CHAPTER II: CHINUA ACHEBE’S NOVELS: A TRIBAL PERSPECTIVE

Chinua Achebe’s novels have been the subject of much critical study and debates within and outside the literary circles, but enough attention has not been paid to a study of his novels from the tribal perspective. As progenitor of a literary tradition and as the father of the Modern African Literature, Achebe becomes a foundational figure who engages in tribal representation through literature. The reputation of Achebe as an outstanding African novelist rests securely on his five novels – *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer At Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) besides scores of books of short stories, essays and poetry. The monumental success of his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* marks him out as the novelist with a difference. As an insider to the tribal experiences immortalized in his novels, Achebe refutes the misrepresentations of colonialist writers on Africa and the African life-world in the Western media. Achebe’s novels belong to the genre which Per Wastberg, in his opening remark in the Scandinavian Writers’ Conference in 1967, called ‘new literature’ or ‘tribal literature’ which has the distinctive feature of representing people, things and ideas that are African. The far-reaching impact of European cultural invasion that comes through colonization and
Christian evangelization of Africa disturbs the native culture, causing spiritual and cultural displacement. As a consequence, the rise of African literature coincided with and was facilitated by the growth of nationalist movement in the continent. Achebe got his inspiration largely from his deep concern for the African nations, specifically for his own Igbo community. So Achebe engages in a cultural appropriation of values of the West through a recasting of the traditional versus the modern, attempting to make sense of the chaos and confusion left behind by colonial intervention.

The positive contributions of British colonial powers, in terms of governance, Christian missions and trade, had enhanced the expressive dimensions of the tribes. But this colonial enhancement on the native tribes is at best paradoxical in nature. On the one hand, it developed new forms of expression while on the other it subjugated the indigenous identity through the colonial power relations. Under colonialism, the culture of the colonized began to break down and got degraded, till a new sub-culture emerged which was neither pure nor completely removed from the mother culture, but that which lived under the servility of the master culture. In his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi (the Tunisian psychiatrist and social critic) puts forward his theory of colonization that might be relevant to any study of colonized
tribes worldwide which were affected by direct encounter with European colonization. Memmi defines the colonizer as a person who imposes his culture – a way of life that includes government, education, and socio-economic systems – on another in total disregard of the latter’s culture. In the process of colonization, the colonizer becomes “an illegitimately privileged usurper”.3 According to him, the colonizer desires to perpetuate the deprived condition of the colonized, and this springs from the colonizer’s racist perception of his supposed superiority. In the likes of Reverend Smith in Things Fall Apart who undid everything that his predecessor Mr. Brown had done, and like certain colonial officers who, under the control from the home government or mission, pursued the white man’s civilizing mission undermining the native tribal culture for their own economic and political benefits. As an insider who experiences the peak years of European colonialism in Nigeria, Achebe seeks to ameliorate his injured Igbo community through his novels, essays, short stories and poems.

Achebe’s commitment to writing has its basis in the view of art among the Igbos who regarded it as a communal activity and not an object of individual pursuit. The artist is chosen by Ala, the goddess of the Earth and also of morality and creativity, to prepare her image and present them at the colourful mbari (traditional displaying of new masks
of the goddess Ala) ceremony. When the assignment is complete, the artist goes back to the community as an ordinary clansman and takes up the normal duties like any other men. In other words, an artist then no longer remains a professional artist. In the same manner, the duties and responsibilities of an Igbo writer primarily lies with the community, and his individuality as an artist becomes important largely in relation to his people. In his essay, “The Novelist as Teacher” Achebe expresses his purpose as an Igbo writer, which is “to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.” To that end he took upon himself the role of a social critic and teacher of his community. Achebe takes upon himself the social responsibility of re-educating and regenerating his community into believing that “their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them.” On being asked if he did any special research on his subjects, Achebe responded:

I didn’t do any research as such…This was largely picked up….this was the life that interested me, partly the life I lived and the life that was lived around me, supported by what I heard in conversation – I was very keen on listening to old people – and what I learned from my father, so it was sort of picked up here and there. There was no research in the library if that’s what you mean.
Again when he was asked about the authenticity of the lives painted in his novel, he commented in an interview to Dennis Duerden in September 1965 that:

It was purely from experience and of course a bit of imagination. I did not have to do any research as such. The festivals were there…the whole attitude (really it’s the attitude of the people), their philosophy of life was still there. I mean, you can see it; and the rest really was using your own imagination to create the details of the story.”7

Achebe, therefore, uses the novel as an instrument of self-recovery, a means to find his historical roots, his identity and that of his people. In various statements, Achebe projected himself as a chronicler of the transition brought to Igbo society by the colonial encounter, with a role to teach his people:

That African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period, and it is this dignity that they must regain.8

Achebe holds the view that colonialism made a destructive assault on Africa and on the psyche and self-evaluation of the African thereby causing severe damage. He believes that the writer can recreate a useful past in order to establish the truth of what actually took place, different from the standard expositions of that reality through the European media.
Achebe goes on to write more intensely about this colonial confrontation and the black writer’s consciousness of it in ‘The Black Writer’s Burden’:

Without subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounter with Europe, one could still say, in all fairness, that she suffered many terrible and lasting misfortunes. In terms of human dignity and human relations, the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers have shown again and again how strongly this traumatic experience can possess the sensibility.9

Achebe views European Colonialism as the factor that had made the most devastating assault on the African personality, his psyche and his self-evaluation. This was done in a systematic manner by consistently belittling the black people based on pseudo-biological theorizing about Africa and the African personality based on Darwin’s Theory of Evolution. With a view to project the supposed superiority of the white people, they categorized the black races as sub-human beings, as savage, a little higher than the animals, uncivilized and in need of the paternal civilizing influence of the white people. The missionary movements, for instance, in Nigeria spring in part from and is motivated by the perceived need to enlighten the ‘dark continent’ and more importantly to assert white superiority. The white man’s criteria for measuring civilizational advancement employed in the novels stems from technological development. For instance, the ‘iron horse’ which the people of Abame tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree and their possession of superior guns
made victors of the white men in Igboland. However, this technological advancement has been counterbalanced in the novels by the Igbo’s commendable strength on family values and social solidarity in the pre-colonial period. In depicting the glorious harmony of traditional Igbo society, Achebe calls upon his person to put away all the inferiority complexes which is dehumanizing them since their contact with the supposedly superior white race.

The first coming of the white man to Igboland augurs danger of complete assimilation to the Igbo people. Obierika in *Things Fall Apart* relates the story to the exiled Okonkwo and his uncle Uchendu how the elders of Abame consulted the Oracle and it told them that “the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.” It also further said that the white men were like locusts and the first white man that the Abame people killed was the harbinger sent to explore their land. Uchendu shuddered at the foolish and cowardly act of Abame people for having killed a man who said nothing which is against their customary practice. All the while the Umuofians also heard how the white men have powerful guns and strong drinks and how they took away the natives as slaves across the seas. Uchendu was convinced that the coming of the white man to that part of Igboland is not by mistake, but with conscious intention and planning. Okonkwo, on his part, agrees with his uncle but
wants the white man to be forcefully driven out of their land as soon as possible.

The first arrival of the Christian missionaries in Mbanta (village of Okonkwo’s mother and his place of exile) before the colonial government was set up caused a lot of stir among the people. They were helped by both the colonial administration and the local converts who also helped them choose the most opportune harvest time for their maiden visit. The first message preached to them was a frontal attack on their ‘false’ gods which caused a deep murmur of disapproval among the people. The missionary’s use of Igbo was made fun of and his message not taken seriously. Thinking that the people were impressed with technological advancement of the West, the white missionary promises more ‘iron horses’ (bicycles) as an inducement to the natives. The people of Mbanta were shocked at the white man’s intention to stay in their midst for a long time. The inaugural Christian messages evoked repulsion at the illogical ideas when mention was made of the Igbo gods as harmless and without life. The natives knew full well through experience that some of their gods like Ani, Amadiora, Idemili and Ogwugwu were very active and fearful. The reaction of Okonkwo was different from the others, in that he stayed on till the meeting was over expecting that the Christians would be forcefully driven out of the village. To Okonkwo and the people of
Mbanta, the missionary appeared to be mad and they thought that his message came from a ‘mad logic’.

Achebe’s five novels can, therefore, be profitably studied as the sequential record of the struggles of Igbo society against colonial domination. They highlight the struggles of the Igbo tribe in their progression from village to city life under the perpetual influence of the West. These narratives may be grouped into the village and city novels. The early two novels – *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* – are elaborate portrayal of Igbo past history and their pristine culture before and at the point of contact with west. The Igbo society presented in the village novels is a self-sustained community which still retained their myths, beliefs, customs, religion, proverbs, tales and taboos with an utmost sense of duty. They made their own laws and rules in accordance with their culture and tradition. The selfless submission of the individual will to that of the community preserved their social solidarity for centuries. But all these undergo drastic change with the intervention of the white man. The third novel, *No Longer at Ease*, may be examined as the Igbo story during the peak of colonial intrusion into the native culture where the good intentions of clansman like Obi Okonkwo lacks all convictions to change the corrupt system handed down to the native elites by the colonial government. The latter group of novels, namely *No
Longer at Ease, A Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah, set in cities, may be regarded as modern Igbo narratives constitutive of their post-colonial experience in their tryst with destiny in running their independent country. Tribal elements are elaborated upon as a common determiner in all the five novels. Besides, Achebe’s view on the function of art gets transformed with each succeeding novel as he records the series of events unravelled in Nigerian or African politics. Achebe’s novels mapped the various contours of Igbo tribal life in its struggle against the continuing encroachment of their tribal cultural space: even after independence, Achebe’s country and its people continue to reel under the systematic onslaught of neo-colonialism and modernization whereby the West wielded uninterrupted control over the erstwhile empire indirectly through economic dominance and control of the media. A critical examination of his five novels reveals the tribal element in his novels which is crucial towards understanding the lived experiences of the natives.

Things Fall Apart begins with the untouched glory of Igbo past and ends with the death of their village hero. The novel is divided into three sections and each section deals with a milestone in Okonkwo’s career. The first section introduces the village life of Umuofia in all her glory and independence. The novels opens with the fiercest wrestling match
ever witnessed among the nine villages in which Okonkwo was introduced as the champion over the seven years reigning champion, Amalinze the Cat. Unlike his father Unoka, Okonkwo achieved greatness by dint of hard work and fearlessness, meeting perfectly the traditional standard by which greatness is measured. Greatness is assessed solely on personal achievement; “Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.”

By pairing Okonkwo with his lazy and ease-loving father, the novelist puts emphasis on Okonkwo’s ‘solid personal achievement.’

Every challenge that he faced transformed him into a more accomplished person; for instance, the impending war with Mbaino over the murder of an Umuofia woman raised his stature within and outside his village. The impetus, both for his success and tragedy spring largely from his fear to be found weak like his father. For this reason, Okonkwo hardly expressed his feeling to others except that of anger.

In the novel, Umuofia was idealized as one of the conglomerations of nine Igbo villages. Achebe carefully presented it as a typical Igbo village with an aura of honour and respect accorded to it:

Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in war and in magic, and its priests and medicine-men were feared in all the surrounding country…so the neighbouring clans who knew of these things feared Umuofia, and would not go to war against it without first trying a peaceful settlement. And in fairness to Umuofia it should be
recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted as such by its Oracle.\textsuperscript{14}

The justness of Umuofia in the impending war with Mbaino was agreed upon by all including the enemy clan. Okonkwo who was sent as war emissary was received by Mbaino elders with great honour and respect, and made to return with a virgin and a young boy named Ikemefuna as war indemnity. Simple truthfulness and justice were employed in settling disputes and conflicts among the villages, especially when Umuofia was involved. As was the practice, the ndichie or the village elder would assemble to ‘whisper together’ the course of action to be taken by the village. The emphasis is placed on the unity of the clan in making and executing decisions affecting the tribe as a whole.

The hard-earned success of Okonkwo was sandwiched between the laziness of his father Unoka and his first son Nwoye which caused much anxiety to him. When Okonkwo was still small Unoka who claimed to have reaped nothing even after offering sacrifices to the gods, had consulted the Oracle and was rebuked by Chika, the priestess of Agbala:

You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms; you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man.\textsuperscript{15}
Fortuitously, the Igbo people have the concept of *chi* (personal god) who can be blamed in times of failure or calamity. Unoka’s failure is therefore directed at the badness of his personal *chi* which led him to his damnable death. Nwoye took after the softness of his grandfather, and was a lifelong bother to Okonkwo who even tried to disown him when he got converted to the new way but didn’t succeed. Nwoye’s emotional agony at the senseless murder of Ikemefuna and at the discarding of the twins in the Evil Forest were too much to be contained in his weak heart, and therefore he failed in the rigorous training that is demanded of any worthy Umuofia clansman. His desertion of his father and clansmen for the white man’s religion became but a cowardly act. Compared to Unoka and Nwoye, Okonkwo’s character was portrayed as a model tribesman. Besides his drunken father, Okonkwo had to support his two dependent sisters, his mother and his immediate family members including his adopted son Ikemefuna. His burden was worsened by famine that befell the land where one farmer was driven to commit suicide. As a brave fighter, he put down his despair to his inflexible will and braved through the famine that ‘had been enough to break the heart of a lion.’ Okonkwo recalls the difficult years and comforted himself with the words: “since I have survived that year, I shall survive anything.”
Okonkwo was feared by his wives and children but the needful respect for the father of the house seems to be missing, largely because Okonkwo ruled his household by the threat of force or with a heavy hand. Okonkwo’s family consisted of his three wives and nine children. His wives and children lived in constant fear of him. In a male chauvinistic tribal world that he lived in, Okonkwo capitalized on his people’s culture with the misguided emphasis on the inflated notion of manliness. The warmth of fatherly love and kindness is not seen in his fiery eyes, though he is not a cruel person. For instance, Okonkwo’s secret fondness for Ikemefuna is revealed by the narrator thus:

Even Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy – inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength. He therefore treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else – with a heavy hand. But there was no doubt that he liked the boy.  

Even though he appeared rough and ruthless from the outside, Okonkwo has his softer side which he tries to hide or suppress. On the killing of the boy who called him ‘father’, Okonkwo was controlled by a higher principle of the clan. Apart from his fear of being considered weak, it is will of the clan or community that dictates his action. Clan solidarity was the highest calling that the pristine Igbo culture set for its members. In line with this fundamental principle, the Igbo saying goes that no one ever won judgement against his clan. For this reason, the love for the
boy is eclipsed by the judgement of the clan. A wise advice was given by his friend Obierika not to be involved in the killing for his own good because his attachment to the boy cannot easily be shaken off.

In the novel, Okonkwo was disciplined again for beating his youngest wife during the ‘Week of Peace’ which was a taboo to the Igbon. His action may stand justified had it not been done during the sacred week. As the man of the family in paternalistic society, it is his primary duty to oversee the overall needs of the family. The erring wife was found neglecting her children and household duties, for which appropriate discipline was expected. As a loyal citizen of Umuofia, Okonkwo did not question the law of the land and offered the needful sacrifices demanded of him by Ezeani, the priest of the Earth goddess. The narrator adds: “inwardly he was repentant.”

The third instance where Okonkwo defended the honour of his clan was seen in chapter twenty-three in which he killed the ‘head messenger’ who along with other four men were sent to stop the emergency meeting of the clan over the undue humiliation of the village elders by the District Commissioner’s order. Right from the time the white man set his foot in Igboland, Okonkwo was of the conviction that the white man should be driven out of the land by any means.
During his seven years exile in Mbanta over the inadvertent killing of a boy during a gun salute, the missionary took advantage of the situation. With the help of the local converts and the backing of the colonial government, the white man established his religious influence. The Umuofia people’s attitudes towards the white man had undergone a drastic change from hostility to one of helplessness. Okonkwo’s return from Mbanta after seven years exile witnessed a humiliating homecoming to the hero, and none appeared to recognize him. Power centres of the village have shifted from loyalty towards the clan to mindless allegiance to the ‘things’ of the white man. The fear that the oldest member of Mbanta expressed about the younger generations is reflective of the fearful changes within the community:

…the younger generation consider themselves wiser than their sires… it is good for kinsmen to do it (gather together) so... I am saying it because I fear for the younger generations, for you people...because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. Ha can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turned on his master. I fear for you and I fear for the clan.21

Solidarity of clan members can be identified as one of basic characteristics of traditional tribal society. In Igbo history, the white man’s religion first brought superlative division within the clan. As a fundamentally different way of life, Christianity was opposed to the
Umuofian ‘pagan’ religious belief and practices. Once certain members of the clan got converted, there was little or no room for close contact. Mutual antagonism therefore divided the clan into two hostile camps. Such hostilities weakened the ‘bond of kinship.’ Okonkwo’s final attempt at arresting the cause of the clan disunity once and for all had no following as the clan was already divided beyond repair. Achebe therefore projected western culture as divisive for the Igbo society.

Similar concerns about the divisive forces acting on the community due to colonial contact have been narrated by Achebe in *Arrow of God.* Set in a fictive village of Umuaro, the grandeur of tribal culture was demonstrated through the presentation of characters, situations and events that are innately African or tribal in content. Published in 1964, *Arrow of God* traced Igbo village life since the 1920s by which time colonization was yet to make in-roads into Igboland. The internal conflicts within the Igbo leadership foreshadowed the coming of the white man which was exacerbated by the impending war with Okperi. The novel began with the sighting of the new moon by the Chief Priest of Ulu which marked the fourth month since the last harvest of Yam, their staple food. The occasion of the festival of ‘New Pumpkin Leaves’ presented the opportunity for the Chief Priest to cleanse the whole community by painstakingly going through the physically arduous ritual. The whole
community would take part in the festival with a sense of fear and delight.

In the past, alliances were made among Igbo villages against a common enemy for the survival of the community. For instance, the village of Umuaro in *Arrow of God* was formed out of a conglomeration of six (seven including the self-destruct Umunna) mutually hostile villages to withstand the threats posed by Abame:

In the very distant past, when lizards were few and far between, the six villages – Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezanai, Umuogwugwu and Umuisuzo – lived as different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief Priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy.

....They said that when the six villages came together they offered the priesthood of Ulu to the weakest among them to ensure that none in the alliance became too powerful.22

This was spoken by the omniscient narrator in the context of the impending war with Okperi over a farmland in which Ezeulu bore witness against his own people before Captain Winterbottom. Even though he earned the respect of the white man, Ezeulu’s truthfulness ultimately amounted to going against the will of the clan. This gave Nwaka the chance to oppose the Chief Priest which ensued in a heated
debate over latter’s apparent disloyalty to the clan. The colonial government, taking advantage of the situation, forced Umuaro to submit to its dictates, firstly by giving the disputed land to Okperi, and secondly by collecting and burning their guns. The story of Umuaro that followed was the account of a vanquished clan at the mercy of the white man.

The occasion of sending his son Oduche to mission school presented Ezeulu another ground for suspicion that Ezeulu was a friend of the white man. In his noble attempt to settle the matter, Ezeulu did not realize that his old tribal matrix was not in vogue any longer. That the white man could not be trusted with his words, and that the good of the community was of primary importance, dawned on Ezeulu’s mind too late. His misdirected anger towards his clan had already reached a feverish pitch that nothing, not even the rebuke of Ulu could change the path he had decided.

In the absence of any king or chief in most Igbo societies, the leadership necessarily hinges on the person of the Chief Priest. The struggle for power over Umuaro revolved around Ezeulu who bears the brunt of attack from both within the community as well as the colonial administration. On the one hand, the offended goddesses were jealous over the installation of Ulu as the village deity. Ezeulu knew that Nwaka
was incited into opposing him by none other than the priest of Idemili. He also knew that:

…the priest of Idemili and Ogwugwu and Eru and Udo had never been happy with their secondary role since the villagers got together and made Ulu and put him over other deities. But he would not have thought that one of them would go so far as to set someone to challenge Ulu.23

The imprisonment of a royal python in the box of Oduche presented an opportunity for Ezidemili to attack Ezeulu. He used the expert oratory of Nwaka to deflate the character of Ezeulu with the sole purpose to usurp his position and to reinstate Idemili as the village deity. The tribal world of Umuaro was further disturbed by the issue of Paramount Chief. The colonial administration was under pressure from the home government to set up a Paramount Chief for Umuaro. In Winterbottom’s opinion, only the ‘fetish priest’ was fit to rule the village on their behalf. This then led to fresh conflicts between Chief Priest and the suspecting clansmen. The invitation from Captain Winterbottom only confirmed the suspicion that Ezeulu was a friend of the white man.

In Arrow of God the novelist critically examined the centre of power in traditional Igbo society. In the absence of kings or chiefs, the ultra-democratic power structure of the tribal society rested largely on the priestly class. In the novel, Ezeulu was intrigued by the uncertainty of his power:
Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day of the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam Feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival – no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare.24

The Igbos appeared to have three-tier structure of power – Ulu (the village deity), its chief priest and the people, each balancing the other. Nothing was absolute in Igbo traditional belief. In other words, the traditional Igbo society made allowances for the possibility of an opposing view or the existence of a greater power to balance the tribal system. This aspect of Igbo culture has been discussed in the following chapters.

In the village novels, the elders were presented as repository of tribal wisdom that had been passed on for generations since time immemorial. In _Arrow of God_, Ezeulu dissuaded his clansmen from provoking the white man who seek opportunities to avenge upon them. Again, Nweke Ukpaka suggested moderation in relation to the white man when he said:

The white man is like a hot soup and we must take him slowly – slowly from the edges of the bowl. Umuaro was here before the white man came from his own land to seek us out. We did not ask him to
visit us; he is neither our kinsman nor out in-law. We did not steal his goat or his fowl; we did not take his land or his wife. In no way whatever we have done him wrong. And yet he has come to make trouble for us. All we know is that our ofo is held high between us and him. The stranger will not kill his host with his visit; when he goes may he not go with a swollen back. I know that the white man does not wish Umuaro well. That is why we must hold our ofo by him and give him no cause to say that we did this or failed to do that. For if we give him cause he will rejoice. Why? Because the very house he has been seeking ways of pulling down will have caught fire of its own will.

A little provocation was sufficient ground for the white man to intervene in the local affairs of Umuaro and bring them under subjection. Perhaps, Ezeulu’s non-interference policy was a ploy to buy enough time to find a stronger medicine to defeat the enemy. The Igbos sacrificed one of their kinds when they reached the ‘end of things’. Ill-prepared to face the ‘unknowable’ enemy, he sent one of his sons to a Christian school as a sacrifice of native blood to appease the gods.

The magnificence and maturity of Ezeulu in leading the disgruntled clansmen is noteworthy. The story of the village presented by him is countered and challenged by Nwaka who is a titled man with more wives than Ezeulu himself. As an orator par excellence, Nwaka swept the elders’ opinion against the very legitimacy of Ezeulu’s power over them:

My father did not tell me that before Umuaro went to war it took leave from the priest of Ulu…. The man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god’s ritual and to carry sacrifice to him. But I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. He is a man of ambition; he wants to be king, priest, diviner, all. His father, they said,
Spoken in relation to the imminent war with Okperi which Ezeulu forbid (as the disputed land rightly belongs to Okperi), Nwaka’s serious accusations belittled Ezeulu’s power over the people. Had Nwaka’s accusation been true that the Chief Priest was driven by ambition, Ezeulu would have seized the opportunity to be the Paramount Chief when offered by Captain Winterbottom. When he was finally released from Okperi prison for his refusal to be anybody’s chief except Ulu’s, Ezeulu unwittingly opened himself before John Nwodika, the ‘Head Messenger’:

Do you know what my enemies call me at home?…. They call me the friend of the white man. They say Ezeulu brought the white man to Umuaro…. They say I betrayed them to the white man.²⁷

John Nwodika’s admiration for the Chief Priest could be understood in the comment that he made about Ezeulu’s courage before the white man by using the metaphor of wrestling: ‘How many of those who deride you at home can wrestle with the white man as you have done and press his back to the ground?’²⁸ Compared with James Ikedi who was appointed as the Warrant Chief for Okperi from the headquarters and against the sound judgement of those on the field, Ezeulu stood supreme as the epitome of a seasoned tribal elder. Among the first product of mission schools in Igboland, James Ikedi was known for his highhandedness and corrupt practices the moment he was elevated into a position of power.
Disciplinary actions from the colonial authority in the form of suspension only made him cleverer to devise ways and means to erase his vile footprints. The narrator comments:

…Chief Ikedi was still corrupt and high-handed only cleverer than ever before. The latest thing he did was to get his people to make him an obi or king, so that he was now called His Highness Ikedi the First, Obi of Okperi. This was among a people who abominated kings! This was what British administration was doing among the Ibos, making a dozen mushroom kings grow where there was none before.²⁹

An ambitious priest would easily fall into such temptation like Ikedi and enjoy an overwhelming power over the people. In his refusal to serve the colonial government, Ezeulu opted for the good of the whole clan by not soiling his hand in the corrupt system of the white man’s government. Winterbottom was ranting at James Ikedi when he said:

The man was a complete nonentity until we crowned him, and now he carries on as if he is nothing else all his life. It’s the same with Court Clerks and even messengers. They all managed to turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people. It seems to be a trait in the character of the negro.³⁰

That this same colonial officer has high regards for Ezeulu showed an individual white man’s recognition of positive tribal values. Undaunted by the threats and abuses of Mr Clarke, Ezeulu stood tall and showed no sign of defeat in his confrontation with the white man. When John Nwodika used the metaphor of wrestling, Ezeulu’s mild rebuttal was revealing of his character:
You call this wrestling? No, my clansman. We have not wrestled; we have merely studied each other’s hand. I shall come again, but before that I want to wrestle with my own people whose hand I know and who knows my hand. I am going to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat and whoever throws the other will strip him of his anklet.31

But his second meeting with the white man was not supposed to be, since his own people had defected to the white man’s religion.

The greatness of Umuaro rested in the presence of great men like Ezeulu, Nwaka and other titled men who wielded total control over their own family. With rampant jealousies among the wives and the sudden spurt of conflict and misunderstanding between wives and children, only strong men can contain the situation. In the paternalistic Igbo society, the fear of the father or husband protected the well being of the family. Women generally were not mistreated but disciplined with mild rebuke or even beating as the case demands. In Arrow of God, Ezeulu scolded his wife Matefi for her prejudiced attitude against the children of his other wives. Driven by jealousy Matefi had been known for gossiping about Ugoye:

Ezeulu had eaten every morsel of the supper Ugoye prepared for him. This should have made any woman very happy. But in a big compound there was always something to spoil one’s happiness. For Ugoye it was her husband’s senior wife, Matefi. No matter what Ugoye did Matefi’s jealousy never let her rest. If she cooked a modest meal in her own hut Matefi said she was starving her children so that she could buy ivory bracelets; if she killed a cock as she did this evening Matefi said she
was seeking favour from her husband. Of course she never said any of these things to Ugoye’s face, but all her gossip eventually got back to Ugoye.\textsuperscript{32}

Such petty misunderstanding is expected among women in any situation, especially in a close-knit tribal society such as the Igbos. The attitude of Ezeulu towards domestic problems revealed his maturity on family matters: he employs of threats on more serious matters, and pretended not to notice trifle issues. For instance, when Oduche’s mother Ugoye confronted him over his decision to send his son to the foreign school, Ezeulu’s assertiveness came to the fore:

\begin{quote}
How does it concern you what I do with my sons? You say you do not want Oduche to follow strange ways. Do you not know that in a great man’s household there must be people who follow all kinds of strange ways? There must be good people and bad people, honest workers and thieves, peace-makers and destroyers; that is the mark of a great obi. In such a place, whatever music you beat on your drum there is somebody who can dance to it.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Ezeulu nobly viewed the presence of different temperaments and characters within a big house as a matter of pride and not a sign of deficiency.

In the tribal society, the well being of nuclear family can be threatened oftentimes by the intrusion of distant relatives. Ezeulu’s half-brother was known to have incited Edogo into believing that he has the right to succeed his father for being the eldest among the sibling:
Okeke Onenyi’s best in Ezeulu’s compound was Edogo,…. In fact this relationship between Edogo and his uncle was known to give Ezeulu great dissatisfaction. Perhaps it was out of pique that he had said that the carving done by the one was about as good as the medicine practised by the other.

‘Those two?’ he once asked, ‘a derelict mortar and rotten palm nuts!’

Ezeulu’s absence during his imprisonment in Okperi gave Edogo “an opportunity to show his resentment against Nwafo, Ezeulu’s favourite son.” The sensitive Nwafo felt the hostility when Edogo took ‘temporary possession of his father’s hut,’ and therefore dared not stay at home:

Although he was only a little boy he had the mind of an adult; he could tell when someone looked at him with a good eye or with a bad. Even if Edogo said nothing Nwafo would still have known that he was not wanted.

The moral integrity of Ezeulu gave him the inner strength to face any challenge. Even in front of Mr Clarke he demonstrated his priestly grandeur. For instance, when Edogo unwittingly asked if it would not be better to return home and come back when the DC recovers from his sickness, Ezeulu’s answer showed his determination forcefully: ‘This is not a journey I want to do twice. No, I shall wait here until I have seen the head and tail of this matter.’

Even within the confines of prison walls, he could share friendly jokes and tribal humour with his friend Akuebue. On the day of his release from prison, he jokingly remarked about the white man’s internal struggles in detaining him: ‘So the white
man is tired… I thought he had more fight than that inside him." Such
fitting remarks, unfazed by the gravity of his circumstances, made the
tribal priest very endearing to the reader.

Juxtaposed against the noble qualities of tribal personality, the
novelist also explored the failings of the priest. Towards the end of the
novel, Ezeulu unleashed his fury on the whole community for
humiliations he suffered in the hands of both the white man as well as his
own clansmen by refusing to declare the New Yam festival. Ofoka, one
of the elders of the clan who told Ezeulu:

I want you to know if you do not already know it that the elders of
Umuaro did not take sides with Nwaka against you. We all know him
and the man behind him; we are not deceived. Why then did we agree
with him? It was because we were confused. Do you hear me? The
elders of Umuaro are confused…. We are confused.

The naming of the harvest season was important for the survival of the
clan. The novelist added:

… it reminded the six villages of their coming together in ancient times
and of their continuing debt to Ulu who saved them from the ravages
of Abam. At every New Yam feast the coming together of the village
was re-enacted and every grown man in Umuaro took a good-sized
seed-yam to the shrine of Ulu and placed in the heap from his village
after circling it around his head; then he took the lump of chalk lying
beside the heap and marked his face. It was from these heaps that the
elders knew the number of men in each village. If there was an
increase over the previous year a sacrifice of gratitude was made to
Ulu; but if the number had declined the reason was sought from
diviners and a sacrifice of appeasement was ordered. It was also from
these yams that Ezeulu selected thirteen with which to reckon the New
Year.
So, the refusal to declare the festival was a serious offence against the spirit of the clan; it unleashed untold suffering to the people. It also means that they have to buy food stuffs from hostile neighbours at exorbitant rates while their own crops lie rotting in the field. In waging a hostile war against the jealous Idemili, Ulu and his priest ruined themselves.

Though the Igbo believed in the supreme will of the community over the individual members, the people defected to the Christian camp for survival. The novelist seemed to show that neither the priest nor the village deity were indispensable to the village community; they continue to enjoy power and prestige so long as they are beneficial to the people. The unnatural death of Ezeulu’s son Obika was seen by the village folks as a judgment against the erring priest. The internal struggle for supremacy among the village pantheons gave way to the domineering influence of the foreign God. From that moment on the converted Igbos ‘harvested in the name of the son’ (meaning Christ) primarily because of the economic security that the religion provided to the people who till then depended on the changeable whims of Ulu and his priest.

The novel focussed mainly on the internal conflicts within the clan – personal or communal – which when played into the hands of more powerful external forces removed the power to control their own history.
Unlike Okonkwo who compensated his deficiencies by sheer strength, Ezeulu is more of an intellectual giving deep thought to events and ready to be flexible to accommodate change and the unexpected. The impact of colonialism is felt more strongly in *Arrow of God* due to the combined forces of their government, religion and trade which capitalized upon the internal rifts within the tribal society thereby ultimately alienating the central character from his community. Given the intelligence and personality of Ezeulu, the internal wounds of the society could have been healed in the absence of pressures from the political and military power of the colonizer.

The occasion of the festival of the ‘New Pumpkin Leaves’ presents the opportunity to cleanse the whole community by re-enacting the first coming of Ulu which is potent enough to remind himself and his clansmen the core principles of tribal leadership which is centred on self-sacrifice. The coming of the white man with his religion confronted the community with a new challenge which calls for the same unity as was done in the case of Abame:

A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs. When we want to make charm we look for the animal whose blood can match its power; if a chicken cannot do it we look for a goat or a ram; if that is not sufficient we send for a bull. But sometimes even a bull does not suffice, then we must look for a human. …we do it because we have reached the very end of things and we know that neither a cock nor a goat nor even a bull will do. And our
fathers have told us that it may even happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things, and their back is broken and hung over fire. When this happens they may sacrifice their own blood.\textsuperscript{42}

So Ezeulu sends his son Oduche to the foreign school not only as a sacrifice, but to be his agent over the strange things about the white man:

I have sent you to be my eyes there. Do not listen to what people say – people who do not know their right from their left. No man speaks a lie to his son; I have told you that before. If anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time.’ He scratched his head and continued in a relaxed voice. ‘When I was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to learn and master this man’s knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn until you can write with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you.\textsuperscript{43}

Unlike Nwoye who defected to the enemy camp because of the harsh reality of the tribal customs, Oduche was sent by his farsighted father as more than a sacrifice because the clan was pushed beyond their means. Even then, the foreign school produced the same result, exposing the internal weakness of the traditional system; they both became loyal to the new faith at the cost of the unity of the clan. Though Ezeulu’s original mandate to his son reveals progressive thinking, he failed to understand the extent of the power of the white man’s religion. Having tasted of that power, Oduche could not be an effective ‘eye’ and failed to report back to
his father perhaps because it fulfilled an important need which his own culture lacks.

In the next novel *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe preoccupies himself with the disturbed life of an Igbo elite named Obi Okonkwo who is the grandson of the great Ogbuefi Okonkwo and son of defector Isaac Nwoye of *Things Fall Apart*. Set in the ‘town’ of Umuofia and the city of Lagos in the 1950s when European colonialism faced the impending independence of Nigeria, the novel explores the theme of corruption committed by the young western-educated Igbo officer. According to David Cook, Obi Okonkwo “has been especially trained to be an outsider.” With the fast changing cultural values in Igboland, the misguided Umuofia clansmen capitalized on the possibilities of western education by sending one of their promising sons to England to study law to help them in their land disputes. The massive invasion on the native cultural space has gone so deep that the natives value only the things that the white man does: ‘Greatness is now in the things of the white man.’ So, to achieve parity with other villages the clansmen taxed themselves mercilessly to have their own son occupy a European post which is only next to being a European. Shorn of all cultural values, Obi who initially intended to fight the corrupt practices in the colonial administration found himself helplessly submerged into the system.
The behaviour and conducts of Obi has been predominated by the invading culture, and there is little in his life to show his tribal identity. Growing up in the new faith and his four years stay in England to pursue a degree in English Literature exposed him to western culture which changed him forever. As a necessary consequence, Obi developed in himself the opposing culture of the west and dared to belittle all his relations including his parents and clan members. Confused and disturbed by the culture that he now imbibed, he ran after the ‘sweet things of life’ and the hybridized elite failed to develop any meaningful relationship with anyone.

The gap between Obi’s childhood impression of Lagos and the reality of city life which he lived after his return from England exposed the artificiality of tribal life in cities. As a boy he heard from soldiers lots of stories about Lagos as a city full of promises. These soldiers who were recruited as labour corps travelled to distant countries in the world during the Second World War and brought home many bags of money and information about the world. The first hand experiences of the soldiers became the main source of knowledge about people and places different from theirs. So, in his mind Obi continued to associate Lagos with plentiful money, electric lights, pleasure cars, dance party and the like. As the lone Umuofian occupying a European post, Obi did not live as a
respectable Umuofian officer. The first impression Obi had about Lagos remained with him ever active to influence his unconscious longing for the pleasures of city life.

Obi’s stay in England influenced him to question the authority of his clan and parents over his private life. Once removed from the protective eyes of his parents and elders of the clan, Obi ran after the temporal things without any restraint. He even abandoned the faith of his father in the land of the missionaries, instead of growing in it. In an individualistic society of the west, Obi now imbibed their cultural values to the extent that it meets his personal wants. It was in a night club that he met Clara, an osu (a person dedicated to the gods and a taboo for the free-born to marry) girl pursuing nursing training there. The dysfunctional role of the city life is a thing that Obi cannot wish away. Once removed from the protective gaze of his parents and his village elders, the unhindered freedom could become destructive. Obi’s first impression about the pleasurable life of Lagos came from the soldiers who returned back from the war front with bags of money and power. With the diminishing clan authority over its members, neither the Lagos branch of the UPU nor his friends like Joseph could restrain Obi from pursuing his private interests even if such interests goes against their culture. They have been made powerless by the changed power relations introduced by the colonial
system. All they could hope to do was give a mild rebuke in the form of advice.

In the novel Achebe projected the circumstances surrounding Obi’s moral degradation that happened since the moment he occupied an important office in the colonial government. His initial attempts at reforming the system looked impressive and gave much hope to the reader. In his simple calculations, the country could be saved from corruption once the administration is rid of the ‘so-called experienced men’ at the top and peopled it with fresh university graduates who need not bribe anyone for the job:

To (whom)...bribery is no problem. They come straight to the top without bribing anyone. It’s not they’re necessarily better than others, it’s simply that they can afford to be virtuous. But even that kind of virtue can become a habit.46

Little did Obi realize that corruption pervades as well as sustains the whole system. Obi later understood the practical impossibilities of meeting all the demands and obligations with the little income paid to him. His economic liabilities in the face of the physical and economic breakdown of his parents, repayment of loans to the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU), monthly fees for his younger brother John and his own expenses, the colonial government provides no other option to bail himself out of bankruptcy.
Achebe holds the view that any culture cannot be destroyed completely; it may be disturbed at a very unsettling level. So despite the disturbance in village solidarity, the bond of kinship continued to hold the clansmen together in times of crisis or calamity. When Obi got into trouble and was caught for accepting bribe, it was his clansmen who came to his rescue. The care and concern of the clan was expressed through their President: ‘… a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone.’

The bond of kinship compelled the clansmen to bail Obi out of his trouble:

The men of Umuofia were prepared to fight to the last. They had no illusions about Obi. He was, without doubt, a very foolish and self-willed young man. But this was not the time to go into that. The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush.

In defending Obi, the beauty of clan unity is demonstrated. Among the Umuofia People in Lagos, there were a number of well-meaning individuals. They sided with Obi mainly because of blood relations. There is nothing to show that they condone his crime. Bribery at some point is comparable to offering of the kola to the guest which has endearing significance in the native culture. Unlike the European Imperialists or their Warrant Chiefs, there is no use of coercion in any way. So, there is a thin line between bribery and accepting gifts. In the
case of Obi, his act can be either seen as a crime or a favour for works
done for the giver. The colonial administration chose to see it as a
punishable crime to warn other native officers from committing the same
offence. But the clansmen on their part would not allow their only ‘palm-
fruit’ to get lost. Compared with the crime committed by Europeans
against the natives and their produce, Obi’s bribe was very insignificant
to the people.

The moral decline in Igboland showed its first sign with the
colonial intervention in the affairs of the Igbo people. Decades of
economic and cultural exploitation directly robbed the vitality of the land
and its people to the extent that the owners of the land became completely
dependent on the good will of the invading strangers. When Mr Green
pronounced his judgement that ‘The African is corrupt through and
through,’ the colonial government put the blame of their misdeed on the
natives. By the twin forces of might and cunning, the colonial
government ascertained the continuation of their rule over the natives.
Therefore Achebe followed Obi’s character closely to show the
honourable life of the hero compared with his European counterpart.

The moral decline in Igboland runs hand in hand with the colonial
intervention in the affairs of the Igbo people. Decades of economic and
cultural exploitation directly robbed the vitality of the land and its people
to the extent that the owners of the land became completely dependent on the good will of the invading strangers. When Mr Green pronounced his judgement that ‘The African is corrupt through and through,’ the colonial government put the blame of their misdeed on the natives. Therefore Achebe followed Obi’s character closely to show the honourable life of the hero compared with his European counterpart.

The natives’ misplaced emphasis on the value of western education blinded them to their indigenous potentials. Majority of the local populace see English education as a philosopher’s stone or a panacea for society’s ills. So every Igbo village tried their best to get parity with other villages in amassing the wisdom of the white man. For this very reason, the Umuofia villagers taxed themselves mercilessly to send Obi to study in England. Little did the simple tribal elders realize the long-term consequences of getting schooled in western thought and culture. On the colonial purpose of western education in India, Lord Macaulay noted:

> We must do our best to form a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country...  

Though the benefits of western education on the colonized tribe produced positive changes, it also developed complexity and confusion in the educated class. The life of a traditional tribal had been dominated largely by his religious beliefs. As a unique religion, it had sustained the society
for centuries. The fear of the gods and goddesses induced the religiously sanctioned respect towards village elders. So, the educated elite felt the endemic tension of being alienated from their tribal self and the clan, and the pressure to play the given role assigned by the new power structure. In his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney observed:

…the racism and cultural boastfulness harboured by capitalism were also included in the package of colonial education. Colonial schooling was an education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion, and the development of underdevelopment.52

In Igboland it was the missionaries who first brought their education as a means to convert the native people to Christianity. They taught them how to read and write so that the natives can understand the Bible translated in their vernacular language. So any student who enrolled in the mission schools also became follower of the new faith. With the establishment of colonial rule, these mission-educated locals were employed as Court Clerks or Court Messengers. That the moral decline of the native coincided with the utilization of the mission education was a strange predicament for the Igbos. Those natives employed in the courts of the colonizer supplanted the power of the traditional leaders of the clan and became high handed to their own people and were corrupted. Because of the sudden shift in power equations, the clan and its chief priest were
treated with much contempt. It was in such atmosphere that Obi was expected to set an exemplary life of a tribal officer.

Again, the unaccountable attitude of the natives in relation to the government also needs proper examination. The colonial government was forced upon the people and therefore it could not gather legitimacy. The narrator of *No Longer at Ease* shows the disowning of the government by the people when he said:

> In Nigeria the government was ‘they.’ It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble.  

It is natural for a people group who does not have a say in the governance of the country to not have a sense of belonging. Therefore the African mind is always intrigued by the white man and their cultural systems. So, they enforced the western system of law and justice, polity and religious beliefs, estranging the natives further in the process.

The cultural prejudice of the colonizer is presented through the character of Mr Green. After staying in Nigeria for full fifteen years, his favourable attitude towards the people declined considerably. In the end he is like Mr Kurtz, a character in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* who wrote about the ‘need’ to exterminate all the brutes. On the question of local leave, Obi had a heated discussion with Mr Green when the latter
blamed the native elites for not putting the interests of the nation above
their own and sacrifices some of their privileges. Obi dared to point out
the biased system of colonial government in his rebuff to Mr Green:

It is not the fault of Nigerians,’ said Obi. ‘You devised these soft
conditions for yourselves when every European was automatically in
the senior service and every African automatically in the junior
service. Now a few of us have been admitted into the senior service,
you turned around and blamed us.54

After receiving an equal challenge from Obi, Mr Green went straight to
the room of Mr Omo who was the authority on General Orders and
Financial Instructions, perhaps, to hide his shame if not to give spiteful
advice.

The system of rewards embedded in the colonial administration
lays the path for corruption in public office. The offices of court clerks,
court messengers and the police force, mostly occupied by the natives
were the forerunner in practicing bribe. As long as they pose no threat to
the colonial government, they were hardly reprimanded. Once Obi got
used to the corrupt system with the general apathy towards the practice,
he was easily swept off his guard. Assigned the department of Foreign
Scholarship, the first temptation to Obi came from an applicant named
Elsie Mark and her brother. But this initial victory evaporated the
moment he came face to face with financial crisis; Obi realized that
without accepting bribe, it is near impossible to make a living with all the
attending financial difficulties and debts – repayment of loans to the
UPU, car insurance, overdraft fees, electric bills and his financial
commitments to his sickly parents, fees for his brother John and helping
needy clansmen. So, to recover from his debts, Obi lied about his
travelling allowance by fabricating a fact that he spent his leave in the
Cameroons. This seemingly petty crime emboldens him to plunge deeper
into other corrupt practices like accepting bribes.

The monthly repayment of twenty pounds to the UPU causes
financial difficulty to Obi. Though the union gave him four month’s grace
period Obi declined the offer the moment they started intruding into his
relationship with Clara. Unlike the Ndichie (village elders) of olden days,
the power of the clan over the erring member of the clan is greatly
diminished. So, the union members, in disapproving Obi’s relationship
with an osu, assumed a power which no longer existed. In the new
situation tribal mores gave way to mere advice, as can be seen from the
Union President’s speech:

We are pioneers building up our families and our town. And those who
build must deny ourselves many pleasures. We must not drink because
we see our neighbours drink or run after women because our thing
stands up. You may ask why I am saying all this. I have heard that you
are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking
of marrying her….
There is a tone of disrespect when the President refers to the girl Obi loves. The speech apparently was made for the whole clansmen but was directed at Obi individually. In reacting sharply to the Union, Obi attempted to assert his independence and guard his personal freedom. To Obi, his relationship with Clara was much dearer than anything; his emotional well-being depended on her. From that time on, Obi’s relationship towards the union members was one of hostility:

I am not going to listen to you anymore. I take back my request. I shall start paying you back at the end of this month. Now, this minute! But don’t dare interfere in my affairs again. And if this is what you meet about,’ he said in Igbo, ‘you may cut off my two legs if you ever find them here again.56

In the novel, Obi’s emotional dependence on Clara could be seen in relation to the change in his personality. For this cause, he was ready to sacrifice anything, even his loyalty to his parents and the clan. In the process, his relationship with all other characters got strained. But Clara, on her part, did not see any future in their relation right from the start. For this very reason, she would evade the talks about wedding ring or marriage. No amount of disapproval from any quarter seemed to have effect on Obi’s mind. The character of Clara was portrayed in such a way that Obi’s mental and emotional stability depended on her. After she was gone from his life the downward slide of his career took a dip. Under the
impact of strong disapproval from all quarters, Obi suffered much mental agony even to the point of losing Clara’s true image and her value.

The shallowness of Obi’s parents in their adopted faith was exposed when they were confronted by issues relating to social taboos. For instance, when they came to know about Obi’s plan to marry an osu, they were filled with apprehensiveness. As it has been Achebe’s overall objective to show the encounter between tribal and western cultures as a problem in his novels. This manifests itself in the attitude that Obi’s parents (who were Christians) showed towards Clara (an osu girl) which was no different from that of the traditional clansmen. Clara could have become the ground for them to assert their transformed view and take a strong Christian stand on the equality of all men and women in the eyes of God. Achebe, in his refusal to project the practised Christianity in Igboland as a liberating force of divine love from the evils of the traditional beliefs, aims at highlighting the diluted message of the missionaries which according to him was a religion blindly followed by his clansmen. Hannah expressed her disapproval of the relationship more vehemently by emotionally blackmailing her son. Instead of giving sane advice, the mother threatened to commit suicide:

I have nothing to tell you in this matter except one thing. If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more. If God hears my prayers, you will not wait long.
... But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself.  

Such unseemly response from the ‘christian’ parents leaves no other alternative for them to but to revolt against their authority. Obi was courageous enough to state his point in front of his father believing that he would change. But to his desperate mother Obi dared not say anything because of her fragile state.

In depicting the difficult situations created by the colonial administration for the native elites during the transitional period in Nigerian history, the novelist understands the mental agony that results from the cultural dislocation caused to them. Though colonial education was projected as a negative influence upon the people, this does not foreclose the fact that wholesome education including a genuine Christian faith can also be weapons for positive change for the same people.

Set in the 1960s in a post-independent fictive country that is unnamed (closely resembling contemporary Nigeria) with its capital city named Bori, *A Man of the People* examines the hopeless situation of an African country in its attempt to run self-government after decades of colonial subjugation. The post-independence betrayals and disillusionments with the ruling elite in the Nigerian politics have been underscored in the novel. Achebe uses the first person narrator in the
character of Odili Samalu whose subjective consciousness, accounts and reports the history of the country and this generated a certain degree of alertness in the readers. The novel expresses a sense of betrayal after Nigeria won her independence from Britain. The novel examines the independent Nigerian politics with the predominant belief that decades of colonial domination had robbed the African of his dignity, of his innate character and of his total life worlds. In no position to run the government in their debilitated state, the elite leadership ran the colonial system to the disadvantage of their own people. The downward slide of morality among the native elites pervades the whole atmosphere not sparing even the common people. Political corruption and bankruptcy then lead to a downfall making way for a new era of the equally corrupt military dictatorship.

Chief Micah Nanga was ironically called a man of the people who represented a constituency constituting of a few villages including Odili’s village Urua and Anata, where he taught. Micah was known to have taught in the Anata Grammar School and was a teacher of Odili in standard three. In the beginning of the novel he was introduced as ‘the most approachable politician in the country.’ Tribalism takes the form of local loyalty to one’s own village as shown by Odili’s friend Kadibe who finds it impossible to side with him because he and the minister
came from the same village. Odili called it ‘Primitive loyalty.’\textsuperscript{59} As A. Y. Andoh has pointed out, a successful politician was seen as an investment by his tribal group:

\begin{quote}
The wide extension of kinship bonds means that a chief (or any other official) is frequently put into the position of having to choose between his obligations to favour particular kinsmen and his official duty to act disinterestedly. This type of conflict of obligation is quite real for the politician, civil servant, policemen or even judge. For a successful political candidate is regarded by many of his constituents (frequently his kinsmen) as an investment, and will be asked for jobs or scholarships, or for help in local disputes.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

The character of Chief Nanga provides a good example in which the clansmen’s expectations hinge on favouritism and special considerations on his own people.

The novel begins with the introduction of the Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga M.P., as the most approachable politician in the country from whom the novel ironically takes its name. The authorial voice of the narrator is found to have lacked the confident omniscient voice of the earlier novels, perhaps to emphasize the idea that he is also part and parcel of the politics of corruption and despotism in the country. The initial good impression Odili made on the reader evaporates once the reader witnessed the incongruence of his double lifestyle.

The misplaced value on western education in the previous novels finds its echo in \textit{A Man of the People}, though with a different reason. In
No Longer at Ease, it was seen as a philosopher’s stone and to occupy a European post was considered only next to being a European. During the time to Chief Nanga, in the early years of independence, during the phasing out of Europeans in public service, public corporations and agencies, the largesse available was great, which included money received not only from lower taxes or piped water, but also from cash for crops, higher wages, scholarships for sons and daughters, even a good market stall.\(^6^1\) In the context of *A Man of the People* higher education was condemned by the likes of the Nangas to safeguard their power and privileges from the highly educated native colleagues. The sacked minister of Finance, Dr Makinde was a first-rate economist in public finance and hence he posed greater threat to the government. After presenting his expert views on how to bail out the country from the current economic crisis caused by a slump in the international coffee market, he along with his two-third majority supporters were sacked and dismissed as conspirators and traitors. The Prime Minister was quoted by the Daily Chronicle as saying:

Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man’s mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people….\(^6^2\)
In the novel, the struggle for power takes an ugly turn; each party tries to capture and retain power by all means. As there was no longer any greater force to restraint them, the misuse of power in the high echelon of the power structure remains unchecked. In the traditional society, fear of the deities and their ancestors made the natives behave as good citizens. And the Christianity that supplanted the traditional religion was not rooted strong enough to have fear of divine intervention in their lives. In such a society, it is less important what you know rather than who you know. Later in his speech the Prime Minister made a declaration:

“From today we must watch and guard our hard-earned freedom jealously. Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of western-educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage...”

Destined by the system they got used to during the colonial period and inherited after their departure from the scene, the new rulers followed the path of self-enrichment at the cost of the people.

The so-called ‘man of the people’ like Chief Nanga learned the trick of the trade by feigning his undivided concern for the people and used them for his selfish gain. On the occasion of his reception at the Anata Grammar School, he impressed Odili with the hope of holding a strategic position in the civil service:
By the way, Odili, I think you are wasting your talent here. I want you to come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service. We shouldn’t leave everything to the highland tribes. My secretary is from there; our people must press for their fair share of the national cake.64

Although, Nanga admitted his loss of happiness after joining politics, the hunger after power foreclosed his return to normal life in the village: “I swear to God that I am not as happy as when I was a teacher.”65 The flattery of Mr Jonathan Nwege, (the proprietor and principal of the school) on Chief Nanga’s sound education was intended as a pun on his insecurity with his mere standard six certificates. For that reason, Nanga immediately added a rejoinder highlighting the higher standard of education of his time. Not satisfied with the self-defeating claim in front of sensible people like Odili, he proudly claimed to have been invited by a foreign institution to receive a doctoral degree. To cover his dubious ways, Nanga professed to have a religiously tinged motto: ‘Do the right and shame the Devil.’66

The post-independent Igbo society was presented through the detailed accounts of Odili’s upbringing. Son of Hezekiah Samalu, an Interpreter during the colonial regime, Odili must have enjoyed the influence of his father in all spheres of life including his education. His mother died at his birth for which reason he was called a bad child: ‘Bad child that crunched his mother’s skull.’67 Certain traditional practices
were continued even after their conversion to the new faith. One of them was the equal treatment of all the children. The eldest wife of the family became every child’s mama while the other wives were addressed as the mother of so and so. Polygamy was practiced by the post-colonial Christians violating the clear Christian teaching on monogamy. Belief in and the fear of evil spirits and poison still pervaded in the society at large. For this reason, the father would forbid his children from visiting certain homes believed to have evil intention on the family. The father would also ensure that protective medicines were hanged on crucial corners of their house. Hezekiah Samalu was known to have turned many clansmen into his enemies, partly out of jealousy and mainly because of the highhandedness of the Interpreters they were known to be.

Odili’s acceptance of Nanga’s invitation to the capital Bori had double purposes; the main one was to spend a good time with his girlfriend Elsie, and secondly to seek gainful employment as was promised. His first visit to Bori presented him with the temptation of a pleasurable life. The big mansion and other privileges enjoyed by an MP took Odili off guard, so much so that for some time he compromised on his own moral stand on the corrupt system:

When I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the
door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a *lappa* I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one forever.68

Chief Nanga’s official quarter is known to have seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms. Mrs Nanga had her separate bed room which in her absence was used by Nanga to entertain his lady guests. And this is the same room where the enmity over teacher-pupil duo started over the question of Elsie. Odili sees injustice in the privileges enjoyed by the ministers. His appetite for active politics is hedged, not necessarily driven by love of the people but more so for self aggrandisement.

The disillusionment with post-independent Nigerian politics has been a primary concern of the novel. The habit of corruption, bribery and violence with the attending general apathy of the people mars the promise of self-sufficiency and good governance in the new dispensation. In the novel, Achebe dons the mouth of Odili in expressing the fear of and disillusionment with the tendency to concentrate power in the hands of a few people:

A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation – as I saw it lying on the bed – was that none of us had been indoors to be able to say ‘To hell with it.’ We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best – had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. and from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that
the first phase of the struggle had been won and the next phase – the extension of our house – was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all arguments should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house.69

The so-called second stage of freedom struggle was a ploy of those in power to secure their hold over the people by all means. Without any voice of dissent, the ruling party would enjoy the unchallenged authority to pursue their own subservient policies. Any power that is unchecked tends to drift towards authoritarian rule. The Josiah episode shows the capability of the village folks who with their ethical consciousness reprimanded Josiah. Josiah, a village shopkeeper, steals the stick of the blind Azoge to make *juju* (a kind of sorcery to hypnotize people) or medicine with it so that the whole village will become blind buyers of his wares. So in response to the call for help the villagers boycotted Josiah’s shop on the ground that “Josiah has taken away enough for the owner to notice.”70 The moral conviction against Josiah’s criminal acts was so strong that he came to his ruin within no time. The narrator reflects on the principle further that:

I thought much afterwards about the proverb, about the man taking things away until the owner at last notices. In the mouth of our people there was no greater condemnation. It was not a simple question of man’s cup being full. A man’s cup might be full and none the wiser. But here the owner knew and the owner, I discovered, is the will of the whole people.71
If the same sense of ownership or responsibility is reproduced at the national level, the situation of the post-independent African state might have a different future. Without that sense of ownership at the national level, the novelist himself knew the impracticality of the idea. In lauding the courage of Eunice in avenging the murder of her boyfriend Max at the end of the novel, Odili returns to the same theme:

The owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless. Max was avenged not by the people’s collective will but by one solitary woman who loved him.72

The primitive loyalties that the narrator referred to at the beginning of the novel hints at the numerous lineages, clans and tribes in any African country, especially Nigeria which has more than 250 tribes. And tribalism divides and weakened the surge for national unity among the different ethnic groups. In other words, loyalty to one’s own group predetermines the exclusion of all the rest as either enemies or at best competitors in the race for amassing their share of the national cake. They looked upon the government as an alien institution to which they had no sense of accountability; during their tenure as government official, they accumulated as much riches as possible, even if done so illegally.

The fear for personal life and safety has been the dominant concern among those who are holding power. Ironically enough, the fear of being
poisoned by their political opponents often finds the ministers in perpetual apprehensions. As for instance, when Mr Nanga and Odili visited the Honourable Simon Koko, Minister for Overseas Training, the minister enacted a fake scene of being poisoned which suggests the looming fear among the political circles. Though the poisoning was later found to be a hoax, the fear in their eyes was real:

... Chief Nanga had been terribly scared himself, witness his ill-tempered, loud-mouthed panic at the telephone. I suspect he felt personally threatened. Our people have a saying that when a slave sees another cast into a shallow grave he should know that when his time comes he will go the same way.73

In the panicky situation, the purpose of their visit did not find the chance of mention. So, the thief of the public money runs without being chased. The scene only reveals the moral degradation of the political establishment.

The rampant corruption in contemporary African countries points to colonial disturbance of their fundamental cultural values and the pursuance of the same suppressive policies by the new ruling elite. Elected or appointed to responsible posts, they practiced the model of government which they have learned from the colonial masters: “we have all accepted things from the white skins that none of us would have brooked from our own people.”74 The era of British colonialism might have been over, but the onslaught of financial capital given as loans
posed a new threat to the emergent independent countries. The surreptitious manner in which neo-imperialism intruded into the African countries could be seen from Mr John’s self-righteous extolment of America: ‘America may not be perfect, but don’t forget that we are the only powerful country in the entire history of the world, the only one, which had the power to conquer others and didn’t do it.’ 75 This move has to be seen as a cover up of the new western economic imperialistic designs.

In the context of Africa, the loose moral lifestyle of the American couple, Mr John and his wife Jean reflected the liberal philosophy that governed the western society, posed a further threat to the health of their family life. While the wife was flirting with Chief Nanga, the husband had to faint ignorance to avoid her domineering rebuttal. To the paternalistic African, the consequence of such an act could but be serious. In the traditional tribal society, the husband might secretly commit extramarital affairs, but the wife would not simply dare to. As expected, the charade at the British conservatism only reveals their lack of inhibitions at their licentious lifestyle. In the novel, a new twist to the moral degradation of the marriage institution came with the arrival of Mrs Agnes Akilo a barrister from another town eighty miles away who according to Nanga must be obeyed. 76 In Nanga’s absence, Odili got the
chance to dance and sleep with the impudent Jean. After the sexual act, Jean took him for a tour of the city:

I began to wonder whether Jean actually enjoyed driving through these places as she claimed she did or whether she had some secret reason, like wanting me to feel ashamed about my country’s capital city. I hardly knew her but I could see she was that kind of person, a most complicated woman.77

Jean thinks poorly of the names of the roads and questions Odili if they have better historical names than those presently used.

The ambivalent attitude of Odili in relation to his girlfriend Elsie reveals the complexity of his character. As he claimed her as one of the main reasons for his interest in visiting the capital, there is no hint of respect for her person. He reveals to the reader boastfully and vaingloriously that Elsie was the girl whom he met and slept with in the same day. When asked about his commitment to the girl by Nanga, Odili disown her as simply a ‘good time’ girl.78 For that reason, the night Elsie was brought to Nanga’s house, the expectant Odili was usurped of his chance to sleep with her by the more venturous Nanga. In his failure to own up to his true self, Odili was trapped in a situation of his own making. The flimsy nature of his character could be seen in that his memory of Elsie faded easily out of his mind once he was in the company of other ladies. The fact that he intended to avenge upon Nanga did not impress the reader much because Odili himself regarded the girl as a mere
sex object. Later he even derided her as a common harlot and refused to talk further about her.

Among the contemporary Africans, the loss of pride in the traditional culture is obvious from the high regard they have towards European goods. In the book exhibition of Mr Jalio’s novel *The Song of the Black Bird*, the author was reprimanded by Nanga for his improper dress. Standing on one extreme of the debate on dress protocol, and as one who did much to project the African personality, Jalio professed to have dressed to please himself. To his defiant reply, Nanga adds: ‘If you want me to attend any of your functions you must wear a proper dress. Either you wear a suit… or if you don’t like it you can wear our national costume. That is correct protocol.’ Among the audience sat another representative character who prided himself in the foreign clothes he wore:

There was one man I noticed particularly. His robes were made from some expensive-looking, European woollen material – which was not very strange these days. But what surprised me was that the tailor had retained the cloth’s thin, yellow border on which the manufacturer advertised in endless and clear black type: 100% WOOL: MADE IN ENGLAND. In fact the tailor had used this advertisement to ornamental advantage on both sleeves.

Though Odili jokingly commented this as his people’s resourcefulness, it simply exposes the extent of degradation in the African personality. There seem to be no local product that could compete with the machine-
made goods of the West, and hence the mental slavery to the old colonial ways.

The unholy nexus between the politicians and the press is highlighted in the novel. After the book exhibition was over, the minister gave five pounds to the journalist with the understanding that his speech will be published favourably in the front page the next day. Nut Nanga’s poor attitude towards the press shows the uneasy alliance between them:

If I don’t give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me. They say it is the freedom of the press. But to me it is nothing short of the freedom to crucify innocent men and assassinate their character. I don’t know why our government is so afraid to deal with them. I don’t say they should not criticize – after all no one is perfect except God – but they should criticize constructively.81

In this analysis of the post-independent society, even the excesses and corruption of the press was not spared by Achebe. The Common People’s Convention (CPC) was formed with the impetus given by a disgruntled junior minister in the government to counter the ruling People’s Organization’s Party (POP). The founding members were professional men and women, altogether eight of them including and one outsider. It was expected to spread very soon among the common people at the grass-root level after all the modalities were worked out. Maxwell Kulamo stressed the importance of the elite class in the great revolutions of history. And it was decided that the party would not get involved in mass
bribing as they stand for exposing the corruptions of the government. They emphasized on waiting for the national turmoil which was rightly believed to happen one day, and by keeping up a brave front all through, the party could capitalize on the upheaval and change for the country for good. However the high-sounding rhetoric soon suffered a defeat by the manner in which Max Kulamo himself sold his candidature to his political opponent Chief Koko for a paltry sum of one thousand pounds.

Among a certain section of the natives there was a strong nostalgia for colonial days. One of them was Max Kumalo who felt that the new government did more harm to Nigeria than that of the colonial days. Max’s father, an Anglican priest, also thought that they should not have asked the white man to leave. According the Maxwell:

The trouble is that he hasn’t got very much out of Independence, personally. There simply weren’t any white posts in his profession that he could take over. There is only one bishop in the entire diocese and he is already an African.82

In the context of modern Africa, the government becomes the sole granary for the people of all classes. Even the minister would not resign for personal reasons, if not for greater personal benefit. So the junior minister in the new party became the agent for them to gather information about the corrupt practices of the ruling party.83
The narrator rightly points out the importance of having good connections in the new nation to climb the social ladder. It is more important who you know than what you know. Political connections rather than expertise in trade govern the order of the day. Having this in mind, Edna’s father built connections with Chief Nanga by sacrificing his daughter’s modesty. He prided in seeing himself as a prospective father-in-law of a minister. For this reason, he jealously guarded his daughter’s affection from Odili. He told Odili:

This is the time to enjoy an in-law, not when he has claimed his wife and gone away. Our people say: ‘if you fail to take away a strong man’s sword when he is on the ground, will you do it when he gets up…? He will bring and bring and I will eat until I am tired. And thanks to the Man Above he does not lack what to bring.’

With the promise of marriage made to the young Edna, Nanga paid handsome gifts to Edna’s family. Odili, on his part, avenged the minister by hijacking the affection of Edna. With the declaration of Odili’s candidature against Nanga, the attitude of Edna’s father changed from one of rage to leniency after the minister was known to have been arrested by the military regime. The attitude of the mother was not much different from that of the father. When the proposal was made by Odili she asked him: ‘What is my share in that? They are both white men’s people. And they know what is what between themselves. What do we know?’ In the new social circumstances, the selfish love for easy money
become dear mainly because of the difficult times in which they were living and partly because of the psychological degradation of the Africans.

The crucial moment the CPC had been waiting for came with the ruling government’s hike of 20% in import duties in order to compensate for the misuse of public funds. The opposition party (PAP) exposed and scandalized the dirty intention of the government in the media: “The country was on the verge of chaos. The Trade Unions and the Civil Service Union made loud noises and gave notice of nation-wide strikes. The shops were closed for fear of looting.”86 The Prime Minister was asked by the Governor-General to resign along with his cabinet which he finally did three weeks later. When the government stood dissolved the callous response of the people over the national calamity was evident in their hilarious excitement:

After seven years of lethargy any action seemed welcome and desirable; the country was ripe and impatient to shed in violent exercise the lazy folds of flabby skin and fat it had put on in the greedy years of indolence. The scandals that were daily exposed in the newspapers – far from causing general depression in the country – produced a feeling akin to festivity;… but for the rest of us who thought we had nothing to lose.87

This presents the chance to the new party to fight in the ensuing election. The loyalties of the village folks were swayed by the power of money. In the case of Urua, where the CPC launched their election campaign, the
village councillor promised Odili all the votes from the village: ‘No man will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very back yard are we not saved the journey?’ But the loyalty of the same people could change overnight by the force of might or the power of money. What one hears next is the announcement of the village crier concerning a decision already taken without the people knowing it to vote for Nanga.

Like any election process in tribal villages, the candidates gather bodyguards around them for their own security against payment of hired money. Weapons like machetes, empty bottles, stone and even guns were carried secretly for any eventuality. The practice makes a mockery of the democratic representation of the people; the will of the people was not involved in many cases. And big time players like Nanga and Chief Koko tried to buy their opponents’ withdrawal so that they can be elected unopposed. Max in fact accepted one thousand pounds from Chief Koko with the reasonable but dangerous excuse of funding their party’s campaign. But Odili flatly refused Chief Nanga’s 250 pounds with the hope to strengthen the party’s position. During the campaign, Max paid with his life in Koko’s hands and Odili survived his injuries in the hands of Nanga’s thugs. Beatrice avenged the murder of her boyfriend by
killing Chief Koko with pistol shots. After the election results were announced, Nanga and Chief Koko’s widow were declared elected.

The sudden downfall of the newly elected government came after a series of violence. After Nanga won the election uncontested, he tried to disband his private army to save himself the cost of maintaining them. But some of them who refused to be disbanded went on the rampage and ransacked one market after another unleashing a minor reign of terror. Hearing of the success of Nanga’s army, other thugs regrouped themselves and started doing the same. In the milieu the army took control of the situation and arrested all the newly elected candidates, and then began to assume power. And ironically enough, Maxwell was declared a martyr and Eunice released from jail. After his recovery, Odili married Edna by returning the bride price paid by Nanga. Finally a semblance of peace was restored after years of misrule by the civilian government. The irresponsibility of the cabinet members towards the people led to its own downfall. But the military take-over became a more troublesome issue which the novelist grapples with in his next novel.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe depicted the governing ideas and practices of military dictatorships in African. The novel took off from where the previous novel ended - the overthrow of the corrupted civil government. Set in a fictional country of Kangan, closely resembling
modern Nigeria, the novelist takes a hard look at the misrule of the military tyrannical government over the apathetic people through the collaboration of their political stooges. The army establishment after the military coup asked Sam, a young graduate from Sandhurst to lead the military government. The novel revolves around the character of the trio – Sam, Christopher Oriko and Ikem Osodi who were colleagues and products of Lugard College – with the latter two trying to play positive influence on the Head of the State. The novel also examines how an ordinary man like Sam was turned into a monstrous dictator with his elevation to the highest office in the country. The novel ought to be read together with his essay ‘The Trouble with Nigeria’ where Achebe deals with the same theme but more directly about the seriousness of utter degradation that Nigeria had slipped into. The novel knits together imagination and the historical reality of Nigeria in the 1980s, a firsthand account of the trouble besetting modern Nigeria.

The novel deals with the trouble with leadership which was directed against the unconcerned attitude towards the suffering of the people. Abazon, one of the provinces situated in the north, was presented as suffering from the severest drought in recent history. The people’s flat refusal to vote in favour of His Excellency’s candidature for life presidency was partly the cause of their suffering, after which the project
work for digging bore wells were abandoned abruptly. Sam’s blatant refusal to mitigate the suffering district, despite Chris’s insistence on a visit to Abazon is understandable when he even refused to meet the Abazon delegation in order to make amends for their past arrogance over His Excellency. The opportunistic Professor Reginald Okong apprised Sam about new developments in the state, and acted as his informer, while Chris and Ikem intended to influence their colleague, His Excellency in the right direction. In a state run by a weak dictator, His Excellency became vulnerable to the wiles of his malevolent subordinates who would rather flatter than tell the truth. As a result, much time had been wasted on managing the crisis within the cabinet that very little was done to really run the government.

The military government under Sam ironically fears the people from whom they robbed the power of the state; the illegitimacy of their rule without the sanction of the people’s mandate makes them nervous all through the novel. The activities of the people were monitored and appropriate measure taken to control them. The haunting fear of Sam at mass procession and the like were assayed with the appointment of the young, brilliant and aggressive Major John Ossai as the Director of the State Research Council (SRC) which functioned as the state’s secret police. Implicated by Prof Okong on the Abazon question Ikem Osodi,
the editor of the *National Gazette* and a native of the district pleaded for the cause of the poor people of the country through his crusading editorials.

The sudden arrival of Abazon delegation intrigued His Excellency when he learned that none of the cabinet members had any prior information locked all of them inside the office. When Prof Okong was summoned by His Excellency presumably for questioning, the sweet-tongued Minister of Home Affairs was asked to represent Sam and talk peaceably with the delegates. Sam told Prof Okong that:

…we must remember that these are not your scheming intellectual types or a bunch of Labour Congress agitators but simple, honest-to-God peasants who, from all intelligence reports reaching me, sincerely regret their past actions and now want bygones be bygones. So it would be unfair to go up to them and say: “You can go away now, His Excellency the President is too busy to see you. You get me?…Find some nice words to say to them. Tell them we are tied up at this moment with very important matters of state…”

In order to win the President’s good will, Prof Okong concocted his unfounded suspicion that Chris and Ikem were not working in the interest of His Excellency’s government: “I don’t want to be seen as a tribalist but Mr Ikem Osodi is causing all this trouble because he is a typical Abazonian.” Again, as a smart politician, he alerts the President on the danger posed by the two colleagues:
Whether to alert you, I mean Your Excellency, on your relationship with the Honourable Commissioner for Information and also the Editor of the Gazette.

...I believe that if care is not taken those two friends of yours can be capable of fomenting disaffection which will make the Rebellion look like child’s play. And if my sixth sense is anything to go by they may be causing a lot of havoc already.92

The poison which Prof Okong planted in the mind of the President alarmed Sam and later asked the Attorney-General to investigate the ‘gossip’. To heighten the President’s insecurity, the Attorney-General relayed to him the advice of the Old President Ngongo: “Your greatest risk is your boyhood friends who grew up with you in your village. Keep them at arm’s length and you will live long.”93 As a matter of fact, Chris had been treating His Excellency as “the boy next door”.94 The Head of State was kept in good humour with the perfected art of flattery disguised as a debate: ‘We do not have any problem in worshipping a man like you. Honestly I don’t. You went to Lord Lugard College where half of your teachers were Englishmen.’95

As a true nationalist Ikem became the mouthpiece for the novelist for exposing the evil of military rule and critiquing the society that allows such despotic rule in their country. His crusading editorials in the *National Gazette* antagonized the leadership while at the same time achieving the intended aim of educating and exciting the masses to reform the country. In directly confronting the government by exposing
their misrule Ikem hoped to whet the dwindling confidence in the people themselves to bring about positive change to their country. He said to Chris that “Our best weapon against them is not to marshal facts, of which they are truly managers, but passion. Passion is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble.” So Ikem took up issue after issue on subjects of national importance and those that affected the people directly. The execution of four natives over petty theft presented him the chance to expose the massive theft and crimes committed by the top officials of the government. The fight was undertaken by Ikem on behalf of the people who themselves did not show any sign of sympathy towards their fellow countrymen. The moral bankruptcy of the people has become a herculean task for people like Ikem to handle. The very next day, Ikem wrote to the President to promulgate against the law pertaining to public execution.

Ikem understood (and was ready to pay with his life) the risk involved in playing the crucial role that he and Chris must play to guide the President in the right direction. In an atmosphere of flattery and deceit attending his high and responsible office, the truth ought to be told before it is late:

I am sure that Sam can still be saved if we put our minds to it. His problem is that with so many petty interests salaaming around him all day, like that shyster of an Attorney-General, he has no chance of
knowing what is right. And that’s what Chris and I ought to be doing – letting him glimpse a little light now and again through chinks in his solid wall of court jesters; we who have known him longer than the rest should not be competing with them. I have shown what light I can with a number of controversial editorials… If Sam were stronger or brighter he probably wouldn’t need our office…

Ikem then reminisces Chris’ theory on the military vocation which consists of two groups. According to Chris military attracts two types of people: the truly brave and those who appeared strong. The first type of people is rare and for them they do not have to show off their strength. On the other hand, the second group are pretending to be strong with the heart of a coward. Sam belongs to the second category and so poses a problem for the nation. The problem with Sam lies in the fact that he is easily swayed by other people’s opinions and ideas and lacked any conviction of his own. For instance, it was his admiration for the white headmaster, John Williams on whose advice he abandoned a career of a medical doctor for military occupation. Ikem knew that Sam on his own posed no danger when he said:

In fact the sort of intellectual playfulness displayed by Sam must be less dangerous than the joyless passion of power of many African tyrants. As long as he gets good advice and does not fall too deeply under the influence of such Rasputins as Reginald Okong we may yet avoid the very worst.

Self-interest rather than the love of the people motivated people like Okong to hold on to power in perpetuity. So it was from dangerous people like him that Sam needed to be safeguarded.
Achebe’s detailed description of Reginald Okong’s personal life showed the people who really endangered the new nation. Okong was a rejected ordained Baptist pastor for his personal ambition while undergoing training abroad. With a dress code of “khaki safari suits complete with epaulettes” spoke of Okong’s eagerness to identify with the military establishment and manipulate power for his selfish ends. His meteoric rise from a simple school-teacher to that of a professor in the university, and from filling a column ‘String Along with Reggie Okong’ in the National Gazette through the mentoring of Chris to becoming a cabinet member served as a fit illustration for the dangers of political cronyism. According to Ikem, the fellow “deserved to be hanged and quartered for phrase-mongering and other counterfeit offences.” Chris learned later that his writing for the national paper was interspersed with lots of cliché which showed his lack of creativity. Unlike Okong, Ikem would not use flattery to keep the politician bemused and favourable, but chose to speak truthfully on behalf of the people. But Okong was seen as one of the most promising cabinet members, perhaps because of his ability to keep the President in good humour.

In an environment ruled by political incapability and stupidity, people like Okong had their full chance to overtly take control of the situation with their sharpened sense of opportunism. Loyalty and
gratitude are values missing in Okong. Having no morality of his own, Okong could debase himself to any level to fulfil his ambition. According to Ode Ogede, ‘Manipulation, intrigue, and opportunism are Okong’s defining qualities.’ Achebe’s presentation of Okong as one of the most revolting figures in literature can but be attributed to the influence of western culture on the native mentality.

The threat to an Independent African country like Kangan comes not only from ambitious people from within but also those foreign countries or corporations that hold economic interest in the country. Ikem rightly pointed out that:

The real danger today is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America, and from all those virulent misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa sired on Africa by Europe. Particularly those ones. Within a short time, Sam also came under the influence of the same forces that produced dictators in Africa and the sudden change in him can be seen after he attended his first OAU meeting: “He spoke like an excited schoolboy about his heroes; about the old emperor who never smiled nor changed his expression no matter what was going on around him.” It was learnt that the President wished to be like President Ngongo from whom he learnt the habit of saying kabisa (which means ‘enough’ or ‘enough is enough’) after the meeting.
In this serious and highly tense novel, Achebe includes the comic character John Kent who is locally known as Mad Medico. He came to Kangan and held a portfolio in the cabinet basically because of his close association with the President. He was a close friend of both Sam and Ikem and the only person on whose near deportation both fought together on the same side over the issue of the graffiti he inscribed in the hospital. In the cardiac ward he wrote ‘Blessed are the poor in heart for they shall see God’ with the purpose of cheering them up. Another interesting inscription in the venereal ward reads ‘TO THE TWIN CITIES OF SODOM AND GONORRHEA’. He presents the lighter side of the corrupt leadership when he redefines Lord Acton’s theory of power: “…the most awful thing about power is not that it corrupts absolutely but that it makes people so utterly boring, so predictable and …just plain uninteresting.” Like Ikem, Mad Medico was known to be a straightforward who openly spoke or even joked about the things that he disagreed with. To the American visitor Dick, he complained about his being seen as prejudicing against the people as the British colonial officer did in the past. By now the country must have wakened up with some amount of national consciousness and therefore saw every foreigner with suspicion.
The novelist uses Ikem to express his suggestions for solving the problem of Nigeria. The novel is Achebe’s response to the complaints of various critics that he did not provide any solution for the problems besetting Nigeria or Africa. Ikem called it ‘new radicalism’ which in content is close to Marxist ideology with the difference in the objective which is reformation rather than revolution of the masses. In his lecture at the Kangan University, he emphasized the fact that they represent only the student’s community. In the frank opinion of Ikem and by extension Achebe’s, the people themselves become the parasites that eat up the nation’s property. When the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was proposed, Ikem dismissed it as another kind of imprisonment and not a solution to the problem; even if such dictatorship is composed of angels, Ikem spoke of his reservations. The students are not different; ‘I regret to say that students are in my humble opinion the cream of parasites.’ The insensible response of the audience which only produced laughter in response to the serious charges against them shows a grim future. For this very reason, Ikem tells them to go home and think. In the absence of all other people like the working class and traders, the limited political consciousness among the people as a whole makes the movement for reform weak at that juncture. Taught by experience, Ikem’s approach to freedom and the need for reform in the country is seen as laudably truthful. As he told Beatrice:
Experience and intelligence warns us that man’s progress in freedom will be piecemeal, slow and undramatic. Revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable stretch of quagmire but it does not confer freedom, and indeed hinder it.  

Ikem is in favour of not disturbing the core of the reality of the African society because he is convinced that any drastic change in them would only destroy the whole system it tries to reform. He likened the contemporary society to an individual suffering from psychological problems. The best psychoanalyst would do to cure mental sickness is to reform by rearranging some defects in the periphery of the human personality:

Society is an extension of an individual. The most we can hope to do with a problematic individual psyche is to re-form it. No responsible psychoanalyst would aim to do more, for to do more, to overthrow the psyche itself, would be to unleash insanity. No. we can only hope to rearrange some details in the periphery of the human personality. Any disturbance of its core is an irresponsible invitation to disaster. Even a one-day-old baby does not make itself available for your root-and-branch psychological engineering, for it comes trailing clouds of immorality… It has to be the same with society. You re-form it around what it is, its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction.

As a keen observer of his country’s political culture, Ikem pressed for the freedom to disagree and contradict. Orthodoxy in its basic practice only precludes death to creativity and change which are the primary necessities for any vital society. In his role as a reformer artist, Ikem knows the high stakes involved but encourages himself with the thought that he would receive a just reward at the end. The reward he talks about resembles the
Christian concept of heaven where the saints would be received after their earthly work is done.

In his modern novels, Achebe also problematizes the institution of marriage among the educated elites in order to truthfully reflect the impacted change of attitude towards women and the sacredness of marriage. In the village novels, marriage was held sacred in the polygamous Igbo society. There is no mention of adultery in the tribal society. One of the possible reasons could be that it is a taboo to speak about it, or that the morality of the natives was actively strong in controlling the people. The first mention of sexual act outside of marriage was of the Obi-Clara affair in *No Longer at Ease* after they were both western-educated and were exposed to the fast Western life-style in England. In *A Man of the People* women were looked upon as mere sex objects. For instance, Elsie was a ‘thing’ on which both Nanga and Odili crave to satisfy their sexual desires. She was not looked upon as a prospective marriage partner. Odili who professed have loved betrayed her as only a ‘good time girl’ before Nanga finally took advantage of her. In the same manner Beatrice of *Anthills of the Savannah* had years of affairs with Chris without the latter even proposing marriage. His indifferent attitude towards the safety of Beatrice revealed the shallowness of his love when the latter informed him of His Excellency’s
invitation to the Retreat Party. Chris does not seem to mind even if Beatrice had slept with the president when he coldly advised her:

Look BB,… in any country and any language in the world an invitation by the Head of State is a virtual command even when he does not pick up the phone personally to issue it. So my dear girl you will go and you may do some good. Sam is not such a fool you know. He knows things are now pretty hopeless and may see in you a last hope to extricate himself. You may be able to help.

‘How?’

‘My dear, I don’t know. But let’s keep all options open. It’s never too late.’

There is no sense of jealousy in his tone and does not seem to mind to even lose her. Stung by anger she uttered in disgust, “‘Chris is damn too reasonable.’” In this sense Obi Okonkwo commands greater respect with all his failings.

In a society that looks upon marriage as a sign of good breeding, the senior spinster Beatrice is exposed to the danger of becoming the talk of the whole village community, especially among the younger girls. Having had developed an independent outlook through experiences in her paternalistic family since childhood, Beatrice did not believe in the prevalent opinion that women wanted men to achieve completeness. Her acceptance of Chris was based on the love which believed in lifelong adjustments from both sides:

Emotionally then I had no reservations whatsoever about Chris from the word go. But intellectually I had to call into full play my sense of danger. In a way I felt like two people living one skin, not two hostile
tenants but two rather friendly people, two people different enough to be interesting to each other without being incompatible.\footnote{112}

It was from Beatrice that Ikem derived his education on women and their crucial role in the national struggle against the government. He had written a full novel on the contribution of women in the Women’s War of 1929 which stopped the British administration cold on its tracts. In the traditional society, women were seen as the last resort, as the only thing left when the clan is at the helpless end of things. Beatrice complained that such a role is a little ‘too late’.\footnote{113} The change in Ikem’s attitude towards the role of women in the modern tribal society can be seen in his ‘Love Letter’ which he read to Beatrice. Looking from the perspectives of both the Christian and Igbo traditional beliefs, women were the object of blame for the problems in the society in olden days. Ikem also knows that it is the womankind who sweeps together the broken pieces of the embittered history of the nations. Like the anthills, women became the bearer of the stories of what happened in the past to the country.

In chapter eight of *Anthills*, Achebe uses a flashback to recast the ethos of the traditional society by likening Beatrice with the mythical water goddess Idemili who was sent to become a lake in the vast desert quenching the thirst of millions throughout the land. In the final scenes it was Beatrice who gathered in her house all the helpless people.
representing different sections of the people. In Beatrice, everyone finds recognition and acceptance which is missing in the impersonal world of the civil or military government. As the daughter of the almighty, she intervenes into the destiny of the main characters in more ways than one. In the dinner party at the Presidential retreat, she came face to face with the foreign saboteurs and got the chance to present a number of concerns she had for the nation which the President himself was not aware of. Beatrice disapproves strongly of the leadership’s eagerness for foolishly seeking the approving eyes of the foreign visitors on matters of national importance which are strictly private. She also expressed her strong reservations against the modelling of their poor country’s economic and political policies on Western countries which only degrades the home country further. Ironically enough, the foreign experts encouraged the poverty-stricken country to “maintain its present (quite unpopular, needless to say) levels of foreign debt servicing currently running at slightly more than fifty-one percent of the total national export earnings.” Beatrice is aware that dependence on foreign countries deprived the home country of local initiatives and enterprise, and an import of goods from western countries endangers the country’s economy. In assuming the role of mediator, she took upon herself the duty of warning and trying to save her two friends from the ruthless hands of the military government. But the situation in the country had
become so bad that none of her attempts were sufficient to save them. In the end both Chris and Ikem paid with their lives, but the ideals they stood for lives on.

In the novel the struggle of Chris and Ikem in some ways was related with the taking of the ozo title in olden days; Beatrice became in that sense the priestess who came between the goddess and the title seekers, predicting the future and giving warnings beforehand. To Chris she admitted the same thought:

You called me a priestess. No, a prophetess, I think. I mind only the Cherubim and Seraphim part of it. As a matter of fact I do sometimes feel like Chielo in the novel, the priestess and prophetess of the Hills and Caves….I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first… He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you. We are all in it, Ikem, you, me and even him… You and Ikem must quickly patch up this ridiculous thing between you that nobody has ever been able to explain to me.¹¹⁵

Beatrice knew what will happen to them from observing all that transpired in the Retreat Party she attended the previous night. And she told Chris:

What I heard and saw last night frightened me. Ikem was being tried in absentia and convicted. You have to save him, Chris. I know how difficult he is and everything…But you simply have to cut through all that. Ikem has no other friend and no sense of danger. Or rather he has but doesn’t know how to respond. You’ve tried everything in the book, I know. But you’ve got to try them all over again. That’s what friends are for. There is very little time, Chris.¹¹⁶
It was through the counsel of Beatrice that Chris realized the futility of exerting positive influence on the government that he chose to resign from the ‘namesake’ cabinet. This courageous step became for Chris the beginning of a new chapter in his life, of following the path of Ikem by directly involving in the lives of the common people.

With the leaders of the Abazon delegation put behind bars, and Ikem murdered under mysterious circumstances, it was time for Chris to reveal the truth to the people. Within a short while, the President was also kidnapped and done away with, while Chris got killed trying to save the dignity of a girl from a policeman. As the leader of the delegation said, the story lives on through the small community that came together in the house of Beatrice. A baby girl was born to Ulewa and Ikem whom Beatrice named AMAECHINA which when translated means ‘May-the-path-never-close,’\textsuperscript{117} meaning the path that Ikem had laid. The novel ends with a note of hope by underpinning the strength of the newly formed community

that was to prove stronger than kindred or mere friendship. Like Old kinships this one was pledged also on blood. It was not, however, blood flowing safe and inviolate in its veins but blood casually spilt and profaned.\textsuperscript{118}

This was the same community that provided comfort and sympathy to the grief-stricken duo, Beatrice and Ulewa.
Achebe’s five novels therefore reflect truthfully the cultural history of the Igbo tribe since the late nineteenth century till date. The advent of colonialism in Igboland brought immense changes in the individual psyche and personality of tribal people. The communitarian way of life crumbled under the influence of a dominant western culture. The impacted tribal individual therefore found himself ‘empowered’ to rise above the will of the community. So, the tribal world of Chinua Achebe is recast through a tribal perspective which is also a postcolonial recovery of the Igbo people in a cultural sense. But a major conflict had emerged in the postcolonial Igbo community centring round tribal communitarian ethos of the past and individualism ushered in by the colonial modernity in Africa. The next chapter has concentrated on this aspect as a part of a larger conflict between tradition and modernity.
Endnotes:


5 Ibid.


11 Ibid., p. 127.

12 Ibid., p. 7.

13 Ibid. p. 3.

14 Ibid., p. 11.

15 Ibid., p. 16.

16 Ibid., p. 22.

17 Ibid., p. 23.

18 Ibid., p. 16.

20 Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 28.

21 Ibid., p. 152.


24 Ibid., p. 3.

25 Ibid., p. 85.

26 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

27 Ibid., p. 179.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 58.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 190.

33 Ibid., p. 46.

34 Ibid., p. 148.


36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., p. 167.

38 Ibid., p. 178.

39 Ibid., p. 188.

40 Ibid., pp. 201-202.

41 Ibid., p. 230.

42 Ibid., p. 133.
Ibid., pp. 189-190.


Ibid., p. 18.

Ibid., p. 4.

Ibid., p. 5.

Ibid., p. 3.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. 140.

Ibid., p. 75.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 123.


Ibid., p. 7.


Wren, p. 99.


Ibid., p. 6.
88 Ibid., p. 125.

89 Ibid., p. 134.


91 Ibid., p. 18.

92 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

93 Ibid., p. 23.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., p. 24.

96 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

97 Ibid., p. 46.

98 Ibid., p. 50.

99 Ibid., p. 4.


102 Ibid., p. 86.

103 Ibid., p. 52.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., p. 55.

106 Ibid., p. 56.

107 Ibid., p. 160.

108 Ibid., p. 99.

109 Ibid., pp. 99-100.

110 Ibid., pp. 72-73.

111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., p. 89.
113 Ibid., p. 92.
114 Ibid., p. 78.
115 Ibid., pp. 114-115.
116 Ibid., p. 118.
117 Ibid., p. 222.
118 Ibid., p. 218.