist forces and, thus, to continue alienating the African black “Other.” As “Ontological” limitations to which the black man finds himself bound, Fanon emphasises some of the racist aspects in which the black man struggles against his own “being,” his “relation” to the white man, and his “resistance” to the white man. Fanon disputes that:

Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some people will argue that the situation has a double meaning. Not at all. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. (ibid, p. 72)

Remarking on Obi's *mistake Number Two*, Achebe metaphorically calls Obi by his full name of Michael Obi Okonkwo only once in the entire novel, in order to highlight Obi's Western 'mimicry' and to emphasise the huge difference between the 'impressive' British secretary's kind English and Obi's "unimpressive" (ibid, p.32) English. However, despite the fact that Obi does not use the same official language as the young secretary, he *impressively* shows his loyalty to his country, which needs non-corrupt young men to serve it, rather than completely corrupt old men:

Obi's English, on the other hand, was most unimpressive. He spoke 'is' and 'was'. He told them about the value of education. 'Education for service, not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly.' When he sat down the audience clapped from politeness. *Mistake Number Two*. (Ibid., p.33)

To the reader's astonishment, although most of the novel's events take place in Nigeria, where our concerns lie, Obi's 'mimicry' actually begins in England, where he writes a "nostalgic poem about Nigeria" (Achebe, 1960, p.17), using the language of the white coloniser. Therefore, the English language becomes one of the most important domains of Obi's 'mimicry' in England, before his return to Nigeria. This sheds light on the power of language, through which Achebe challenges colonisation by using the white coloniser's own language. Achebe's life had been impacted by the English language since he was eight years old. At school, it was the only language permitted, which caused him to consider the imposition of English as part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the white colonisers to impose their authority and power on Nigerian children; forcing them to "put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the language of their colonizers" (Ohaeto, 1997, p.30), especially as Nigeria is a multilingual country.

In relation to his own desires and idealism, Obi's relationships with women are counterbalanced, most notably, his beloved Clara, and Elsie Mark, who offers him a bribe. While his relationship with Miss Mark reveals his Western idealism in that he rejects her sexual favours in exchange for a scholarship to England; his relationship with Clara shows his Western open-mindedness, which his strict Igbo background ultimately denies. Despite their differences, however, both relationships foreshadow his downfall. Had Obi accepted Miss Mark's offer, he would have saved his penniless family and himself. On the other hand, his broken relationship with Clara and her abortion not only foreshadow his tragic end, but also serve as a sign of the irreconcilable conflict between modern Western culture and traditional African culture. Hence, it becomes apparent that the narrative schema and sequence of events is not intended to compromise the conflict of these two parties, but rather

to exacerbate it to the point where it cannot be resolved. Achebe embodies this conflict and its consequences in the hard experiences endured by Obi in the novel, with the textual strategy being highly instrumental to his complex and ambiguous end.

It is very clear in *No Longer at Ease* that Obi's life has descended into a hopeless predicament, especially after Chapter Nine, in which he experiences the last chance to fulfil his idealism, hope and self-satisfaction by refusing the financial and sexual bribes that are offered to him. However, the series of predicaments that Obi gradually finds himself in, which Achebe builds layer upon layer, foreshadow his tragic end, revealing the importance of Achebe's flashback technique as a textual strategy:

A particular event is presented at the beginning of a text, and ignored at this point, but later towards the end of the story recalled by the narration of an event similar to the first event. (Phala and Mojalefa, 2005, p.63)

Such a technique plays a major role in highlighting Obi's tragic end (the trial), which opens the novel. It is as if Achebe is telling us that Obi is *doomed* from the very beginning. In fiction, to narrate a story by starting from its end, rather than the beginning, is to reverse the narrative sequence. Achebe's flashback technique in *No Longer at Ease* is seen as "a disposition towards remoteness", compared with his later novels, where he presents the plots chronologically (Winters, 1981, p.64). This unique 'remoteness' produces a reversal in the plot; from the outset, this has a dramatic impact, drawing the reader towards the climax of the plot when Obi's trial takes place.

As Achebe's flashback narrative style presents Obi's tragic end at the beginning of the novel, I venture that it invokes Obi's end in all its ambiguity and complexity, in terms of the theme of guilt. Although the novel clearly presents Obi as guilty and corrupt, he also elicits the reader's sympathy. More specifically, his responsibility to his family, Clara and even to himself are balanced against his own desires. His strict background stems from his culture, while his parents are originally from a small village and never realise how difficult it is for him to deal with all these financial problems, especially in the city. For example, his parents' 'monthly allowance', his brother's 'school fees', Clara's engagement ring and eventual abortion, and the repayment of his debts from studying abroad place a heavy weight on his shoulders. Therefore, he cannot endure any more pressure, "finding it more and more impossible to live on what was left of his forty-seven pounds" (Achebe, 1960, p.88). Eventually, he succumbs to the offer of a bribe that he had initially rejected. In this case, it is highly likely that Obi's financial problems are the sole reason for him taking a bribe.

However, the actual end of the novel — and not the end depicted in the flashback at the start of the narrative — is ironic, as it shows the ambiguity of Obi's real reason for accepting bribes. Specifically, in the very last paragraph of the novel, Achebe terminates the narrative with a few sentences that reveal how no one really knows why Obi accepted the bribes:

Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either. (Ibid., p.171)

The above quotation exhibits Achebe's complex and ambiguous linguistic style, leaving the reader in a quandary over the real purpose of Obi's acceptance of the bribes. Despite the aforementioned financial reasons, which appear to be the most feasible, Achebe states: "Everybody wondered why", expressing the astonishment of each character in the novel, with no one being aware of the true reason, including Mr. Green. The discourse continues, emphasising Mr. Green's uncertainty over the real reason, inviting us to 'presume' that he does not know. What makes this doubt even stronger is the use of 'must': the strongest auxiliary in the English language. In this manipulation of language, Achebe leads the reader very definitely in the direction of this presumption, as if he does not want the reader to solve the mystery, but rather to remain lost in its ambiguity. Why 'must' the reader 'presume' that Mr. Green does not know Obi's true purpose in accepting bribes, despite his 'certitude'? Achebe could have easily omitted the expression, "in spite of his certitude". Thus, the unfathomable reason for Obi taking bribes leaves an open ending to the narrative, with the flashback that opens the novel and the actual end forming an infinite loop. In this endless loop, Obi's trial is depicted in the flashback at the beginning, even though this is the final incident in the sequence of events. The reader is therefore presented with the developments and circumstances (plot) between the flashback at the beginning and the actual end of the novel.

Furthermore, by identifying the three tragic endings of *Things Fall Apart* as 'nationalist', 'adversarial and 'metahistoric' in nature,⁴⁸ Begam (1997) sees *No Longer at Ease* as a continuation of the tragic end of Okonkwo, Obi's grandfather. Based on this continuation, Obi is just starting where his grandfather left off. Begam consequently debates that "the very structure of *No Longer at Ease* indicates, then, that Okonkwo's story has not reached its end, that the tragic destiny it implies continues to be lived out" (ibid., p.404).

⁴⁸ As the space and focus here do not allow me to explain the role of Achebe's trilogy in rewriting Nigeria's colonial history and the way that *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* can be seen as a 'meta-history' for *Things Fall Apart*, the main introduction of this thesis elaborates on this important role.

This implies that Obi, the grandson, inherits Okonkwo's unfulfilled destiny. In this regard, we observe that Obi's destiny is doomed to an unresolved and ambiguous end.

3.4 Obi's Transformation: Subjectivity versus Universality

It is unsurprising that central to Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist writings (whether philosophical or literary) is his concern with the concept of absolute, individual freedom of choice, which carries with it the concept of responsibility (Halper, 1965). However, Sartre goes beyond the limits of this mere individuality into a more complex and universal sense of freedom and responsibility, arguing that man is not only responsible for making choices about his own life, but also for the rest of mankind (Sartre, 1996, pp.23-25). Sartre's shift from an individual to a universal exhibition of both freedom and responsibility is most notably evident in his essay, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946), where his main purpose is to prove that existentialist philosophy is also humanist, defending it "against some charges that have been brought against it" (ibid., p.1). It is in this very defence that Sartre no longer discusses man's *free will* and *responsibility* from a purely subjective and *individual* perspective, but rather from a *profound* and universal one. It is his highest expectation that existentialism extends across the universe, without "leaving out of account the solidarity of mankind [but rather] considering man in isolation" (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.23).

To articulate this, Sartre attaches great importance to 'individual' responsibility for shaping one's unique 'existence' by arguing that each human being is "*solely* responsible for his own existence" and even for "what he is" (ibid.). He asserts that existentialism, with its complete freedom of choice, "places the entire responsibility for man's existence squarely upon his own shoulders" (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.23). Despite this assertion, what is worthy of more complex and controversial debate is that Sartre expands the range of responsibility beyond mere personal capability by placing more commitments and burdens upon it. In so doing, he turns individual responsibility into a vast, more universal sense of responsibility for all mankind. In Sartre's words, "when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only *for his own individuality*, but that he is responsible *for all men*" (ibid.).

In light of this statement, I argue that although Obi Okonkwo's mutually exclusive conscious choice to *refuse/accept* bribes is something that he makes subjectively; he experiences a 'universal' (moral) sense of responsibility, not only for himself, but also for Igbo society as a whole. To further illustrate this heavy weight that is thrust upon him, I refer

to Sartre's moral philosophy, along with the Kantian⁴⁹ ethical term, 'universalisability' to show how Obi's moral choices and 'will' are universalised. Thus, he is seen as responsible for his entire community.

Although *No Longer at Ease* offers Obi several free choices, the reader will come to recognise that his most remarkable decision in the novel is to accept bribes, even after initially rejecting them. These choices follow completely different trajectories. While Obi's refusal to accept bribes displays his morally idealistic behaviour, where his ultimate purpose is to try and eradicate this corrupt practice from his society, his acceptance of bribes represents his immoral behaviour, whereby he promotes the spread of corruption, instead of trying to combat it. This change in behaviour is a sign of several phenomena: irony, contradiction, the failure of idealism and morality, and inevitable corruption. Despite the differences between these choices and the paths towards them, what they have in common is the failure of Obi's Western idealism to eliminate corruption from his society. Moreover, both choices illuminate superstitious Igbo beliefs.

As a two-sided, mutually exclusive choice, Obi lives in a struggle between his moral and immoral decisions. He will either refuse or accept bribes. His Western idealism and education prevent him from accepting them, whereas his severe financial problems and the psychological pressure that he is under drive him to accept them. Finally, after having lost both his mother and his beloved Clara, with apparently nothing more to lose, he accepts a series of bribes, until he is finally caught and faces legal procedures as a result.

To interpret these complex and self-contradictory choices, it is useful to refer to Sartre and even Kant and their ethical theories, with the former believing that human codes of conduct and "ethical values are invented, not discovered" (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.191). Because Sartre does not believe in God, there are no 'God-given' rules governing and controlling our conduct, regarding what is right or permissible and what is wrong and

⁴⁹ One of the greatest, if not the greatest, of all modern philosophers, the German Immanuel Kant has had a profound and lasting influence, both on philosophy itself, and across most intellectual disciplines, including sociology. The core of Kant's critical philosophy is generally taken to be his synthesis of the two rival traditions of empiricism and rationalism, which dominated epistemology (or the philosophical theory of knowledge) during his lifetime. Kant argued, in opposition to the empiricists, that some judgements were not mere tautologies, but neither were they derived from experience. Kant's great work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is devoted to proving this claim, and to the systematic derivation of those *a priori* concepts and categories, which are conditions of the possibility of us apprehending space and time (the 'forms of intuition') and making objective judgements of experience (the 'categories' — causality, necessity, possibility, and others). For Kant, however, the categories, whilst not derivable from experience, could only be legitimately applied within the field of possible experience. To use the categories to offer accounts of 'things-in-themselves', beyond possible experience, is to fall into irresolvable contradiction. Therefore, whilst rejecting a central doctrine of empiricism, Kant nevertheless shared with the leading empiricists a concern to defend the cognitive status of empirical science against metaphysical claims to knowledge of 'things-in-themselves', beyond experience (Scott, 2014, 'Kant, Immanuel').

prohibited. Rather, it is man himself who is responsible for establishing his *own* code of conduct and rules to follow, without any external intervention. It is based on these self-imposed codes that he distinguishes between right and wrong. This reads like a reference to the doctrine of relativism,⁵⁰ which asserts that all morality, truth, knowledge and ethics are based on cultural and societal points of view. As a result, relativism rejects all absolute principles and rules of law. Nevertheless, despite the fact that relativism and Sartre's philosophy of freedom both deny absolutism, they differ on one critical point; while relativism maintains that morality is basically founded on individual, societal and cultural beliefs, Sartre's moral philosophy is based solely on individual 'values'. Sartre states that man makes choices and defines himself independently of any external force or influence. This is why his individual moral responsibility intermediates determinism, the predetermined, 'God-given' rules, and the socially/culturally based judgment of relativism (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.192).

It becomes clear that the value of responsibility for Sartre is fundamentally determined by the moral principles and values underpinning the choices that human beings make freely and independently of any divine or social pressure. He states that to choose "is to affirm the value of that [thing] which is chosen" (Sartre, 1996, p.24). Such moral values play a major role in analysing Sartre's statement on universalising moral responsibility, where one is judged in relation to one's acts or behaviour, whether praised or blamed: "for we are [self-intuitively] unable ever to choose the worse, what we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for *us* unless it is better *for all*" (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.30). Thus, he is universalising, yet also unifying the morally superior values of human choices.

Nevertheless, in logical terms, because it is impossible to *literally* choose and be responsible for the whole of humanity, an individual *implicitly* chooses for all. Thus, he or she is *implicitly* responsible for all. For example, if I choose to join a liberal party, get married, fight for my country's independence, etc. whatever I do, I am just *implicitly* acting and subjecting the whole community to that act. In other words, it is like a recommendation of my actions to others. More simply, by helping a blind person to cross the street, I am implicitly setting an example through my actions, as if I assume that anyone else in that situation would do the same thing. Sartre implies that "our responsibility is thus much greater than we might have supposed, because it concerns all mankind" (Sartre, 1996, p.24).

⁵⁰ In philosophy, the position that all value judgements (e.g. ethics, morality, and truth) are relative to the standpoint of the beholder. To put it another way, relativism does not accept that there is an absolute ground or reference point, which could provide an objective guarantee that things are not necessarily the same as they are perceived to be by a given subject (Buchanan, 2010, 'Relativism').

In moral philosophy, this implicit suggestion is recognised by many scholars, notably Kant, as ‘universalisability’. For Kant, “ethics is spelled out on the basis of a ‘moral law’ which is valid for all finite rational beings” (Mieth, 2008, p.vii). In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, first published in German in 1785 (Kant, Gregor and Timmermann, 2011), Kant asserts that only objectively ‘unconditional’ moral ‘goodwill’ is universalised, because its absolute and fixed ‘precepts’ do not belong to or depend on subjectively specific principles. Thus, it is always right and ‘good’ for all humanity: “There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a good will” (Kant, Wood and Schneewind, 2002, Ak, 4:393,⁵¹ p.9).

In Sartre’s philosophy, however, this universalisability follows a moral obligation towards human codes of conduct, acknowledging two potential explanations: *causality* and *logic* (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.192). Causal explanation reveals the *direct* impact of one’s course of action upon others, assuming it to be the essential reason for others following a specific course of action. In this case, “my responsibility is in a direct sense of responsibility for what I make others do, not just for what I do myself” (ibid., p.193). Conversely, the above authors add that logical explanation mainly depends on the compatibility between one person (such as the initiator of a course of action) and a group of peers, who, in a similar position to the actor, are likely to follow the same course of action or experience the same human conditions. For example, let us assume that someone decides not to cheat anymore in school examinations. According to Sartre, because this refusal to cheat refers self-intuitively to moral ‘goodness’, this person is responsible for the whole of mankind, who are consistent with or in agreement with this action. This, consistency is the “condition for ethics according to Sartre” (ibid., p.193). As with Kant, it could be said that decent universalisability is the decisive criterion⁵² from which Sartrean moral rules are derived. Consequently, only moral ‘good will’ choices and responsibility can be universalised, whereas immoral commitment can never be universalised (ibid., p.194).

This morally interprets why Obi’s decent denial of bribes can be universalised as a morally philosophical duty, in the sense that his responsibility is no longer merely to himself, but rather to the whole of society (Tollefsen, 2005, p.229). Since it is self-intuitively understood as ‘goodness’ to choose to reject a bribe, it is as though Obi is choosing on behalf

⁵¹ All Kant’s original German published writings, originally in German and translated into English, provide its readers with a margin volume no. and page no., preceded by the abbreviation, ‘Ak’, which refers to ‘Akademie’ in German. An English language version is referenced here.

⁵² For Kant, a decisive criterion is what he calls a ‘categorical imperative’.

of all his people to eradicate corruption from his society. In so doing, he attempts to achieve his ultimate moral goal of eliminating corruption by spreading Western ideals and moral principles, adopted from England. The best example of a morally consistent community, which is in a similar position as him, is the *young* “second generation of educated Nigerians” (Achebe, 1960, p.21). However, Obi thinks that corruption is inherently rooted in Igbo society, by virtue of corrupt *old* male civil servants: “the so-called experienced men at the top”, as he refers to them (ibid., p.20). Therefore, he is convinced that in order to rid his country of corruption, such corrupt old men must be replaced by the young educated generation, which has been grounded in virtues and morality. Obi’s theory that consistent integrity will only be possible with ‘straight’ young honest companions first developed while he was in London. This implies his firm intention to completely cleanse his country from the corruption of the older generation, before coming to Lagos.

Obi’s theory that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities was first formulated in a paper read to the Nigerian Students' Union in London. (Ibid., p.38)

For Obi, despite this new generation’s lack of experience, it “would be better than filling our top posts with old men who have no intellectual foundations to support their experience” (ibid., p.20). Disdaining the corrupt system controlled by old men, Obi says of such characters:

He probably left school thirty years ago in Standard Six. He has worked steadily to the top through bribery - an ordeal by bribery. To him the bribe is natural. He gave it and he expects it. Our people say that if you pay homage to the man on top, others will pay homage to you when it is your turn to be on top. Well, that is what the old men say. (Ibid., p.21)

It is in Obi’s profound and universalised responsibility that his most intense and deepest feelings of ‘anguish’ originate. He is extremely anxious about the uncertainty of his duty in combating corruption in his society. This illustrates the reason for his complete refusal of financial and sexual bribes, despite his serious financial crisis. Obi’s overwhelming burdens position him in a state of trouble and fear, causing him to desperately consider whether he is right or wrong to refuse bribes; whether the consequences of this choice would be a relief or bring misery. In turn, this confronts him with feelings of ‘anguish’, due to what Sartre describes as “complete and profound responsibility” (Sartre and Priest, 2001, p.30).

Before examining the Kantian ‘non-universalisability’ of Obi’s ‘immoral’ and deliberate act of accepting bribes, it would be helpful to look at Achebe’s flashback narrative style in *No Longer at Ease*, which opens and ends in a court of law. It is a place where a *decision* is made by a judge against Obi Okonkwo for his culpability in accepting bribes on

several occasions. However, a deep existentialist analysis of the novel would suggest an alternative reading, based on the assumption that the decisions in the novel are no longer made by the judge, insofar as they are made by Obi, especially as the court's decision is only mentioned in the first and last paragraphs of the novel. According to Sartre, a judge represents an external form of authority, who controls and binds one's own freedom; whereas Obi's decision is a subjective but absolute freedom, which implies individual responsibility. In this regard, the reader comes to recognise that the significance of the court in the novel is to provide a framework, in which Obi's free will and responsibility are made manifest, rather than an environment where a judge makes a decision against him. The consequences of such a free, yet disastrous, choice reveal Obi's responsibility, in that he puts an end to his position in the Civil Service, while finally facing his tragic and perhaps ironic self-destruction.

Meanwhile, according to Kantian ethical theory, Obi's acceptance of bribery cannot be universalised as a moral commitment, because it is self-intuitively regarded as an 'evil' act. Achebe's ironic shift from the refusal to accept bribes, through which Obi is swept away, leaves the novel open to broad criticism (Singh, 1989, p.165). From Achebe's post-colonial perspective, this ironic shift symbolises the hopelessly inevitable corruption that prevails in Nigeria, where even the idealistic and well-educated Obi succumbs to bribery. Ethically speaking, the reason for the failure of Obi's idealistic and moral ambition of eliminating corruption lies in the fact that he simply tries to instill the *right* (moral) beliefs into the minds of the *wrong* (amoral) people. From an existential perspective, however, it is only a matter of a free conscious choice and *individual* responsibility, since it cannot be universalised. Thus, Obi alone must bear the full responsibility for accepting bribes and so the grave consequences of this falls solely on his shoulders, leaving him jobless and abandoned by his entire community.

I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this'... a sudden and marked change occurred. Treacherous tears came into Obi's eyes. He brought out a white handkerchief and rubbed his face. But he did it as people do when they wipe sweat. He even tried to smile and belie the tears. A smile would have been quite logical. All that stuff about education and promise and betrayal had not taken him unawares. He had expected it and rehearsed this very scene a hundred times until it had become as familiar as a friend. (Achebe, 1960, p.2)

Conclusion

No Longer at Ease depicts Obi's spiritual self-destruction from a colonial and existential perspective. It does not in any way show Obi's success, aside from in his studies. Thus, the

main focus is on his struggles and failure in life. On his return to Lagos, as the first section of this chapter reveals, Obi's Western education does not provide him with the wisdom to struggle for idealism or to combat corruption in his native Igbo society. In contrast, his Western education and adaptation have left him a stranger and socially alienated, even amongst his own people. The second section of this chapter then moves on to illustrate the effect of this Western education and adaptation on his identity, which is an unstable, cross-cultural hybrid that deprives him of any sense of belonging, either to his native African society, or to his Western adopted one. Thus, his identity now belongs nowhere. Based on the ethical theories of Sartre and Kant (Baiasu, 2003, p.22), the final section of this chapter examines Obi's socially alienated identity from an existential (moral) perspective. His mutually exclusive individual choices to both refuse and accept bribes reflect on his enormous universal and moral responsibility for his entire community, rather like the fate of his grandfather, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Moreover, despite Obi's Western education and idealism, his readiness to accept bribes on multiple occasions leads him to a tragically ironic fate.

Chapter Four: *Arrow of God* and the Crisis of Identity

4.1 Introduction

Written in 1964 and set during the 1920s, *Arrow of God* (Achebe, 1964; 2016a) is the third of Achebe's novels to examine British colonialism and Christianity in Nigeria. Unlike *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* begins with British military forces having already established a presence in the country, while Christian missionaries work to convert and Westernise indigenous Nigerians. As a result, the novel focuses intensely on the effect of these two clashing cultures on Nigerian society as a whole, as well as on conflicts within Igbo societies and their effect on the identities of native people. In order to understand the significance of this novel as a comment on colonialism, and the way in which Achebe portrays the Igbo identity of his characters, I believe that it is first important to understand the overwhelming impact of British rule on Nigeria. This was an era when the sun had not yet set on the British Empire, and the concept of imperialism was at its peak. As a result, British forces were spread across the globe; experimenting with governing tactics such as indirect rule, with a view to achieving greater stability in the far-reaching corners of the Empire.

However, it should be noted that these British forces and their means of maintaining power are only of interest to the current story, in that they bring about change and conflict within African communities. In fact, *Arrow of God* centres on the character of Ezeulu, who is an honest chief priest; serving a collection of small Igbo villages in the south of Nigeria, which is being actively colonised by the British. The title, *Arrow of God* is derived from an ancient Igbo proverb, which refers to 'the one who carries out the will of God' (Smith, 2001, p.588). In this case, Ezeulu presents himself as the 'arrow of God', who preserves African traditions for the sake of upholding strict religious customs, despite grave consequences for his personal and social life. Thus, as the title suggests, the novel could be said to illustrate Ezeulu's perception of his moral duty towards his God and his identity. The novel consequently charts his experiences, as well as those of his fellow Igbos, who are striving to gain power. They not only struggle within their own social structures, but also to adjust to the British presence and its impact on tribal life.

Like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Ezeulu's harsh experiences force him to deal with numerous difficult situations, as he endeavours to lead both his society and his family, resulting in tragic consequences. In moral terms, the more he fights to do what he believes to be right, the more he struggles with the authenticity of his

role and identity. This also relates to the way that he must define himself, when there is no longer a traditional Igbo nation for him to lead as chief priest. Key topics in the novel are therefore leadership and the responsibility that accompanies power, as well as the source of that power. As mentioned earlier, the title is derived from an Igbo proverb, denoting the way in which a person or event acts as the ‘arrow’ or will of God. The question remains, however, of who represents the will of God in this novel; the significance of this in the face of atheistic existentialism, and what is altered through the force of that will.

Early in the narrative, Ezeulu is invited by Winterbottom, the British District Commissioner, to join the colonial administration. This establishes the theme of indirect rule within the story. As indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, indirect rule is an important historical concept, and the primary system of government used by the British and French in the more remote foreign territories of their Empires. In particular, it was applied in the most distant parts of Asia and Africa, because it allowed the government to build on existing indigenous hierarchies and social structures, as a means of maintaining colonial power (American Historical Association, 2019). These dependencies were referred to as ‘crucial states’ or protectorates. Meanwhile, smaller administrative bodies within these protectorates ran their day-to-day operations through traditional local rulers, who drew their real power and stability from British military forces.

More specifically, the Marquess of Salisbury, who served as British Prime Minister towards the end of the 19th century, explained the reason for adopting indirect rule, stating that

the condition of a protected dependency is more acceptable to the half-civilized races, and more suitable for them than direct dominion. It is cheaper, simpler, less wounding to their self-esteem, gives them more career as public officials, and spares of unnecessary contact with white men. (Roberts, 2012, p.529)

Smaller local governments freed a bigger percentage of the British military to continue pressing for the expansion of the Empire. While reducing investment in new lands, however, the British concentrated on increasing the *total area* of land. As defined by the British government at the time, this practice of *indirect rule* is interesting on several levels. First, it displays the view of African nations as ‘half-civilised’, which means that the British saw themselves as governmentally and socially *superior* to the native tribes.⁵³ Secondly, it suggests that in spite of this superiority, the British genuinely believed that the use of indirect rule would grant these tribes greater autonomy; thereby preventing them from responding

⁵³ This reminds us of Achebe’s criticism of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. For more information on this, see Achebe (2016b).

aggressively to maintain their pride. In fact, the British used indirect rule as a means of gaining international power and trade-related resources, without forcefully establishing colonies. It was ultimately an approach that gave them external power, military control, and a means of taxing the Nigerian people (Chanock, 1977). It consequently expanded British power and its economy, drawing upon the financial and natural resources that Nigeria could provide. However, Britain was under no compunction to enrich or control the Nigerian nation, which meant that they could indefinitely plunder its resources without any concern for the damage caused, or any expenditure to improve the lives of native Africans. This was seen as a solution to what has otherwise been referred to by Ugandan political scientist, Mahmood Mamdani⁵⁴ as ‘The Native Problem’ (Chanock, 1977, p.81). It was also seen as a means of addressing the problem of being greatly outnumbered by the native population, who could easily have overpowered the small foreign community. In this case, the presence of the British in Nigeria, following Britain’s claim over the territory, was made through colonisation. Indirect rule allowed greater independence and reduced tension and friction via an adaptive government situation. In turn, this protected British interests, with significant economic and military advantages for Britain (ibid., p.25).

In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu is invited to become the tribal leader of a British Protectorate, but he refuses to be a “white man’s chief” (Achebe, 2016a, p.135). This is significant, because it demonstrates that native Africans were under no illusions that this indirect rule actually gave them any kind of independence. Although it was ‘indirect’, it was still a form of imposed British government. Ezeulu recognised that on these terms, if he accepted the position, he would become a mere ‘puppet’ of the British government, allowing it to establish a firmer rule over his people (ibid., pp.135-6). Indirect rule essentially uses existing local traditions as a channel of influence to establish a new set of rules. In this case, it allowed the British to take power, without raising the defences of the local people. In short, it enabled local leaders like Ezeulu to merely *appear* to maintain control, while British leaders operated in the background, pulling the strings.

At least in part, the need to secure control over the local population was based on Britain’s drive for expansion, under what was a blatantly paternalistic government. The British government acted like a parent, overseeing Nigeria’s child governments, as demonstrated in the sense of supremacy and superiority expressed by the Marquess of Salisbury (cited earlier). As a paternalistic government, the British focused their investment

⁵⁴ Mamdani was among the first critics to define the ‘Native Problem’, or the conflict between the interests of white settlers and native Africans. Thus, there was a need to reconcile the interests of both parties, which the British government attempted to manage through adaptive forms of government.

on improving Nigeria in material terms, especially by building roads, which is illustrated in *Arrow of God*. However, beyond this very direct investment and improvement, little else was done to develop Nigeria, either ideologically or politically. Moreover, the local leaders appointed by the British merely served as figureheads, with no opportunity to develop their own political and social aspirations, as in the case of Ezeulu. Through this lens, the struggles of Igbo society may be analysed. In looking critically at these struggles, I will refer to the primary themes in the novel by examining how they relate to individual identity; most notably, that of Ezeulu, under the implementation of an indirect rule policy. More specifically, the current textual analysis will focus on the individual struggles experienced by Ezeulu, as the protagonist, and the impact that these have on his identity. In sum, what will be explored in this chapter is the impact of conflict on the identity of the individual experiencing that conflict.

The post-colonial approach, as defined by Said, is an area of study that considers the cultural and social implications of imperialism or colonialism on native populations (Said, 1993). It takes into account the human consequences of exploitation, where this occurs in the colonisation of one nation by another. As such, post-colonialism, or the events that occur after a nation has been colonised, is concerned with the ideological response from the local population, especially in their interaction with the colonists. Within the sphere of literary criticism, the post-colonial theoretical approach primarily relates to literature from Britain's former colonies, including Africa, the Caribbean and India. This has resulted in the emergence of several common themes, including British rule or systems of government, the desire for independence, the impact of colonisation or immigration, identity, and allegiance. Said (1979), who defines the 'othering' of these cultures as 'Orientalism', states that this is "ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them') (p.43).

Post-colonial writers are usually members of a native people who have suffered as a result of colonization and who attempt to articulate their cultural identity, so as to reclaim those elements of the self that they feel were compromised as a result of interacting with the colonists.⁵⁵ Said and Achebe are both excellent examples of this trend; capable of demonstrating how the coloniser treats the colonised as inferior, or as children. Consequently, I believe that the cultures of colonisers distort the reality of colonised nations and their populations.

⁵⁵ See Barry (2002, p.193) for more on this point.

Postcolonial Theory often focuses on the idea of ‘otherness’, which encompasses both the concept of identity and the difference between cultures, individuals, and groups. In *Arrow of God*, this can be seen in the sense of ‘otherness’ that exists between Ezeulu and the British colonisers. Their worlds are separated by a gulf, each ‘mutually excluding’ the other. They are represented as incompatible opposites, leading to the polarisation of Black and White, native African and white British, Western and non-Western. In religious terms, this can result in the mystification of the ‘other’ culture, placing the mystic in contrast to Western Christian belief patterns.

Another key feature of post-colonial literature, given that it is a direct product of the impact of colonisation, is conflict. This is particularly evident in *Arrow of God*, which describes several instances of conflict, as mentioned earlier. More specifically, Postcolonial Theory is concerned with resistance or subversion. It consequently reflects the desires of the ‘other’, together with their subsequent action to resist Westernisation. In this case, it is the British colonisers who attempt to Westernise Nigeria by force. Postcolonial Theory is almost always tied to the individual, and the infringement of the colonising culture upon the identity of the colonised individual.

The purpose of post-colonial literature, like the writings of Achebe, is to reconstitute the identity of native peoples. In other words, it creates something that is strictly from the perspective of the oppressed, thereby allowing the author to defend or provide evidence of the oppressed people’s true identity, without interference from the coloniser. However, in some ways, this compromises native identity through the adoption of a Western literary form, such as the novel, in order to tell the story of a people whose narratives are generally part of an oral tradition. It becomes a demonstration of forced hybridity, or the impact of social change within a native population as they remain in long-term contact with their colonisers. It is sometimes referred to as the development of a double consciousness or hybrid identity. Consequently, the abstract concepts of nationality and identity can be difficult to capture.

As defined in the previous chapters, Existential Theory is a philosophical line of inquiry of relevance to Achebe’s narratives. In existentialism, it is stated that all thought begins with a human subject, which Sartre called ‘subjectivity’; famously expressing this as “existence precedes essence”.⁵⁶ It applies to *Arrow of God*, in that all the way through, Achebe’s ideas are perpetuated in a single subjectivity or character, namely Ezeulu.

⁵⁶ Originating in his 1945 lecture, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Sartre, 1996).

Existential Theory supports two prominent themes, relating to individuals and their identity: freedom and authenticity (Flynn, 2006). Thus, the individual's sense of identity lies at the core of the larger theory.

Kierkegaard, frequently cited as the father of the theoretical approach, was of the view that the individual has sole control over his or her destiny, and that the meaning of all life is derived from living in an authentic manner (Kierkegaard, 2013). To live authentically, in existential terms, is to think consciously, and therefore to be entirely responsible for one's own free choices. All existentialists agree that there is no excuse for an authentic choice, because it is determined at mental level. This is critical to an analysis of *Arrow of God*, because it supports the idea that within the internal conflict, Ezeulu's experiences are just as important as external stimuli in shaping his character. In other words, the conflict between survival and belief (for example) is just as crucial or formative, given that it relates to identity in the conflict between native Africans and the British. As such, it is essential that both post-colonial and existential analysis consider the role of the Self in determining identity.

One of the primary concepts of this approach is authenticity, or the notion that a person should act in accordance with who they perceive themselves to be (Heidegger, 1977). For instance, when Ezeulu refuses to accept the position offered to him in Britain's indirect government, he is acting authentically; in a way that is directly aligned with his ideals and morals, and his view of and respect for his role within the community. He makes a choice and is willing to live according to his beliefs, regardless of the outcomes. Existentialism contains the core belief that authentic action is often tied to social expectations, or the sense that one must not act in a way that is predetermined by external forces, but rather subjectively and consciously; defining oneself according to one's own choices and actions. Sartre refers to this as acting in good or bad faith, or according to typical social norms, and in accordance with one's own perceived identity (Sartre, 2012). This supports the idea of free will or choice and responsibility for that choice, regardless of the consequences.

4.2 Ezeulu's Complex Confrontation: Against the White Man, within Igbo Society, or with Himself?

Nevertheless, not all the tension in *Arrow of God* is derived from the interplay between Western and native African cultures, or their very different cultural practices; it is also necessary to consider the social interaction between members of Igbo society and the way that they ultimately undermine one another, once the intervention of Western ideas upsets the balance of power within their society. Since the focus here is on the British colonisers'

interaction with the Igbo people, the novel is primarily set in Igbo villages: most prominently, the six villages of Umuaro, which Ezeulu oversees. The story opens with conflict between these villages, demonstrating that the tensions in Igbo society are not only cross-cultural, because there is evidence of existing struggles in Igbo communities, where white colonists have not yet intervened. This has further implications in the novel, pointing to layers of struggle within the native population. Moreover, while the most prominent conflict is clearly between British and Igbo culture, there is also conflict between Africans and Christian missionaries. Each of these factors separately contributes to the overall theme of the novel, as they relate to identity.

Greek philosopher, Heraclites first stated that conflict is universal (Williams, 1985). This is critical to understanding the social dynamics and action of conflict in *Arrow of God*, because it is foundational to understanding identity, thereby acknowledging that colonialism was not the sole source of conflict in the primary population. According to Jordan (2013), this “culture of conflict” is a recurring theme in fiction from sub-Saharan Africa in general, especially as it relates to the “effects upon the individual and its repercussions for society as a whole. A struggle between the claims of tradition and the forces of modernity, resulting in some form of social change” (Jordan, 2013, p.73). It results in a number of conflicts, both political and social in nature, each of which can be analysed separately.

Correspondingly, conflict is defined by Holman (1960) as the struggle that results from two opposing forces coming into contact with each other, whether in the plot of a novel or in real life. This conflict becomes the force driving the action and the reader’s point of interest in a novel’s events. Conflict is also what shapes individual characters through opposing forces, moulding them into multi-dimensional characters by detailing their reactions and the significance of these reactions. Holman (1960) classifies universal conflict into four basic types: conflicts between man and nature, conflicts between man and man, conflicts between man and society, and conflicts between man and destiny.

The conflicts in *Arrow of God* can similarly be classified according to these categories. First, the conflict between Christian and African traditions embodies a conflict between man and society. Secondly, the conflicts relating to indirect rule reflect the conflict between man and man, as well as man and society. Thirdly, the existing African tribal conflicts are an illustration of the conflict between man and man, and finally, the conflict between survival and belief highlights the conflict between man and his destiny. The man at the centre of all these conflicts is Ezeulu, who is at odds with his people, society and fate at multiple points in the narrative (Anaso and Nabudike, 2016). Moreover, the conflicts that he experiences

can be seen as shaping his character and distinct goals. In fact, the above-mentioned conflicts ultimately shape his identity.

Just as society struggles with itself or collapses inward, so can individual characters be seen to conflict with themselves. This internal conflict is the result of changes in identity or self-perception. Firstly, it is perhaps relevant to consider the nature of conflict within Achebe's novel. Hence, internal conflict is what distinguishes it from the others analysed in this thesis. While there are a host of different conflicts, which directly influence the individual and his or her actions, it is important to consider that Achebe is focusing on internal struggles. More specifically, reflecting on the novel as a whole, Mordaunt (1989) states that while there

exists a genuine struggle between Ezeulu and his rivals in his own tribe, the British Administrators, and the Christian Missionaries... the struggles do not get down to the root of the matter; *Arrow of God* is not so much concerned with inter-tribal conflict, but with the chief priest of Ulu who is in conflict with himself. (p.154)

Thus, emphasis must be placed on the internal conflict that Ezeulu is experiencing, and the way in which his identity shifts, following his contact with the British colonisers. In this respect, the clash between the British and the tribal clans, the clash between various tribes, amongst other conflicts, merely mirror the struggle experienced by the primary character in striving to establish his own identity.

Identity is a social construct relating to how one defines or perceives oneself. Therefore, it is impacted by and reflects the way that social change occurs, or changes in culture and social patterns. Hall and Du Gay (1996) expand on this further, stating that "identities are about the questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or where we come from' [...] identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation (ibid., p.4). Hence, it is possible to see Ezeulu as representative of the changes that are occurring in his tribe, due to colonial power and its ability to change social identity. As the position of the individual character changes, so does the way in which he identifies himself. Consequently, each of the conflicts — including those arising between the British and African population, as well as those that occur between various tribal elements of the Igbo people themselves — should be considered as an external influence on Ezeulu's identity. The specific conflicts of interest, with regard to social change and the shaping of identity, include the conflict between the British and the Igbo, the conflict between their regions, the conflict between native tribes, and the need for survival.

The tension between the policy of indirect rule and Ezeulu's ideology are central to the changes that take place in Ezeulu, where friction appears between himself and his people. Winterbottom selects Ezeulu to act as the local ruler, or pseudo-chief, who will work with the British leadership to enact a system of indirect rule (Achebe, 2016a). Winterbottom makes this selection, based on the fact that Ezeulu has stood up to the other tribesmen, refusing to support their plan to go to war against a neighbouring tribe. Winterbottom perceives Ezeulu's willingness to go against the will of his people as an act of strength and leadership. He believes that this will make him a better puppet, because he will stand up to the people and support British rule. However, Winterbottom wrongly interprets Ezeulu's character and motivation, and misjudges how rigidly he clings to his ideals. When offered the position, Ezeulu delays his response to the District Commissioner, which results in his imprisonment. Anaso and Nwabudike (2016) note that this is both a personality clash between the two men, and a conflict between the interests of indirect government and local autonomy:

it is these elements in them that are struggling for mastery in form of personality clash with each of the individuals being unable to recognize his limitation as the D.C.⁵⁷ and chief priest respectively. This clash imperceptibly leads to the second struggle between Ezeulu and his community. (ibid., p.32)

The conflict between the limited powers of the District Commissioner and chief priest, and the resulting conflict between indirect rule and the people is significant, because it is the source of every other conflict in the story, or at least has a direct impact on it. This is due to the reasons for indirect rule and the way that it was used to control the people. Anaso and Nwabudike (2016) describe these reasons for indirect rule and the White colonisation of indigenously black parts of Africa; stating that historians and politicians created a "a negative picture of Africa as a 'dark continent which God commissioned the white people to, on God's behalf, deliver from darkness'" (p.32). It is critical, because of its portrayal of the Black role in indirect rule. It assumes stupidity, or a lack of maturity and social development across all African races and makes no attempt to understand or accommodate the intricacies of these local populations, before beginning to take ownership and assuming leadership on their territories.

As mentioned earlier, indirect rule was designed to manipulate local populations through local leaders. It allowed white men to gain and maintain control, based on the assumption that Africans had not yet developed civilisations with social patterns. Therefore, they could be brought into submission by Western governmental structures. Oriaku (2009)

⁵⁷ District Commissioner.

describes the conflict that this generated; stating that Achebe's primary characters, including Ezeulu, struggled against British rule by temporarily forgetting the supremacy of native culture:

Two very successful and admirable men, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, failed ultimately when they placed themselves in opposition to Umuofia and Umuaro. What Achebe is stressing here is the supremacy of the community along with its laws, ethical codes, cultural values and system of rewards and punishments. (p.164)

In fact, the existing political methods and standards of moral behaviour in native communities were sophisticated, relevant and completely overlooked by the colonists.

Similarly, Ambreena (2000) also considers the balance of power in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, drawing upon the significance of a metaphor uttered by Ezeulu in relation to the balance of power, wherein he compares it to "a dancing mask" (p.626). Ambreena claims that this refers to legal pluralism and the need for people in power, including both the British and indirect tribal leaders, to share an understanding of the cultural rules, socio-legal approaches, and needs of the people (ibid., p.627). However, since the British appear to have a fundamentally flawed understanding of the native people and their social structure, they see their society as simple and easy to manipulate. The effect of this underestimation of African people is that they not only feel insulted, but are also driven to stand up for themselves, and the British are surprised by their strength and resistance.

Just as the British have underestimated the power of the local population, Ezeulu has underestimated the degree to which the British would resist his leadership in various ways. This ultimately contributes to the conflict between the locals and indirect rule, and amongst the locals themselves. As Oriaku (2009) states, a society will only be as strong as its individual members and their perception of their own governance. In the case of Ezeulu, he resists indirect rule, which is evidenced by the fact that he puts off going to the District Commissioner and positions himself as leader instead. However, he fails to gain the support of his fellow countrymen and goes to see the District Commissioner alone. Had he relied on the local population and believed in their supremacy, he could have led them towards further resistance against the British and the impact of indirect rule.

Achebe has a particular interest in depicting the conflict between British colonisers and African Igbos during the colonial period. Hence, it is unsurprising that the most obvious and most frequently studied conflict in *Arrow of God* occurs within Igbo society (Mordaunt, 1989). The primary conflict is simply over space. The British have invaded a terrain in which the Igbo people have lived for generations. Nevertheless, the main focus of the novel is not

society as a whole, but Ezeulu's experiences among his own people. This is significant, because it also relates to existentialism; it looks at the way in which man defines himself and makes completely free choices. However, Ezeulu is caught in a conflict between the interests of the British and those of local Nigerian society. In sum, the story is set in an Igbo village at the beginning of the British colonial rule in Nigeria, where Christian missionaries are also working to influence the lives of native Africans. This is important, because the Igbo community is a "closely-knit society" and Ezeulu's role is central to it (Mordaunt, 1989, p.155). He has a close relationship with members of his local community and faces a complex set of struggles as a result.

The Igbo have a social identity that was already established through local tradition, long before the arrival of the British. However, the intervention of colonists led to changes in these social patterns. In *Arrow of God*, The Igbo resist or find themselves in conflict with the colonial powers, as a result of differences in culture, customs and beliefs, generating a power struggle related to social change. It is important to note here that this is largely a *social*, rather than *political* tension, because of the principle of indirect rule in the region. Consequently, there was relatively little change in the nation's political structure. Achebe states that "[c]olonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it didn't create big political units where there were small scattered ones before... of course there are areas of Africa where colonialism divided a single ethnic group among two or even three powers" (Achebe, 2016a, p.19). Instead, there remained these small political units, run by locals, who were appointed to positions of power by the British.

As indicated above, British indirect rule subsequently brought about change in Nigeria's social structures. Ezeulu is hesitant to work with the white man and become his puppet, because of his loyalty to his people and to the God whom he believes he is ordained to serve. He represents the desire of the native population to maintain their traditional beliefs and lifestyle. He is acutely aware that accepting the position of chief and aligning himself with the British will change his social position and role in his community, because of tension between the coloniser and colonised, so he resists that change by refusing to serve the British government. This conflict is the byproduct of resistance in the face of an alien force. For example, as the British attempt to exert their influence on the Igbo people, the latter respond with resistance, and work to maintain fundamental and well-established aspects of their cultural identity. This is further exacerbated by unequal power. For example, Achebe observes that

when the roof and walls of a house fall in, the ceiling is not left standing. The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road—they are all part of the same thing. The white man has a gun, a machete, a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with one weapon alone. (ibid., p.85)

The Igbo were generally a peace-loving tribal people, having very little need for warfare. When they did go to war against another tribe or community, they did not arm themselves in the same way as the English, who were the dominant power in the Western world at the time. This illustrates the cultural gap between the coloniser and the colonised, and their different perceptions of conflict. From a psychological standpoint, Erikson (1994) explains this process as follows:

identity connotes the resiliency of maintaining essential patterns in the process of change. Thus, as a strange as it may seem, it takes a well-established identity to tolerate radical change, for the well-established identity has arranged itself around basic values which cultures have in common. (pp.95-96)

The colonial powers try to institute radical religious and social change, while the Igbo resist it to maintain their Nigerian identity. As mentioned before by Hall and du Gay (1996), this process can be seen across the nation's history, languages and cultures. Nigeria's history did not begin the moment the British arrived, but dates back to the very beginnings of the African continent, symbolised in Achebe's novel as the remembrance of ancestors who are honoured by the novel's characters. Ezeulu remarks that he is not the first 'Ezeulu', reminding the reader that he inherited the title and that the existing political or governmental system had been in place and functioned well for centuries. Thus, conflict with the British can be seen as a means for the Igbo to hold onto their traditional culture, while the British infiltrate the nation with their language, Westernised historical and political concepts, and a significantly different culture. They then proceed to impress these elements of identity on the native population, who in turn, start losing their indigenous culture to the colonial influence. This can be further examined by considering the conflict between traditional Christian and African religious ideas.

In *Arrow of God* there is a clear conflict between Christian and African traditions. This is because a very different cosmology is embraced in each case. There is consequently a dramatically different understanding of the creation of the world and a completely different moral compass to make sense of it (Onyibor, 2016). The significance of belief is explained by Okafor (1992), who argues that "cosmological and metaphysical ideas determine the basic notions underlying our cultural, religious and social activity. In fact, these notions, necessarily though, sometimes covertly shape our behavior and thus guide our actions" (p.13). Similarly, Animalu (1990) explains the belief patterns within both Christian and Igbo

tradition; stating that cosmological or religious belief defines how a group of people organise their activities and structure their worldview. It becomes the means by which a people make sense of their reality. Onyibor (2016) emphasises the significance of this for the individual, asserting that it is fundamental to a person's ability to explain the "how and why of their daily existence" (p.110). Thus, when the British colonisers enter Nigeria and begin working to convert the Igbo people from their native beliefs to Christianity, it triggers a struggle for identity, faith, and even the most basic components of daily life. It corresponds to Sartre's (2012) insights into the ordinary or 'unauthentic state' as a composite of a person's behaviour and everyday life, which is bound up with routine and habit, occurs without reflection, and which cannot be confused with conscious decision-making. The struggle over identity, in this case, occurs when an individual is called upon to make choices that challenge the status quo.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe dedicates a considerable amount of time and space to describing the Igbo faith and its role in society. The religion is predominantly animistic or naturalistic, with nature-based deities and a strong emphasis in the supernatural. For example, emphasis is placed on Ota, the God of the River. In Achebe's words,

the nearer stream, Ota had been abandoned since the oracle announced yesterday that the enormous boulder resting on to other rocks at its source was about to fall and would take a softer pillow for its head. Until the Alusi who owned the stream, and whose name it bore had been placated, no one would go near it. (Achebe, 2016a, p.7)

This demonstrates the personification of natural elements and reveals how they are defined. It also affirms the religious beliefs of the Igbo and how these relate to their behaviour. There is strength in these beliefs, which drives action, but there remains the question of whether the choice to believe is 'authentic'.

Aside from the above, the Igbo deify ideals, or protective forces, which are believed to be constantly at work, directing people's lives. This illustrates the power of belief. For example, Idemili is a protective spirit, but unlike the Christian God, local deities do not appear to be omnipotent or all-powerful. Instead, they are given limited dominion in people's lives. For example, the God served by Ezeulu only rules over the yam harvest but has no power over any other aspect of life, which means that he has limited dominion within the Igbo belief system. Thus, the transition from this set of beliefs to Christianity results in tension, and the eruption of conflict between existing social norms and the new belief system being imposed. More specifically, a major issue in this situation is the lack of understanding displayed by the British, who fail to see the complexities of the local religious structure and

its role in native society. As a result, problems arise at political level. For example, the first major religious conflict in Achebe's novel concerns the function of religion in government, as highlighted by Nwofa (1981): "It might be said that Ulu had abandoned his military function to Government but remained cleanser of the community, governor of the agricultural cycle, and guardian of the people. These first two remaining functions were not separable" (p.34). Therefore, the conflict arises from the fact that Winterbottom has attempted to assume some, although not all the duties of Ulu, whereas the Igbo people see these responsibilities as inseparable.

To clarify the above, tradition and religious belief dictate every aspect of tribal life, including the times for planting and harvest. The seasons are marked by rituals, managed by the priests such as Ezeulu. However, problems emerge when Christian missionaries, like Goodcountry, begin to undermine these traditions. For example, Goodcountry tells the people that they can harvest their crops without fear of Ulu, following a thanks offering to the one true God, rather than waiting on the priest. This undermines and conflicts with Ezeulu's rigid adherence to the tradition of waiting one full month to eat each yam, leading to the Festival of the New Yam being delayed. The resulting starvation and the fear that follows leads the people to turn from Ulu to Christ, in what Wren (1978) refers to as a transfer of faith. This is a direct result of the conflict between Ezeulu's own deeply embedded religious beliefs, his identity as a tribal priest, and Christianity.

It should also be noted that the conflict between Christianity and native culture intensifies existing tensions between native tribes. For example, Goodcountry, who knows nothing about local beliefs, unknowingly aggravates the tension between Ulu and Idemili when he pushes Oduche to kill the sacred python. This is seen by the Igbo as an offence against Idemili, creating a rift between the priest of Idemili and Ezeulu. It consequently triggers inter-tribal conflict. Thus, the conflict between Christianity and the native belief system is complex, with a direct effect on the identity of the people at multiple levels. Most notably, it alters Ezeulu's social role and his people's beliefs, whereby they are no longer prone to believing in or relying on him. While Ezeulu clings to tradition and struggles to maintain his identity, which is tied to tradition, his fellow tribe members begin to adopt elements of the Christian mindset; seeking relief from the physical trials of hunger and poverty when their yams spoil and go to waste. Therefore, the native people begin to depart from tradition, which brings them into direct conflict with Ezeulu, and by implication, sets the influence of Christianity against local tradition and Ezeulu's identity.

Nevertheless, many of the conflicts in Achebe's novel actually occur within the native tribes themselves, rather than between the British and native Africans. This is a primary focus of this current study, as it relates to existentialism and the way that it is reflected in the character and life of Ezeulu. The first of these tensions is revealed through a flashback technique, portraying a feud between the Umuaro and Okperi tribes over matters of social order and land. The Umuaro live in a specific subgroup of villages led by Nwaka, who wishes to go to war against the Okperi. However, this plan is shut down by Winterbottom, the British overseer, who wants to keep the peace. It is evidence of the tensions between local tribes under the same British governor, as well as tensions between the local leadership and British rule.

More specifically, one of the novel's characters remarks that "the house which the stranger has been seeking to pull down has caught fire of its own will" (Achebe, 2016a, p.106). Hence, the destruction of the native people and their way of life takes place because these local people work against each other, not because of the British or their direct attempts to undermine local culture and sabotage the independence of native communities. Ezeulu and his adherence to tradition ultimately create many of the conflicts that drive Igbo society towards Christianity and British control, rather than supporting their continued independence. Soile (1976) describes the nature of this internal conflict, stating: "As the chief priest of the god Ulu, he locks horns with reactionary elements within the clan... one might call the home front of the war, the opposing forces are led by Nwaka, the ambitious and hearty upstart" (p.284). This is important, because it shows how the forces at work in the story are not solely external. Rather, it is Nwaka who challenges Ulu and his sanctity, believing that Ezeulu has either been given, or is trying to seize, too much authority within the community. This is at least in part because of the influence of his friend, Ezidemili, the power-hungry priest of a lesser god.

What emerges from Achebe's narrative are two basic flaws, which eventually serve to pull the local community apart. First, there are too many gods, each with their own priesthood, leading to competition for overall leadership as the community moves from a traditional form of government to the newly implemented British system. Second, it is evident that the vices to which all human beings are prone are equally common amongst Nigeria's tribal populations. These men, in their flaws, lead their people into conflict, rather than supporting their unity, in the face of an invasion by British governmental and missionary forces. Mordaunt (1989) defines this conflict within traditional society as "...really a struggle for authority within the clan, starting as a struggle for supremacy

between the chief priests of two deities, Ezidemili, the chief priest of Edemili, and Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, the main clan deity” (p.159). Hence, one of the internal struggles demonstrated in the novel concerns traditional deities and the locus of power. It directly relates to the character of Ezeulu and his identity, because it determines what power he has or has not been given by Ulu. It also defines his self-perception and the way that he is perceived by his people as the chief priest of the most powerful of their gods. In turn, it points to his lack of power, implying that there is no God; pointing to atheistic existentialism and emphasising the importance of man’s conscious decisions.

Ultimately, the local community is locked in a battle between the need to survive and the need to believe. Uchendu (1965) clarifies that within Igbo culture, belief and survival are inseparable:

the Igbo world is a world peopled by the visible and invisible forces, by the living, the dead and those unborn. It is a world in which all these interact, affecting and modifying behavior, a world that is delicately balanced between opposing forces, each motivated by its self-interest, a world whose survival demands some form of cooperation among its members, although that cooperation may be minimal and even hostile in character. (p.20)

Echeruo (1975) similarly speaks to the integration of the tribal belief system, the survival of the primary characters, and the primary themes in the novel, stating that “*Arrow of God*, ...tells three stories in one integrated style: the trial of Ezeulu, the disintegration of the indigenous political and religious order in Umuaro, and the establishment of British rule and Christian religion” (p.226). This is because, once belief is lost, the survival of indigenous society is impossible. As described above, the local community has a strong belief that their naturalistic gods participate actively in their daily lives, i.e. telling them when to plant and when to harvest. Basically, the community’s ability to grow food and provide for their most basic needs depends on their belief system and sacred traditions, which need to be upheld to ensure continued success. Moreover, the tradition of the priesthood is deeply embedded in Igbo culture, meaning that

it is significant that this symbol [religious token] is manifested during the festival of the first pumpkin leaves, the first food related item to be harvested in the year. The harmonious society works together to produce life-giving food. The abundant green leaves carried by women symbolize life and good health, continuity of the group is reaffirmed and reassured. (Kalu, 2004, p.205)

Thus, until the arrival of the British, the tribal peoples’ beliefs are firmly tied to their survival.

However, the arrival of the British colonisers challenges these beliefs and ultimately endangers the survival of native tribes, both physically and culturally. The missionaries encourage the locals to put God first, abandoning their culture and traditions. In fact, when the church bells ring, Nwafo claims “It is saying: Leave your yam, leaving your cocoyam and come to church. That is what Oduche says”, to which Ezeulu replies: “Yes, it tells them to leave their yam and their cocoyam, does it? Then it is singing the song of extermination” (Achebe, 2016a, p.43). This is a perfect illustration of the fundamental conflict between Christian and Igbo religious cultures and ultimately, the struggle between survival and belief. If the church bells are telling them to leave their crops, it is telling them to leave the very staples that stand between themselves and death. This either indicates a lack of understanding on the part of the British, or a willful extermination of the native people, after they have been lulled into a situation where they have no food. In reality, the native population must depend on their own gods, their traditional sources of food, and their own labour to survive, which is incompatible with the traditional Christian mindset.

This can most clearly be seen in the way that Ezeulu perceives his duty or sacred role in declaring the new moon and therefore, the beginning of the harvest season. After his imprisonment, the ritualised seasons are thrown out of their normal rhythm, because Ezeulu has not been present to perform his duty. However, he continues to rigidly follow tradition, because he takes his responsibility to his God, his people, and their survival very seriously. It corresponds to Sartre’s existential statements, whereby man is not only responsible for himself, but for all mankind. More specifically, Sartre (1996) affirms:

Thus, the first effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. (p.23)

Meanwhile, Ezeulu’s response, when he is asked to declare the start of the festival early: “You all know our custom, ...I only call a new festival when there is only one yam left from the last. Today I have three yams and so I know that the time has not come” (ibid., p.207). As a result of his rigidity, the yams rot in the ground and the people are literally starving, igniting a conflict between their beliefs and survival. Ezeulu is consequently making a choice that affects all those around him (‘all of mankind’).

In turn, the people feel abandoned by their God: their crop is failing and Obika’s death indicates to them that Ulu is displeased or has even abandoned them. They declare that “no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against

his clan” (ibid., p.32). Feeling that Ezeulu has placed his position above the wellbeing of his people, they question Ulu’s loyalty to them and turn to Christianity. Again, this demonstrates the conflict between survival and belief. Goodcountry, the missionary, tells the people that they need not fear Ulu, but should rather follow the one true God and proceed to gather their yams, making a sacrificial offering to God. The Christian community’s willingness to welcome the people in their hour of need, when paired with Ulu’s perceived failure, encourages their conversion. In this case, they choose belief in a Christian God over belief in Ulu, and their physical survival over the survival of their culture

The above events are directly tied to Ezeulu’s crisis of identity, wherein he sees his belief as the key to his people’s survival. Thus, his faith is a choice that he makes for the betterment of all mankind, but it leads him to choose faith over the immediate survival of his people. His faith in Ulu and adherence to the traditions engendered by this belief is designed, in his mind, to protect his people from misfortune – such as the curse of the gods, the loss of crops, and the infiltration of the British. However, his rigidity ultimately leads to the decimation of his people their loss of belief, and an end to their very survival. This is the ultimate existential choice, whereupon he chooses freely and bears the responsibility for his choices. Ezeulu’s choice not only threatens his community, but also his personal identity as a member of the Igbo nation, as a chief priest of Ulu, and as a leader in his community.

4.3 Ezeulu’s Identity Crisis: A Colonial and Existential Trend

Achebe’s main point of interest is ultimately the story of Ezeulu’s identity crisis. Identity, as previously discussed in the theoretical framework of this thesis, is an individual’s self-defined social role, or a conscious construction of the self in alignment with social norms, shaped by conflict or tension. As seen in the previous discussion, Ezeulu is subject to a variety of conflicts and is torn between both the colonial and native social systems, resulting in an identity crisis. As the main concern of this thesis, such a crisis can be analysed in relation to colonial and existential concepts. The colonial conflicts in *Arrow of God* arise because of contact between the British and Igbo society. This aligns with Chennells (1999), who identifies the significance of post-colonialism as its “[concern] with the worlds which colonialism in its multiple manifestations, confused, disfigured and distorted, reconfigured and finally transformed” (p.110). In the case of *Arrow of God*, it centres on understanding the ways in which Igbo culture has been confused, misconfigured and changed through contact with British colonialists. The phenomenon is manifested in the identity crisis experienced by the character of Ezeulu.

These conflicts can be grouped into and analysed according to three overarching categories, which include internal conflicts within Igbo society, conflict between Igbo society and the influence of indirect rule, and religious conflict related to the influence and interpretation of authority. These are viewed through the lens of conflict between Christian religion and Igbo religious traditions. This delineation is possible, because colonial theory assumes that colonisation and imperialism have impacted the whole world and multiple layers of human interaction, not just the relationship between the coloniser and colonised (Burney, 2012).

According to the tenets of colonial theory, the forms of power wielded by colonisers vary from location to location, but the resistance to them is consistent: “[Wherever] a globalized theory of the colonial might lead us, we need to remember that resistances to colonialist power always find material presence at the level of the local.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006, p.52). As such, it is important to consider the changes that occur at local level and within local systems, as a result of the interaction between native tribes and the British colonisers. As previously noted, some tensions already existed between tribal groups prior to colonial intervention, which is portrayed in flashback in the novel, with the Umuaro and Okperi arguing over a shared tract of land. However, these tensions intensify under the influence of British involvement.

Close examination of the details provided during the above-mentioned flashback further illustrate the relationship between the tribes, before and after the influence of the British colonisers. The author announces that “this feud was made worse by the fact that Okperi welcomed missionaries and government while Umuaro, on the other hand, has remained backward” (Achebe, 2016a, p.36). While the feud already existed before the arrival of the British, the related tensions were heightened when one tribe elected to accept the British invasion and support the colonist’s efforts, while the other chose to remain true to their tribal system. The use of the term, ‘backward’ is also interesting here, further reflecting the tone of the indirect government and the way that Blacks, even within their home communities – where they were in the majority – were treated like second class citizens, as if they were uncivilised and in need of development at the hands of the British.

Nwaka consequently begins stirring up resistance and seeking power for himself, rather than remaining within his traditional social role, according to his assigned station. This could partly be attributed to a disruption of power through the arrival of the British, and the interference of the District Commissioner in deciding tribal affairs. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe (1988) observes that

in the absurd raffle-draw that apportioned the destinies of post-colonial African societies two people starting off even as identical twins in the morning might quiet easily find themselves in the evening one as President sitting on the heads of the people and the other a nightman carrying the people's shit in buckets on his head. (p.168)

This is significant, because it demonstrates how, from the perspective of the native African, local tribesmen begin to treat each other differently following contact with the British; they become more willing to usurp one another's power, to seek power for themselves, and to begin actively trying to gain a footing within the British system of government.

One explanation of the above phenomenon could be that British involvement reduced the notion of humanity or sense of civility, negatively affecting the mutual respect with which native Nigerians once treated each other. Achebe (2016b) describes post-colonial Africa as a "setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor" (p.21). In addition, the process of colonisation both dehumanises and depersonalises people's suffering, so that individuals are more likely to commit acts of brutality against each other. Correspondingly, one character in *Arrow of God* states that "the house which the stranger has been seeking to pull down has caught fire of its own will" (Achebe, 2016a, p.106), because the native people were abandoning their traditions and common culture. As a result, they began attacking each other in different ways, while aligning with the British. The above quote is a metaphor for the loss of native identity in the process of assimilating with the imposed British or Westernised identity. Thus, the ultimate destruction of the native way of life leads to the loss of the Igbo people as a discernable tribe; occurring as a direct result of native peoples working against each other in the shadow of the British colonisers.

This phenomenon is most evident from Ezeulu's loss of position. As the high priest of his nation's most powerful God, Ezeulu is a respected man, well-liked and supported by his community in the early part of the novel. However, his adherence to tradition, his fear of the white man, and his unwillingness to work with the British, ultimately lead to tensions between himself and his fellow tribesmen. Soile (1976) refers to his fight, not only to maintain his position, but also to preserve his people's traditions, as "the home front of the war" (p.284), where the enemy is internal, and therefore a member of his own native tribe. Nwaka seeks power for himself and his allies, and in doing so, cuts down Ezeulu, so that he loses his power and position. This is essentially a territorial dispute, as each man strives to find a foothold where he can maintain control over his home community, since contact with the British has eroded their claim to power. Said (1993) describes this phenomenon, stating that

just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. (p.7)

In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu imagines that the most effective way for him to protect his people is to preserve tradition. However, when tradition threatens their very survival, a rift opens up between Ezeulu and his people. The belief that Ulu has abandoned his people drives a wedge between Ezeulu and those who choose to defect from this faith in tribal gods. As a result, Ezeulu loses his sense of identity, because he is the chief priest of a religion with a diminishing following, and the battle he is fighting is not one with “cannons and guns” but rather with fearful, hungry people, who reach for what they perceive to be their best chance of physical survival.

Like the exiled Okonkwo’s loneliness in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu’s loss of identity may be seen as another kind of exile, in which he becomes an outcast, or a leader without a nation. When Ezeulu’s people turn away from him and the traditional yam ceremonies to embrace Christianity, they consign him to an emotional exile; leaving him without his former identity and even a homeland. Said (2000) expresses the real pain and distress of being away from home, stating:

exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. (p.173)

Ezeulu is estranged, not only from Ulu and his people, but ultimately from his life’s purpose and from himself, as a result of Igbo society collapsing from within after contact with the British colonisers and missionaries.

Furthermore, there is an internal conflict within Igbo culture, relating to the tribe and their traditional gods. It is clear throughout the novel’s narrative that every decision of the Umuaro stems from a very rigid set of traditions. Consequently, they are stuck as a culture. This dependency on tradition and superstition is part of what leads the British colonisers to underestimate the native population’s strength, intelligence, and political organisation. Nevertheless, it subsequently undermines the stability of the culture and shackles the people to practices that are no longer relevant to their lives, or which cannot benefit their day-to-day existence. Hence, while it is clear that few actually believe that Ulu brings the harvest, they are too steeped in tradition to walk away. Therefore, their traditions ultimately make

them poorer; for example, by preventing them from harvesting their yams when they are ripe. This creates an internal conflict amongst the native people themselves, whereby they are divided into factions: one being dedicated to the old beliefs, and the other, willing to compromise in some way.

The above-mentioned conflicts between Igbo communities, however, are certainly not the only outcome of contact between the British colonisers and native Igbos. More specifically, there is the impact of indirect rule upon personal identity, as illustrated in the character of Ezeulu. For example, there is friction between indirect rule and Ezeulu's role as a religious servant of his native tribe; this being the source of his identity crisis. It is important to note that indirect rule was used to select local leaders as theoretical figureheads, so that the British government could communicate with the local population. Winterbottom decides that Ezeulu should be appointed as the chief or leader of the area over which he is District Commissioner. The shortcomings of the indirect approach, which become clear in this aspect of the novel, are that the appointment of Colonial Chieftaincy (the position to which Africans were appointed under the British colonial government) was based on the British notion of ownership. It was a form of governance over native Africans that conflicted with traditional African federated land ownership, wherein land was not considered to be owned by any one person, but rather by a whole village or tribe.

In contrast, Britain claimed land to which no ownership had been declared; in a profound misunderstanding of the nature of communal land ownership (this being the most common system of land ownership in Nigeria, prior to colonisation). Their claims were precipitated on the colonial position, which saw the British introducing a political structure to an 'uncivilised' people. However, as declared by Awinsong (2017), "Long before contact with European merchants, African societies developed sophisticated communities and kingdoms" (p.121). As such, when Ezeulu comes into contact with the British and is appointed to a position within the indirect governmental structure, despite his rejection of the role, it fractures his sense of identity. By assigning him a position of Western colonial leadership, his role as chief priest is diminished or even belittled by the British colonisers, who make it clear that they do not hold to or respect existing political structures, and that they intend to replace them. Nevertheless, it should also be borne in mind that this approach completely contradicts the rationale behind British indirect rule, which was ostensibly aimed at preserving local autonomy and culture. Thus, the Igbo are left feeling that their existing political system, based on traditional religious appointments, is being undermined, even though the British claim to support the native population. In one article, entitled 'Blind

Imperial Arrogance’, Said (2003) expresses this tension, stating that “Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate” (p.1). This is critical in that it observes how British missionaries, not being direct representatives of the imperial government, did not intend to dominate or wipe out traditional African peoples; they had no desire to create a crisis where some native Africans, like Ezeulu, could no longer be the people or leaders that they had always been. However, their very presence and well-meaning attempts to help ‘savages’ organise a modern government and find God ultimately destroyed the native people’s sense of identity, and annihilated the values and cultural components of their self-image, as in the case of Ezeulu.

More specifically, when considering the impact of indirect rule on identity, it is argued that a strong group identity forges inter-group solidarity (Acemoglu et al., 2014). However, as this group identity is challenged by change, intergroup solidarity begins to crumble. In part, this is due to the colonised beginning to assimilate elements of the colonisers’ identity. In the case of Ezeulu, it is clear that from his secure position within the group that he is unafraid to voice his opinions and influence the people to make good decisions. He therefore behaves like a leader. It is evident from the way he vocally opposes going to war. In fact, it is this transparency, honesty and sound leadership, as well as his ability to go against the grain, which initially attracts the District Commissioner to Ezeulu as a potential State representative. However, Ezeulu is also aware that he will be manipulated and controlled if he accepts the role. He consequently resists this imposition on his perceived role as chief priest, in the belief that he is ordained of God; refusing to be the puppet of man, which would be an inferior position.

Bhabha (2012) likewise refers to colonisation, in relation to the effect of mimicry. Mimicry is the “representation of difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (ibid., p.126). Therefore, those who begin to accept indirect rule as normal, or who pretend to accept it by mimicking British ideals, ultimately betray or disavow their native culture. This concept is well-established in Ezeulu’s character, whereby he refuses to mimic British culture; turning down the role of colonial chief, but simultaneously sending his son to study with the missionaries. It demonstrates the conflict between indirect government and the native people, and the risks posed to individual identity by aligning with British influence. It could be said that British colonisation, in attempting to place indirect colonial government on Ezeulu’s shoulders, marks the beginning of his end. By freely choosing to reject a colonial appointment, Ezeulu not only remains true to his self-concept by displaying his ‘good will’

morality (to quote Kant), but also initiates the conflict that shapes who he will become, in that it displaces who he has always been. This subjective free choice to transform his identity, his loss of self, and his subsequent regrouping of self, provides evidence that in one way or another, Ezeulu's ill-fated destiny is something that he must take responsibility for.

The Christian religion has historically been used by colonising forces to manipulate or exert power over native peoples (Marandi and Shadpour, 2011). Within the text of *Arrow of God*, this purpose is verbally acknowledged by Moses Unachukwu, who states "So I want to tell you now that I will not be led astray by outsiders who choose to weep louder than the owners of the corpse. You are not the first teacher I have seen; you are not the second; you are not the third" (Achebe, 2016a, p.49). He understands that it is the white man's religion, designed to lead him away from his native cultural traditions and beliefs. However, he takes great pride in his role, which he sees as distinguished, because he has received his education within it. Marandi and Shadpour (2011) venture that imperial powers have commonly used the ideological institution of the church as a secondary form of indirect control over native peoples, because locals are more likely to accept and assimilate religious ideals introduced by missionaries than the power of a ruling class asserted through dominance. This certainly proves to be true in Achebe's narrative, regarding the response from the Igbo people to white rulers and white missionaries.

In *Arrow of God*, there is a conflict between Christian ideology and the basic tenets of Igbo religious belief. Historically, Ezeulu has been the chief priest of the most powerful Igbo tribal deity. However, the missionaries leverage the concept of an all-powerful and all-knowing Christian God, in order to instil fear in the people. As a result, when things start to go wrong for the local population, as seen during the yam harvest, they attribute it to the Christian God. The novel reveals that:

As daylight chases away darkness so will the white man drive away all our customs. I know that as I say it now it passes by your ears, but it will happen. The white man has power which comes from the true God and it burns like fire. This is the God about whom we preach every eighth day. (Achebe, 2016a, p.85)

This demonstrates the perceived power of God, and how fear of that God gives the colonisers power over the native population. It is also an essential element of the novel, as it relates to Ezeulu's identity crisis while he strives to unify his people by clinging to the traditions of the past. He reminds them that "this is not our custom", holding fast to both his role as chief priest and the basic tenets of his religious beliefs. However, the church missionaries actively seek to create division among the Africans and undermine Ulu's perceived power. In particular, the notion of omnipotence, attributed to the Christian God, is an area of conflict

between the two sets of beliefs, whereby it is easy to create discord between the two factions. More specifically, while the Christian God is all powerful, Achebe (1975) points out that according to native Igbo tradition, power over nature is divided among multiple gods. He compares these two ideological positions as follows:

Wherever Something stands, something else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute. *I am the truth, the way, and the life*, would be blasphemous or simply absurd, for is it not well known that a man may worship Ogwugwu to perfection and yet be killed by Udo. (p.55)

Ezeulu takes steps to prevent the continued growth or acceptance of the white man's religion among his people. These measures include refusing to cooperate, rejecting the appointment offered to him by the District Commissioner, and eventually going to prison. However, he also sends his son to study in a Christian school, although his actions are misinterpreted by his fellow Igbos, who believe that he has compromised and angered God as a result. Ezeulu is consequently perceived as displaying weaknesses and his fellow countrymen believe that these weaknesses have brought punishment upon them, exasperated by the extended presence of the white man. The church then becomes the sole mediator who can take man's concerns to God. Again, this eliminates the primary service once performed by Ezeulu, which was to intercede on behalf of his people.

By disempowering the identity that is not only associated with the tribal gods, but also with the tribal leaders, who are believed to derive their power from these gods, the colonial forces effectively eliminate all competition for belief and create a power vacuum. It allows the colonising power to step in and fill the void, breaking down the core values and characteristics of native identity. Within *Arrow of God*, this is manifested in the personal identity crisis experienced by Ezeulu, the ultimate loss of his identity, and the cultural decimation experienced by the Igbo people. Again, we see that the fate of Ezeulu is connected to the fate of his people. The missionaries and their efforts to spread Christianity cause the loss of personal and cultural identity, which in turn helps the British wrest even more control from the native population. The effects of this are manifested in Ezeulu – such as the loss of his self-identity, and the loss of his power and status among his people, just as his people lose their beliefs and traditions and eventually, their unity, which would otherwise have given them the strength to retain their cultural identity. In unity, they once supported or found strength in their religion, because they all believed the same things, but when this group identity was fractured, they were forced to make more authentic decisions, with a gradual loss of their cultural identity.

In this thesis, while it has been well-established from a post-colonial perspective that Ezeulu experiences a kind of identity crisis, resulting from the interplay between colonial exposure and factors of personal and cultural identity, this does not mean that colonial forces are solely to blame. Rather, an existential approach, or the consideration of internal and personal factors impacting on self-ideation, is equally strong in Achebe's novel. Returning to the notion that all thought begins with a human subject, the existentialist argument is that Ezeulu's identity crisis begins within himself and not on contact with the colonisers. If one agrees with Kierkegaard (2013) that man is in control of his own destiny, then Ezeulu's loss of identity must also be considered as the result of his own choices, and his inability to assimilate in a meaningful way with post-colonial life. He begins making conscious decisions, and while this leads to greater authenticity, it also engenders anxiety and alienation. At some point in the narrative, he stops living authentically and this lack of authenticity triggers an existential crisis within him, or a crisis of self. Thus, in alignment with this approach, Ezeulu's actions, reactions and self-perceptions can be analysed according to the existential principles of anxiety, alienation, authenticity, freedom of choice and responsibility.

The first feature of existentialism that can be related to Ezeulu's identity crisis is anxiety. In the existentialist sense, anxiety is somewhat similar to emotional anxiety, but it goes beyond fear and the sense of being threatened or vulnerable; it also involves more than worrying about outcomes. Instead, it extends to feelings of alienation and increased responsibility. Sartre defines anxiety as evidence of our 'consciousness of freedom' (Sartre, 2012, p.35). What this means in practice is that fear equates to trepidation about a very specific thing or event. In contrast, anxiety is experienced in the face of something less defined; it is the experience of 'absolute freedom', which implies 'absolute responsibility', or, I believe, the burden of the consequences of our free conscious choices. Meanwhile, anguish stems from moral uncertainty over whether our choices are right or wrong, or even whether we can bear such responsibility. It reveals our consciousness that we are free and is characterised by the terrifying feeling that accompanies increasing self-awareness. Sartre argues:

We wished only to show that there exists a specific consciousness of freedom, and we wished to show that this consciousness is anguish. This means that we wished to established anguish in its essential structure as consciousness of freedom. (Sartre, 2012, p.35)

This is extremely important in the formation of identity, because of its power to shape thoughts about the Self. Throughout the text of *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu experiences anxiety.

Ulogu (2014) defines this as an “anxiety to fulfil desire” (p.291). Ezeulu is future-oriented and trying to prepare for future events, as they relate to the Igbo people and his role within that society. This anxiety is manifested in the way that he thinks his way through various tense moments. For example, the coming of the new moon is a common period of anxiety for the chief priest, because chiefs have a high level of responsibility and an intense desire for procedures to be properly carried out. In this case, Ezeulu’s anxiety connects expectation with the self; for example, he seeks to meet the expectations of his people and of Ulu without sacrificing himself, which causes tension between his limited power and his desire for success, resulting in anxiety.

Similarly, he is anxious about the impact that the new Christian faith will have on his people. Hence, he sends his son to study at the Christian mission, believing that he will obtain more information in this way, so that he can prepare for Christianity’s onslaught on his culture, and on his social and religious position. However, in so doing, he continues to proclaim the superiority of native tradition, stating:

Listen to what I shall say now. When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing. It was I who sent you to join those people because of my friendship to the white man, Wintabota. He asked me to send one of my children to learn the ways of his people and I agreed to send you. I did not send you so that you might leave your duty in my household. Do you hear me? Go and tell the people who chose you to go to Okperi that I said no. Tell them that tomorrow I the day on which my sons and my wives and my son's wife work for me. Your people should know the custom of his land; if they don't you must tell them. Do you hear me? (Achebe, 2016a, p.131)

Nevertheless, this response to anxiety, while satisfying his need to prepare, fails to relieve the underlying stressors.

Another source of anxiety for Ezeulu is his dissatisfaction with his limited powers. Early on in the narrative, he is offered a position of authority by the British leaders, which triggers his anxiety. If he had accepted the position, he would have become a puppet of the encroaching British government, but by refusing to accept it, his power is diminished. His position as chief priest is therefore a constant source of anxiety to him. According to Ulogu (2014) “Ezeulu the chief priest experiences significant unpleasant moments that keep him constantly thinking and agitating” (p.293). His agitation largely stems from his own pride, and his need to preserve this pride by working directly against what he can see might be beneficial for his family and tribe. For example, at the same time that Ezeulu refuses to help the British, he invites conflicting ideas into his own home; consequently, aggravating his anxiety by clinging to tradition, while sending his son to study with the missionaries. Likewise, Ulogu (2014) notes that “the day to day rivalries and quarrels in Ezeulu’s

household are all indicative of the little foibles that cause tension in individual persons and threaten the peace of their environments” (p.293). This indicates that he is experiencing discomfort, but without fear, which is born of a lack of authenticity.

Another example of Ezeulu’s anxiety is depicted in the passages about the yam harvest. Here again, Ezeulu chooses to adhere to tradition. He consequently experiences intense anxiety over his desire to cling to what he has always known, namely the traditions that grant him status and power, but which lead his people towards struggles, hunger and loss, thereby driving them to Christianity. Ezeulu’s anxiety adds fuel to the rapidly spreading fire of his personal identity crisis and the broader identity crisis amongst his tribe. His anxiety is inevitable, because of his position, as he remains in a kind of limbo; caught between his people and the encroaching British elements, where freedom and authenticity are extremely hard for him to master. However, given the power struggles between native tribes, and the power struggles between native priests, these tensions and anxieties would arguably still have been a feature of Ezeulu’s life, even without the colonisation of his homeland, because they stem from basic flaws within human nature.

The second main tenet of existentialism, relevant to the construction of Ezeulu’s identity and his existential crisis, is the concept of alienation. According to Sartre, alienation involves estrangement, or disconnection from ‘authentic’ life. In short, living in ‘bad faith’⁵⁸ Furthermore, according to Sayers (2011), alienation can be overcome if one successfully manages doubt. He states that it “can be overcome and individuality developed and realized only through participation in a social world: by fulfilling my station and duties” (p.4). Alienation is therefore mastered by examining self-doubt and bringing it back to the self as a learning experience. However, according to Quayson (2011):

This is to take seriously Axel Honneth’s suggestion in *The Struggle for Recognition*. (1996) that identity derives from a “practical relation-to-self” that is neither limited purely to beliefs about oneself, but lie in the dynamic processes by which individuals come to experience them-selves as possessing a certain status, or as being the focus of particular concern, or as capable of acting as responsible agents, or as making valued contributions to shared projects. (p.32)

Throughout the novel, we see Ezeulu struggling with doubts about himself, brought on by his struggles with status, his struggle to maintain power, and his struggle to lead.

One passage where these doubts and the resulting internal conflict are especially visible, is where Ezeulu perceives the loss of his own power but does not want others to be

⁵⁸ *New World Encyclopedia* (2016) ‘Alienation’, available at: [//www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Alienation&oldid=994418](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Alienation&oldid=994418).

aware of this loss. Here, he dreads pity, but realises that he has fallen from his station. Achebe (2016a) writes that “even if they had been sincere Ezeulu would still have resented anybody making him an object of pity. At first his anger shouldered inwardly” (p.61). However, rather than resolving this conflict and the feelings of alienation that flow from it, he tries to stuff them down; bottling his problems up, rather than actively processing them. Ezeulu’s doubts may be viewed as trials, or moments of indecision that relate to alienation. With each of his decisions leading to a downward spiral of events, his alienation appears to increase and manifest itself in a loss of authenticity. For much of the text, it is clear that Ezeulu is not leading his most authentic life. More specifically, what this means is that he is met with hostility by his people and within his own mind. The effect of this is internal alienation from his true self, while he grows more alienated within his own peer group. He responds to the needs of his people and fulfils his duty as a priest out of a sense of obligation but is then alienated by the fact that his people reject his counsel. This is important, because it demonstrates a misalignment or element of doubt between his expectations of himself and his participation and performance in society.

Perhaps more significantly, however, alienation involves isolation from one’s social group and working to resolve one’s personal and cultural identities. Culturally speaking, individuals are primarily identified by their ‘place’ or nation, which helps establish their sense of Self. The place can also be the community or tribe to which they belong. In the case of Nigerian tribal society, a sense of community was traditionally supported by common land and communal living, a shared religion and ideologies, and a similar way of life. However, the reality of belonging – especially belonging to Igbo society – changes significantly over the course of Achebe’s narrative; leaving Ezeulu with an existential crisis of Self and some very real questions about who he is, what his duties are, and what his role should be in the post-colonial environment.

In order to resolve alienation, one must align one’s personal identity with a sense of belonging and the corresponding expectations of one’s peers, which is a difficult task when one’s peers and lifestyle are in a state of flux: “I confront the world as a member of this family, this household, this class, this tribe, this city, this nation, this kingdom. There is no ‘I’ apart from these” (Sayers, 2011, p.9). At the time of the novel’s events, Ezeulu cannot be held accountable to the resolution of these factors, because he does not know what his class, tribe or nation will become. His identity and the components that bear upon it are in a state of transition and so he is necessarily alienated; facing an existential crisis in the form of a lost identity, because his former identity is disappearing with the remnants of tribal society.

Conversely, his new identity is not yet established, so that he becomes an uneasy hybrid of the two, with a crippling inability to be authentic, because he does not know what that even means. Moreover, he will continue to be incapable of authenticity, until the situation in his homeland, tribe and within himself have settled into a 'new normal'.

As has already been mentioned in relation to anxiety, one of the main principles of existential philosophy is authenticity. According to Sartre (1996) and his character archetypes, the heroes are those who recognise their inner being and allow it to direct their actions. Meanwhile an anti-hero acts inauthentically, reacting to an external pressure to act. Kierkegaard (2013) ties this authenticity to finding and living one's true faith. This is perhaps the area of greatest conflict and loss of identity for Ezeulu; he consistently acts inauthentically and maintains tradition instead, regardless of the consequences or even his own faith. It is clear that if he were being authentic, he would have doubts about his own power. In his *Arrow of God*, Achebe (2016a) tells the reader that "[w]henever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real" (p.2). This means that if he were facing his role authentically, or if he knew himself fully, he would admit the limitations of his own power and the implications of that for his identity, especially his identity in a shifting, colonised culture. However, he chooses to deny these feelings of anxiety and alienation; allowing his pride, wishful thinking and anti-heroic behaviour to overwhelm all possibility of authenticity. Conversely, he thinks: "No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that." (ibid., p.2) He is grasping at power and at his perception of what a chief priest should be, instead of authentically living who and what he is.

It is as a result of this existential crisis that Ezeulu ultimately acts to destroy his own people. He refuses to move the day of the festival, in order to flex his power and cling to tradition, in an elusive vision of what his society expects of him. He believes that "If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival – no planting and no reaping" (Achebe, 2016a, p.2). While he does eventually permit the change of season, this focus on his own power, which so drastically contradicts his authentic thoughts and desires, is evidence of a deep lack of authenticity and a resulting crisis of identity.

Ezeulu's failure to resolve his personal crisis is at least partially due to his fealty to Ulu, or his genuine belief in his tribe's deity. However, it is clear that other members of the tribe no longer subscribe to his faith and have lost their unwavering belief in the tribal gods and their power. Nwaka claims that one can seek to fulfil one's authentic desires, abandoning those gods who do not support the wishes of the community. He states that "If a man says

yes his *chi* also says yes. And we have all heard how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. Did they not carry him to the boundary between them and their neighbors and set fire on him? I salute you” (Achebe, 2016a, p.11). Here, Nwaka places authenticity above belief, stating that “If a man says yes, his *chi* also says yes” (ibid.). This means that internal and external decision-making should be aligned where one is acting authentically. However, because of Ezeulu’s continued support of Ulu, he cannot begin to make authentic decisions for himself. Instead, he perpetuates the decisions of those who also adhere blindly to tribal beliefs, even when their gods appear to be ignoring their needs.

Thus, a third area impacting the primary protagonist’s identity is belief versus authenticity. In other words, Ezeulu has allowed his faith in the principles of Ulu to overshadow his own true beliefs. He does not act according to his words and does not align with what his *chi* says. This produces the identity crisis that shapes Ezeulu’s character and so he becomes the novel’s anti-hero. As such, when he acts inauthentically, he allows himself to be pushed and pulled by the story’s antagonists; reacting to external forces, rather than relying on internal motivation. It ties the notion of inauthenticity to the post-colonial factors mentioned earlier. Because he acts in an inauthentic matter, Ezeulu makes himself more vulnerable to the colonisers’ external manipulation. It is what causes him to refuse to begin the Yam Festival, effectively punishing the people and allowing them to starve, in order for him to maintain his power and status. In consequence, the village turns against Ezeulu, rejecting him as their chief priest. Instead, they embrace Christianity, which ultimately serves as a catalyst for the destruction of the Umuaro people.

4.3.1 Freedom of Choice

Taken together, what these points highlight is the increased impact of freedom of choice. This is a phrase drawn from Existentialist Theory to describe free will, or the opportunity to exercise autonomy (Carter, 2004, p.61). Freedom of choice necessitates decisions that are completely free from outside interference. This is interesting in the case of Ezeulu, because he never acts with complete autonomy. Rather, he consistently believes that his actions and obligations are subject to the will of Ulu. He consequently has no free will and merely attempts to carry out the rituals assigned to him by his God, and to protect his people from the influence of the colonists. Thus, his identity is impacted by a lack of true free will.

Ezeulu’s absence of autonomy is due to a genuine belief that his God is real and will punish his people for their disobedience:

Umuaro had grown wise and strong in its own conceit and had become like the little bird, nza, who ate and drank and challenged his personal god to single combat. Umuaro challenged the deity which laid the foundation of their villages. And – what did they expect – he thrashed them, thrashed them enough for today and for tomorrow (Achebe, 2016a, p.7).

The above comment demonstrates that Ezeulu does not wish to ‘challenge’ his personal God, but rather believes that no one should challenge the gods. Thus, to prevent this from happening, he surrenders his own free will, leaving all decision-making to Ulu.

4.3.2 Responsibility

First and foremost, Ezeulu’s free will is born of a sense of responsibility, as he feels the heavy burden of his tribe’s culture and beliefs on his shoulders. He tries to uphold tradition, because of his dedication to Ulu and his desire to protect his people. He sees this as a means of preventing any further losses resulting from the contact that his people have with the British colonists. He also views it as a sacred duty, directly assigned to him by his God, Ulu. Ezeulu expresses this with great frustration, telling his fellow leaders:

Leaders of Umuaro, do not say that I am treating your words with contempt; it is not my wish to do so. But you cannot say: *do what is not done and we shall take the blame*. I am the Chief Priest of Ulu and what I have told you is his will not mine. Do not forget that I too have yamfields and that my children, my kinsmen and my friends – yourselves among them – have also planted yams. It could not be my wish to ruin all these people. It could not be my wish to make the smallest man in Umuaro suffer. But this is not my doing. The gods sometimes use us as a whip. (Achebe, 2016a, p.208)

While talking to these leaders, Ezeulu again demonstrates how rigidly he feels that he must follow ancient traditions by upholding the ceremony, purely according to Ulu’s demands. In his mind, the delay caused by the white man does not permit an exception to his responsibility to uphold tradition and serve his people. He sees this rigidity as a responsibility and a means of protecting his people from the wrath of the gods and from their own impatience. He reminds them that it is Ulu and not man who must call the harvest, and that he has a duty to do things correctly.

His duty also includes ensuring that others do not have to take responsibility. When other men in Umuaro say that they will take the blame and bear the wrath of God, he once again stresses that it is his sole responsibility, with no one else to blame. In this way, he sacrifices his own free will to the will of God and his duty as a priest. However, in sacrificing his authenticity and free will, he also gives up his identity, abandoning himself to his personal crisis to serve his people.

4.4 Conclusion

Ultimately, *Arrow of God* tells the story of a lost identity. By following the resistance and acculturation of the Igbo people in the final days of their traditional way of life, Achebe demonstrates the effect of British colonialism and indirect rule on both the individual and the broader culture of Nigerian peoples. Beginning the narrative after Britain's entry into Nigeria, he depicts the Igbo in great detail as a proud tribal nation, who have led a relatively peaceful agrarian life, as dictated by their gods, with rituals conducted by their chief priests. The implementation of indirect rule in Nigeria was intended to allow the British to take control of the nation with a soft hand. By allowing tribal leaders to continue performing their executive duties, while simultaneously becoming puppets of the Empire, the British colonisers undermined native culture from the inside out. This is most poignantly demonstrated in the personal identity crisis suffered by Ezeulu, one such tribal leader. Ultimately, his identity is both internally and externally conflicted by contact with colonial forces, as he loses his social and spiritual roles, and struggles to resolve the anxiety that results. His authenticity is consequently brought into question through the surrounding social change. This is partly due to his strong sense of responsibility, especially as it relates to the upholding of tradition and the surrender of his free will to Ulu, his tribal God. Ultimately, both the Igbo people and Ezeulu's former self are utterly destroyed, forcing them to rebuild an identity that conforms to the colonisers' Western standards. In the process, the Igbo lose those pieces of themselves that are steeped in tradition, which no longer has any place in post-colonial life.

Chapter Five: *A Man of the People* – A Take on Existentialism and Post-Colonial Criticism

5.1 Introduction

First published in 1966, Achebe's *A Man of the People* (Achebe, 1966) is regarded as a satirical take on Nigeria's political system of the 1960s. Taking into account the way that the novel is written, it is easy to assume that it is nothing more than a direct criticism of the country's corrupt political system. However, as satire is meant to make people look and laugh at the absurdities of a situation, the term is not misplaced here. Nevertheless, the novel is thought-provoking in that it addresses a number of very serious topics. These topics are still relevant today for nations that have more recently won their independence. Thus, it is not surprising that *A Man of the People* offers a post-colonial take on Nigeria, or what British colonialism left behind, including political turmoil, the struggle for power, upheaval and most notably, rampant corruption.

By focusing on the "postcolonial" history of Africa, Basil Davidson (1992) discusses the effects of the European colonialism and dominance over the African nations by highlighting the emergence of the Civil War as internal conflicts within African societies. From an historical perspective, it appears that the contemporary Africa, preceded by the colonised Africa, still lacks well-established ideologies by its African leaders. In this respect, after the collapse of direct colonial rule and, thus, the advent of the African governmental control, ethnic rifts, disruption, and corruption had further undermined the political stability of African countries, most notably Nigerian. To quote Mazrui:

What had in fact happened in all these countries was surely the suppression of the basic human rights, blatant autocracy, widespread corruption, nepotism and the domination of all aspects of the society by the state apparatus and the monopoly of the resources and wealth of the state by the party leaders or the military oligarchies and their clients. (Mazrui, 1993, p. 492)

As reviewed by John Lonsdale, Davidson's book is nothing more than an inquiry about "how Africans, and Europeans too, can invent a state appropriate to a post-imperialist future." (p. 143) By attributing the African deep "corrupt" world to the leaders of the African states, Lonsdale contends that they "failed to deliver on their promises, securing neither international peace nor domestic justice." (ibid, p. 145)

The novel centres upon a schoolteacher named Odili Samalu and consists of his first-person account of the events leading him to stand for election against Chief Nanga, the Minister of Culture. While the story is set in an unnamed African country, which is not described in any specific detail, it is assumed by many to be set in Nigeria, because what transpires in the novel is believed to be inspired by real-life events in Nigeria. Other signals include the ethnicity of the protagonist and the author's own nationality (Sullivan, 2001). Moreover, Achebe's previous novels were all set in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Igbo people. In *A Man of the People*, while these similarities exist, Achebe has nevertheless tried to write a novel of relevance to African literature in general, drawing inspiration from the entire continent, not just Nigeria: "By ending with a coup, an event anticipated yet still unknown in Nigeria but familiar elsewhere in Africa, Achebe added a dimension of universality to his story" (Lindfors, 1978).

While the novel's plot may revolve around the fight between the abovementioned school teacher, Odili Samalu, and Chief Nanga; the main theme explored in *A Man of the People* is the politics of the nation in which it is set, and the corruption that is prevalent within it. More precisely, the issues that arise from this corruption are blatantly described, such as the buying and selling of votes, the use of public money for personal gain, the mob's collective acceptance and anger, and the public's disregard for these problems, which makes them vulnerable to be preyed upon by those in authority. Therefore, although this is not a long novel, the components of its theme are densely packed into the narrative.

In light of the above, what is on one level an entertaining story, proceeding at such a nail-biting pace that it is difficult to put the book down, it is also an important comment on serious matters of corruption at all levels of many African societies. Moreover, in my opinion, the novel looks at the ways in which people often create their own problems; namely, when they try to be someone or something that their society asks of them, or when they move up in the world and gain a taste of power, which they are then reluctant to relinquish. For example, there are many instances in the novel where Chief Nanga's corruption is clear to all, but no one resists him (Achebe, 1966, pp.34, 108, 121).

As mentioned above, the story is told from the first-person perspective of Odili, an elementary school teacher in a country that greatly resembles post-colonial Nigeria. Not long before a general election, one of Odili's former teachers, Chief Nanga, now the Minister of Culture, visits the school where Odili works and recognises him immediately as one of his former pupils. Odili is subsequently invited by the Chief to stay with him at his home in the capital, Bori – an offer that Odili initially hesitates to accept. When he finally does so,

however, he discovers the gulf between the lives of the rich and poor in his country: in their lifestyle, views on life, and the way that they spend their wealth. Moreover, he notices how people who were once poor change with their rise in social status. It is also during his stay that Odili comes into conflict with Chief Nanga, because the Chief seduces his girlfriend. Odili had been having a casual affair with a woman called Elsie, with no illusions about the seriousness of their relationship, as Elsie already had a boyfriend. However, he later catches her sleeping with Nanga and is deeply offended. He moves into a friend's house for a while and helps launch a new political party, with the intention of challenging Chief Nanga in the coming elections and trying to woo the Chief's second bride-to-be, Edna, as a form of revenge.

Meanwhile, along the way, Odili is steeped even further in the nation's political landscape, which makes him aware that many of its problems, despite these having their origins in the past, are now exacerbated by the indifference of the people. As a result, Odili slowly begins to change and by the end of the novel, he no longer wants to win the election out of spite, but rather out of genuine concern for his country. He also begins trying to win Edna over out of love and the care he has for her. However, with regard to the election, his efforts are not enough, because Chief Nanga wins through corruption. Moreover, tragically, Odili's friend Max is killed on voting day, and Odili is beaten to within an inch of his life. Finally, Odili does marry Edna, but the nation descends into chaos because of a coup in the troubled aftermath of the elections. In his final thoughts, before the close of the novel, Odili reflects on the events of the past year and how lucky Max has been to have someone to avenge his death at this chaotic time.

It is therefore not difficult to see why *A Man of the People* is often considered to be nothing more than a thinly veiled criticism of Nigeria in the 1960s. At the time of writing, the novel drew much of its inspiration from real world events, whether intentionally or otherwise. In fact, while no coup took place during the writing of the novel and its initial publication, one took place soon after, in an eerie reflection of the novel's events (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997). Notwithstanding the above, this is not to suggest that Achebe's novel was prophetic; he merely took into consideration what was happening in other parts of Africa at the time, with many African nations were experiencing similar issues. For instance, one country with a corrupt government would witness a coup, replacing its government with another, only for that new government to be overthrown in turn, due to corruption. It was an eternal cycle, which continues in many parts of Africa today, albeit not specifically in Nigeria and no longer as a direct effect of colonisation (Guy, 2010).

Within the confines of the novel alone, there are many things that can and should be discussed, but what cannot be denied is that the characters are all self-destructive in some way, even Odili. This self-destructiveness takes different forms, regardless of the individual's position or status in life. A good example of this is to be seen in Josiah, the bar-owner, who allegedly attempts to seize a blind man's walking stick from him. This causes the villagers to shun him and his business, cursing him and eventually running him out of the village. However, it is never clarified in the narrative whether Josiah truly acted in this way and if so, why. Another example of self-destructiveness is evident in Chief Nanga's first wife, who continues to support her husband, despite being aware of his corruption. Instead, she chooses to turn a blind eye and keep her own counsel. This is not to imply that a husband or wife should not support their spouse, but when the actions of that spouse are hurtful or destructive, it points to a need for discussion or action in the marriage.

Yet another background character whose self-destructive tendencies become a sticking point in the story is Edna's father, who has virtually sold his daughter off in marriage to Chief Nanga, because of the family's hardships. While such practices are not uncommon in many cultures, and the researcher is neither condoning nor condemning this act, it should be noted that Edna only agrees to it because she feels that this is her lot in life; namely, to become the wife or mistress of a man who is old enough to be her father. Her own father also readily agrees, because of the money he will receive from the transaction. This still holds true at the end of the novel, when Edna's father only agrees to allow Edna to marry Odili, purely because the latter is willing to pay at least the same price as Chief Nanga, and not because of Odili and Edna's feelings for each other. Naturally, the fact of Nanga having to flee the country because of the coup certainly has a bearing on Edna's father's decision; had the coup not taken place, he would have surely married his daughter off to Chief Nanga, merely so that he could boast about his son-in-law being the Minister of Culture.

Out of the novel's main characters, Chief Nanga displays the most extreme self-destructive tendencies. Nevertheless, he is nearly outdone by Odili himself, who constantly puts himself in harmful situations, which he ought to be smart enough to avoid in the first place. The first instance of this is his initial visit to Chief Nanga's home in Bori. It is initially motivated by his curiosity, but deep down, he knows that he should have politely refused the invitation. Instead, he goes and then chooses to stay, accepting all the comforts that the Minister of Culture has to offer. Other self-destructive traits exhibited by Odili can be seen in his affair with Elsie, who already has a boyfriend who is currently away. While Odili understands that his affair with Elsie is just for fun, and there is nothing serious between

them, he continues to sleep with her to stroke his ego. However, when this backfires on him, due to Chief Nanga also sleeping with Elsie – in the knowledge that their relationship is not exclusive – Odili takes great offence and sets off on yet another self-destructive path to take his revenge on Chief Nanga.

Although the morality of the relationship between Odili, Elsie and Chief Nanga is not a matter for debate here, the fact remains that Odili cannot accept Elsie's 'unfaithfulness' with the Chief. This is despite the fact that he himself has been sleeping with Elsie behind her boyfriend's back – a character who never shows up in the novel. Worse still, Odili blames others for the situation he finds himself in, without realising that most, if not all his problems are his own fault. One's overall impression at this point is that Odili is reprehensible in his anger, seeking vengeance against Chief Nanga at the expense of Edna, an innocent party, whose life would ultimately be ruined in the process. To be more precise, Odili plans to try and seduce Edna, Chief Nanga's second bride-to-be, even though she has nothing to do with the source of his anger and has no idea of his argument with Chief Nanga. Nevertheless, Odili is willing to stoop that low, ruining someone's reputation and discrediting their name, merely for the satisfaction of having his revenge. Thus, although Chief Nanga is clearly the novel's antagonist, who perpetrates deliberate heinous acts of all kinds, Odili is also somewhat flawed and capable of acting out his anger.

In particular, some of the ways in which Chief Nanga is self-destructive are common to man. If Odili is self-destructive out of naivety, Chief Nanga is self-destructive because of his jadedness. He has seen both sides of life: its upside and downside, and apparently started out as a decent, well-mannered and well-intentioned man, who subsequently realised that the world chews up and spits out men like him, so he adapted. There are numerous points in the novel when Chief Nanga believes that what he is doing is for the good of the nation (Achebe, 1966, p.40). Many believe him, especially when they are the recipients of his good will, even if this is only because they do not see the toll that it takes on others – such as not questioning where their clean water comes from, so long as they can get it (Achebe, 1966, pp.122-123).

Ultimately, the novel does not attempt to make a statement about man being inherently evil, and neither does it suggest that power or politics are corrupt in themselves. Instead, it reveals that people do things that seem sensible, but which are truly destructive, and then end up blaming others for the consequences. Indeed, we can encounter unfavourable circumstances in life, where we are, or believe ourselves to be, wholly blameless, but this

does not excuse how we react to those situations. Not all hate is warranted, and not all hate is equally intense, but all forms of self-destruction are abhorrent.

While the novel might not be specific about the country in which its events take place, one thing for certain is that the nation was once colonised by another. Here again, the coloniser is not specified, aside from being indicated as a Western power, populated by ‘white men’ (Achebe, 1966, pp.126, 131). The effects of colonisation can be felt throughout the novel, although these are never referred to overtly. The subtlety adds greatly to the underlying chaos that shapes the national identity, and the apathy that the novels’ characters exude.

For example, in the novel’s setting, owning a car carries a great deal of social status, while owning an imported car is even more socially desirable (Achebe, 1966, pp.29, 53, 99). Then, there is the way that the characters speak. The use, adaptation and evolution of language has always been intertwined with culture, as revealed in numerous studies (Nau, 2014; Day Translations, 2018). This is doubly true when the language used by a nation is not its native tongue. Because the setting of *A Man of the People* is not specified, neither is the primary language of its characters. However, English is specifically mentioned as one of the languages they use, as well as one unnamed native language and a dialect (Achebe, 1966, pp.31, 36, 84).

The specific language used by the characters in a novel can be very helpful in understanding the way that they (and others in the same context) think. For example, in *A Man of the People*, those who speak English are usually of higher socio-economic status than those who do not. Moreover, it should be noted that the novel is not a translation, but was originally written in English, with most of the dialogue in English, unless stated otherwise – although those instances are rare. Taken as a whole, it becomes clear that the effect of being colonised has completely changed the way in which the society depicted in the novel is organised and functions. While apathy is the fault of the individual, no one is born apathetic, although it could be argued that we are all born greedy – a whole other debate in itself – and so apathy could be considered as a state that pervades an individual over time, as a result of life experiences, or of ceasing to care about anything that does not immediately concern oneself (this will be explored in more detail later in this chapter).

Throughout the novel, there are characters who appear to pepper their native language with English words. At times, Achebe writes in the manner that his characters speak, even going so far as to misspell words to show the difference between those who are educated (English-speaking) and those who are less well-educated (whose English is either heavily

accented or non-existent and whose utterances are translated for the reader's benefit) (Achebe, 1966, pp.31, 36, 84, 120, 122; Day Translations, 2018).

The point being made here is that where there is a huge rift in national identity, it can lead to further problems, as individuals will stop caring for their fellow man. They may also display hypocrisy, like at the end of *A Man of the People*, when Max is suddenly lauded as a hero instead of being condemned as a mindless troublemaker. By this point, the actions that his death was the catalyst of are affecting the very people who once turned a blind eye to the corruption in their government, shrugging their shoulders and merely commenting: "let them eat since we are eating too" (Achebe, 1966, p.131). The language used in the novel is therefore a good indicator of attitudes and social class.

Foreign language use by a population is likewise a barometer of societal norms, and the hybridity of foreign and native ideologies. Good examples of this phenomenon in *A Man of the People* can be seen in marriage conventions and people's names, since all the characters have Christian names, even though Christianity is not a native African religion. In fact, it may legitimately be assumed that it was introduced into the setting of the novel by Whites. Nevertheless, despite the widespread practice of monogamy in Christianity, many of the novel's characters are polygamous, such as Chief Nanga himself and even Odili's father. This mixture of foreign ideology and native cultural practices not only leads to a new blended culture, but also a battle over what customs and beliefs will be carried forward by the next generation, such as Chief Nanga's children (Achebe, 1966, p.36).

Another topic that comes to light when dissecting this novel is the difference between vice and corruption. As with other themes in *A Man of the People*, it is not presented in blunt terms, but rather through Odili's inner monologues, which reveal Achebe's thoughts and opinions on this point. By direct reference to the text, therefore, a more accurate interpretation of the novel's underlying themes may be made. For example, one difference indicated between vice and corruption lies in the fact that the vices of politicians are rarely related exclusively to politics or governance. In this regard, Chief Nanga is reputed to be corrupt, with numerous houses suddenly appearing in his name after he makes deals on behalf of the government. However, in the narrative, he is never portrayed as engaging in overtly corrupt activities, such as buying votes. Admittedly, he does try to pay off Odili to forfeit the election, but at that point in the narrative, Odili is more of a nuisance to him than a real threat. The nearest the novel gets to a description of Nanga's corruption involves an obscure road-building deal, which is presented in broken and mispronounced English, making it difficult for the reader to understand (Achebe, 1966, pp.33, 40).

Similarly, in terms of vices, Odili also seems far from perfect. Putting it crudely, he is a womanising schoolteacher, who seeks to ruin his rival and the life of his rival's fiancée, merely because he wants revenge. An incidental mitigating factor here is that by bringing down his rival, Chief Nanga, he is likely to benefit his nation, but the personal implications for Odili are the same. In fact, throughout the novel, Odili displays poor judgment, which he even acknowledges himself on multiple occasions; stating that he does not know why he is about to take a certain course of action, knowing full well that it is likely to end badly and flying in the face of advice from others (Achebe, 1966, pp.115,124). Nevertheless, it could be argued that Odili's insatiable curiosity is necessary for moving the plot forwards, even though there are points where it is difficult to sympathise with him, despite being aware of what is going on in his head (Achebe, 1966, pp.24, 94, 121).

Another illustration of a person snared by their own self-destructiveness is embodied in Odili's father, who previously worked as a translator, at a time when translators were basically the most powerful and richest people in the village. He was able to make a name for himself, build a big house, marry several women, and father a large number of children. Unfortunately, while he earned a decent living, it was not enough to keep his many wives and children. This is not his vice as such, so much as a lack of wisdom; his true vice is his heavy drinking, which he falls into when faced with having to meet the needs of his huge family. Aside from this, there is no direct mention of Odili's father engaging in corrupt activities, although there are hints in the novel; for example, his overexaggerated wealth that allegedly enables him "to slaughter a goat every Saturday, which was more than most families did in two years, and this sign of wealth naturally exposed [the family] to their jealousy and malevolence" (Achebe, 1966, p.20). Nevertheless, none of his activities could be seen as political corruption. Therefore, although his inability to meet the needs of his family cannot be described as a vice per se, his drinking can, and both aspects of his downfall are self-destructive.

The question arises here of whether the novel's themes, concepts and observations stem from the nation's colonial past, with its consequent loss of community and sense of camaraderie, to the point where society becomes individualistic and competitive. Conversely, is this selfish individualism merely a common trait in all human beings, therefore predating colonisation, which purely served to bring them to light? I would venture that the truth lies somewhere in-between these two hypotheses.

In simple terms, post-colonialism is the study of the effects of colonialism on a nation, once the colonisers have left (Said, 1993), although there is more to post-colonialism than

merely studying a once-colonised nation. Instead, it involves understanding how and why a nation developed into its current state. It is also about identity: the current national identity of a previously colonised nation, and the effect of colonisation on that nation's development. For example, it begs the question, how would that nation have developed, had it not been colonised, and how could it rediscover its original path, if this were even possible? (Bhabha, 1990).

The main problem with post-colonialism is that while there is no denying that colonisation has affected many aspects of the societies that hosted it, the issue of when these effects started to appear, or when the period of post-colonialism actually began is difficult to determine. This is because the timelines of post-colonialism and neo-colonialism usually overlap, and the lines of demarcation between them are easily blurred. Moreover, the definitions of these concepts vary widely. What can be stated, however, is that if post-colonialism involves a nation's identity, politics, social organisation, culture, etc. following colonisation; neo-colonialism is basically a continuation of the above-mentioned colonialism by less overt means: often through capitalism or the propagation of the colonisers' beliefs via pop culture (Said, 1993).

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the study of post-colonialism has no merits, aside from attempting to apportion blame; far from it, its study offers an important route towards understanding how the politics, history and economic practices of the past still affect the modern world. For instance, today's global lingua franca is generally considered to be English, despite Mandarin Chinese being acknowledged as having the highest number of native speakers in the world. This is because English is the most widely spoken language, when all its native and non-native speakers are counted together – just about exceeding the total number of native and non-native Mandarin speakers worldwide (Ayancan, 2018; Lane, 2018; Simons and Fennig, 2018). Furthermore, even if native speakers alone are taken into account, Mandarin Chinese cannot be considered as the international language of trade, because most of its speakers live on mainland China.

This fact is unsurprising, in light of consistent historical records of the British quite literally taking the world by storm from the early 17th century onwards, and colonising as many nations as they could (Gallaher et al., 2009). The English language was subsequently adopted by the colonised nations. English has since pervaded many of the world's cultures, as witnessed today; not only as a means of everyday communication, but also in popular culture, politics, education, medicine, and other channels through which Western ideas are transferred to other parts of the world.

For instance, *A Man of the People* was originally published in English by a *Nigerian* writer and has become part of the canon of *African* literature, even though English is not a native African language. Neither was it the first national language of Nigeria (Hausa having been the official language of the Northern States, and the rest of the country remaining linguistically diverse until the late 1960s). Naturally, the study of post-colonialism is concerned with more than language acquisition, adaptation, and its effects on society, but language is the most obvious expression of the effects of colonisation; after all, if a person can be made to think in your language, then they have already been enslaved, without the need for chains (Shakib, 2011).

Another important contribution of post-colonialism is that it highlights the way in which cultures, identities and societies blend. This is a widely debated topic in the modern world, where we can access images and discourse from the other side of the world, thereby experiencing other cultures from the comfort of our own homes. The physical experience of actual travel and first-hand encounters clearly differs, as in the difference between an astronomer and an astronaut. However, each experience enables some kind of knowledge to be gathered with varying degrees of objectivity, coloured by the culture and socio-economic status of the learner/adventurer.

In an age where neo-colonialism and hybrid identities exist, due to multiple diverse societies, post-colonialism allows its students to study the differences, similarities and origins of those societies, while hypothesising about the future of their own cultures (Bhabha, 1994). In turn, it enables cultures to take control of their own development and dictate how they wish to proceed, in a world where social and cultural identities can easily be lost – and indeed have been lost during the world’s colonial periods.

In reference to *A Man of the People*, post-colonialism allows us to study the characters, landscape, language and motivating forces behind each character, in order to ascertain whether they would have taken different paths, had they never been exposed to colonialism. While the nation in which the novel is set is not specified – although this is not really an issue, as post-colonialism also relates to fiction – it does bear many striking similarities to post-colonial Nigeria; including, amongst other features, the use of Nigerian Pidgin English. Thus, to simplify this study, Nigeria will be used as a point of reference for the study of post-colonialism in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is clear that not everything that the characters do stems from the fact that they were once a colonised people. Indeed, it could be argued that all that colonialism did was create a space for their own desires to flourish. Therefore, it is

not enough to look at Achebe's novel through a post-colonialist lens; it also needs to be studied on a more personal level.

From a philosophical perspective, most, if not all philosophy is a dialogue: someone puts forth an idea, and someone else responds. Sometimes, this response is instantaneous, and sometimes it takes generations before anyone responds to an idea with their own. Existentialism is one such topic in philosophy. It stems from questions about Plato and Aristotle's notions of existence, put forward by many 19th and 20th century European philosophers, namely the idea of *essence* (Macquarrie, 1972, pp.18-21). According to Plato and Aristotle, 'essence preceded existence'. Therefore, every entity or concept was said to have essential characteristics, making it what it was. In contrast, for most existential philosophers of the 19th and 20th century, especially Jean-Paul Sartre during the late 1940s, "existence preceded essence" (Sartre, 1996, p.1). The rationale behind this is that people first come into being, before finding their reason to be. Meanwhile, it is evident that this theory is irrelevant to objects, or any being other than man, which is precisely the point. In the past, the majority of the human race did not need to question their purpose for living; it was assumed to have been given to them by a supernatural being, namely a god. Nevertheless, it does not mean that existentialism is necessarily an atheist philosophy, although most existentialists are also atheists. There are other existentialists, like Kierkegaard, who are theist. What unites these philosophers is the concept that nothing has a purpose, especially human life, unless purpose is imposed upon it by the Self. Theistic existentialists also support this; in the belief that although the universe was created by a divine being, it has no pre-existing purpose (McDonald, 2009).

Consequently, the overarching theme in existentialism is man's search and actualisation of meaning in life, given the vast freedom he has to make choices, perform actions, and exist in any way that he sees fit, as expounded by Sartre in his philosophical writings (Sartre, 1996). However, Sartre postulated that the main problem with existence is not that it has no meaning, because this would render it easy, but rather that we have too many paths to choose from. This makes it difficult to decide which path will enable us to live 'authentically'. Freedom and authenticity are other ideas propagated by Sartre. He states that while we may choose to mimic other people's lives, or follow rules set by others, it is important to remember that the law-makers, parents, the government, etc. are also mere mortals, all trying to work out how to live in a world without meaning (Sartre, 2012).

Given the typical existentialist worldview, it is easy to assume that existentialism is a philosophy of bleakness. In fact, the opposite is true. All existentialists, including Sartre and

Heidegger, advocated living an *authentic* life, and talked extensively about the ‘absurd’, which refers to people looking for answers in an existence where there are no answers (Heidegger, 1962, pp.1-9). This concept of the absurd is important, as it is addressed by all existentialists in their own way. For example, Camus, the French 20th century existentialist author, used the Greek myth of *Sisyphus* to illustrate his perception of the absurd and an authentic life (Bryan, 2018), while Sartre drew upon examples from his own life, such as one of his students, and even a waiter he once encountered (Sartre, 2012, pp.55-67).

‘Authenticity’ and what Sartre calls ‘bad faith’ are two other ideas that need to be discussed when tackling the fundamentals of existentialism. Living in bad faith is what Sartre describes as an existence where one does not accept the absurd, or the fact that nothing has meaning unless one creates it for oneself. It happens when a person decides to follow an idea, belief, or set of rules, which they did not ascribe meaning to for themselves, but rather adopted someone else’s meaning. In turn, authenticity requires an acceptance of the absurd and living a life that one has chosen for oneself; one that has been given meaning by the person living it (Sartre, 1956). Naturally, this could just as easily be an immoral life, or a life that flies directly in the face of the norm, but this is irrelevant. The point is that an authentic life can only be lived if it is given meaning by the person concerned, and no one else. Sartre expressed many other existentialist ideas, to the point where he contradicted himself on several occasions (Marcuse, 1972, p.161; Krell, 1978, p.208), but nevertheless, existentialism was greatly influenced by his work.

Another author who specifically needs to be discussed in relation to existentialism is Heidegger, a controversial figure during his lifetime, due to his support for the Nazi Party before World War II (although, by all accounts, he denounced the Party as time went on) (Moehling, 2010). Moreover, his ideas about being, nothingness, thrownness and authenticity have influenced many other philosophers. He produced a robust body of work; most notably, his *Being and Time* (1962). The original version is notorious for being almost unreadable, in that the German is so convoluted, but the principles outlined are quite simple. To begin with, the absurdity of the world and man’s obsession with the nuts and bolts of daily life has led to many people forgetting to live in the moment, or what Heidegger calls *das Sein* (‘being’). According to Heidegger, while we might acknowledge on an intellectual level that we are alive, we are generally unaware of this fact, except for those rare moments when the strangeness of life suddenly comes to fruition. Heidegger believed this awareness to be our defence against *das Nichts* (‘nothingness’) (Heidegger, 1962). It is because we are trying to get away from ‘nothingness’ that we forget how interrelated all existence is. It was

Heidegger's belief that in the end, nothingness wins through death. However, before that happens, if we are able to remember and give importance to our being, and the being of all life, we will have more appreciation for all existence. This is what Heidegger referred to as 'the unity of being'. He hoped that this revelation would lead to people caring more about each other and the world in general (Heidegger, 1962).

A third concept presented by Heidegger, which should be included in any discussion about existentialism, relates to what he called *Geworfenheit* or the 'thrownness' of being. He believed that every being is 'thrown' into a world that is already set up with rules and ideologies that the being has neither chosen nor created. The only way to overcome this is to accept it and move forward from it by understanding our world and everything in it. Heidegger also believed that when beings overcome this thrownness, they avoid being caught up in *das Gerede* or the 'chatter' of the world. Only then can they begin to live an authentic life (Heidegger, 1962).

5.2 Said's Post-Colonialism and Achebe's *A Man of the People*

Edward Said, Professor of Literature at Columbia University, is one of the founders of post-colonial studies (Young, 1990). As a pioneer in academia, he has had a profound impact on this field. One of his best-known works, *Orientalism*, critiques the way in which the West, especially the USA, romanticises the idea of Asia and in particular, the Middle East (Said, 1978). He criticises the fact that in most depictions of the Middle East and Asia in general, a romanticised image has facilitated the propagation of false belief systems, and a patronising view of the Middle East on the part of the West.

In turn, this has provided justification for the West to continue colonising the Middle East in various ways and in different guises, such as for 'peace keeping' purposes (Democracynow.org, 2003). A good example of this can be seen in pop culture. Currently, one of the largest film series in the world is the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The first film in this series was *Iron Man* (2008). In the original comics, the character of Tony Stark was captured and held hostage during the Vietnam War. However, in the film based on this storyline, the director wished to update the story to the present day, specifically the early 2000s (Thorne, 2010). Thus, the story's setting was changed to Afghanistan, where Tony Stark was captured by Middle Eastern terrorists. While the attitudes described above are understandable, given that the USA was in the midst of a war on terror at the time, this was not the first time that the Middle East had been gravely misrepresented in Western pop culture (Medhat, 2015).

Orientalism and many other subsequent works by Said have received their fair share of criticism, but *Orientalism* remains a pioneering work in the field of post-colonial studies (Eagleton, 2006); while Said's other work on post-colonialism and the novel can similarly be referenced, when examining the ways in which colonisation and decolonisation affect the characters, plot and background in *A Man of the People*. In a critique of the novel, it is convenient to begin with its setting, namely a nondescript African country, which has clearly been colonised by a Western power in the past (Achebe, 1966, p.126). Using Achebe's previous work as a point of reference, it may be assumed that the novel's setting is Nigeria, and the main characters are likely to be from the Igbo tribe, as they exhibit many of the cultural traits that are associated with the Igbo. For instance, their staple food is the yam and they all have Christian names (meaning that they have at the very least been exposed to Christianity), and therefore, they have not been greatly affected by Usman dan Fodio's *jihad*. Lastly, Achebe himself is an Igbo (Okeke, Ibenwa and Okeke, 2017).

With that in mind, based on Nigeria's history, the colonisers mentioned in the novel were likely to have been British, as Nigeria officially became a British colony in 1901, and remained so until 1960, shortly before the publication of *A Man of the People*. As for the Igbo, they represent one of the largest ethnic tribes in Nigeria, with territories split unevenly by the Niger River (Williams, 2008). Igbo politics were traditionally characterised by a type of democratic republican system, based on close ties with each other. This is illustrated in the novel by instances where characters are generally apathetic until something affects them directly; for example, when someone has "... stolen enough for the owner to notice" – a point which will be explored in more depth later in this chapter (Achebe, 1966, pp.78, 135-136). With this in mind, what really strikes home the impact of colonisation is the short time frame in which it forces change. To illustrate this, the official language of Nigeria is now English; the language of the British, who colonised Nigeria for just 60 years (Blench, 2017). Said (1993) explains this phenomenon in *Culture and Imperialism*, arguing that control over local culture is crucial to maintaining order in an empire. While he agrees that many of Europe's colonies gained their independence after World War II, mainly because the mother nations were too weak by then to maintain their hold, this did not bring an end to imperialism, because the colonisers still controlled the culture of their former colonies (Said, 1993). Moreover, while no time period is specified in *A Man of the People*, it may be inferred that only a short time had elapsed since the ejection of the white colonisers from the country in which the novel is set, and within that time, there had already been at least one instance of social and cultural upheaval. In addition, there are numerous references to influences of

colonisation, such as in the everyday lives of the characters; for example, attitudes to people with cars, especially European cars (Achebe, 1966, p.99).

Another illustration of this colonial control over culture is the general misrepresentation of Africa by the West. Pulling away from the novel for a moment to use a real world example: a popular song entitled 'Africa', recorded in the early 1980s by the American band, Toto, was described by one of its writers as "a white boy... trying to write a song on Africa, but since he's never been there, he can only tell what he's seen on TV or remembers in the past" (Toto, 2007). This is just one example among many of the role of cultural representations in perpetuating imperialism: fabrications and second-hand perceptions being presented as reality. As in the case of 'Africa', romanticised views of another country can be conveyed by Western pop culture and capture the public imagination ('Africa' was very successful on its release, going to the top of the US Billboard chart (US Billboard 100, 2010). This means of controlling culture has been used by imperialism to maintain colonisation in subtle ways, which largely go undetected, because few notice the insidious effects of invasive cultures or consider their significance.

Another example may be drawn from within *A Man of the People* itself. Here, after a dinner party, Odili dances 'highlife' with Jean, an American (therefore, a Westerner). Highlife is an authentic genre of West African music and dance. Odili describes this in the novel as Jean dancing highlife in the way it is portrayed in the West, like 'African ballet'; meaning that she exaggerates the movements, wiggling her hips excessively. Although Odili acknowledges that it is pleasing, it is by no means a good highlife dance. Thus, Western imperialism persists in the decolonised nation, as it passes into a post-colonial era, with its culture butchered and another worldview imposed by the former coloniser (Achebe, 1966, p.48).

Nevertheless, it is evident that not every aspect of colonisation is negative and it could even be argued that nothing is inherently evil, anyway. One positive feature of colonisation for a nation is that it enables economic, social and cultural growth through the adaptation of existing cultures and the creation of new ones, as well as new societies and new economies. This process comes to the fore during decolonisation and the post-colonial period.

5.3 Bhabha's Post-Colonialism and *A Man of the People*

At the time of writing, Homi Bhabha is a professor at Harvard University and major influencer in the field of post-colonial studies. His contribution to the field can never be understated. In particular, he argues that cultures should not be seen as separate from one another. It is this view that causes us to segregate the world and devise hierarchies of culture,

where some are seen as superior to others. In contrast, Bhabha (1994) believes that they should all be viewed as of the same importance. Meanwhile, cultural *hybridity* means that post-colonialism should be studied as cultural adaptation, with new cultural phenomena emerging on a daily basis, following the departure of the colonisers. Moreover, this idea does not even consider the neo-colonisation of Africa, which is still taking place today.

One real world example of this is the integration of Eastern and Western cuisines in what is known as *fusion* cuisine (Perry, 1993). While this is a phenomenon that has recurred throughout the history of mankind, it has been identified as a specific culinary trend, which began gaining momentum in the 1970s, and has since proliferated. Similarly, some of the world's societies are described as 'melting pots' (Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2011, p.83). While the notion is not new that cultures are akin to living organisms – with a need to evolve and adapt to survive – Bhabha's statement that for this to happen, cultures need to be looked at globally, rather than individually, offers a novel perspective.

In the novel under study in this chapter, the most obvious sign that the nation is adapting is reflected in the use of the English language. Again, this is nothing new in itself. However, it does not simply entail adapting the language, but also modifying and moulding it to the emerging nation's needs and usage. In the case of Nigeria, what develops is the vernacular known as Pidgin, which is widely used throughout *A Man of the People* to show economic and social differences, as well as to enable the reader to 'hear' the characters' authentic, accented voices (Achebe, 1966, p.31).

Another topic that Bhabha discusses at length is cultural ambivalence (Bhabha, 1990). Put simply, he states that this is a necessary component of post-colonialism, in that it allows people of dual cultural identity to integrate into a colonised society, without being ostracised. To clarify this further, Bhabha does not claim that there will be no issues at all when someone of dual cultural identity attempts to integrate and/or adapt a trait from a contrasting culture; rather, this ambivalence of the colonised towards their colonisers – as well as those from both cultural backgrounds – permits everyone to find a middle ground from which to begin working towards hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). For instance, during World War II, Japan was seen by many as the enemy, but nearly a century later, it is not only a peace-loving nation, but also a leader in the global economy for sustainable technology and society. Between these two points in time, tensions needed to pass through stages of cooling, as Japan was a nation of broken people, who had fallen from the height of imperialism (Takemae, 2003). During and after a period of occupation (which was not strictly colonisation), Japan was reconstructed and heavily Westernised. While American movies and music did become

widespread in Japan, the people needed something to continue *feeling Japanese*, without ostracising the new occupiers. This ambivalence led to the wrestler, Kim Sin-rak (better known as Rikidozan) to constantly take on American wrestlers, who employed underhanded techniques to try and win (Weiner, 2004).

In *A Man of the People*, a good example of cultural ambivalence is the inclusion of two American characters, Jean and John, who host a dinner party. During this event, the couple mention art and a distinctive sculpture displayed in Bori, which many consider to be un-African. While a British guest at the party is convinced that a native woman, whom he sees shaking her fist at the statue, hated the art; Odili corrects him, explaining that this gesture means associating power with something, rather than signalling anger, as it does in the West. Odili's clarification leads to an aside about a French art critic, whom Odili similarly corrects some time after, because he attributes Western concepts to African art, which causes him to misunderstand the pieces themselves. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Odili dances with Jean and finds her highlife rather awkward, but understands why she dances this way.

Odili's unease in certain situations is just one good example of cultural ambivalence in the novel. While he appreciates that Westerners are trying to learn about his culture, he is simultaneously annoyed at their ignorance, because they behave as if they know better than the native population. This ambivalence is also the reason why so many native Nigerians do not care much about the politics of their country. In one of the closing lines of the novel, a common local saying is cited, stating that it is better to outlive one's problems, especially when they involve corruption, and what is more, it makes little difference if the politicians are corrupt, because the Whites were equally corrupt before them (Achebe, 1966, pp.45-51, 114, 135-136).

Another common concept in Bhabha's work is what he refers to as *mimicry*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'mimicry' as the act of "imitating someone or something", often as a means of ridicule.⁵⁹ For Bhabha however, cultural mimicry is a means of both the colonisers and the colonised coming to terms with colonisation in a projection of the *other*, as Bhabha calls it (Bhabha, 1994, p.85). Mimicry therefore works both ways: for the colonisers, it is a means of understanding the self, and for the colonised, it is an attempt to gain a level footing with the colonisers, while remaining aware of the cultural differences. For the colonised, it therefore represents a means of understanding the colonisers and even

⁵⁹ Cambridge Dictionary (2020) 'Mimicry'. [Online]. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mimicry>

blending into the background, while at the same time standing out, since the differences are noticeable.

Again, a perfect example of this in the real world is the expansion of the English language and the spread of Western pop culture. Using one of the cases mentioned earlier, namely post-World War II Japan, Japan became a major exporter of culture in their design, animation (commonly known as *anime*), and in particular, technology (Takemae, 2003), following the end of their occupation. Even now, Japanese culture can seem strange to Western eyes, such as their sense of humour, although it is sufficiently accessible to gain and retain a Western audience. The best examples of Japanese humour may be found in *anime* and Japanese video games. However, this is unsurprising, because during the occupation, American movies and music became very popular, to the point where many Japanese creators were heavily influenced by them throughout their formative years. As a result, they assimilated Western Cultural components and now reproduce them in their entertainment content today.

In *A Man of the People*, one example of mimicry may be observed during a visit that Chief Nanga and Odili make to another Minister, Chief Koko. After Chief Koko takes a sip of his coffee, he immediately thinks that he has been poisoned and calls his guards to summon the suspect, his chef. Koko subsequently nearly kills his chef on the spot, but the chef proves that the coffee is not poisoned by drinking the Chief's coffee in front of him, pointing out that if it had been poisoned, he would be dying. The difference in flavour noted by Chief Koko turns out to be due to nothing more than a change in supplier: it was locally farmed coffee, because the chef had run out of imported coffee. This is a typical instance of mimicry, where a Chief, a government Minister, does not even recognise the flavour of local coffee in his own country (Achebe, 1966, pp.31-33), implying that he only ever drinks imported coffee. It is also likely that he did not start drinking coffee until he had attained his government post, given that it is not a traditional beverage in his (African) country, and the sole reason why he drinks coffee at all is because it is what the white men previously in power used to do (Achebe, 1966, pp.4, 31-33).

Returning to the scenes at the dinner party, Jean, the American host declares that she enjoys listening to Pidgin English, as she is never certain what it means, perhaps indicating that she finds it a challenge in a positive sense. On re-reading this comment, however, I realised that it could be taken as a backhanded compliment on the local population's general use of English. While her description can be understood purely at face value, it can also mean that she finds it entertaining that speakers of Pidgin English often use words without

being sure of what they mean, which results in them saying the very opposite of what they intend (Achebe, 1966, p.46).

This overlapping of the reasons for mimicry can likewise be noted in Odili's choice of car. While he mentions that it is a Volkswagen, it is a source of great admiration from those around him, meaning that this considered to be a luxury vehicle, which few could afford at that time. As a side note, one envisages the iconic Volkswagen Beetle from the 1960s, but everyone in the nation knows that owning a new car, especially from Europe, is an indication of wealth. Odili even wants to drive immediately to Edna's house, just to show off his car to her as a sign that he has made it.

Odili's own experience of post-colonialism is therefore rather skewed, or at least, idiosyncratic. While he never patently declares that he feels like a stranger in his own country, he fails to consider that all his privileges and luxuries come from the West. His car, his education, even his idealism about helping his nation are all derived from Western humanism and politics (Achebe, 1966, pp.8, 34, 59, 92, 99, 121, 135). He even intends to continue his studies in the West, demonstrating his belief that postgraduate studies in a Western country are superior to their equivalent in his own country (Achebe, 1966, pp.17, 108). Granted, this may have been true at the time, but it does not deny the fact that his concept of privilege is not native to his own culture but is rather taken from ideals that he is trying to mimic. This process started with a sense of ambivalence and perhaps even dread when he first arrived in Bori (Achebe, 1966, p.29).

Therefore, how has colonialism ultimately contributed to the self-destructive behaviour of the characters in *A Man of the People*? A post-colonial study of the novel will reveal that these characters, from the protagonist to the individuals who only appear once in the narrative, or who are only mentioned in passing, discover a standard of living that differs from what they were accustomed to before they were colonised. These characters, much like in real life, have found that the transition from being a colony to gaining independence is a hard road, and it is made infinitely harder if one decides to work under an unfamiliar paradigm, which is not yet understood.

5.4 Existentialism in *A Man of the People*

5.4.1 The Characters

According to the previous definitions of existentialism in this thesis, it is natural to enquire whether the characters in *A Man of the People* have been living authentic lives. In blunt terms, it would not seem so in every case.

5.4.2 Authenticity in the Characters' Lives

I would personally argue that, along with Odili, only two characters in the novel live authentic lives: Odili's father, Hezekiah Samalu, and Josiah, the disgraced store owner and bartender. For Sartre, Man's "agency" or the ability to act authentically is to make choices and decisions subjectively and freely; away from people's interventions or pressures and to make oneself, in turn, the only responsible for the consequences of these choices no matter what it is. Based on the narrative, Odili's character is more complex than it appears to the readers, as it engages in multitransitional phases throughout the story. At first, readers come to recognise Odili's character as merely a teacher so committed to his educational purposes. Then, Odili is presented as a lover, a love affair which does not last for long until he transmits into a revenger. Later, we can clearly conceive Odili as a political campaign competitor against Chief Nanga's severe corrupt world. However, I suggest that Achebe satirically creates an atmosphere in which readers come to recognise the sense that Odili's character is more preoccupied with education than political activism, as he takes part in such a competition only to take revenge on Nanga's betrayal. Such a preoccupation may make his character less involved in Nanga's corrupt world, revealing at the same time his existentialist "authentic" choices; most notably, his affirm refusal to take bribes in order to give up or withdraw his political campaign against Nanga, despite his father warnings not to participate in the elections against Nanga. (Achebe, 1966, p. 96)

According to Sartre, it is our subjective inclination to the absolute freedom that determines our authentic existence. It is a feature of "honesty" and of "courage" with which the "authentic individual" confronts an experience that "the unauthentic individual is afraid to face." In an attempt to illustrate authenticity as a subjective force, Marjorie Grene, following Sartre, emphasises the idea that, "it is we ourselves that shape ourselves and our world." (1952, p. 266) However, in this unique constitution we may fail to achieve it. Thus, the true successfulness in winning our existential authentic life, argues Grene, "is not to escape compulsion [of life] but to transcend it." (1952, p. 266-69) Such a transcendence, I believe, is quite applicable to what Odili authentically struggles against Nanga's corrupt world by not following others' rules and even his father's recommendation to withdraw his political elections or campaign. Conversely, Odili follows what his own authentic rules and moral values dictate him by living a life that he has chosen for himself. The key point is that

an authentic life can never be founded unless it is given genuine meaning by the person involved, and no one else.

While neither are truly free in moral terms, Odili's father, Hezekiah Samalu and Josiah are living an authentic life in their choices. However, the reader is left knowing very little about them, other than the fact that Josiah once owned a shop and bar, and has never encountered any serious troubles, until allegedly trying to steal a walking stick from a blind beggar in his village. We also know that his business is ruined towards the end of the novel, and that he offers to support Odili in his campaign, but is rejected, causing him to join Chief Nanga's campaign instead. The last time he is mentioned in the narrative is when he successfully attempts to have Odili intercepted at one of Chief Nanga's rallies, near the end of the run up to the elections. Nevertheless, it could still be said that Josiah has lived an authentic life in its most basic form. Sartre once describes one of his students, by way of illustration, who is in the throes of trying to make an ethical/moral decision: he could either join the army and fulfil his duty to his country, or stay home to take care of his grandmother, as he is the only one left in his family who can. Ultimately, Sartre postulates that there is no single morally correct decision to be made in this matter; what is important is rather the student's own opinion (Sartre, 1948). Thus, whatever the student decides is the more morally responsible thing to do, would be the 'right' thing to do in the circumstances, given that he has at least considered his *essence*.

The same holds true for Josiah; even after his support is rejected by Odili, he does not lash out, but rather warns him that he will regret his decision one day (Achebe, 1966, p.92). However ominous that statement might sound, Josiah chooses his path and adopts an ideology of his own choosing, thereby accessing his *essence*. Meanwhile, Odili rejects Josiah's offer of support out of what Sartre refers to as 'bad faith', rather than his own personal volition, because he *knows* that having Josiah on his campaign team will attract ostracism from the entire village and ruin his chances before he even begins. Odili goes so far as to tell Josiah to "go to hell", in response to the warning that he will regret his decision one day. Odili's decision may be considered as one made in bad faith, because he is basing it on how other people live. He decides to refuse someone's help, not because of his own beliefs, or the value he places in Josiah's *essence*, or what it will do for his *essence*, but because of what other villagers think of Josiah and the rules imposed by society. This is not to say that Odili is actually making a wrong decision in itself, but it should be borne in mind that he does not know if the stories about Josiah are true. Moreover, Josiah has not tried to defend himself against that hate (Achebe, 1966, pp.7-78).

Having someone of questionable reputation in a political party will almost certainly ruin its chances of victory, However, at the point in the narrative when Odili is running for office, he gradually becomes less naïve. He is still driven by spite and the desire for revenge, but he also begins to seek the good of his nation, or at least, what he believes will be good for his village. Nevertheless, had he first tried to find out the truth behind the rumours about Josiah and then made a decision about accepting his help *after* looking at the facts, rather than listening to *gossip* (as Heidegger puts it), then his actions, even if they were the same, would have been authentic instead of in bad faith.

Similarly, Odili's father exhibits an authentic life, based on the little we know of him. For example, we know he has a large number of wives and children, although the specific numbers are not stated in the novel (even Odili says he is unsure). We also know that he spends a lot of his time drinking, but as far as Odili can remember, his father has never been interested in anything beyond the boundaries of his own life, much like Heidegger's concept of *everydayness* (Heidegger, 1962, p.59). This is not to suggest that existentialism encourages the individual to forget everyone else and focus exclusively on oneself; rather, it exhorts the individual to seek an authentic life, which will help others do likewise. In this chain of action and reaction, the world becomes a better place, because no one is acting in bad faith, but out of choice and in accordance with personal values, *essence* and authenticity (Sartre, 1996, p.1).

Two good examples of Odili's father embodying this notion is his willingness to host Odili's campaign programme at his house (for Max and Odili's political party, the Common People's Convention or C.P.C.), when he himself is a high ranking member of a rival political party, the People's Organisation Party (P.O.P.). Hezekiah does this despite Odili's initial objection, which was based on his fear of bringing shame on his father, but Hezekiah stresses that it does not matter, because he is merely doing what he believes to be right by his son, according to his own *essence*. He is therefore acting as a father, instead of following other people's rules – people who are just as fallible as he is. The next example of Hezekiah's authenticity is his acceptance of the fallout from his decision to support his son, whereupon a smear campaign against him results in his expulsion from the P.O.P. Even his pension is withheld for 'reassessment'. Nevertheless, he continues to support his son and remains by his bedside, while Odili is recovering from being beaten up towards the end of the novel.

Does this excuse his vices? Most certainly not, but it does put into perspective the underlying reasons for them. Hezekiah is the perfect example of a man who lives an authentic life: he is 'being' for its own sake, living his life in the knowledge that one day, he will have

to face nothingness. Therefore, he decides to 'be' in the here and now. He drinks, because he believes he can, marries multiple wives, because he can, and because he perhaps believes in his capacity to support them, which in a way, he does. He is unfazed by the way the world reacts to his behaviour, based on the premise that it is more important to act according to his beliefs than to strive to conform to everyone else. It would therefore appear that Hezekiah understands life's absurdity, the fear of so much freedom, and chooses to live according to his personal *essence*.

However, it should not be assumed from the above that Hezekiah does not commit morally/ethically questionable deeds. Again, existentialism is silent on the matter of ethics and morals; instead, its focus is on avoiding bad faith (a form of self-deception and hence, the failure to live an authentic life). It is for the individual to determine his or her *essence* (Sartre, 1996, p.1), which offers further support for the claim that Hezekiah actually lives a very authentic life. At one point, he tells Odili that he should have accepted Chief Nanga's bribe, stepped down, and left the country, as he would not get a better offer. In contrast, when Odili tells Max about the bribe, Max agrees that he should have taken it, but not backed down. He could have then told Nanga that he would use the money to fund their campaign, as Max did when he was bribed. The difference here is that Hezekiah is living an authentic life and Max is living in bad faith through his deception. Something that is easily overlooked within the topic of the authentic life is that in Sartre's (1996) words, we are "condemned to be free" (p.29), but this does not absolve us from all responsibility; this freedom makes us even more responsible, or at least it should.

Briefly returning to the fundamental principles of existentialism, there is no *essence* before existence, which also means that there are no rules or limits, and there is no justice, until we decide to impose these restrictions on ourselves. The only rules we follow are those we believe to be valid (Heidegger, 1962). However, this does not mean that there is no truth in existence; after all, no matter how much a person rejects the laws of gravity, jumping from the 20th floor of a building will most certainly be fatal. What it does mean is that in being free to decide one's path, one is also 'free' to bear full responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. Thus, one is not free of the consequences of one's actions, whether glorious or tragic, because to take responsibility for them means realising *das Sein*. Understanding the absurd and the anguish of living is the core of existentialism and living an authentic life.

In relation to Odili's father and Max, Hezekiah accepts the consequences of his actions and advises his son to do the same, remarking that Odili should have accepted Chief Nanga's proposition. Conversely, it could be said that Max did not, although one might argue that he

was simply being true to his *essence* and acting according to his beliefs. However, he gives Nanga his word and then reneges on it. Here, it is not deception itself that is the issue, so much as avoiding the consequences and failing to see one's part in an entire process. Therefore, Max was displaying a lack of awareness of his 'being'.

Many other characters fall into the same trap of living inauthentic lives by blaming others for their lot; avoiding their responsibility to themselves or simply giving up on the notion of 'being'. They simply do not even consider the absurdity of existence or their *essence*. In *A Man of the People*, this is highly evident in the population in general; the flat, anonymous background characters, and the nation as a whole. These characters, because they are flat, are difficult to differentiate from each other, but throughout the novel, they inspire many words of wisdom and observations in Odili, as he accepts various realities. They illustrate that most of Odili's people are unconcerned with whether they are living authentic lives, or even if they are living something that could be called a *life*. Instead, they content themselves with merely existing.

A good example of this unconcern, bordering on apathy (and often, precisely that), is the mantra of the masses: 'Let them eat', meaning that the people in power are left free to eat in a *figurative* sense, as well as to steal and engage in corruption, so long as everyone else gets to *literally* eat and stay alive. This is taken to a whole new level at the end of the novel. Those who did not even know Max previously, or else knew of him but did not care, or considered him to be nothing more than an annoyance, are suddenly hailing him as a hero; praising him for standing up to a wasteful, greedy, violent, corrupt and dysfunctional regime. However, prior to the events leading to Max's death, these same people were either praising the system or doing nothing to stop it, whether through a lack of concern for others, or because they knew they could profit from it themselves.

Almost all the named characters in the novel are guilty of bad faith to varying degrees. Beginning with a few of the minor characters, Elsie already has a boyfriend, but still sleeps around; Edna's father only seems to care about maintaining a comfortable life for himself, rather than ensuring that his daughter marries someone appropriate (Achebe, 1966, pp.134-135); Nanga's wife appears to have given up trying to keep her husband on the straight and narrow; Edna herself willingly gives up her freedom to make life easier for herself and her family; Max is prepared to get his hands dirty to gain what he wants, despite his lofty ideals; Hezekiah encourages his son to abandon his political campaign; Josiah becomes too greedy; Nanga conforms to a system that he knows to be corrupt – assuming that he was not that

kind of person to begin with (based on what others say of him in the narrative), and Odili only seeks revenge when it suits him.

To clarify this further, Hezekiah and Josiah have instances of bad faith in their lives, exhibiting the same lack of concern for others at various points in the novel, but their reasons for doing so differ from those that drive the other characters. As part of being human, even those who try to live authentic lives will inevitably make mistakes at some point or other. They may also become disconnected from *das Sein*, or unaware that their actions are propagating what they do not intend (Heidegger, 1962, p.251). What is important is to realise this and revert to an authentic life, such as when, after Odili explains himself, Hezekiah stops berating him for his choice.

Admittedly, a single act does not automatically condemn a person, just as one good deed cannot redeem a miscreant from a long life of wickedness (as will be discussed later in relation to Chief Nanga), but every character in the novel is guilty of at least one instance of poor judgement. However, these deeds are nothing more than symptoms of a much bigger problem in each case. What is more, every secondary character brings out one of Odili's traits and his reaction to these existential issues, starting with Elsie, who willingly sleeps with Chief Nanga, despite knowing that Odili is under the same roof. While she is right in her estimation that her relationship with Odili is not serious, she is already engaged to another man. Therefore, the issue is not that she is sexually promiscuous, so much as deliberately unfaithful to her fiancé, making her life inauthentic.

Since morality does not fall within the domain of existentialism, Elsie cannot be judged for her promiscuity; however, what does stand against her in existential terms is her inability to realise *das Sein*, her failure to distance herself from *das Gerede*, and her omission to take responsibility for her freedom. Personally, I would argue vehemently that Elsie is merely turning to casual relationships to compensate for the fact that her boyfriend is currently far away in Britain. Nevertheless, it becomes clear in the novel that given the chance of an affair with someone of high social status, she seizes it at the expense of her current lover, Odili, due to the prospect of greater personal gain. However, I venture that if she could have distanced herself from the meaningless *Gerede* that surrounds her, she would not have been blinded by Chief Nanga's ostentatious wealth. This is not a question of sexual liberation (which, even in the context of the 1960s, was still treated with ambivalence), but rather the fact that this is a woman who, earlier on in the novel, was ready to break the rules of her workplace (a hospital), merely because Odili arrived by car (Achebe, 1966, p.51). Granted, African societies at the time viewed a car as an elite status symbol. However, it does not take

away from the fact that even according to today's more relaxed standards of sexual freedom in much of the world, Elsie's behaviour could be considered irresponsible, whether existentially or otherwise. She deceives herself, letting others take the blame for her actions, as if accusing them of leading her into temptation. Nevertheless, in the existential worldview, man is *condemned* to be free and so no one else is responsible for his actions but himself (Sartre, 1996; Sartre, 2012).

Meanwhile, Edna's father, Odo, is another easy character to dissect, not because of his fleeting presence in the novel, but because of his lack of concern for each moment that passes. He wants his daughter to marry Chief Nanga, despite there being no love between them. In other words, he would rather have a wealthy son-in-law, because he thinks his life would be better as a wealthy man – influenced by the prevailing belief in his society that money can buy happiness. In contrast, Sartre (1993) abhors reliance on money as a route to meaning and satisfaction. It is well reported that he was a proponent of Marxist theory and believed capitalism and/or dependence on money to have shackled many people. Heidegger (1962) is of a similar view, but perhaps less adamantly opposed to the quest for material riches. He is mainly concerned with the concept of *Geworfenheit* ('thrownness'), but when postulating this belief, he states that we are thrown into a world that offers the basic necessities, which *das Sein* does not choose for itself. Thus, it may be hypothesised that Heidegger was not opposed to the pursuit of worldly riches per se, but only if this was at the expense of finding *das Sein*, or if it led to forgetting one's mortality, as in Odo's case. The quest for riches then becomes nothing more than a self-destructive trait, which only the individual concerned is responsible for, even if the circumstances have been created by someone else.

Likewise, the existential crisis of identity experienced by Chief Nanga's wife is quite simple: much like her husband, she has no concept of life's absurdity, but lives it in bad faith; letting her husband do as he wishes, because she also benefits from it. While she does try to help Odili win over Edna, before she discovers that he is running for office against her husband, this action merely highlights how apathetic she has become to anything beyond her existence. She therefore appears to have complete disregard for the unity of beings. She is consequently willing to do anything to avoid Edna marrying her husband, just so that she and her children do not have to share their wealth with her, or any children Edna might have in future. Therefore, while she is initially willing to help Odili, albeit discreetly; when she finds that he is running for office against her husband, she disavows him and tells anyone who will listen what a leech he is. This is purely due to the fear of her husband losing the

election, which would impact on her own financial position, rather than because she has any real ill will against Odili. Conversely, Edna is also living an inauthentic life, in that she allows herself to become lost in her *thrownness*. This strangely mirrors her father's problem, but in reverse; her father wishes for nothing more than to live a comfortable life, following the rules of others without even asking himself whether these are rules he wants to live by. Similarly, Edna does not believe she can do anything but follow others and live a life of bad faith. She has no distance from her situation; she just acknowledges it, understands it and even accepts it, because she believes she has nothing else to offer or expect in the world. Her existential issue is not that she does not know who she is, or what her *essence* is, but rather that she has given up entirely because of it, and this is her existential crisis. Even at the end of the novel, she continues to exhibit this trait. While her feelings for Odili help her inch a few steps forward in understanding and/or finding her *essence*, it is still insufficient to change her perception that there is nothing else she can offer the world but be a wife.

Camus's interpretation of the myth of *Sisyphus* is of greater relevance here than either his or Heidegger's other philosophical writing, although both are applicable to Edna's problems. By way of a brief explanation, the Classical Greek myth of Sisyphus recounts the story of a king by the same name, who angers the gods and is consequently punished by Zeus to roll a boulder up a cliff every day for all eternity. Before the boulder reaches the top of the cliff, however, it rolls down to the bottom, with Sisyphus being forced to start over, time and time again (Camus, 1955). Today, the term, Sisyphian is used to describe a pointless or frustrating repetitive act. In Camus's (1955) *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the narrative of the myth is outlined, but more importantly, Camus expresses his belief that all life is a Sisyphian exercise, which actually helps us find *essence* in our lives. He argues that in the face of the absurd, one should *revolt* instead of committing suicide, whether literally or figuratively; claiming that it is the Sisyphian struggle to find meaning in a meaningless existence that gives the life of an individual meaning and purpose (or *essence*, in existential terms). In contrast to this, Edna does not appear to *revolt* when she realises how devoid of *essence* her life is. Instead, she commits figurative suicide.

Max is also an easy character to break down into existential features. He too fails to display any existential crisis of identity per se, but rather, in the freedom to which he is condemned, he forgets that he is also responsible for its results when he makes a decision. The best way to explain this is his reason for accepting Chief Nanga's offer in exchange for dropping the campaign, whereupon he takes the money, promises to stop, but continues to campaign regardless. When he finds that Odili has rejected the bribe, he tries to explain to

him why he should not have done so. In response, Odili chastises him, stating that what they are doing should not be tainted by lies, or else they become what they are trying to destroy. Meanwhile, Max laughs at his friend, calling him naïve and asking how else they could win such a dirty game, if they did not also play dirty. Odili is disturbed by this conversation but decides to shelve the matter for the time being. As a side note, this is a good indication of how far Odili's character is developing in the novel. While he is definitely still set on revenge and 'getting the girl', the reader can see that he is starting to open up to the idea of doing the right thing, simply because it is right.

To return to Max, his response here is a classic example of what Sartre refers to as blaming others to avoid facing one's own freedom, and what Heidegger means by *das Nichts*. It is a common phenomenon for a person to try and avoid the feeling of freedom, because this is where one faces the absolute certainty that there is no one to blame but oneself when things go wrong. This is because we choose our own path and are not compelled by any external force (Sartre, 1956). Max typifies this by blaming politics, so that he can feel better about his wicked deeds, so long as he can tell himself that he is doing them for the right reasons. So, is Max wrong about the nation's politics being dirty? No, of course not, but just because he is thrust into a bad situation, does not mean that he has *carte blanche* to do things what he knows to be wrong, regardless of how he tries to justify it. This act of rejecting one's freedom is also demonstrated by Chief Nanga, described below.

While Chief Nanga is clearly the antagonist in the novel, it is harder to determine whether he lives an authentic life or a life in bad faith. It is easy to assume that the antagonist is automatically a villain and therefore not living an authentic life. Nanga is undoubtedly corrupt, but he does act according to his beliefs. For example, he tries to enrich his home village of Anata, but he also steals vast amounts of wealth from the 'national cake' – as it is popularly referred to by the local population. Moreover, although he sleeps with Elsie, he is careful to make sure that she is comfortable with the idea. Only one question now remains: Does he take responsibility for his actions? Ultimately, this question reveals Nanga as a man who does not live an authentic life. In fact, the novel ends with him trying to flee the country, because he is accused of a plethora of crimes against the people. He quite literally attempts to run away from his problems, and apparently, he escapes alone, without his wife and children. No more explanation is necessary to persuade the reader that this is not the existentially correct thing to do. Not only does he deny the freedom he already has, he denies all responsibility for his actions, and even the absurdity of existence. Furthermore, he does

not acknowledge or identify his *essence*. The many existential failings of Chief Nanga could generate a paper in themselves.

Meanwhile, each minor character's existential crisis affects Odili in some way, which also exacerbates his own inability to live an authentic life. However, by the end of the novel, Odili is able to redeem himself to an extent. For example, he is a good example of someone in the process of discovering what it means to live an authentic life. He has not yet reached that place and is by no means close to realising his *essence*, but he is starting to see the bigger picture. I would argue that he is the only character in the novel who has an existential issue concerning his identity, perhaps because the reader is given so much insight into his thoughts and feelings through the first-person narrative, thereby gaining a better understanding of what drives him. Again, this by no means absolves him of his misdeeds, but it does allow us to see where he is coming from, and as a consequence, perhaps to understand ourselves. To clarify this further, it does not mean that no other character in the novel has an identity crisis, but specifically, an *existential* identity crisis is far more evident in Odili than in anyone else.

Odili is a man beset by conflicts, both existentially and ideologically, as he glimpses a world beyond his normal routine. We see how he changes, how he views things, and how his worldview changes when he encounters wealthy people. We also see how *his* behaviour changes once he starts to earn more money. At times, it even seems as if he could end up like Chief Nanga, if he won the election. One also wonders if Chief Nanga was once like him, before he became the Minister of Culture. In this way, Odili's identity crisis is clearly visible, as he always has a foot in both worlds; he was born into an affluent family, but due to the size of his family, there was little money to go around. Nevertheless, he received an education and even became a teacher himself, but he does not always appear to be very intelligent and is definitely immature in much of his behaviour.

Odili's opening lines in the novel depict him complaining about how excessive he finds the party being held for Chief Nanga's visit. He even laments that the hunters are still wasting their gunpowder, irrespective of the fact that the price of gunpowder has skyrocketed, due to government corruption. He is initially reluctant to go to Bori to stay in Chief Nanga's house, making it clear to the reader that he intends to win a scholarship by himself. The minute he arrives, however, he is happy to enjoy the benefits of being involved with a member of the wealthy social elite. Furthermore, before going to Bori, it would seem that he is a staunch supporter of his country's self-government, but by the time he is settled in Bori, he is not averse to a casual sexual encounter with Jean, the white American wife of a diplomat (Achebe, 1966, pp.48-49). From all angles, there would appear to be a radical

change in Odili's worldview, from the start to the end of the novel, but whether or not he manages to resolve his existential issues is debatable. On the one hand, he definitely appears to be making strides towards becoming a better man and a better person in general, while on the other, there are things that have changed in the nation, which have nothing directly to do with his actions; nor have they anything to do with him resolving his existential issues.

For example, in looking at his initial failure to take responsibility for his freedom, Odili first has an affair with a woman who is unfaithful to him, but he then also blames Chief Nanga for sleeping with her, when he has no claim over her to begin with. Even before this, he indirectly rejects a friend, in favour of living as a guest in the household of a man he barely knows, despite his misgivings. Next, he tries to steal away the fiancée of a man he hates; deciding to do so in the knowledge that he will not only be manipulating her, but also leaving her in the dust once he has wrought his revenge. Even at the end of the novel, he continues to act irrationally, such as by attending Chief Nanga's rally, knowing that if he is caught, he will most likely be beaten up, which is exactly what happens. Finally, however, he takes Edna's hand in marriage, promising to pay the same price as Chief Nanga, intending to 'borrow' money from the C.P.C. fund to do so. By the end of the novel, Odili is still not living an authentic life, nor is he free from the problems of having two different and often conflicting ideologies bearing upon him. Nevertheless, he starts to search for his *essence* and take responsibility for his actions, even if this might appear somewhat egotistical.

In sum, the novel's main characters are clearly destructive individuals in existential terms. Moreover, they aggravate their destructive tendencies by interacting with one another. For example, Odili becomes more destructive, the moment he gets involved with Chief Nanga. If these characters were not destructive, they would be questioning their existential identities, especially as some have never even considered their identity or existence. Nevertheless, what I think should be taken away from this study of the more prominent characters in *A Man of the People* is that human beings will always try to grow and develop in some way – even if they are deluded and lying to themselves – purely so that they can sleep at night.

Some individuals do manage to learn from their experiences over time, even if they continue to make mistakes. Most importantly, if we are to consider ourselves as 'good people', then we need to at the very least reflect on our situation in life, without even trying to find meaning, but rather considering our personal reasons for living.

5.5 Conclusion

Ultimately, are the problems faced by the characters in *A Man of the People* to be seen as the result of post-colonial factors, or are they due to the choices made by the characters themselves? As with many other philosophical questions, the answer to this is complex and multi-factorial. On the one hand, there is no denying that colonialism has given rise to such situations, but the existential concept is that we are responsible for ourselves, regardless of external stimuli. With these thoughts in mind, I propose that these characters are less likely to be suffering due to a lack of identity, but rather have overbearing identities, which leads them down a very different path of self-destruction.

Although there are numerous points to support the independent study of *A Man of the People* through a post-colonial or existentialist lens, it would seem that the characters' self-destructive traits are less the result of colonisation and more the outcome of their constant attempts to do good for all the wrong means. For instance, Chief Nanga does not appear from the narrative to have been corrupt before he attained his position. Neither does Edna appear to be malevolent in any way; she merely wishes to do what she thinks is best for her family. Meanwhile, Max is doing what he believes to be best for his country, and Odili is striving to do the best for himself.

There is no denying that colonialism, followed by decolonisation in a period of post-colonialism, facilitates the manipulation of a people, either by each other or by external forces. However, it cannot be denied that many of the problems encountered in the novel could have been avoided. Here, it is important to note that the population fails to improve their lot in existential terms. Even at the end of the novel, their actions still seem meaningless, with the nation being subjected to a military government after a *coup d'état*, because of the riots and mayhem that break out when the already corrupt elite return to power. Odili may have won the girl, which may be considered as a happy ending by some, but in existential and post-colonial terms, the ending is a less than happy one.

In short, *A Man of the People* is a satirical novel, which succeeds in covering numerous themes with significant economy of words. While the topic of this thesis does not require great detail of all the novel's features and themes, its emphasis on man's responsibility, both to himself and to the rest of mankind, is clear in the interconnectedness of the novel's characters and events: it endeavours to explain why people let bad things happen to others, merely because they are not directly affected by them, despite the notion and experience that what happens to one person will surely affect others in some way.

The best way to sum up the novel and its themes is probably in Odili's own words at the close of the novel. To paraphrase, if the owner of the house starts noticing that things are going missing, then you have stolen too much. While this is worthy of a whole other discussion in itself, Odili is quoting this proverb to highlight the hypocrisy of his people and the nation as a whole. Despite this being a traditional saying, the people do not act upon it, choosing instead to turn a blind eye to what is being stolen from them and thereby allowing it to continue. Odili muses on this fact, reassuring himself with the thought that although many people in the world are like this, there are also others who are not. Even if just one person takes some inspiration from the lives of others and tries to improve the status quo, then perhaps this makes all one's positive efforts worthwhile.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this thesis, four novels by Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, have been analysed in the light of Existential and Postcolonial Theories. In particular, the self-destruction of Igbo characters has been explored, resulting either directly or indirectly from colonial and post-colonial influences. What emerges is the problem of identity, as the characters struggle to resist or adapt to changes in their culture and society, with the passing away of traditional beliefs and lifestyles. Within that process, there is also great conflict and ambiguity, even within existing Igbo communities, which are governed by rigid social and religious conventions. In this way, Achebe uses his narratives as a lens through which to view the impact of Western colonialism on one side, and the pressures of tribal life on the other. From an existential perspective, these overbearing forces threaten or obscure the authentic self (Sartre's *essence*). In particular, the problem of corruption is highlighted, as a complex phenomenon that flourishes in the gulf between Western ideals and traditional value systems.

In the first of these novels, *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) – set during the British colonisation of Nigeria – Okonkwo, the protagonist adopts various identities across the novel's three main transitional phases; starting off as a traditional farmer, then becoming a protestor against the colonial powers, before being annihilated through his self-destruction, thereby demonstrating an unstable identity. Thus, what may first be concluded is that Social Identity Theory, which “predicts that in each interaction, people take on a different identity” (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012, p.74) is more applicable than Identity Theory in Okonkwo's social context. Furthermore, in the last phase of the novel's events, it becomes clear that Okonkwo's identity is shaped by the distinct cultural and social circumstances that lead to his self-destruction. Hence, the strict tribal traditions of his social background not only dominate his life, but also his death. For example, it is according to these restrictive customs that Okonkwo is judged for his violations against the Umuofia clan, his own people, causing him to be sent into exile. Finally, his suicide is considered as an unforgivable sin in his culture, with the Umuofia stating that “his body is an evil” (Achebe, 1958, p.68). This demonstrates that instead of the Umuofia taking his suicide as a sacrifice, their strict tribal rules condemn it as a sin, and “a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen” (ibid., p.68).

In short, Okonkwo contributes to his self-destruction, aside from the issue of his guilt or innocence, violations, and role in his own downfall. Here, the Self gradually supersedes the collective identity, throughout the various transitions of his identity. Following the loss of his surrounding social structure, his familial connections deteriorate. He is finally reduced

to an alienated state, subsequently sinking into human abjection. By that point, he is merely a body, devoid of social worth and isolated from his people. Okonkwo embodies this in an ironic representation of a tragic hero, since his flesh is not even considered worthy of burial according to the customs of his people; his flesh is merely left to pass into the earth with no subjective or socially sanctioned value.

Aside from the above, Sartre's concept of 'everyday life' (1943, p.253) may be applied to Okonkwo's self-motivation. In an elaborate manner, an analysis of his self-destruction as a perceived 'great warrior' would reveal his social status and existential crisis; this being a state of dissatisfaction with life's normalcy. As explained previously, his character analysis is partly built on Sartre's concept of 'everyday life'. This concept underpins his actions, especially at the beginning of the novel, when 'everyday life' dominates. The harmony of Okonkwo's life is based on specific tribal religion and customs, and the accompanying social obligations and expectations, as illustrated in the following passage:

Near the barn was a small house, the "medicine house" or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children. (Achebe, 1958, p.4)

Since the plot of *Things Fall Apart* concerns the dominance of Whites over Blacks, Said's contribution, from his critique of colonial rhetoric in *Orientalism*, was referenced in this thesis, with Said illustrating how the most significant feature of European cultures is their dominance over other cultures; resulting in the assumption that European identity is the only identity of value. Said (1978) contends:

Indeed, it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. (p.7)

This illustration allows for a more accurate interpretation of the reasons behind Okonkwo's desire to commit suicide: an urge that is usually perceived as self-determined. However, the reader becomes aware that Okonkwo, "a man of action, a man of war" (Achebe, 1958, p.3) is attempting to maintain 'superiority' and the 'Self', rather than 'inferiority' and the 'Other'. It is as if Achebe, in one way or another, is trying to reverse the pattern in which Blacks can never attain 'superiority' or realise the 'Self'. In failing to retain his 'superiority' and the 'Self', Okonkwo ultimately chooses to die independent, rather than staying alive and being colonised, especially when he realises that his clansmen will no longer fight with him against

British colonisation. Finally, it may be concluded that African identity is at best ‘existential’, but it can never be ‘stable’.

Meanwhile, *No Longer at Ease* (Achebe, 1960) portrays the protagonist, Obi’s spiritual self-destruction from a colonial and existential perspective. However, in no way is Obi depicted as successful, except in his studies. Instead, the focus of the novel is on Obi’s struggles and failure. On returning to Lagos from the UK, Obi’s Western education is found to be lacking, in that it does not provide him with the wisdom to fight for ideals in his country, and neither has it equipped him to combat corruption in his native Igbo society. Consequently, his Western education and adaptation have left him estranged and socially alienated from his own people. Furthermore, the effect of his Western education and adaptation on his identity, whereby he becomes a cross-cultural hybrid with an unstable identity, deprives him of his inherent African identity, while leaving him unable to fully assimilate his adopted Western identity. The outcome of this is that he belongs nowhere.

Based on the philosophical theories of Sartre and Kant, Obi’s socially alienated identity is examined from an existential (moral) perspective. His mutually exclusive individual choices to refuse or accept bribes reflect on his huge universal moral responsibility to his community, which echoes the fate of his grandfather, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*. Despite his Western education and idealism, Obi’s approval of taking bribes on several occasions leads him to an ironic end.

Similarly, Achebe’s (1964) novel, *Arrow of God* tells the story of a lost identity. By charting the course of resistance and acculturation (that of Christianity) amongst the Igbo people in the final days of traditional Igbo society, Achebe demonstrates the effect of British colonialism and the policy of indirect rule on both the individual and wider Igbo society. With the novel’s narrative beginning after Britain’s entry into Nigeria, he depicts the Igbo in great detail as a proud tribal nation, who have historically led a relatively peaceful agrarian life; a lifestyle dictated by their gods through the rituals that are conducted and perpetuated by their chief priests, at least until the arrival of the British colonisers. The implementation of a policy of indirect rule was intended as a soft approach to taking control of Nigeria; allowing tribal leaders to continue performing their executive duties, while still subjecting them to imperial powers, under which they served as mere puppets. This consequently undermined native culture from the inside out, as demonstrated in the personal identity crisis suffered by Ezeulu, one of these tribal leaders. Ultimately, Ezeulu’s identity is both internally and externally conflicted by contact with the colonial forces, as he loses his social and spiritual roles, struggles to resolve his anxiety, and strives to meet the challenge to his

‘authenticity’ from the surrounding social change. This is at least partly due to Ezeulu’s strong sense of responsibility, especially in terms of upholding tradition and the surrender of his free will to Ulu, the God he serves. Ultimately, both traditional Igbo tribal culture and Ezeulu’s former self are utterly destroyed, forcing them to rebuild an identity that conforms to the Western standards of the colonisers. In the process, however, the Igbo lose a part of themselves that was once steeped in tradition, but which is now meaningless in colonial life.

In the fourth and final novel analysed in this thesis, *A Man of the People* (Achebe, 1966), the question arises of whether the problems depicted in the novel are caused by post-colonialism or by the free choices of the characters themselves. On one hand, there is no denying that post-colonialism has created the conditions for these situations to develop. However, existentialist ideas centre upon the notion that because we are absolutely free, we are entirely responsible for ourselves, regardless of external influences and forces. With this in mind, the characters in the novel do not appear to have personal identity issues, but are rather led down various paths of self-destruction, due to an overpowering sense of identity. The result of this is that *A Man of the People* ends differently from the other novels studied in this thesis, namely with the marriage of the protagonist, Odili, to Edna, the woman he eventually falls in love with. In contrast, the other novels have more tragic endings.

Although there is substantial support for studying *A Man of the People* independently, from either a post-colonialism or existential perspective, it would seem that the characters display fewer self-destructive traits as a result of colonisation. However, they constantly try to do good, using all the wrong means. For example, it is implied that Chief Nanga, the novel’s antagonist, was not a corrupt man before he gained a position of power as Minister of Culture. Meanwhile, his one-time fiancé, Edna seeks to do her best to help her family; while Max believes he is taking positive steps towards improving the state of his country and Odili seeks to do the best for himself. In this thesis, there is no attempt made to diminish the impact of colonialism and subsequent decolonisation in the post-colonial period, which facilitated the manipulation of native Nigerians by each other and by external forces. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many of the disasters that befall the characters in Achebe’s *A Man of the People* are the result of their own choices. It poses the question of whether they could have avoided these troubles, had their decisions been different. Moreover, they did nothing to improve their lot in existential terms. Even the novel’s ending reveals the meaninglessness of their actions, with the fictitious nation being subjected to a military regime, following a coup d’état during intense social unrest and chaos when the corrupt elite returned to power. There is the romantic ‘happy ending’, with Odili final

marrying his love interest, but existentially and from the perspective of Postcolonial Theory, there is no real ‘happy ever after’.

Ultimately, *A Man of the People* may be read as a satirical novel, with a dense and fast-paced narrative. The many complex themes within it and the questions that it raises provide a rich source of discussion – some of which falls outside the scope of this study. In brief, it endeavors to explain why we, as human beings, allow bad things to happen in the world, so long as we are not affected ourselves. In this way, we fail to consider the interconnectedness of all life, as put forward by Heidegger, wherein what happens to one entity will surely affect others in some way, shape or form.

In sum, perhaps the best way to conclude this examination of *A Man of the People* is to look at the conclusion of the novel itself, when Odili cites a traditional Igbo proverb, warning that if the owner of the house starts noticing that things are going missing, then you have stolen too much. What Odili is trying to highlight here is the hypocrisy of his people, in that despite having traditional wisdom and proverbs about theft and corruption, they still do nothing about it. However, he reassures himself with the thought that while there is so much apathy in the world, there are also individuals who strive to uphold ideals, and we can take our inspiration from them in trying to improve our communities and the wider sphere. Even if only one other person is influenced in this way, it makes all positive efforts worthwhile.

Having critically discussed the theme of self-destruction, in terms of the identity of Igbo characters in a colonial, post-colonial and existential context, this thesis has illustrated some of various forms of self-destruction, which result from different historical interactions between the British and the Igbos in Nigeria. Consequently, this study has looked the ways in which Achebe’s narrative reveals instability in the identity of his Igbo characters, both during and after colonisation. The self-destruction that all Achebe’s protagonists finally face is a clear and common sign of their annihilated identity. However, this theme of self-destruction varies from one protagonist to another. The questions that arises here is the extent to which post-colonialism and existentialism shape/reshape Igbo identity. If we assume that identity reflects the Self, what happens when this Self vanishes due to colonisation, or due to an existentially authentic decision?

Finally, from a personal point of view, the most obvious limitations of this study are that only one African country is examined (Nigeria) and within that, only one of Nigeria’s ethnic groups (the Igbo), and predominantly one gender (male). For myself, as the researcher, these limitations point to the need for further research, in order to broaden the

debates and issues revealed in this thesis. For instance, in terms of self-destruction, can Achebe's fiction be examined from a perspective of diverse ethnic and gender groups? In particular, why do women appear to be marginalised in these narratives, especially in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, although less so in *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*? Moreover, do women existentially decide and react differently from men in Achebe's fiction? Furthermore, despite the fact that Achebe's novels are mainly concerned with the Igbo ethnic group, how can other ethnic groups in Nigeria, notably the Hausa and Yoruba, be viewed from an existential, colonial and post-colonial perspective? What is more, would different themes emerge in other contexts or time periods? If so, what might these issues consist of? As an attempt to go beyond those limitations, an extensive examination of the above-mentioned inquiries would be of great interest to me, as the present author, and hopefully, for other researchers, in order to ascertain whether conflicts of identity are still an issue for the ethnicities and genders that are subjected to these influences.

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