CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Communities of the formerly colonized countries in general and tribal communities in particular have suffered from a sense of cultural alienation from their roots due to colonial domination experienced specifically at the spiritual and cultural level. Such a form of colonial domination manifests in the form of psychic violence which according to Albert Memmi is a ‘colonization of the mind’ from which a postcolonial recovery becomes possible only through a reclaiming of one’s cultural past. In the context of Africa the 1950s was the decade of postcolonial writings which reflected an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist perspective alongside an optimistic vision for the future. Postcolonial African writers countered the claims of racial superiority of the west by producing artistic works that showed that Africa had its own history, culture, and civilization that were equal if not superior to that of the imperialists. The writers saw their societies ‘put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement’ imposed on them by colonialism. But Chinua Achebe, the most celebrated of the writers in Africa had a different perspective about African postcolonialism represented particularly in his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which was set in Umuofia, an independent and progressive society much before the intrusion and entrenchment of colonialism. Achebe’s postcolonial
sensibilities differed from that of other African writers of his times who idealized the past in order to reshape Africa's distorted colonial history. Achebe assumes a self-critical insider’s position in the context of his native Igbo community, showing how African society had its own contradictions and spiritual crises much before the intrusion of the colonizers. The colonizers had only made use of such contradictions in imposing its ideologies and religion upon his community. Therefore, a re-reading of Chinua Achebe’s novels from a postcolonial perspective becomes extremely important in the context of reclaiming a tribal lifeworld depicted in his novels.

Colonialism in Africa, with its apparatus of domination at the social, economic and political spheres had also stretched its boundaries to the cultural sphere of the natives which involved their religion, lived experiences and values. Representation of the natives by the colonizer became a strategy of domination which influenced the self image of the natives. Following Edward Said’s argument that the Orient could not represent itself and had to rely on the West to produce the histories of its colonies, had also affected the postcolonial African imagination and the self-image of the Africans. Therefore Achebe’s attempt has been to critically appropriate western representation of the Igbo people as a tribe hitherto used in a derogatory sense by western Anthropologists. Achebe’s view is that unlike the experience of colonialism in case of the settler
colonies where the natives became a minority, African “indigenous people remained in the majority even after the colonizers came, but were administered by a foreign power.” Achebe was well aware of the nature of African colonialism and thus his postcolonial perspective sharply contrasts the writers of the same period, such as Senghor, Laye and others, whose artistic works are produced from a position of negritude and which only idealize Africa. Therefore the central focus of this study lies in examining how a reclaiming of the tribal world in Achebe’s novels and the representation of the Igbo people from Achebe’s perspective as an insider, can be a postcolonial recovery in a cultural sense. A postcolonial recovery in such a sense requires a critical examination of colonial machineries of domination: education, religion and language which enable popular representation of the colonized ‘other’. How a postcolonial author like Achebe creates alternative modes of articulation and description for the native Igbo tribe is discussed in this chapter.

Achebe objectively examines the unique lived experiences of a tribe in terms of its clash with other tribes over power and resources. This is how Achebe, despite being an insider, develops an internal critique of his tribe. An existential crisis for a tribe arises in their encounter with modern institutions that shifts the story of their essential tribal selves from the subject of their own experiences to an alienating state of being. The
experience of transition for a tribal subject from being a ‘noble savage’ to a participant in a system of governance transforms their collective identity into a singular and exclusive notion of tribe. Such a predicament of alienation of the self from the tribe and the tribe from the world is a running theme in Achebe’s novels.

The predicament of the Igbo tribe has been Achebe’s consuming passion both in his life and narratives. As he himself writes in his essay ‘The Novelist as Teacher’:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my (Igbo) society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of the word. Here, I think my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet.⁶

Again, in the same essay he expresses the primacy of his role as a writer in the new republic:

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front. For he is after all…the sensitive point of his community…Art is important but also is education of the kind I have in mind.⁷

Despite the significant beneficial changes that the western civilization have brought to Igboland, it also incurred as much harm to the native culture, and so the wounds of the centuries is still a long way from healing.⁸ The restoration of the injured Igbo psyche and sensibility of his people therefore occupies the core of Achebe’s concern.
Chinua Achebe (pronounced /tʃɪnwaː ətʃɛbeɪ/), the “father of modern African literature”\(^9\) and the fifth of six children, was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe to Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam on 16 November 1930 at Ogidi, east of Onitsha, in the eastern region of Nigeria. So far he produced five novels, scores of essays, criticism, political commentary, poetry, short stories and children books. Achebe is the first recipient of Nigeria’s highest honour for intellectual achievement, the Nigerian National Order of Merit. He has also received numerous honours from around the world, including the Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as more than thirty honorary doctorates from universities in England, Scotland, the United States, Canada, Nigeria and South Africa. Achebe is best known for his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* which has a record sale of eight million copies and translated in more than fifty languages and remains to this day the most widely read book in African literature. The driving passion that propelled him to fame has been his overall concern with his Igbo community, of whose cultural history he professed to be the chronicler. Achebe strongly believes in the uses of literature, especially the novel, to educate his people and help bring about social and cultural reformation in his society:

But we must not see the role of literature only in terms of providing latent support for things as they are, for it does offer the kinetic energy
necessary for social transition and change… literature is also deeply concerned with change.\textsuperscript{10}

His novels therefore can be studied both as a record of cultural history and an experiment at social engineering of the Igbo people. Again he writes in ‘The Role of the Writer in the New Nation’:

It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate or be indifferent to this argument (that the rule of white people is synonymous with civilization and the rule of black people is the negation of Christianity and civilization) which calls his full humanity to question. For me, at any rate there is a clear duty to make a statement… as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must be disposed of… that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, and they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer’s duty is to help them regain by showing them on human terms what happened to them, what they lost… to explore the depth of human condition.\textsuperscript{11}

Achebe’s novels and critical writings have become his attempts at social reconstruction of the Igbo people.

The Igbo\textsuperscript{12} people are one of the three largest and most influential ethnic groups (the other two are the Hausa and the Yoruba tribes) living chiefly in south-eastern Nigeria, constituting eighteen percent of the total Nigerian population. They speak Igbo, which includes various dialects and a majority of them speak English alongside Igbo as a result of British colonialism. Due to the effects of migration and the Atlantic slave trade, there are Igbo people in countries such as Cameroon and Equatorial
Guinea, as well as outside Africa also. Before the advent of British colonialism, the Igbo were a politically fragmented group. Various subgroups were set according to clan, lineage, village affiliation and dialect. There was no centralized chieftaincy, hereditary aristocracy, or kinship customs except in the kingdoms of Nri Arochukwu and Onitsha. This political system changed significantly under British colonialism since the late nineteenth century; *Eze* (kings) were introduced in most local communities by Frederick Lugard as “Warrant Chiefs”\(^\text{13}\). Before their acquaintance with the Europeans and full exposure to other ethnic groups neighbouring them, the Igbos lacked a strong sense of identity as one people: inter-tribe or inter-clan conflicts and war was a common phenomenon then. As in the case of most ethnic groups located in sub-Saharan Africa, the Europeans had identified the Igbo as a tribe. Chinua Achebe, among other scholars, had challenged this because of its negative connotations and possible wrong definition. The suggestion was that the Igbo should be defined as a nation similar to the Cherokee or Japanese, although the Igbos do not have an official recognized state of their own.\(^\text{14}\) Under the leadership of their elites, a strong sense of Igbo identity developed which was fuelled by colonial situation of the mid-20\(^{th}\) century. Certain conflicts with other Nigerian ethnic groups led to the attempted secession of Igbo dominated Eastern Nigeria, to create the independent state of Biafra. The Nigerian-Biafra\(^\text{15}\) war broke out shortly
after. The end of the war led to the defeated Republic Biafra being reabsorbed back into Nigeria. The politics of the country was embroiled in the failure of civil governance, succession of military dictatorships after independence in 1960 till late twentieth century. The legacy of colonial regime has played the greatest part in the rapid disintegration and dislocation of the Igbo tribe. All these historical accounts and more had been given a fictional touch by the novelist who prefers to call his narratives as ‘applied art as distinct from pure.’

In Nigeria the Igbo were the forefront in reaping the benefits of western learning and gainful employment that comes along with the missionary movements under the colonial rule. Many of the African writers, including Achebe, were products of western education during the colonial period. The colonial consciousness, gained through the benefits of western learning, his keen sense of history and the great concern over the ‘traumatic’ experience of his injured community, compelled Achebe to question, to remember and attempt to relocate all that had been lost or destroyed by the tragic encounter with the colonial West. Achebe described his early condition in terms of a ‘crisis of the soul’. The pressures exerted by the process of Europeanization on the young intellectuals of Achebe’s generation can be understood fully only by
those who had undergone the experience themselves. In his interview with Donatus Nwoga, Achebe said:

…what I think is the basic problem of a new African country like Nigeria is what you might call a ‘crisis of the soul’. We have been subjected – we have subjected ourselves too – to this period during which we have accepted everything alien as good and practically everything local or native as inferior. I could give you illustrations of when I was growing up, the attitude of our parents, the Christian parents, to Nigerian dances, to look down on itself…and this was a very bad thing; and we…still haven’t got over this period. I can give…the example of the boy in my wife’s class who said he wouldn’t write about harmattan because it was ‘bush’, you see: he would rather write about winter.19

As a result of colonial contact with the West high values were placed on western education and everything the white man did became valuable and worthy of emulation. By a kind of perverted logic, colonialism had turned to the past of the colonized tribe and distorted, disfigured and destroyed their culture, robbing them of their dignity and self-respect, to the extent that the Igbos themselves could not take pride in whatever belongs to them – their culture, people and even their folk dances and literature. It is here that the duty of the African writer is called into question – “to help them (African people) regain it (their dignity and self-respect) by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost…to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa he (the African writer) cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history.”20 Achebe’s novels, therefore, presents the authentic record of Igbo history. He does this by re-examining and refuting the given cultural
history of Africa and the identity of the African that never was, by presenting a parallel/alternative Igbo life-world and closely scrutinizing the prevalent European colonalist texts. His early two novels – viz. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* – paints the veritable Igbo past with all the authenticity that a writer can master, to show that his people’s past is not one long night of savagery in need of the paternal influence of the civilized west.

All postcolonial novelists share a common condition of colonial consciousness and this awareness was more acute among the African elites, especially writers, because of widespread slavery, segregation and colour prejudice, making the condition of Africans worse than that of the other colonized tribes of the world. Based on the exploitation of the natural and human resources of the colonized nation, colonialism perpetuates itself through oppression and aggression. Jean Paul Sartre argues that “Oppression means, first of all the oppressor’s hatred for the oppressed” which creates a “petrified ideology that devotes itself to regarding human beings as talking beasts.” 21 This in turn dehumanizes both the colonizer and the colonized. In one of his latest essays, Achebe opines in relation to the logic behind British Imperialism that “a tradition does not begin and thrive, as the tradition of British writing about Africa did, unless it serves a certain need.” 22 This point was discussed in his
essay “An African Image: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (1988) where he said:

As I said earlier Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray – a carrier on to whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate.23

The inferior status that the West had assigned to the Africans provides the former’s need for self-assurance. In other words, the imagined dignity of the European personality is realized through comparison with their supposedly degraded counterpart. Aime Cesaire, the formulator of ‘Negritude’ says the same thing when he remarks:

The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal…. They thought they were only slaughtering Indians or Hindus, or South Sea Islanders, or Africans. They have overthrown, one after another, the ramparts behind which European civilization could have developed freely.24 (Italics mine)

Again, Edward Said also remarked in *Orientalism* that “the Orient (Third World countries) has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience….The Orient is an
integral part of European material civilization and culture.”25 In other words, the colonial West paints the image of the Orient in the way and manner that serve their psychological needs. Said further argues:

Additionally, the imaginative examination of things oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by batteries of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.26

The colonizer creates a myth of the colonized by proposing the image of the colonized as lazy, inferior, stubborn, wicked and even having a dependence complex. O. Mennoni’s re-reading of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* found an analogy between the colonizer-colonized and Prospero-Caliban. He reads ‘inferiority complex’ in Prospero and ‘dependence complex’ in Caliban. While the Prospero-type Whiteman has a ‘pathological urge to dominate,’ the Caliban-type Blackman feels wholly dependent on the authority of the white master.27 Paradoxically, it was from the white man that Caliban also learned how to curse and protest. Despite the inadequacy of Mennoni’s thesis, it can be seen that the image of the Whiteman’s positive self perception is directly linked with the projection of his extreme opposite in the far-away savage Blackman. But this counterpoising always informs the dialectics of colonialism, which has a vested interest in the economic and political exploitation of the colony. By circulating the myth of the inferiority of
the colonized and getting it reinforced through the education system, the colonizer gets it internalized into the psyche of the colonized. Once that is done, this myth acquires a dimension in which the colonized views himself through the mirror of the colonizer. The internalization of the myth of his innate inferiority destroys the very fabric of the social, religious and cultural life of the colonized. In this connection, Homi K. Bhabha also states; “Colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative in which the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality.”

Thus having been thrown out of the history-making process, the colonized loses interest in his selfhood and accepts the myth of his intellectual, social, cultural, religious and even physical inferiority. This process of cultural racism, in the end, makes the colonized hate his language, dress, techniques, value system, social institutions, historical past, religion and practically everything that is not connected with the colonizer.

The resistance to the cultural hegemony of colonialism takes the form which is of psychological dimension. The ‘self’ has always been accepted as self-referential; the ‘other’ might be either a threat to one’s own identity or a source of confirmation of one’s uniqueness. The
European notion of the ‘other’ was an inalienable entity, external to oneself which was both a source of terror and an object of desire. Sartre’s famous statement that ‘hell is the other’ carries a strong echo of Hegel who always defined one’s identity as ‘identity against the other’, either to be appropriated or to be destroyed. By defining the identity of the self in this manner, however, a European finds himself trapped in his own contradiction; if he succeeds in completely subjugating the ‘other’, the identity of his own self becomes dubious. He wants to become whole by destroying the other, but without the other he becomes nothing. Due to this deeply rooted need in their psyche, one finds the European’s interest in the subjected other he despised.

Abdul JanMohamed also formulates the theory of colonial consciousness in terms of Binary or Manichean Code of Recognition which underlies colonialism’s domination of the ‘Other’. This consists of a series of fixed oppositions such as self/other, white/black, good/evil, rationality/sensuality, civilization/savagery, subject/object etc. This code of binary oppositions allow the colonizer to situate the ‘Other’ in his own ideological metaphysical system which enables him to rationalize the culture of the colonized as ‘supposedly inferior’ to the ‘putative superiority’ of the colonizer’s culture. Thus the colonized can never be identified with the colonizer, leaving no ground for the meeting of the
colonized and the colonizer. At the base of this Manichean code, argues
JanMohamed, is the perception of the racial difference, real or imagined,
influenced by economic motives. According to him, there are two
phases of colonialism: the ‘dominant’ and the ‘hegemonic’. In the
dominant phase, which starts with the establishment of the colony and
ends near the colony’s independence, the consent to the direct military
and bureaucratic control is primarily passive and direct. His ‘savage’
culture remains fairly integrated though his land is subjected. “By
contrast, in the hegemonic phase (or neo-colonialism phase) the natives
accept the version of the colonizer’s entire system of values, attitudes,
morality, institutions, and more important, mode of production.” By the
time the colony was ‘independent’ the colonized had already internalized
most of the socio-economic structures, democratic, legal and educational
institutions of the colonized including the ‘to-put-down-names’ and
distorted images given to them.

Since African literature was generated by this traumatic collective
experience of colonization it strongly reflects the resistance to the
colonial and neo-colonial invasion of African cultural space as its primary
thematic preoccupation. In his introduction to The African Experience in
Literature and Ideology (1981), Abiola Irele explains the value of modern
African writing as a literature with a directive purpose and is essentially:
the comprehensive testimony it offers to the turns and patterns of an unfolding drama of existence in which we continue to be involved. That drama has its source in our relation to the Western world which has crossed our historical path and modified the realities of our entire perspective upon the world. The imaginative writing in particular stands both as a direct representative of the concrete facts of our collective experience as well as a reconstruction in the form of images of the states of consciousness induced by that experience; the very process of symbolic projection revealing itself as a means of drawing this experience more fully and ultimately within the collective self so as to enable us to comprehend its meaning for ourselves in the immediate future.32

The modern African novel is a genre developed as a particular body of imaginative discourse, as a literature of social engagement, primarily occupied with modes of resisting the role of the Western cultural hegemony in determining African states of consciousness. The idea of ‘African’ as a referent to a specific area of cultural and socio-political experience and existence is central to the study of fiction that is politically committed towards the decolonization of the African mind and imagination. Decolonization in the cultural and intellectual terms, according to Ayi Kwei Armah in *Masks and Marx*, is therefore “the search or research for positive African ideas, perspectives, techniques, values. That enterprise tautologically is centered on Africa.”33 Decolonization therefore involves a parallel process of the re-Africanization, or a discursive formulation wherein the artist, in a conscious act, is building or reconstructing an identity he was hitherto
denied or deprived of. The very act of writing becomes a means of self-realization.

Critics of Chinua Achebe’s works often expressed the need to emphasize the point that Achebe is basically a novelist, and that the sociological or anthropological content in his novels ought to be seen as the necessary background to serve his thematic purpose and his interpretation of life. In his book, The Novels of Chinua Achebe, G. D. Killam observes: “So much has been written about the anthropological and sociological significance of Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God – their evocation of traditional nineteenth-century Igbo village life… that the overall excellence of these books as pieces of fiction, as works of art, has been obscured.”

Again, M. M. Mahood has also written that:

This social concern…has been held by some European critics to imply that the established criteria have no relevance to the African novel; that Achebe’s fictional world does not, as it were, turn, in the way that the European novel turns, on the poles of the author’s world-view and his individualization of character…(If we trust ourselves primarily to Arrow of God itself we shall find that all the seeming “anthropology”, a few minor details apart, relates directly to the tragedy of Ezeulu, in which Achebe’s own criticism of life and his sensitivity to complexities of character come together in a story of great force and beauty.

There is no doubt regarding the authenticity of the world presented in his novels, and that they can be used as aid to understanding the Igbo society. Yet the point to remember is that Achebe should be given the due share of his being a successful novelist.
Certain conceptual terms like ‘tribe’, ‘community’, ‘colonialism’, ‘neo-colonialism’, ‘marginal man’ and ‘imperialism’ that are associated with the study need some explanation as the works of Chinua Achebe will be explored from a postcolonial as well as tribal perspective in its attempt to dismantle and de-centre European hegemonic authority. Igbo words will, however, be briefly explained as and when they are used in the discussion though endnotes or otherwise.

The concept of community has aroused much critical debate among sociologists, and they are yet to arrive at an agreement on the definition of the term. Indeed, there are about a hundred definitions till date. Traditionally, a ‘community’ has been defined as a group of interacting people living in a common location, a group that is organized around common values within a shared geographical. However, the definition has evolved and enlarged to mean individuals who share characteristics, regardless of their location or type of interaction. In this sense, the term can mean a community of interest or an ethnic group. These meanings have in common the strength of the ties among the constituting members. German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies distinguished between two types of human association: Gemeinschaft (usually translated as ‘community’) and Gesellschaft (‘society’ or ‘association’). In his 1887 work, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, Tonnies argues that gemeinschaft is
perceived to be a tighter and more cohesive social entity, due to the presence of a ‘unity of will.’ He added that family and kinship were the perfect expression of gemeinschaft, but other shared characteristics such as place or belief could also result in gemeinschaft. Gesellschaft, on the other hand, is a group in which the individuals who make up the group are motivated primarily by self-interest. Tonnies also proposed that in the real world, no group was either pure gemeinschaft or pure gesellschaft, but, rather, a mixture of the two. In this study the term community is used in the former sense of a sui generis. Here, the term community would be used mainly to mean the Igbo tribe or a clan or the people of an Igbo village. The social conflicts and subsequent disharmony leading to the community’s ultimate breakdown as a consequence of the self-assertion of the individual will be examined in detail in the second chapter.

Again, Achebe has always considered himself to be a writer for his Igbo tribe, and his works attest to this claim. This term ‘tribe’ has been widely used in Anthropological studies, but there is no general consensus as to its precise definition or appropriate application. The Roman tribua means a political unit, and was used to refer to social groups defined by the territory they occupied. Taken from the Latin tribus it is used for the political divisions or patrician orders of the Roman state. However, in this study the term is used to mean a nation organised around kinship, real or
fictitious, common language, having relatively backward economy and isolated and self-contained, possessing a common morality, religion and worldview of corresponding dimensions. The Igbo as a tribe share a common language (although there are dialectical differences in various regions), common beliefs and practices which marks them out as a distinct group. In India, tribe may be differentiated from caste on the basis of religion, geographical isolation, language, economic backwardness, and political organization. Tribals are variously animistic, while caste group are largely Hindus; tribals live in hilly and mountainous religion while caste Hindus live in plains; tribes have their own language; though they are equally backward economically, the tribals were considered more backward in the past. 37 In the context of African tribes, Charlotte Seymour-Smith writes:

…the concept of tribe was largely a colonial creation…tribal division and tribal consciousness were largely a creation of the efforts of colonial rulers to impose order and supralocal unity among the previously largely autonomous local communities, and where there was previously a loose and contextually relative sense of ethnic identity, colonial rule often impose a tribal division which then acquired increasing concreteness due to the need to adapt to the administrative and political demand of colonial rule. 38

Contrary to the deep-seated traditional view, not all tribal societies disintegrate or lose their identity in situations of contact with or acculturation by widely diverse cultures. Indeed, so long as the traditional economy is not radically changed and the weight of foreign influence is
not overwhelming, much of the traditional tribal culture and values persists and shows remarkable resilience in adapting to the new conditions. Tribal cohesion has, moreover, in most cases shown itself to be capable of surviving and even profiting from quite radical changes in political organization under colonial rule. Frequently indeed, and especially where the policy of indirect rule has been followed, colonial administration has buttressed and strengthened rather than weakened tribal identity. Even in areas of religion, Christianity is seen by many tribal groups as an important referential point in the transformation and development of their culture and of the tribe as a whole. Achebe himself does not seem to wage a frontal attack on European culture or Christianity *per se* but the manner of its spread and the unfortunate manner the Igbos received or experienced it have become disadvantageous to them in a number of fundamental ways.³⁹

Achebe expresses his preference for use of ‘nation’ over ‘tribe’ in relation to his Igbo community. In his book, *Home and Exile*, he argues that the term ‘nation’ better fits the Igbo situation, though not without its limitations. Achebe prefers it mainly because of the derogatory connotations attached to the word ‘tribe’ like primitiveness and smallness of numbers. He argues that the Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria are much more than ten thousand and are one of the major people groups of
the country. Even though nation may not be a perfect description for the Igbos, yet it is for him more respectable than being recognized as a tribe in a colonial sense. For this reason he finds “no good reason to continue answering a derogatory name simply somebody has given it to you.” However, the term tribe will be used in relation to the Igbo people throughout the study without the derogatory connotations attached to it. As a reverse process, the elite section of tribal societies had begun to question the misperceptions of the colonial West and the derogatory names used for the tribals in European Anthropology and Historiography.

The term ‘elite’ is important in the study of Achebe’s novels, because it is to this class of people that the novelist pins his hope for Nigeria’s future. The word simply means the influential sections of a society. It was used in the 17th century to describe commodities of particular excellence. And the usage was later extended to refer to superior social groups. In the 19th century the concept was widely used in social and political writings. For example, Pareto treats elite as ‘a class of people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity’, and to that class he gives the name elite. The elites are relatively small, advantageously organized groups which, legitimately or otherwise, exercise authority, lay claim to exercise authority over other groups with which it maintains a relationship, usually of a political or cultural
nature. In the context of the present study, the concept will be utilized to connote the western educated class who hold pivotal positions in the public undertakings and by right of colonial education enjoys power over the masses. In other words, the elites in the postcolonial society usurp the power that had traditionally rested with the tribal chiefs and this has brought immense changes to the social structure. The change in power relations disturbed the smooth functioning of the tribal society in a number of fundamental ways. Two of Achebe’s novels deal with the evils of the leadership of the corrupt political elites.

In the context of a postcolonial perspective Helen Tiffin suggested that the term ‘Postcolonial’ can be used to describe writing that was both a consequence of and reaction to the European imperial process. However, the experience of postcolonization in the African context involves a situation specifically peculiar to the African continent. Postcolonialism was born out of and structured by the neo-colonial experience. Since the early 1980s, Postcolonialism has developed a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between the Western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed. It examines and claims the right of all people of the world to the same material and cultural well-being. Throughout the period of colonial rule, colonized people contested this domination through many forms of
active and passive resistance. It was only towards the end of the 19th century, however, that such resistance developed into coherent political movements: for the peoples of most of the earth, much of the 20th century involved a long struggle and eventual triumph against colonial rule, often at enormous cost of life and resources. When national sovereignty had finally been achieved, each country moved from colonial to autonomous, post-colonial status but which did not free the colonized people from their dependence to the West. It is striking that despite decolonization, the imperial power of major world powers did not change substantially during the course of the 20th century and they continued to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies. The western resistance to the term ‘postcolonial’ is because it challenges as well as questions the existing order of things, and in the process disturbs the status quo. It threatens their privilege and their power and refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures. The radical agenda of Postcolonialism has been to demand equality and well-being for all human beings in this earth. Commitment to art involves the conscious choice, on the part of the novelists, to express a specific point of view and to place enough tactical pressure to persuade the reader to re-examine social realities. The reason for the postcolonial writers’ major preoccupation with the novel is for using it as an ideological weapon for asserting political and cultural identity.
Postcolonial theory comprises a related set of perspectives, which are juxtaposed against one another, on occasions contradictorily. It involves issues that are often the preoccupation of other disciplines and activities, particularly to do with the position of women, of development, of ecology, of social justice, of socialism in its broadest sense. Above all, Postcolonialism seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledge into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different peoples of the world. The term ‘post-colonial’ is often considered a sequential stage of history. With the linguistic and hermeneutic turn to the study of history, it is the interpretation offered by actors themselves and not the received understanding of historical facts that constitutes the content of history. An alternative construction of *self* and ‘other’ is constitutive of what comes after colonialism. In the process, the days of colonial oppression is reconstructed from the present state of independence and autonomy till such achievements are emasculated into new forms of local and global domination. The postcolonial writings interprets, reconstitutes their culture and history in terms of self-consciously locating the ‘self’ as the actor and the wielder of power at the centre-stage by resisting the ‘given’ subjectivity and objectivity.
Neo-colonialism is another important concept to understand the dynamics of postcolonial tribal life-world. It is employed in critical practice to denote the mechanisms by which an ex-colonial power retains politico-economic control and dominance over its former colony even after the formal granting of independence. The term is often applied also in a broader sense to mean strategies or policies within the industrialized nations, designed to maintain or establish colonial-type of dependent relationships among Third World nations, independently from previous colonial relations. Through the second usage, one can surmise and define neo-colonialism as a strategy of the industrialized nations which, faced with the impossibility of creating and maintaining new colonies under direct administrative control, nevertheless attempt to perpetuate hegemony and to create new relations of international dependence.

Derived from the term Imperialism, ‘neo-imperialism’ was defined by Ngugi as “the rule of consolidated finance capital…with economic, political, cultural and psychological consequences for the people,” and functions as an agent of continued de-Africanization or the subversion of African culture. A complex extension of colonialism was achieved through intensified economic and cultural dependency with the complicity of the neo-colonial African elite leadership. Under neo-colonial circumstances, therefore, the novel begins to function as ‘space’
or a carrier of a message that challenges the destructive oppression of the West.\textsuperscript{47} The vehemence and intensity with which postcolonial writers, including Achebe, responds back to the overwhelming dethronement of all that is central to tribal existence speaks of the massive damage caused. Literature produced in the African continent addresses the issues of meaning and representations from anti-colonial standpoint. They can be, therefore, seen as postcolonial writing because they attempt to dismantle and de-centre European hegemonic authority.

Postcolonial consciousness appears to surface among the native elites only after the colonial empires achieved independence. This consciousness was heightened and intensified by the disappointment with the ruling elite leadership under democratic system. In other words, Postcolonialism as a theory flourished as a by-product of and under neo-colonialism. The political liberation, however, does not as wishfully hoped until then, eliminate the overwhelming presence of the erstwhile imperial power. The mind of the tribals had become the battlefield where the natives have continued to wage the war of decolonization in order to reclaim the lost tribal world. Aime Cesaire wrote about the plight of the post-colonial elites that:

\begin{quote}
Whenever colonization is a fact, the individual culture begins to rot. And among the ruin something begins to be born which is not a culture but a kind of subculture which is condemned to exist on the margin allowed by a European culture. This then becomes the province of a
\end{quote}
few men, the elite, who finds themselves placed in the most artificial condition, deprived of any vivifying contact with the masses of the people.\textsuperscript{48}

A complex extension of colonialism was achieved through the intensified economic and cultural dependency with the complicity of the neo-colonial African elite leadership. In his speech before the first Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956, Frantz Fanon analyzed the relationship between racism and culture, by dividing it into two categories – primitive and cultural racism. The primitive or vulgar racism finds its material basis in biology. Superiority of a race becomes a matter of the size and form of human skull. ‘Scientific arguments’ are put forward in support of a physiological lobotomy of the African Negro. It is this type of racism which creates colour prejudice also. On the other hand, ‘cultural racism’ is a subtle and more refined form of ‘primitive racism’, for in it the object of racism is not the individual man but a certain form of existence. Carried to its logical end, it makes the colonized hate his language, dress, techniques, value system, social institutions, historical past, religion and practically everything that is not connected with the colonizer. Thus, ‘the social panorama’ of the colonized, ‘is destructed, values are flaunted, crushed, emptied.’\textsuperscript{49}

According to Om P. Juneja, the ‘marginal man’ is a product of two or more social worlds and is poised in psychological uncertainty of these
worlds. The two characteristics of the personality of the marginal man are alienation and ambivalence. The colonial elite is conscious of their role as potential leaders but are denied access to political power; this makes them feel alienated. Western liberal education teaches them to reject the norms of their traditional society and to accept the egalitarian values of the colonizing society. By rejecting his societal norms and by his marginal acceptance by the colonizer, he begins to see himself through the eyes of his ruler. The more he attempts to emulate and assimilate, the more he rejects himself, and this develops existential tendencies.\textsuperscript{50}

A good example can be found in the character of Obiajulu Okonkwo in \textit{No Longer at Ease}. According to David Cook, Obi “has been especially trained to be an outsider.”\textsuperscript{51} Like the other black men, he is torn between his thinking which stems from coordinated living in Igbo community and the new ideas developed by his education and exposure to the western way of life. He has a national outlook which transcends the Umuofian barriers of caste, region and tribe. Under neo-colonial leadership, therefore, the novel begins to function as ‘space’ or carrier of a message to challenge European representation of African reality which continues to be violated through the ideological mechanisms of neo-colonialism. In this context, the novel becomes a political narrative of liberation from the lingering destructive oppression of the West.
The postcolonial perspective, therefore, involves the questioning of western values that has so far been considered as universal and eternal and that all things be examined and given their respective values in relation to it. On the question of universality, Achebe argues in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*:

> It is only others who must strive to achieve it...as though universality were some distant bent in the road which you may take if you travel out far enough in the direction of Europe or America, if you put enough distance between you and your home. I should like to see the word universal banned altogether from the discussion of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe...⁵²

To the postcolonialist, Euro-centric norms and practices get promoted in the guise of universal and eternal values assigned to western literature. They contend that one take into account the cultural specificity of writers when one reads them, and consider the dynamic relationship between a writer and the cultures about which he or she writes.

The hyphenated term ‘post-colonial’ should be differentiated from the unhyphenated one, for the former seems more appropriate to denote a particular historical period or epoch like those suggested by phrases such as ‘after colonialism’, ‘after independence’ or ‘after the end of Empire’. The non-hyphenated term ‘Postcolonialism’ stands not just in terms of strict historical periodization, but “as referring to disparate forms of representations, reading practices and values”⁵³ or the social, political,
economic, literary and cultural practices which arise in response and resistance to colonialism. The development of Postcolonialism is the by-product of the theories of colonial discourse which explores, in general, the ways of representations and modes of perception, and used as fundamental weapons by the colonial power to keep the colonized peoples subservient to colonial rule. Writing about the internalizing of certain expectations about human relationships in colonialism, Sam Selvon (a Trinidadian writer) writes:

When one talks of colonial indoctrination, it is usually about oppression or subjugation, or waving little Union Jacks on Empire Day and singing ‘God Save the King’. But this gut feeling I had as a child, that the Indian was just a piece of cane trash while the white man was to be honoured and respected – where had it come from? I don’t consciously remember being brainwashed to hold this view either at home or at school.54 Colonialism suggests a certain way of seeing, specific modes of understanding the world and one’s place in that justifies the subservience of the colonized peoples to the (often-assumed) ‘superior’ civilized order of the British colonizers.

The commitment of a postcolonial writer to his art, therefore, involves a certain conscious choice to express a specific point of view and to place enough tactical pressure to persuade the reader to re-examine social realities. In response to the Western colonist misrepresentation of the African people, specifically of the Nigerians, Achebe points out the racial prejudices and cliché that overwhelmed such literary productions.
He challenges such misrepresentations of African reality by western writers and argues on what constitutes a good writing in his *Home and Exile*:

I suppose we can differ as to the exact point where good writing becomes overwhelmed by racial cliché. But overwhelmed or merely undermined, literature is always badly served when an author’s artistic insight yields place to stereotype and malice. And it becomes doubly offensive when such a work is arrogantly proffered to you as your story.55

Such prejudiced view of the native tribes in colonialist writings needs to be countered by presenting insider’s view to counterbalance the misconceived version of the west. In the same book, Achebe quotes at length the words of Mr. F. J. Pedler: “It is misleading when Europeans talk of Africans buying a wife,”56 possibly hinting at Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson*. Pedler further commented:

A country’s novels reveal its social condition. West Africa has no full-length novels, but a few short stories may serve the purpose. We quote from two recent publications which show how educated West Africans themselves describe some of the features of social life in their own country….Here is a dramatic treatment of a contemporary social phenomenon which leaves one with the hope that more West Africans may enter the field of authorship and give us authentic stories of the lives of their own people.57 (Italics mine)

Pedler’s faith on and wish for an authentic voice from the West African themselves was instantly answered through the versatile pen of Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Achebe himself, just to name a few. These
native West Africans fought back Europe’s imposition of a derogatory narrative upon Africa and their narratives were designed to call African humanity to question.

For centuries Africa and its people were presented to the gullible reading public of the West as non-human, a being slightly higher than the beasts. It was the voyager Captain John Lock who described the Negroes as “a people of beastly living, without a God, laws, religion.” Joyce Cary, in the early part of the 20th century, saw them as ‘unhuman’. A generation before Cary, Joseph Conrad had created a memorable narrator-actor who could be greatly troubled by the mere thought of his Africans being human, like himself: “Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman.”

The scene being set, Achebe’s major preoccupation, therefore, has been the use of the narrative medium as an ideological weapon for reasserting tribal political and cultural identity. His novels will be considered on the basis of their polemical dimensions and the extent to which the experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism dominates the basic paradigm of fiction. It is possible to locate different temporal levels ranging from the level of myth and legend (in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*), to the immediate post-independence period (in *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*) to the deeply neo-colonial setting (in
Anthills of the Savannah). On being asked if Anthills of the Savannah is more related to his previous novels or his other post-war writing, Achebe told Jane Wilkinson in September 1987 shortly after its release that:

I think they are all related. What I am trying to do is to look at the story of Africa in the modern world, looking at it from different angles, according to what’s happening at the time, according to what I’ve been through, according to what I have just learned, or even just to be different from the way I looked at it previously… like the masquerade…dancing…circling the arena in order to catch the various glimpses…in order to approach anything like a complete image of its formidable presence. That’s what I try to do: even the essays, even the poetry. I think they all come from the same concern, to tell as complete a story as possible.  

In his five novels, complemented by his essays, poems and short stories Achebe endeavoured to present the complete picture of the Igbo life-world, thereby providing an authentic Nigerian character.

The African novel is largely known for its depiction of the various conflicts and tensions arising out of Africa’s encounter with Europe. As a corollary, the native writers preoccupied themselves with themes and issues that are essentially central to their very existence, such as the conflicts between tradition and modernity, the real and the occult, the individual and the community, paganism and Christianity, and so on. The text of Chinua Achebe’s novels becomes the location for what Abdul R. JanMohamed terms as “a Manichaean code of binary oppositions” such as white/black, civilization/savagery, rationality/sensuality, modern/traditional, individual/community. But, it is the conflict between the
individual and the community and the way Achebe tries to resolve it, is what seems to lend a typical tribal flavour to Achebe’s novel. The disturbance of the various elements of tribal social system that led to the entire confusion both at the community as well as the individual levels would also be examined subsequently.

There are other levels of conflicts, namely those against the other tribes or nations, resulting oftentimes in an all-out warfare between tribal groups. The village of Umuofia was set up by the Igbo community which claimed their origin from a common ancestor, for which they also had a collective sense of pride. The inter-village hostilities that resulted in war are typical of tribal villages in their struggle for economic sufficiency and honour of the clan. Their nationalism does not seem to extend beyond the boundary of their village. In *Arrow of God*, the origin of the town of Umuaro was recorded as a union of nine mutually hostile villages as a defence against ‘the Abam’ warriors (head hunters). These tribal villages have their own system of beliefs, wisdom and philosophy that had sustained the society for generations. Their manner of resolving conflicts within and without the clan does have its own principles, ‘uncivilized’ though it may appear to its European jaundiced eyes. So, Achebe presents the validity of such unique worldview in his rural novels.
In Indian context, a brief comparison can be drawn between tribals and non-tribals, tribals and the *adivasis*62 (both are considered ‘untouchables’ by the caste Hindus), keeping in mind the closeness of the former to nature in order to lay bare the conflict for power over scarce resources and the necessitated assertion of group identity. The tribes and lower castes were called depressed classes by the British Raj. After Independence, they were recognized and protected through the constitution as either scheduled tribe or scheduled castes.

All these issues may be tied up with the crux issue of Achebe’s novels - the postcolonial tribal identity, which to the novelist, is both very unsettling as well as colossal in its potential for causing continued damage or change to the social fabric of the society. Achebe’s protagonists- Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*, Mr. Nanga of *A Man of the People* and Ikem in *Anthills of the Savannah* enact the predicament of a postcolonial tribal identity and the utter confusion in which the postcolonial tribal community finds themselves.

The idea of fulfilment in the life of a tribal individual is equivalent to the common good of the community. For this reason, Achebe suggests, in place of the narrow and egocentric Cartesian philosophy (Descartes has been considered by Achebe as the father of western philosophy and the
cause for gigantic philosophical accident), an alternative universe of reality in which community life turns upon the Augustinian notion of ‘other-centered fulfilment’; the notion of community life as a ‘presence’ that deliberately and creatively restricts the freedom of individuals, but in non-oppressive ways. To that end, Achebe lauds Frank Kermode’s definition of fictional reality as “something we know does exist but which helps us to make sense of, and move in the world” and he therefore rejects Milan Kundera’s definition of the novels as “an investigation into human existence… (that) proclaims no truth, no morality” because such an idea denies the equally important didactic and social functions of the Novel. As a postcolonial writer, Achebe therefore purposed literature to comprehend (and also challenge) the states of consciousness induced by an experience which had modified not only physical realities of life, but also internal modes of perspectivization of the tribal psyche. The novels of Achebe show the formation of a genre developed as a particular body of imaginative discourse primarily occupied with the modes of resisting the role of the western cultural hegemony in determining and reaffirming African states of consciousness.

Achebe’s commitment as an artist springs from his faith in the traditional view of art among the Igbos, who regarded it as a communal activity. The artist in Achebe’s novels is a person chosen and ordained by
the earth goddess Ala (who is also the controller of morality and creativity) to prepare the images of Ala and present them at the colourful ceremony called *mbari* (new masks display). When his assignment is complete, he goes back to his society and takes up his normal duties. He then no more remains a professional artist. True to this belief, Achebe admits that what he writes is applied art as distinct from pure and is meant to help his people regain their self-confidence, by creating a useful past which is the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son to the traditional way of life of his people. In his novels, Achebe realistically portrays the past of his people (their encounter with the west and the ensuing struggle for control over modern institutions) with artistic detachment. Achebe uses the novel as an instrument of self-discovery through which he attempts to find for his community a place in the world which they considered as rightfully theirs. In so writing he cannot but be true to the real or lived world of his people.

The distinctive mark of Achebe’s fiction lies in his ability to create events; the mark of his maturity lies in his ability to successfully present, by way of events, a community of individual lives in the act of defining themselves. In that sense, the novelist is the recorder of the history of his people. His characters therefore live through an ordered sequence of time. They have motives and their conduct has consequences for the entire
community which they represent. Even when the novelist tells the story through the consciousness of one of his characters, the focus still remains on events. In the same vein, one may also add that the communal or communitarian aspects of tribal socio-ethical thought has been not only outstanding, but are the defining characteristics of their culture, which stands in direct contrast to the individualism and egocentrism of its western counterpart. This sense of community which has been the hallmark of tribal society is the direct consequence of the maturated communitarian social arrangements. According to Senghor, “Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on individuals, more on solidarity than on the need of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society.”

The rise of the African novel is associated with, and a direct response to Africa’s contact with the West, which is also a major theme assessed in many of their writings; the meeting of the two cultures had been presented as more of a conflict without undermining the positive benefits of the alien on the native culture. Focussing on the contradictions of modern Africa which stems from the co-existence of widely differing values, Aime Cesaire once said:

Whether we like it or not, we cannot pose the problem of native cultures without at the same time posing the problem of colonialism, for all native cultures are today developing under the peculiar influence of a colonial, semi-colonial or para-colonial situation.
Modern African literature has been largely concerned with interpreting the recent implications of their history extending over the last four centuries. Africa’s first contact with the West as slaves exposes the extreme injustice which remained a cruel mystery to most Africans. Several ex-slaves wrote accounts of their experiences of the West to expose the cruelties of Western civilization. Though most of these people protest against the injustice meted to them, they embraced the values of their slave-masters. These writings have been referred to by Janheinz Jahn as ‘apprentice literature’ because they tried to imitate the European models of the period in their accounts.

The development of the modern African literature is also deeply attached to African nationalism. African thinkers such as Dr. William DuBois and Marcus Garvey were seen as the first major links between political consciousness and literary awakening. The pan-African movement was mainly concerned with the rediscovery of salutary elements of the African traditional way of life. In many ways the nineteenth century Afro-American romantic essayist, Edward Blyden, was the precursor of this movement. Blyden was the first black man to attempt an objective appraisal of African culture and tried to rehabilitate the living cultures of African communities which had been abused by centuries of degradation. He took pride in his blackness and urged the
black races to embrace their history and culture and use them as the foundation for building the future.67

African literature in English and the African novel are essentially creations of the twentieth century. A brief review of its literature reveals the fact that there seems to be no one principle of treatment around which the literary development of a dozen countries can be coherently arranged, except by simply moving from one writer to the next. According to Simon Gikandi, the beginnings of the African novel might be traced to Mofolo’s *Chaka* (1908), a historical romance which was written in Sesotho early in this century, the publication of which was delayed by the author’s missionary patrons due to the ‘pagan’ elements in the book. Solomon Plaatje’s *Mhudi* appeared in 1930. Scattered minor works began to appear mainly in South, but also in East and Central, Africa. The nationalist stance has provided a facility for the modern African writer to assess and comment upon his contemporary experience.

Due to the immensity of the literature produced in the continent, the area of literature review will be limited to those few theorists and writers, emphasizing more on the literature produced in Nigeria which the researcher considers as equally representative of the genre that began with Achebe. In 1958 Chinua Achebe published the first standard West African novel in English, *Things Fall Apart*. Since that time hundreds of
other titles have appeared, some more than five hundred of them from Nigeria, making the largest contribution to the growth of West African novel in English at least in sheer numbers; the history of this growth is largely the history of the Nigerian novel.

By virtue of his vision and mission as a novelist, Chinua Achebe became the role model as well as inspiration for succeeding African writers. These writers preoccupied themselves in their earlier works with cultural nationalism, a term that relates to the novels dealing with the colonial encounter, those re-creating tribal lives in the past with its imperfections, or merely retreating into the serenity of rural life. Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) encouraged other writers to explore and exploit the literary potential of Africa’s cultural past. Flora Nwapa’s first two novels, *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1969) set in the past examine the condition of women in the African traditional society. In his first novels, *Toads for Supper* (1965) and *The Naked Gods* (1970), Chukwumeka Ike makes ample use of proverbs in the manner of Achebe as the ‘palm oil with which words are eaten’.

Following political independence in Nigeria, writers turned their attention to the immediate realities of their society; the abuse and misuse of power by the new political elite. These novels became known as novels of post-independence disillusionment. Wole Soyinka’s *The
Interpreters (1965) is the first to reflect this disenchantment. Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) flays the antics of such leaders as chief Nanga. For most of the time since 1966 the army has been in power in Nigeria, a development foreshadowed at the end of the novel. Under the military, corruption has become institutionalized. Twenty years after the publication of his last novel, Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), severely criticizing military rule in Nigeria. In the novel, Ikem Osodi, an abrasive Marxist intellectual and editor of the official newspaper, resists official pressure on him to compromise his professional integrity by using the paper to sing his master’s praise. Instead, his crusading editorials excoriate the failures of the government.

Any discussion about the development of African literature over the last four or five decade will not be complete without recognizing the crucial role played by Chinua Achebe in liberating this practice from the colonialist persuasions. The colonialist literary criticism examines the third world literatures and judges their worth from the various strands of Euro-centric standpoint taking western cannon as the measuring rod. Talking about Achebe’s theoretical contestation of colonialist criticism implicit in his fictional writings, Gikandi remarked that such contestations “evolve narrative procedures through which the colonial language, which was previously intended to designate and reproduce the colonial ideology, now,
evokes new forms of expression, proffers new oppositional discourse….”

Achebe’s critical essays, besides his fiction, particularly those collected in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), *Hopes and Impediments* (1988) and *Home and Exile* (2000), made the focus of his attack on the unfounded belief that Africa is less civilized and hence is in need of Western paternalistic assistance. In this sense Achebe joins the ranks of theorists like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon whose work constitute the genesis of what has come to be known today as postcolonial criticism. Peter Barry said of his reading of Fanon: “…the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which the past has been devalued.”

As a postcolonialist, Achebe contends that colonialism implants an inferiority complex in the African psyche by undermining its cultural originality. So, the first step in regaining original Self is ‘the decolonization of the mind’ – a concept borrowed from Ngugi wa Thiongo’s book bearing the same name. And this task includes even the emancipation of contemporary African literary criticism which functions like the colonialist criticism under colonialism: they both looked upon African or their product as unfinished or inferior and in need of European intervention. Achebe himself became the victim of colonialist criticism; when he first published his novel *Things Fall Apart*, it was received in European critical circles not
as a literary text, but rather as a simple documentation of Igbo cultural practices. It is perhaps such wayward discussion and hostile reception that compels Achebe to strongly frame the criteria for judging African Literature.

In colonial discourse, language is not a mere means of communication, but constitutes a worldview by cutting up and ordering reality into meaningful units. It also is a carrier of Imperial English culture and their history. On this point, the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiongo reasons:

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we came to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves effect how they look at their culture, at their politics and their social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other human beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

This is how the cultural values of the colonized are deemed lacking in value, or even seen as uncivilized in need of being rescued. The British Empire endured by getting both colonizing and colonized people to see their world and themselves in a particular way, internalizing the language of Empire as representing the natural, true order of life.

It was only in the 1950s that there emerged a new brand of writers who attempted to record the psychological damage suffered by colonized
peoples who internalized these colonial discourses. Prominent among them were Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakraborty and others. A psychologist by profession and influenced by contemporary philosophers and poets such as Jean Paul Sartre and Aime Cesaire, Fanon’s publication include two polemical books – *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* – that deals angrily with the mechanics of colonialism and its effects on those it ensnared. The colonized is forced to see himself as an object, a peculiarity at the mercy of a group that identifies him as inferior, less than fully human, placed at the mercy of their definitions and representations. For Fanon, the end of colonialism meant not just political and ecological change, but psychological change too, by successfully challenging the imposed identity of the colonizer. Another postcolonial theorist Edward Said published his *Orientalism* in 1978, considered to be one of the most influential books of the late 20th century. Unlike Fanon, Said devoted more attention to the divisive role of the colonizers than the colonized. He examined how the western nations like France and Britain form knowledge about their colonies that helped them to continually justify their subjugation, about the locations they dominated. So, overturning colonialism is not just political and economic independence, but it is also a process of overturning the dominant ways of seeing the world, and representing reality in ways which do not replicate colonialist values. The success of *Orientalism* provoked many writers to
study literary texts from the postcolonial perspective, and this give rise to a new generation of critics who turned to more ‘theoretical’ materials in their work. Novels like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), etc. were re-read provocatively in terms of colonial discourse. These critics began to enquire studiedly into the representation of colonized subjects in a variety of colonial texts, not just literary ones. The issue was pursued in different ways in the 1980s by two leading postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak. In his work on ‘mimicry’, Bhabha explored the possibility of reading colonialist discourses as endlessly ambivalent, split and unstable, never able to install securely the colonial values they seemed to support. In her influential essays, Spivak explored the problem of whether or not it was possible to recover the voices of those who had been made subjects of colonial representations, particularly women, and read them as potentially disruptive and subversive.72

*The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, a book of critical essays edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, addresses the increasing popular view that literature from once-colonized countries was fundamentally concerned with challenging the language of colonial power, contesting its worldview, and
producing new modes of representation. The writers claimed that postcolonial texts were creating new ‘englishes’ (the use of small letter ‘e’ is deliberate) through various strategies: inserting untranslatable words into their texts; by glossing seemingly obscure terms; by refusing to follow standard English syntax and using structures derived from other languages; of incorporating many different creolized versions of English into their texts. They hold the view that:

The crucial function of language as medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of ‘English’ involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over means of communication. The second, the appropriation and re-constitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. 73

The perceived aim of such exercises was the discontinuation of the received English which speaks from the centre, and the act of appropriation (seizure) which brings it under the influence of the vernacular tongue, the complex of speech habits which characterize the local language. The great contribution of Empire lies in the fact that it shifted the approach to literatures from the once-colonized nations away from the abstract issue of a text’s universal and timeless value and towards a more publicized approach which analyzed texts primarily within historical and geographical contexts.
In the 1990s, the most useful surveys of postcolonial theory tend to be collection of essays rather than critical texts, which are built upon the works of Said, Spivak and Bhabha. Mention may be made of Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory, The Post-colonial Studies Reader, and others. Attempts were also made by authors such Peter Childs and Patrick William, Ania Loomba and Leela Gandhi to highlight postcolonial theory. In the later part of the 1990s, even though theoretical discussions continued, more attention has been paid to the cultural and historical specifics of literature from particular locations in the light of important theoretical developments. Michael Chapman’s Southern African Literatures and Ato Quayson’s Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing may be named as important inputs in that period. But several good comparative texts do exist: Edward Said’s Culture and Imperialism and Elleke Boehmer’s Postcolonial Literature (1995) surveys a wealth of postcolonial writing in a variety of locations. In her book, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Spivak traces the limitations and loopholes of Western thought in representation and administration of Third World countries including tribals and of how the disempowered people continued to suffer the same fate under the inherited philosophical, political and cultural systems of colonialism. The politics of othering the subjugated natives presumably foreclosed the possibility of redemption. Spivak’s concept of the ‘native informant’ is defined as “a name for the mark of
expulsion from the name of man - a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation.” Spivak believes in the possibilities of alternatives when she says: “As as postcolonial I am concerned with the appropriation of alternative history or his histories.” On the West’s notion of ‘three worlds’, Spivak vouched for the fourth which is also the redemption of the othered native informant. In order to deconstruct the otherized self, there ought to be the denial of the foreclosed impossibilities and an emergence of the subjected other without the help of the distorting Western mirror.

In the light of the historical and intellectual contexts discussed above, one may safely say that Postcolonialism involves the challenge to colonial ways of knowing, of ‘writing back’ in opposition to such views. In spite of the fact that colonial relationships still prevail, the term Postcolonialism should not be equated with after-colonialism, but it is rather a way of locating oneself, of looking at things from a particular standpoint and challenging the world-view of the colonial west. Postcolonialism recognizes both historical continuity and change. On the other hand, it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to colonialism are still very much present today; it asserts on the other hand the promise, the possibility and continuing necessity of change.

As a postcolonial writer, Achebe provides an insider but objective view of his people in order to rectify the misjudged idea about them in the
western media. Unaware of the democratic balance that *ozo* achieved and maintained, and the divine idea based on Ani, the Earth goddess, and her compassionate care for the living and the dead, the colonial masters were confused at the stateless system of the Igbo society which they find rather anarchic. They saw only that the people were maddeningly difficult to deal with; proud, confident, self-satisfied, disinclined to proper humility, disdainful of any authority save their own, apparently indifferently to their own leaders. Achebe shows that beyond this seeming anarchy there was order. The *ndichie* gathered all Umuofia for great decisions, such as war. The ancestors or *egwugwu* themselves rose up from the earth for mortal arbitration. The deity Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, spoke through his priestess the will of the Earth in matters of communal and domestic importance. The priest of the Earth goddess enforced time-honoured principles of behaviour. Above all, the clan itself ruled all: the living with the dead in the Earth, were both part of a mystic unity and an eternal order. Beyond Earth, clan, and the gods was *Chukwu*, the great and unknowable God. Within this order and unity, there was duality that pervaded all things. This duality is the central paradox of his early novels – male-female, man and his *chi*, etc. This duality in all things is inescapable because, as Achebe puts it, “wherever something stands…Something Else will stand beside it.”

In the Igbo system, nothing is absolute, and anything and everyone is counterbalanced by a something or a someone; this
dialectical existence or belief enables the Igbo society to achieve balance and continuity in life.

The life and works of Chinua Achebe has been as well documented as that of any modern novelist, and possibly more than most other writers. A simple perusal of the shelves at nearly any university library will reveal biographies and critical analysis of his works by, among many others, individuals such as Robert Wren, C. L. Innes, David Carroll, G. D. Killam, Kate Turkington, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Abiola Irele. Still others have demonstrated, with varying degrees of success, his life and beliefs by compiling and editing his essays and dissecting his work. It hardly seems necessary, or even desirable, to rehearse what multitudes have done before. This study will, therefore, focus on the tribal life-world of the Igbos as it was woven in the narratives of Achebe who lived in an age which often fell far short of the principles for which it is famed. What one is concerned with in this study is the unsettling conflict between the individual and the community in Achebe’s novels which can be considered as the one neglected theme in critical discussions. Besides, what happens in their history after the publication of his last novel in 1987 is another theme that can be the subject of another study.

Achebe uses his novels, especially those set in the past, as a necessary background for exploring his thematic purpose and
representation of his ‘less superficial’ picture of Igbo life. As Achebe himself claimed to be an insider to the Igbo world and the recorder of the cultural history of his people, the world of his novels can be studied from the tribal as well as the postcolonial perspectives.
Endnotes:


5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.


9 Nadine Gordimer, one of the writers indebted to Achebe for the ground he broke, describes him as the “father of modern African literature” in the New Introduction to Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: The Orion Press Inc., 2003), pp. 27-44. Print.


12 The spelling ‘Igbo’ is used throughout to refer both to Achebe’s people and their language, except in quotation where the form ‘Ibo’ will occasionally be found. This is in accordance with Achebe’s own practice where, in his later writing, he implies that the former is the indigenous, the latter the non-African usage.


15 The war was fought during 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970.


17 Achebe views the West’s perception of the African and their politico-economic exploitation of the land and its people as dehumanizing. He uses the word
‘traumatic’ whenever he talks about the encounter with the West. *Hopes and Impediments*, pp. 8, 29.


26 Ibid., p. 25.


30 JanMohamed as quoted in Om P. Juneja’s *Post Colonial Novel*, p. 9-10.


36 Root words for ‘tribe’ taken from www.wikipedia.com


39 Achebe talked endearingly about his parent in *Home and Exile* p. 10.

40 Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile*, p. 5.


57 Ibid., pp. 42-43.


62 The term *adivasis* is used in India for Indian tribals who live in the plains.

63 Frank Kermode as quoted in Chinua Achebe’s ‘The Truth of Fiction’, *Hopes and Impediments*, p. 139.


79 Ibid., p. 1194.

80 Spivak as quoted in www.emory.edu/Bahri/glossary/08apr23.pdf 22/3/11.