

# A SITE OF STRUGGLE

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Two of the main justifications for concentrating on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*<sup>1</sup> and *No Longer at Ease*<sup>2</sup> are that the symptomatic<sup>3</sup> reading of these two texts will reveal how the use of language incorporates the warning that the site of the 'shared' discourse- the literary text- is not the site of a shared mental experience and how the construction of counter-hegemonies is in part contingent on the very structure of language itself .

We will avail ourselves of the concept of discourse as developed in the work of Michel Foucault. A discourse in the Foucaultian sense is a system of possibility for knowledge. The concept of truth is paramount here. Foucault says:

*The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and function would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics of truth', that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. <sup>4</sup>*

And adds:

*My problem is rather this: what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth? Or alternatively, what type of power is susceptible of producing discourses of truth that in a society such as ours are endowed with such potent effects? What I mean is this: in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There*

*can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.* <sup>5</sup>

Also Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, in *The Empire Writes Back*, argue that 'Power is invested in the language because it provides the terms in which truth itself is constituted' and that 'the structure of power is perpetuated through language, which is also the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order' and 'reality' become established'.<sup>6</sup>

In order to approach this question of how the use of language incorporates the warning that the site of the 'shared' discourse is not the site of the shared mental experience it is necessary to mention three important features of postcolonial writing. The first feature is the silence and marginalization imposed on the postcolonial voice by the imperial centre. The second is the abrogation of this imperial centre within the text and the third the active appropriation of the language and culture of that centre. Before advancing it is necessary to define the last two processes. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define the abrogation or denial of the privilege of English as 'a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication; a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage ...'.<sup>7</sup> They regard the process of appropriation as one in which the language is captured and remoulded to new usages and 'made to 'bear the burden'<sup>8</sup> of one's own cultural experience'.<sup>9</sup> Post-colonial literatures are therefore cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between 'worlds', a gap in which the simultaneous processes of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practice. Here we shall take up Homi.K.Bhabha's concept of hybridity. He writes in *The Location of Culture*<sup>10</sup>: '... colonial hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two cultures... Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so the other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority- its rules of recognition'. In the Introduction to the same book he writes: 'What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences'. His interest lies in those 'in-between' spaces, those interstices where negotiation constitutes itself. Power does not disappear in that other space but because of the nature of

the confrontation its semiotic system changes and the same values are not ascribed to the same signs.<sup>11</sup>

In *Things Fall Apart* it is Achebe who writes the story, it is his voice that tells the tale. As James Snead writes in *European Pedigrees / African Contagions* Achebe 'expropriates and pre-empts (albeit only in fiction) an attempted white usurpation of his story'.<sup>12</sup> He says at the end of the book:

... in the book which he planned to write he would stress that point.... The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading... He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.<sup>13</sup>

It is not the District Commissioner- the delegate of power- who speaks in the name of that terrible Other, but it is the black voice itself that speaks. Achebe not only abrogates the means of communication but appropriates it, 'pushing back those limits to appropriate his idea'. He makes the language 'bear the burden of his experience'. Some of the strategies he resorts to are glossing, untranslated words, similes - based on African not European realities, allusion and difference, code-switching and vernacular transcription.<sup>14</sup> Achebe inserts a glossary at the end of *Things Fall Apart*, and here he matches words from the Ibo language to English. To show how this strategy works, let us take one gloss. In matching 'obi' and 'hut' Achebe is revealing the general inadequacy of the glossing. The putative referentiality of the words *obi* [ ]<sup>15</sup> (hut) is put into question by the implicit gap between them. It is this gap that establishes 'obi' as a cultural sign and highlights the continual reality of cultural distance. As for untranslated words, the only example available in *Things Fall Apart* is the song that Ikemefuna sings on his way to death:

*Eze elina, elina!*  
*Sala*  
*Eze ilikwa ya*  
*Ikwaba akwa oligholi*  
*Ebe Danda nechi eze*  
*Ebe Uzuzu nete egwu*  
*Sala*<sup>16</sup>

Achebe's refusal to gloss the song aims at making overt that alterity which is implicit in glossing and negating the higher status glossing gives to the translated word. In *No Longer at Ease* Achebe has already discarded glossing. Words like *ojare* (p.117), *aghada* (p.191), *uli* (p.145) and *garri* (p.55) remain untranslated clearly

showing it is not the putative referentiality of the word but its use in the situating context which confers meaning. When it comes to similes we have to say that they are mainly drawn from the African tradition. Let us give some examples:

*...words that filled the mouth like the proverbial dry meat.<sup>17</sup>*

*'It is like the story of white men who, they say, are white like this piece of chalk,' said Obierika ...*

*'And these white men, they say, have no toes.'*

*'And have you never seen them?' asked Machi.*

*'One of them passes here frequently,' said Machi.*

*'His name is Amadi.' Those who knew Amadi laughed. He was a leper, and the polite name for leprosy was 'the white skin'.<sup>18</sup>*

*... proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.<sup>19</sup>*

We shall take issue here with the second of the similes since it is the one that most blatantly challenges our own cultural assumptions. For us white is synonymous with innocence; for Africans white is synonymous with leprosy, with disease. As regards code-switching and vernacular transcription, we have to say that they are perhaps the most common methods of inscribing alterity by the process of appropriation. One of these features is the narrator who 'reports' in Standard English but moves along in the dialogue of the characters. One of the examples of switching between codes occurs when Achebe transcribes 'broken' English. In *No Longer at Ease* the bus driver is saying to Obi:

*'Why you look the man for face when we want give um two shillings?' he asked Obi.*

*'Because he has no right to take two shillings from you.' Obi answered.*

*'Na him make I no de want carry you book people,' he complained. 'Too too know na him de worry una. Why you put your nose for matter way no concern you? Now that policeman go charge me like ten shillings.'<sup>20</sup>*

Another case in point is when Joseph, Obi's friend, says:

*'Ah? Na Obi go buy you that-o. Me I never reach that grade yet.  
Na squash me get.-o.'*

And then the narrator says:

*Whether Christopher spoke good or 'broken' English depended on what he was saying, where he was saying it, to whom and how he wanted to say it. Of course that was to some extent true of most educated people, especially on Saturday nights. But Christopher was rather outstanding in coming to terms with a double heritage.<sup>21</sup>*

Finally, allusion and difference also register cultural distance. We shall take our example from *No Longer at Ease*. While Obi is making the journey home to Umuofia, in the Eastern region, some traders burst into song. The song is not in English.

*Obi knew the refrain, he tried to translate it into English, and for the first time its real meaning dawned on him.*

*'An in-law went to se his in-law  
Oyiemu-o  
His in-law seized him and killed him  
Oyiemu-o  
Bring a canoe, bring a paddle  
Oyiemu-o  
The paddle speaks English  
Oyiemu-o.'*

*On the face of it there was no kind of logic or meaning in the song. But as Obi turned it round and round in his mind, he was struck by the wealth of association that even such a mediocre song could have. First of all it was unheard of for a man to seize his in-law and kill him. To the Ibo mind it was the height of treachery. Did not the elders say that a man's in-law was his chi, his personal god? Set against this was another this was another great betrayal; a paddle that begins suddenly to talk in a language which its master, the fisherman, does not understand. In short, then, thought Obi the burden of the song was 'the world turned upside down'.<sup>22</sup>*

This example is very telling. In spite of the fact that the song has been translated into English, it is so crammed with cultural signifiers that we need Achebe to explain it to us. Once the context with its allusions and differences has been grasped we, too, can make sense of the song.

In the article entitled *The Role of the Writer in a New Nation* Achebe declares:

*For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing situations and modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his idea. The first method produces competent, uninspired and rather flat work. The second method will produce something new and valuable to the English language as well as to the material he is trying to put over. But it can also get out of hand. It can lead to simply bad English being accepted and defended as African or Nigerian. I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through mastery of English and not out of innocence.*<sup>23</sup>

The aforementioned strategies allow Achebe to construct difference and appropriate English. Such uses of language have an important function in inscribing difference. They signify a certain cultural experience which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation. In this sense they are directly metonymic of that cultural difference which is imputed by the linguistic variance. The use of English inserts itself as a political discourse in postcolonial writing.

It is necessary here to link the process of appropriation and discourse. We consider it relevant to engage ourselves with the problem of how power and political relations in society produce different fields of knowledge. Foucault says: '*... it (power) doesn't only weigh on us as a form that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse*'.<sup>24</sup> Foucault remarks that we often hear the clichè '*power makes mad*'<sup>25</sup>, but we should consider the fact that '*... the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge ...*'.<sup>26</sup> Here the concept of discourses as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak is of special interest. As Jean-Paul Sartre says in the Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* '*Not so very long ago, the Earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants:*

five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives. The Former had the Word; the others had the use of it'.<sup>27</sup> In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe subverts this. He is writing the story from the perspective of the margin, the colonized, the diaspora and so the traditional image evoked is now stood on its head. He escaped from the oblivion of silence, from the 'white prison' of history. Had the District Commissioner written his book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, we would have had the coloniser's vision imprinting on the native the reductive but convenient stamp of the demonic and the coloniser-observer established as the unquestioned source for knowledge and power. In *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* colonisers are put under glass, as in an aquarium.<sup>28</sup> In *No Longer at Ease* Mr Green, Obi's boss, gives his opinion about Obi's case and about Africans in general:

*'The African is corrupt through and through.'*

*'They are all corrupt,' repeated Mr Green. 'I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won't alter facts.'*

*'The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?'*<sup>29</sup>

Here we have what Edward Said sees as one of the common traits of centuries of orientalism. Africans are not presented as beings with potentialities or history in process of development, rather they are presented to us as static stereotypes, almost ideal.<sup>30</sup> In saying that Africans have '*been sapped mentally and physically*' and that '*equality won't alter facts*', Mr Green is ostensibly alienating his own language of liberty and producing another knowledge of its norms. As Homi. K. Bhabha says the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite is the sign of a double articulation. It is, he says, '*a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline*' and, at the same time, '*the sign of the inappropriate, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both normalized knowledges and disciplinary powers*'.<sup>31</sup> He argues that for the 'colonial' to be represented there must be some kind of limitation or prohibition within the authoritative discourse itself.



Consider what Obi's father tells him when he learns that his son wants to marry an *osu* (an outcast):

*'We are Christians,' he said. 'But that is no reason to marry an osu.'*  
*'The Bible says that there are no bond or free.'*  
*'My son,' said Okonkwo, 'I understand what you say but this thing is deeper than you think.'*<sup>32</sup>

In saying this Mr Okonkwo is not only mocking his moral project but he is violating a central Christian tenet which forbade any tolerance of heathen faiths. Take as another example the following:

*...the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government. It was said that they had built a place of judgement in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion.*<sup>33</sup>

*..in this way Mr Brown learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. and so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia.*<sup>34</sup>

What Achebe is saying here is that the missionaries were producing not only a knowledge of Christianity but a knowledge of Christianity as a form of social control. Nevertheless, the authority of colonial discourse is profoundly disturbed by the effect mimicry has on it. The 'normalization' of the colonial subject brings about the production of another knowledge of the norms of the civilising discourse. Let us illustrate this point by looking at *No Longer at Ease*. On returning to Nigeria Obi is given a welcome. At this reception Obi speaks about the value of education on the threshold of independence.

*'Education for service, not for white-collar jobs or comfortable salaries.'*<sup>35</sup>

The audience, however, is not impressed by his address. They expect a man from England to speak 'the kind of English they admired if not understood: the kind that filled the mouth, like the proverbial dry meat'.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that Obi shows willingness to trust European declarations, regarding them as literal truths rather than class- and history-determined remarks of interests and groups, he speaks 'is' and 'was'. There is a tension between the audience's expectations of a discourse of power for which language is itself a sign -the incorporation in the centre- and the demonstration in Obi's language of the opposite process, that is, resistance. He is,

in this way, appropriating the language, emerging as a conscious antagonist, disrupting received notions of truth, proposing claims and advancing arguments. The authoritative, compelling right usage which mastered the procedures of intellectual mastery finds here its opposite in this 'impure' language. This process of 'normalization' of the colonial subject does not allow us to overlook the fact that imperialism occurred at the level of economic laws, political decisions as well as education. In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi is holding a meeting with a Nigerian recently arrived from England. This man's sister wants to apply for a scholarship in England and he is asking Obi to do him a favour. As there is a European, Miss Tomlinson, in the office the man asks Obi to speak in Ibo. Yet

*Although he (Obi) spoke in Ibo, there were some words that he had to say in English. Words like school certificate and scholarship. He lowered his voice to a whisper when he came to them.*<sup>37</sup>

The fact that Obi has to resort to English is a telling clue to the status of education. These two words are the purveyors of the mysteries which will always be inaccessible to the 'uneducated', for education, class status, and an ability to speak 'standard English' will always be synonymous. In *No Longer at Ease* Achebe says:

*Mr Okonkwo believed utterly and completely in the things of the white man. And the symbol of the white man's power was the written word, or better still, the printed word. Once before he went to England, Obi heard his father talk with deep feeling about the mystery of the written word to an illiterate kinsman:*

*'Our women made black patterns on their bodies with the juice of the uli tree. It was beautiful but it soon faded. If it lasted two market weeks it lasted a long time. But sometimes our elders spoke about uli that never faded, although no one had ever seen it. We see it today in the writing of the white man. If you go to the native court and look at the books which clerks wrote twenty years ago or*

*more, they are still as they wrote them. They do not say one thing today and another tomorrow, or one thing this year and another next year ...'*<sup>38</sup>

In the Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* Sartre claims that a trait of the modern form of imperialism was that it was, or at least, purported to be an educational movement. Sartre says:

*The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, white-washed.*<sup>39</sup>

This point can be supported by the following lines from *No Longer at Ease*.

*A university degree was the philosopher's stone...*

*And the disparity in salary and amenities did not tell even half the story, to occupy a "European" post was second only to actually being a European.*<sup>40</sup>

University education allowed Nigerians to occupy a 'European post'. This was considered second 'only to actually being a European' - the same, but not quite. As Mr Green says, 'But what use is it to him?' 'He has been sapped mentally and physically'. His words uncover the fact that even 'on the threshold of independence' 'the nineteenth century divide between native and Westerner'<sup>41</sup> still holds. After being arrested for taking bribes and while the trial is taking place we learn that Obi is 'able to look words like *education* and *promise* squarely in the face'.<sup>42</sup> As Bhabha says, 'It is from this area between mimicry and mockery where the reforming civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double...'.<sup>43</sup> He has violated the law and the inviolability of their worlds of discourse. As Foucault says, subjugated knowledges have voice and the fallacy of representation is broken.<sup>44</sup> There has been an 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'.<sup>45</sup>

Let us now take issue with the two poems quoted in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease: The Second Coming* and the *Journey of the Magi*. As Bhabha says in *Nation and Narration* Achebe takes the title for his book *Things Fall Apart* from Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming* but he rewrites the text. The choice is not a small or negligible point. We must bear in mind that, despite the fact that Yeats has been incorporated into the English canon, he is a poet that belongs in a tradition not usually considered his, that of the colonial world ruled by British imperialism during an insurrectionary stage. It should be observed here that although Yeats sounds the nationalist and nativist note as a result of the colonial encounter he cannot go further, that is, he cannot cross the threshold of reactive native defensiveness. The difference between Yeats and Achebe thus lies in the accents and inflections of liberation that traverse Achebe's discourse. His is a discourse of liberation that marks the second moment of decolonization, the era of liberationist anti-imperialist

resistance, the first being the period of nationalist anti-imperialism. This liberationist anti-imperialism fuels the cultural task in hand: rewriting a history and culture that, although shared, enslaved. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe sets out to fulfill this task by adopting the idea of cycle used by Yeats but instead of presenting the cycle to us as barbarism (negative)- Christian era (positive)- third period (negative) he disrupts this and stresses the negative effect that this Christian phase had on African culture. Yeats:

### *THE SECOND COMING*

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falconer cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, and  
everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned,  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand,  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? <sup>46</sup>*

In *Things Fall Apart* we can see how Achebe subverts and reverses 'the white man's exclusivist definitions of history and culture'. On his first visit to Okonkwo in exile Obierika brings him 'a woeful story': Abame has been destroyed by white men and a few survivors have fled to Umuofia. Obierika says:

*'If I had not seen the few survivors with my own eyes and heard their story with my own ears, I would not have believed.'*

*'They (the men of Abame) have paid for their foolishness,' said Obierika. 'But I am greatly afraid. We have heard stories about white men who made the powerful guns and the strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true.'*

*'There is no story that is not true,' said Uchendu.*

*'The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others.'*<sup>47</sup>

Two years after Obierika's first visit the missionaries are already in Mbanta. There are six of them and one is a white man. Out of curiosity the people of Mbanta gather to see him. Then the white man begins to speak to them through an interpreter. He tells them that their gods are 'gods of deceit' and that there is one true God. One man asks him:

*'If we leave our gods and follow your god who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?'*

The white man answers:

*'Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm,' replied the white man. 'They are pieces of wood and stone.'*<sup>48</sup>

Here we have the evangelizing/conquering authority deploying the binary oppositions of true god/ gods of deceit and reality/appearance and making the first element in the opposition the bearer of truth. In such a way Western man is imposing his way of seeing and believing and downplaying the indigenous gods and ancestral traditions. But Achebe reverses the missionary/coloniser's view when he reports Okonkwo's feelings on his son's treachery.

*Now that he had time to think of it, his son's crime stood in its stark enormity. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors. Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation.'*<sup>49</sup> (my italics)

Okonkwo offers us a different view of things. For him and others like him Christianity represents the threat of annihilation looming ahead- '*things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*'.

In *No Longer at Ease* Achebe avails himself of the *Journey of the Magi* by T. S. Eliot. The writer and intellectual who now seizes the lines of this poem does so in a catachrestic gesture of reinscribing it and using it to transform the locus of thought and writing in his postcolonial critique. The aim of this strategy is to rearticulate the Western knowledge of Christianity from the perspective of those that resist totalization. As Bhabha says in *The Location of Culture*: '*The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the grounds of knowledge, or to engage in the 'war of position'<sup>50</sup> marks the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies of identification*'.<sup>51</sup> The repetition is not the same, that is, the repetition of the sign is in each social practice, in this playing across cultural sites, different. Let us look at this stanza to get a better hold of the kind of reversal Achebe performs on the poem.

*Journey of the Magi*

*All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
And I would do it again, but set down  
This set down  
This: were we led all that way for  
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,  
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,  
But had thought they were different; this Birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.*<sup>52</sup>

For the Magi this Birth represents life in the new faith and the Death of their old selves, their being 'no longer at ease with the old dispensation'. After the journey their own people have become 'alien'. For Obi and millions like him this Birth represents death. Achebe is concerned with a complex cultural situation where the imposition of foreign ideas, cultural representations and structures of power subjugated and rendered invisible indigenous spiritual and intellectual needs. Let us illustrate our point by looking at a passage from *No Longer at Ease*:

*'Olulu ofu oge, 'he began in the tradition of folk tales, but that was all he knew. His lips quivered but no other sounds came out. <sup>53</sup>*

On being asked by the teacher to tell the rest of the class a folk story, Obi is unable to do so. What we have here is the impossibility of re-membling <sup>54</sup>, of putting together a dismembered past and culture. Hannah, Obi's mother, had stopped telling her children folk stories because her husband forbade her to do so.

*'We are not heathens, ' he had said. 'Stories like that are not for the people of the Church. '<sup>55</sup>*

In the words of Obi's father we can hear both the voice of the native catechist converting the heathen and the oppositional voices of a native culture of resistance silenced by the Word of God.

Let us now take issue with Obi's journey. After his 'journey', his voyage *in* Obi is 'no longer at ease in the old dispensation'. As Sartre says: *'After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, white-washed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed'.* <sup>56</sup>

Consider this episode in *No Longer at Ease*. This is what Joseph tells Obi when he learns that he wants to marry Clara - an *osu*.

*'Look at me, 'said Joseph, getting up and tying his coverlet as a loincloth. He now spoke in English. 'You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an osu is? But how can you know ?' In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country - the most painful thing one could say to Obi. <sup>57</sup>*

In Joseph's words we glimpse what Bhabha has described as the 'mimic man' <sup>58</sup>. He says, quoting Macaulay: *'A class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'.* <sup>59</sup> The effect of a process, *'in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English'* <sup>60</sup>, that is, almost the same, *but not quite.* <sup>61</sup> He has endorsed the Western predicament and therefore questions, disputes and disavows his people's age-old customs. After his mother's death Obi no longer feels guilty for the suffering his decision to marry an *osu* inflicted on her.

He no longer felt guilt. He, too, had died. Beyond death there are no ideals and no humbug, only reality. The impatient idealist says: 'Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth.'  
But such place does not exist. We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace. The most horrible sight in the world cannot put out the eye.<sup>62</sup>

Thus for Obi and many like him this Birth represents Death. It is important here to insist on the reversal performed by Achebe on the vision of Christianity depicted by Yeats and Eliot. For the Nigerian writer the intrusion of Christianity and Western values was destructive since it disrupted the values that gave these societies their moral cohesion. Here there is one point worth making about *No Longer at Ease*. This point is that in this novel Achebe seems to be unable to get beyond a dispiriting phase of strong disaffection with the process of independence. Saying this by no means involves denying Achebe's appropriation of English to create an anti-hegemonic counter-discourse. As Sartre says, '*a new generation came on the scene, which changed the issue*'.<sup>63</sup> For this new generation Europeans are no longer 'valid intermediaries' but 'the object of their speeches'.<sup>64</sup> Achebe himself belongs to that generation of poets, scholars and political leaders from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean that have challenged and overtaken the massive edifice of Western empire.

By way of conclusion, Achebe's work is only 'apparently dependent'<sup>65</sup> since he appropriates the language to put it to new uses. The emergence of the fragility of the word, of the word in its fragility is not an act of weakness. Rather, 'it is an action in itself- a dangerous act'.<sup>66</sup> He is, in a Gramscian sense, an organic intellectual<sup>67</sup> related to the mass resistance to empire. He is a new social operator who designs a specific cultural politics and reflects on cultural practices as counter-hegemony.

Prof. Silvana Noeli Fernández



## NOTES

1. Chinua Achebe (1997), *Things Fall Apart*, Oxford, Heinemann New Windmills.
2. Chinua Achebe (1994), *No Longer at Ease*, New York, Doubleday.
3. I use the word symptomatic as used by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989), *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, London and New York: Routledge, p.52:

*For Bhabha it is preferable to read the tropes of the text as metonymy, which symptomatizes the text, reading through its features the social, cultural, and political forces which traverse it.*

The word is also repeatedly used by Edward Said (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage. Take as one example the following:

*That neither Yeats nor Fanon offers a prescription for making a transition after decolonization to a period when a new political order achieves moral hegemony is symptomatic of the difficulty that millions of people live with today. (p. 284)*

The word is also used by Homi.K.Bhabha (1995), *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge. Take as one example the following:

*Nor can it be represented as a dialectical problem or a symptomatic contradiction constitutive of the materiality of the 'real'. (p.24)*

4. Michel Foucault (1980), *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Great Britain: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.131.
5. *ibid*, p.93.
6. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989), *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 167-168
7. *ibid*, p.38.
8. Quoted in Chinua Achebe (1975), *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, New York: Doubleday, p.62. Achebe is quoting the American writer James Baldwin but I cannot trace the reference further.
9. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p.38.
10. Homi. K. Bhabha (1995), *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, pp.114 - 1.
11. Homi.K. Bhabha (1997), 'La cultura de Internet no es cosmopolita', *magazin literario*. No.4, pp.72-73.
12. James Snead (1995), 'European Pedigrees/African Contagions: nationality, narrative and communality in Tutuola, in Homi.K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 242.

13. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p.183.
14. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*.
15. As used by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p.62.
16. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p.53.
17. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.37.
18. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, pp. 64--65.
19. *ibid*, p.6.
20. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.50.
21. *ibid*, p.125.
22. *ibid*, p.53.
23. Quoted in Gilbert Phelps (1995), "Two Nigerian writers: Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka", in *From Orwell to Naipul*, in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford, London: Penguin Books, vol. 8, pp.320-321.
24. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.119.
25. *ibid*, p.51.
26. *ibid*, p.51.
27. Frantz Fanon (1990), *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin Books, p.7.
28. Marina De Chiara (1996), "A Tribe called Europe", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds), *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies Divided Horizons*, London and New York: Routledge.
29. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.4.
30. Edward W Said (1990), *Orientalismo*, Madrid: Libertarias.
31. Homi. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp.85- 86.
32. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.151.
33. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p.136.
34. *ibid*, p.159.
35. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.37.
36. *ibid*, p.37.
37. *ibid*, p.98.
38. *ibid*, p.144.
39. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.7.
40. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.105.
41. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.269.
42. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.3.
43. Homi.K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.86.
44. Miguel Morey (1983), *Lectura de Foucault*, Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, p.235.

45. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.81.
46. William Butler Yeats (1969), "The Second Coming", in *The Collected Poems of W.B Yeats* Edinburgh: Macmillan, p.210.
47. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p.123.
48. *ibid*, p.127.
49. *ibid*, p.134.
50. Bhabha is using a Gramscian concept. I quote from Fred Inglis (1995), *Cultural Studies* Oxford: Blackwell, p.75:

*Much struck by the analogy of war between classes which was one of communism's earliest slogans, Gramsci applied the analogy with unusual thoroughness to politics. He saw class warfare as a 'war of position' like the World War in which the trenches were the deeply embedded frontline of a massive structure of provision and reinforcement. The trenches may be broken into here and there, but unless that vast structure is riddled and shifted, such victories are merely tactical. In a famous formulation, 'the superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare.*

Inglis is quoting from Antonio Gramsci (1974), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Lawrence & Wishart, p. 235.

51. Homi.K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 162.
52. T.S. Eliot (1966), "Journey of the Magi", *Selected Poems*, London: Faber, p.98.
53. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.66.
54. Homi.K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.63.
55. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.65.
56. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.7.
57. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.82.
58. Homi.K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.87.
59. *ibid*, p.87. Bhabha is quoting from T.B. Macaulay, "Minute on Education", in W. Theodore de Bary (ed.) (1958), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, vol. 2, p.49.
60. *ibid*, p.87.
61. *ibid*, p.86.
62. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p.190.
63. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.9.
64. *ibid*, p.9.
65. Edward W Said (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage, p.293.

66. Michel Foucault (1994), "Introducción", in *De Lenguaje y Literatura*, Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós, p.17.

67. The concept of *organic intellectual* was developed by the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci. Each social group effects a new type of intellectual that gives it homogeneity and understanding of its own function in the economic, social and political field. But each new social group, on its coming into existence from the previous economic structure and as an expression of the changing process of production, finds pre-existing intellectual categories that appear as representatives of a historic continuity, not even interrupted by the most radical political or social changes. Gramsci calls them *traditional intellectuals*. These two concepts must be understood within the framework of his strategy of cultural politics. Here we must engage with the concept of *hegemony*. A predominant class produces and maintains power or, as Gramsci calls it, hegemony, via civil society, where a set of ideological practices guarantees the *status quo* anchored in political society. Most accounts appear to regard hegemony as predominant power that manages to assure spontaneous consent- not coercion- to its dominant operations. Gramsci sets out to understand the operations of hegemony, the operations of predominant ideologies and languages, as well as the operation of counter-hegemony and what he proposes is rationally planned political and cultural intervention. The object of his cultural programme is not to work for a public opinion that legitimates economic social and political inequities. Its object is to understand the needs of readers and consumers, and then to transform and homogenize them through a process of organic systematic thought. So in designing his cultural politics, in reflecting on cultural practices as counter-hegemony to bourgeois culture and ideology, Gramsci operates with the concept of a new social operator, an engineer, an organic intellectual who designs plans and instruments for implementing a new culture. Lastly, he understands language, or communicative practices, as a territory which both enables and delimits possibilities of freedom. The materiality of language thus figures in Gramsci's understanding of consciousness and its relation to the production of hegemony and counter-hegemony. For Gramsci this invention of counter-hegemonies is in part contingent on the structure of language itself. (my italics)

I have, for convenience, composed this passage from different sources:

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Los intelectuales y la organización de la cultura*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, pp.9-27.
2. Fred Inglis (1995), *Cultural Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 75-79.
3. Raymond Williams (1983), *Keywords*, New York : Oxford University Press, pp. 144-146.

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