SYNOPSIS OF THE THESIS:

Reflection of Igbo Element in Afro-Fourth World Literature

To be submitted to Gujarat University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Reflection of Igbo Element in Afro – Fourth World Literature

HYPOTHESIS:

The colonization by the British in Africa, particularly in Nigeria brought in cultural differences in society affecting individuals of the country. The struggle between the traditional and European cultures left the Igbo people of Nigeria in a sort of a no man’s land. The Igbo did not understand whether to continue with their traditional Igbo culture or to start accepting the British one. This thesis would examine how language becomes a tool through which the Igbo writers in their novels reflected the contemporary society and the contradictory forces of foreign culture and indigenous culture and values. The novels used for study in this thesis would show how the Igbo were caught between resisting and embracing the change. The Igbo were caught in the dilemma of determining how far to adapt to the reality or change. One of the solutions led to accepting the positive aspects of both, the Igbo and the British culture.

This thesis would also throw light on how the Igbo writers used fiction as a platform to display their own culture; different political, social and religious facets of their community. Fiction is also used by the Igbo writers to show the injustices and cruelty meted out to them by the British, and also to break down the misconceptions that the other countries have about Africa being uncultured, primitive and a continent full of mindless savages.

At the same time it shall also examine the variety of English and the usage of native language in Igbo English novels.
CHAPTER DIVISION.

The proposed study shall aim at the research on The Reflection of Igbo Element in Afro – Fourth World Literature. This thesis will elaborate the research work on the basis of the following chapters:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: FOURTH WORLD LITERATURE

CHAPTER II: INITIAL ATTEMPTS IN IGBO ENGLISH NOVELS AND THE RISE OF FOURTH WORLD WRITINGS

CHAPTER III: THE RECOGNITION OF IGBO NOVELS

CHAPTER IV: CONTEMPORARY IGBO WRITINGS

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: FOURTH WORLD LITERATURE

The First chapter will explain in detail what the term “Fourth world Literature” means. It becomes necessary to be acquainted with the term “Fourth World”. For this purpose, what is meant by the Fourth World will be explained in detail and also some idea about the First, Second and the Third world will be given. The term “Fourth world” refers to the poorest, underdeveloped, oppressed and underprivileged smaller groups within nations. It includes groups like the Dalits and tribals of India, Igbo of Nigeria and the Blacks. No specific definition can explain what Fourth world literature is. But at the same time, Fourth world literature would mean, literature written about and by the oppressed, poor, underprivileged and marginal people of any nations. The researcher has observed that the main themes of the Fourth World Literature are — social expulsions and discords which result into racial discrimination, injustice, untouchability, colonization etc. Fourth world writings also include — Dalit and Tribal literature of India, Igbo literature of Nigeria and Black literature.

Fourth World Writings – Fourth World writers and their works

1. Dalit Literature – Dalit writers and their works

The Dalits of India belong to the dispossessed groups recognized as scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. They have been oppressed for thousands of years. Today, Dalit literature refers to Dalits and is composed mainly by them. It focuses on calling attention to their suppression and oppression. Literature seems a tool of resurrection — a powerful medium to create awareness and work towards a more just treatment.

The works of some famous Dalit writers’ like — B.R Ambedkar, Baburao Bagul, Namdeo Dhasal, Kaiyoor Murli, Dagdu Maruti, Om Prakash Valmiki, Annabhau
Sathe, Kanchan Ilaiah, Arun Kamble, Raja Dhale, Malika Amar Sheikh will be discussed in this section. The works of Dalit women writers like - Kumud Pawade, Jyoti Lanjewar, Urmila Pawar, Hira Basode etc. will also be discussed. The themes of the novels will be analyzed in detail in this section.

2. Tribal Literature - Tribal writers and their works

Tribal literature also comes under Fourth world literature. They are the indigenous population and much of their literature is oral. The tribals are also known as *Adivasis*. Their stories are also of displacement, marginalization, exploitation and alienation. Some important tribal writers who wrote in Marathi like – Atmaram Rathod, Laxman Mane, Laxman Gaikwad etc. and their works will be discussed in detail in this section.

3. Igbo Literature - Igbo writers and their works

Igbo is the largest and the most influential ethnic group in Nigeria. Their literature also comes under Fourth world literature. Igbo is a spoken language and has a written script. The language is rich with several variations. Their literature emerged due to missionary activity.

Igbo literature voices the encounter between their traditional values and culture as they collide with Western beliefs. This is a common experience of colonization – especially India and Africa. At the same time, the writers get an opportunity to write about their traditional beliefs, aphorisms and culture. The most famous Igbo writers are – Chinua Achebe, Olaudah Equiano, Buchi Emecheta, Cyprian Ekwensi, Flora Nwapa, Ben Okri and Elechi Amadi and Pta Nwana. The famous novels written by these writers will be analysed in this section.
4. Black Literature – Black writers and their works

This term incorporates works in Black writers about Black people. It is mainly African-American literature—writings by people of African descent living in the U.S.A. They write about the discrimination faced by the Blacks, who are treated as inferiors and marginalized. Their themes explore racism, slavery, black identity etc.

The slave narratives written by Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, the novels written by Toni Morisson, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Ralph Waldo Ellison and the plays written by Lorraine Hansberry will be analysed in this section.

CHAPTER II: INITIAL ATTEMPTS IN IGBO ENGLISH NOVELS AND THE RISE OF FOURTH WORLD WRITINGS

In order to understand the characteristics of the major Igbo writers and their works, the Igbo novels will be divided into three categories: “Igbo writings at the Onset”, “Igbo writings that gain Peak and popularity with recognition”, and “Contemporary Fourth World Igbo writings”. Chapter two, deals with the writers whose works fall into the “At the Onset” category. The writers that fall in the “At the Onset” category started writing to show the world that the Igbo have a separate culture, traditions, language etc. from the British who colonized Africa. The important writers and their works that fall in this category are — Oladuah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oladuah Equiano, Gustavus Vassa the African, Omemuko* by Pita Nwana and Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer At Ease*. All the three novels have been analysed in detail in terms of their themes, symbols, motifs, characterization, language etc.
1. Oladuah Equiano

i. The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Gustavus Vassa the African

Olaudah Equiano wrote his two volume autobiography titled, An Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Gustavus Vassa the African in 1798 in which he has described his life from bondage to freedom. It was the first influential slave narrative. It highlighted the suffering and the atrocities inflicted on Africans, who were treated like animals. It is an eye-opener – a firsthand account of a slave. The protagonist of the novel is clever, intelligent, and full of fortitude and has great competence. For him, it is a success story as he struggles and achieves – his freedom and life of dignity. This book has a political colour, as do some major Igbo novels. There are clear social, ethical and religious arguments for the abolishment of slavery at the end of the book.

2. Pita Nwana

i. Omumuko

Pita Nwana is remembered for first publishing a novel in Igbo. He is known as “the father of the Igbo novel”. His novel Omumuko is a spirited account of a man who sins but bounces back through repentance and atonement. It focuses on Igbo culture and traditions, especially the importance of community. There are a lot of Igbo proverbs used, which are drawn upon by later writers like Achebe.
3. Chinua Achebe

1. *No Longer at Ease*

Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* attacks the heart of the problem – the contrary pulls between the preservation of traditional culture and values and giving into the overpowering influence of a progressive Western culture. The protagonist Obi is caught between these pulls. The clash occurs because Obi after his Western education abroad, comes back to his country and is confronted with the dilemma of accepting or rejecting traditional values and culture. Two other significant areas highlighted by Achebe are that of conversion to Christianity as an alternative to emerging restrictive and oppressive practices. The novel also highlights traditional Igbo values and cultural practices. Another important theme is the oppression and suppression that people of underdeveloped or developing nations have to undergo. The White colonizers especially with their air of superiority and under the guise of their civilizing mission heaped atrocities on natives besides exploiting them.

**CHAPTER III: THE RECOGNITION OF IGBO NOVELS**

This chapter deals with those Igbo writers and their novels that fall in the “Igbo writings that gain peak and popularity with recognition” category. These writers started writing after the British left Nigeria. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Potter’s Wheel* by Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike, *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* will be studied in detail in this chapter. The themes, characterization, symbols, motifs, the author’s purpose of writing the novel, writing style of the author etc. will be analysed in detail in this section.
1. Chinua Achebe

i. *Things Fall Apart*

*Things Fall Apart* is a seminal work and a milestone in African literature. It is a masterpiece, an archetypal modern African novel. Through this novel, it appears as if Africa writes back to clear prejudices and misconceptions harboured by the Western world about Africa being a land of savages – uncultured and primitive. Achebe in his novel presents the real Africa – the progressiveness of Igbo culture and traditions and its erosion by the onslaught of Western culture. Thus the progressive traditions highlighted are their laws which give importance to justice and fairness and the system of direct democracy. Another progressive practice is the faith invested in individual’s to grow and achieve greatness through their own hard work. The Igbo believe that with will power one can change his destiny. Some interesting religious beliefs – the belief in an individual’s personal God is also shown. The novel shows how Christianity provided a resurrection for the underdog and people oppressed by the dominant class or culture. The book is replete with unique Igbo proverbs. Achebe has also incorporated Pidgin English in the novel.

2. Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike

i. *The Potter’s Wheel*

*The Potter’s Wheel* shows the importance of discipline in a male child’s life. It also shows the importance of learning adjustment and developing strategies for survival. The novel has a moral core. The novel centres on child abuse and education (an English education) in order to interrogate how the mental universe of the colonized was transgressed by new attitudes of the colonizer. Ike criticizes the post-colonial
burden of the Africans slavishly following the education system established by the colonizer. Another general truth is highlighted, which is also true for other similar colonized countries – the adoption of similar structures of oppression and suppression which were the weapons of the colonizer. There is a constant interplay between the Igbo language and the English language in the novel.

3. Elechi Amadi

1. The Concubine

*The Concubine* written by Elechi Amadi is a literary work which has a supernaturally influenced love story as its main plot. The novel starts with a love story at its centre and slowly, the supernatural takes over and a new dimension added is that of fantasy and an open-ended conclusion. In the novel, questioning of the limits between the spirits and matter and the issues relating to strong sexual desire cast doubt on happenings that could be given both realistic and supernatural explanations. The novel has two dimensional characterizations. There are a lot of dreams present in the novel and animal imagery is heavily used throughout the novel.

4. Flora Nwapa

1. Efuru

Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, is an outstanding example of a feminist novel which is based on an old folktale of a woman chosen by the Gods. She highlights the strengths of women to deal with different kinds of situations in her novel. The novel challenged the traditional portrayal of women in Igbo society. Flora Nwapa emphasizes a woman’s intelligence, competence and power of independent thinking. In the novel,
Flora Nwapa shows the traditional Igbo woman and their capacity to survive all odds that are against them. Flora Nwapa has emphasized the role of marriage and procreation in Igbo society, but has also critiqued it by lying over emphasis on marriage and having children; a woman's role is narrowed down. It prevents them from achieving higher roles in other fields. The novelist is trying to convey a very important message through her book — only having children does not bring self-fulfilment. She wants people to understand that companionship, understanding and love are equally important in a marriage. The book is a significant move towards women empowerment.

CHAPTER IV: CONTEMPORARY IGBO WRITINGS

Some of the important contemporary writers are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nnedi Okorafor and Chris Abani. These writers and some of their important novels will be analysed in detail in this section.

1. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a gifted novelist who wrote important novels like — *Purple Hibiscus, Half of Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck*.

   i. *Purple Hibiscus*

In the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie writes about contemporary Nigeria and specially explores the post-colonial burden. The main character of the novel is Kambili. Through the eyes of Kambili, the notions of freedom and religion are greatly exposed in the novel. The story is about a people trying to come to terms with their post-colonial heritage and trying to pick up the remains of a shattered culture. They
are unable to establish a good and efficient system of governance and corruption is rampant. Religion and politics are important themes of the novel. Inevitably, the theme of corruption seeps in. Though most of the book is dark, but hope and love form important thematic threads. One very important effect of colonization is code mixing and code switching. The English that the protagonist, Kambili uses is punctuated with Igbo words and Nigerianisms. It gives the reader, a feel of Nigeria.

**ii. Half of Yellow Sun**

One of the consequences of post-colonial world is fragmentation and different groups vying with one another to grab power. Adichie’s *Half of Yellow Sun* deals with this theme. It is about the Nigerian-Biafran war which broke out as a consequence of this internal power struggle. *Half of Yellow Sun* explores the lives of four characters within the background of the Biafrian war and how it affects their lives. There is a mature and in-depth exploration of serious existential issues like identity, meaning of existence, nationhood, rootlessness, fear, insecurity and problems like racism, sexism, colonialism, power, politics, betrayal, personal relationships, etc. It is a story of survival and highlights the struggles and nobility of ordinary lives, which need to be told as much as global stories. An interesting experiment in narrative technique used by Adichie is the use of book within a book in which one of the characters is writing a book and excerpts from it carries the story forward, adding new dimensions.

**iii. The Thing around Your Neck**

Adichie’s third book is an amazing collection of twelve stories titled *The Thing around Your Neck*. All the twelve stories will be analyzed in detail in this section. The important themes in the stories of the novel are – religious fanatism, cultural and
religious clash between Christians and Nigerians, interaction between traditional 
religion and Christianity and marriage life. *The Thing around Your Neck* is rich with 
references to history, culture and literature.

2. Nnedi Okorafor

Nnedi Okorafor is a Nigerian-American writer of fantasy. Nnedi Okorafor wrote two 
books: *The Shadow Speaker* and *Who Fears Death*.

i. *The Shadow Speaker*

*The Shadow Speaker* is a young adult, first person novel that takes place in the year 
2070. It explores science fiction and fantasy with a story that plays out in the 
futuristic, magical universe with worlds beyond earth. The narrator of the story is a 
14-15 year old Black Muslim girl called Ejii Ugabe. However, this is nor a “race 
novel”. The readers find contrary portrayals of Islam in the novel. Okorafor weaves 
fantastical creatures and talents into a story. She also incorporates the everydayness of 
Islam into Ejii’s life. This book is engaging and creative. Okorafor develops a 
complex and detailed world and her vision of a futuristic Africa sprinkled in magic is 
fascinating.

ii. *Who Fears Death*

*Who Fears Death* is set in a post-apocalyptic and magical Africa. This novel is very 
complicated and difficult to understand. The book is narrated by Onyesonwu who is a 
Ewu. *Ewus* are the children of *Nuru* and *Okeke*. It is assumed that *Ewu* are generally 
children of rape. This is an important novel especially because of its superb writing 
and its refreshing and interesting portrayal of a strong woman of colour in fantasy.
Science and fantasy have long been neglected those outside of the white male majority. But Okorafor’s work is a welcome departure from the norm.

3. Chris Abani

Graceland

A different kind of fiction was introduced by Chris Abani. He wrote a political thriller. *Graceland* evokes indigenous Africa with its folktales and ancient rituals. It has a lot of political imagery and messages. Violence is a vital part in the novel and it runs throughout the novel. The novel is a strong rant about “thieves” and World Bank people. *Graceland* brings to life one more story of how America affects people everywhere.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The Igbo writers have presented a very diverse and impressive body of work despite of the many challenges they were faced with.

1. Themes

The Igbo writings throw light on various aspects of the Igbo way of life. Writing becomes a tool through which the Igbo writers convey the plight of their people and the injustices meted out to them. Fiction is initially used as a platform to display Igbo culture, and to clear misconceptions of the world about them. The clash of the Igbo value system as opposed to the Western thinking and values is a recurrent theme in the novels by all the writers. All the themes that occur in the most important Igbo novels will be analysed in this section.
1. Igbo Ethos

*Things Fall Apart* is the study about all the aspects of Igbo life, exhibiting the different political, social and religious facets of the Igbo community. The book is based on the clash of two different civilizations, each trying to understand the other. Achebe's earlier novel, *No Longer at Ease* also attempts to do this. Achebe's themes reflect the cultural traits of the Igbo, the impact of European civilization upon traditional African society, and the role of tribal values in modern urban life.

ii. Spirituality

The Igbo people due to the effects of colonization, and the presence of missionaries, had converted to Christianity. This is the reason why spirituality is an important theme in Igbo literature. The writers show great maturity by including questions that deal with penance, salvation, and in general the human condition. In Equiano's slave narrative, the underlying theme is the journey from being heathen to a Christian. Salvation is an important theme in the narrative. Some Igbo authors enmesh African mysticism within the realms of literature. Elechi Amadi's novel *The Concubine* is about the human condition and the relationship between Gods and man. Adichie's book of twelve short stories, *The Thing around Your Neck* has themes ranging from religious fanaticism, religion versus tribal culture, the intermingling of Christianity and Nigerian culture.

iii. Marriage and Gender Equations

The other theme is that of love and marriage that we find in the works of Igbo authors. Through marriage and love the relationship between the genders is explored. Marriages give the writers a chance to delve into ancient tribal rituals like the *Uri*
ceremony, and the Isa-ifị ceremony seen in Things Fall Apart. Achebe's No Longer at Ease also has love as its central theme, as Obi falls in love with Clara who is an outcaste. Chukwuemeka Ike's The Bride Price has marriage and love as its main theme, as is obvious from the title of the novel. It explores the notions of life and marriage and delves into the lives of married couple.

The traditional view of certain tasks being accorded to women and some to men is shown in some Igbo novels. Also the time-honoured outlook of manhood equated with brute and power; and womanhood with beauty and ability to bear sons, is shown. The women are supposed to be the weaker sex—meek, mild and submissive. The novels show the changing gender equations with the onset of colonialism and education. In the novels of Achebe and others, this kind of writing is prevalent. Flora Nwapa is the first female Igbo writer. Her novels have a feminist slant.

iv. Politics

The African continent has been struggling for independent dignity and identity in all spheres of life. Therefore one of the themes of Igbo novels is of politics. The writers “At the onset” deal with the colonization, and its effects and the atrocities committed by the white man. Achebe’s books are about how the Igbo overcome this onslaught on their culture, and how they develop in the modern world; successfully bridging the gap between the modern and traditional. The second generation of writers deal, with the atrocities committed during the war. The civil war lasted from 1967-70, and had obviously deep rooted effect on the Igbo psyche. This was reflected in a most of the Igbo novels. Buchi Emecheta’s book The Rape of Shavi talks about the civil war and European Colonization. The contemporary writers like Adichie, too have religion, and politics as an underlying theme as seen in Purple Hibiscus. Adichie's book Half of
Yellow Sun has the Nigeria-Biafra war as its backdrop. Chris Abani’s Graceland unashamedly uses novel as a vehicle to make strong political statements.

2. Literary Attributes

The roots of Igbo language he in albeit rich, but oral tradition. A language that is shackled with colonial history, rules, principles and values that, are at variance with the Igbo ethos. It should be understood that the Igbo writer who writes in English is very different from that of his European or American counterpart. The language of the Igbo writers write in a very ethnic variety of Nigerian English. The Igbo writers have established an Igbo identity in style, culture and linguistic experimentation, through their works.

3. The Igbo Contribution to Nigerian Fiction

Literature is often an expression of a culture’s perception of its problems and of the solutions to these problems. An Igbo writer’s sources of creativity are his culture and traditions. An Igbo writer writes in English. The Igbo tradition is characterized by linguistic innovation which can be classified under the following seven categories.

Loan words, coinages, loan-blends, translation equivalents, semantic extension, collocational extension and colloquialisms.

Each category will be explained in detail in this section, with examples from some important Igbo novels.
4. Language

The language of the Igbo writers is hard-hitting and harsh. The terrain, the landscape is harsh. The events, the political fallout of colonialism, the slave trade and the war; all contribute to this brand of literature being harsh. There is a rare instance of flowery speech, of eulogy. The writers end up being poetic and lyrical at times. But it is more so because of the deep rooted emotion they feel, rather than superciliousness.

5. Characterization

Writers like Chinua Achebe, John Munonye, Buchi Emecheta, Chukwuemeka Ike display great maturity in the portrayal of their characters. The characterisation is not that of types, but is well rounded individual characters. The novel, Things Fall Apart, is a medium through which Achebe introduces the world to Nigeria, and its customs. The protagonist of the novel has all the character traits of a traditional hero. He is masculine, heroic, and stubborn and cannot tolerate weakness. The protagonist goes through a gamut of experiences as Achebe talks about the evils and superstitions that exist in Igbo culture and confronts the effects of colonization.

Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike’s Obu, in The Potter’s Wheel, is a boy of six years. His intelligence leads his parents to send him to a boarding school. The character of Obi is delightful, as he outsmarts his teachers, who abuse him, starve him and beat him up. The book ends with him growing up to be a young industrious man.

The main character of Amadi’s The Concubine, is that of Omakachi. The novel revolves around her and her many suitors. The Concubine does not have a strongly etched character, which supersedes all others.
Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* deals with the lofty protagonist, of the same name, Efuru. She has all the things that conventional girls long for. Efuru is a rebel. She does not conform to the traditional idea of womanhood, where the girl is supposed to be meek and submissive. She is strong, independent and makes her own decisions. Efuru is characterized beautifully. She is a symbol of survival, and female empowerment.

In Equiano’s slave narrative the protagonist is the writer himself and his experiences, and his journey. In Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, the protagonist is Kambili, a teenager. The whole novel is written from the point of view of a fifteen year old, and her brother, who is seven years old. The novel *Half of Yellow Sun* is based on the Biafra war. The novel has not one, but four main characters, whose lives change drastically after the war.

Nnedi Okorafor is a female writer who chooses fantasy as a genre for her novels. This gives her ample scope to develop and raise her characters to unimaginable heights. In *The Shadow Speaker*, the protagonist is a Muslim adolescent girl called Ejii Ugabe who can communicate with the shadows and is a psychic. Among the youth writers particularly in the contemporary writers we find, the youth playing an important role. In Chris Abani’s *Graceland*, the protagonist is once again a young boy, who lives in Nigeria, and has to survive on his wits, amidst a chaotic political atmosphere, and violence.

The Igbo writers seem, fearless creative, and have successfully bridged the gap between the old and the new, and reached a happy compromise between the western thought processes, and reconciled it with the Igbo culture. They show at once common ethos, and yet a lot of creative use of language.