



Issues of Identity in Chinua Achebe Novels

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ABSTRACT

The concept of human identity is connected to culture and the environment. This work delineates the concepts of “identity” and “culture,” as well as their implications in literary works, specifically in some of Chinua Achebe’s novels. This study also examines contemporary challenges of identity and culture in Nigeria in connection to those presented in the works of Chinua Achebe. This study reveals that identity is a dynamic and ever-evolving process: it is not static, it continues to evolve, and it eventually becomes broadly recognised by society.

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Chinua Achebe, one of Africa’s most influential literary figures, has had a profound impact on modern society through his literature. His works, particularly "Things Fall Apart" (1958), have shaped global perceptions of African culture, history, and identity while addressing universal themes of colonialism, tradition, and modernity. Below is a discussion of his influence on modern society. Achebe's works have played a pivotal role in challenging the Eurocentric narratives that dominated literature about Africa. By presenting African societies with complexity, dignity, and nuance, he has: restored African voices in literature. His portrayal of Igbo society in "Things Fall Apart" and other works highlighted the richness of pre-colonial African cultures. He inspired pride in African heritage. Achebe’s literature empowered many Africans to embrace their cultural identities amid the impacts of colonialism and globalization. Achebe is considered one of the founding figures of postcolonial literature. His works have: inspired generations of writers. Authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and others draw on Achebe’s themes and storytelling techniques. His exploration of the tensions between tradition and modernity resonates with societies navigating postcolonial realities. Achebe's literature scrutinizes the



cultural and psychological consequences of colonialism. He brought awareness of historical injustices: His novels explore the human cost of colonialism, fostering discussions about historical accountability and reparations. Achebe examines how colonial and indigenous cultures interact, contributing to modern conversations about identity and globalization. Through his storytelling, Achebe bridged cultural gaps. His works are studied globally, providing insight into African perspectives and experiences. He has Challenged stereotypes: Achebe dismantled harmful myths about Africa by humanizing its characters and societies. Achebe's themes remain timely and universal. His literature addresses political corruption and leadership: In works like "A Man of the People" (1966) and "Anthills of the Savannah" (1987), he critiques the pitfalls of post-independence governance. His exploration of cultural erosion, resistance, and adaptation continues to resonate with individuals and communities facing similar challenges today. Achebe's novels penetrate not only the older form of existence but also locate the issues of identity and culture in the contemporary Nigeria. The novels are incorporated three essential phases of African or rather Nigerian history. The first phase draws attention towards the loss of pristine glory of a civilization that had flourished on the strength of its own merits and demerits. The second phase elucidates the painful experience of colonialism and the process of disintegration, pacification and invasion. Finally, the struggle against the foreign domination, the establishment of indigenous rule foregrounds the sense of the issues of identity and culture. Achebe's novels penetrate not only the older form of existence but also locate the issues of identity and culture in the contemporary Nigeria. The novels are incorporated three essential phases of African or rather Nigerian history. The first phase draws attention towards the loss of pristine glory of a civilization that had flourished on the strength of its own merits and demerits. The second phase elucidates the painful experience of colonialism and the process of disintegration, pacification and invasion. Finally, the struggle against the foreign domination, the establishment of indigenous rule foregrounds the sense of the issues of identity and culture. Nigeria is comprised of around 250 different ethnic groups. The three major largest ethnic groups have been divided by the religious lines. The Hausa-Fulani in the north comprises by Muslims, The Christian Ibo are in the south-east, and the animistic Yoruba in south-west Nigeria. By scattering into the different groups, the people in Nigeria struggle to foster the sense of nationalism, consequently the identity of them as a united nation seems weakened. The conflicts on the ground of economic and religious differences between the north and the south are the sources of violence and unrest among the people. It has been observed that the British didn't consider the ethnic groups in the region during Independence. On the parts of the Nigeria, Efforts were not made to unify the people of Nigeria with certain National identity. It created the political turmoil



after Independence. To some extent, the nationalism among the people of Nigeria was built up in the Independence movement early in the 1960s but it was discarded quickly due to the distinct ethnic groups. The civil conflict between the religious and tribal groups is the major issue of the Nigerian Identity. The north part of Nigeria advocates the religious laws according to the local demands of the Muslims, subsequently the federal government left the local governments and the *Sharia* riots took place between Hausa Muslims and Ibo Christians in 2000. It is about the issues of their culture and the judicial systems. In the parts of Sharia, There are the restrictions for women to the traditional roles in the public spheres. The feminine identity issues are still posed to the religious domain. The inequality in economical share between the southern and northern part creates the disparity between the southern rich people and northern weaker sections causes the conflicts among them.

On the other hand, The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is the major oil producing part of the country. Due to the environmental issues, the crisis has occurred between the government and the *Ogoni* people. Security forces are unable to control the area and typically exacerbate the social issues. The violence and International boycotts have resulted to control the environment and to protect the human rights in the region. Nigeria is also a capitalist society, which proclaimed the social division resulting from the huge amount of petroleum related wealth, which poured into the country during the late 1960s. It has resulted in two stratified classes within Nigeria; a wealthy, politically influential elite class funded by oil wealth and the poor tribal class without access to representation or social mobility. The levels of bribery and corruption have made in impact on the part of their social issues. In Achebe's first four novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966) the social system is exposed with the identity issues which evaluate the characters on the basis of their dilemma, actions, adjustments and interactions with the natives. It can be argued that the protagonists of these novels like Ogbuefi Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo, Ezeulu, Chief Nanga lead certain types of 'pride' to regulate the cultural norms in order to keep the cultural and social values vibrant. *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) differs from the identity issues due to the similar sort of intensions are found among major characters like Sam, Ikem, Chris and Beatrice. Excluding Sam, others perceive the similar moral and ethical standards to aware the people of Kangan regarding the good governance. Each of the novels of Achebe considered as a delectable cameo containing the subtle enfoldment of a particular stage or aspect of the process of change from prosperity to adversity that has taken place in the Igbo society.



It is evident that the identity theory is not only helpful to assess the individuals according to their depths, but also finds the sense of virtuousness accordingly to mould with the different situations. Identity issues chart the social movements from the fringe of individual to individual and individual to social. Moral power plays a pivotal role in such cases. We find Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* (1964) struggle for social power and the moral codes make them to realise about their individual crisis, even the issues of their identity have the social influence. In *No Langer at Ease* (1960), the predicament of Obi Okonkwo represents the state of the educated Africans. He is torn between two cultures and fails to achieve the goals. He learns that the ideals must be supported with practical wisdom. In *A Man of the People* (1966) Chief Nanga's struggle for political power makes a sense of the identity issues regarding the pursuit of a 'national cake'. Odili Samalu gets into the traps of identity issues that suggest the conflict between individual and salience. *Anthills of Savannah* (1987) represents the political powers by exposing its failure to connect with the masses in the fictional state Kangan. It reflects the need of a range of possibilities to open up the new horizons as the remedies to its social malaise

Things Fall Apart (1958) reflects the issues of identity and culture of the Igbo people of Nigeria. Ogbuefi Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel wants to hold the reputation in the clan by taking the reputed 'titles' one of the pre-eminent men in the village of Umuofia. His ambitions to keep the clan vibrant during the invasion initiated by the British people got failure, As a man of action, he didn't tolerate the insults caused by the 'womanish' reaction of his clan towards the colonial power, subsequently, he decides to avenge by killing one of the 'kotmas' court messengers. At the end, he commits suicide by hanging himself to the tree. It can be argued that he was himself responsible for his fall, but the things fall apart in Umuofia at the advent of colonialism results in the issues of identity of the people in Nigeria. Ogbuefi Okonkwo's attempt to identify himself as a man of 'titles' in the clan is the part of his 'pride' that never allowed him to adjust with the inevitable changes in the society. The beginning of the novel makes a sense about his 'personal achievements' that made him to consider him with certain respect in the clan. The novel begins as, "Okonkwo"Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino" (p. 3). Okonkwo' strength earns a reputation as a wrestler, besides he is a warrior and had taken the heads of five victims at the age of twenty-one. His prosperity is visible including two barns full of yams, three wives, nine children and two titles, all symbolizes his success. It is evident that the social constructs play the significant role to



form the self-identity and vice-versa. Okonkwo's instance in the Igbo clan is a perfect illustration of it. He brings honour to the clan and the clan honours him for his achievements. The novel brings out the duality of Umuofian clan. It has not only manly men like Okonkwo but also weak-willed people like Unoka. They represent the cultural issues of their society. But their patterns of behaviour disclose the hidden facets of their character. Okonkwo, though the man of action, aggressive is not cruel at heart. Similarly, Unoka is a failure as an individual. But the fact that he is a mystic surface when he plays on musical instruments. On such occasions, one could see "his face beaming with blessedness and peace" (TFA, p. 4). The Igbo clan too follows the same patterns of culture. Both its culture and identity are projected with aesthetic sense and practical wisdom is evaluated by the practice of different customs and the rigid judicial system. Briefly, the novel takes place in a late-1800s Nigerian Ibo village of Umuofia, prior to the arrival of the first Christian missionaries and British officials. The main character, Okonkwo, represents the tragic hero who has status, prestige, bravery, wealth and a strong desire to succeed to make up for his father's failings. However, as a tragic figure, Okonkwo's human flaws contribute to his downfall. More broadly, however, Okonkwo represents every man who must have a strong enough self-image and personal integrity to battle new ways and customs from a competitive culture. It doesn't describe the actual geographical location or region in Nigeria, but it gives an ornate description of the cultural ethos of the Igbo community. In *Longer at Ease* (1960), The Umuofian society represents values of the past, While Nigerian Capital Lagos, is cosmopolitan urban presents, where everyone take a refuse to seek the fortune, no holds barred, for the meagre parks of the effulgence. Umuofia is rurally conservative, the hybrid amalgam of pagan and established Christian respectabilities. Obi finds the bonds of kinship and conservative values suffocating during the disruptive period of rapid change. The Umuofia Progressive Union was established in Lagos for the welfare of the Igbo people of Umuofia. Obi was sent to London on scholarship for further education to acquaint the English – based knowledge. "They (Umuofia Progressive union) wanted him to read the law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours" (NLE, p. 6). It means that the youth are motivated and mobilized by the ethnic society as the instruments for conflict and protecting the self-image of the society. But when he got to England; He did graduation in English instead of studying law. The Umuofian Progressive Union got angry and left him alone. He got the 'European post' as a civil servant in Lagos. Achebe's concern to focus on Obi Okonkwo is to describe that he is not only the product of Umuofia but also of Lagos and Europe. He is dismantled to return to his origin; moreover he is no longer at ease in the old dispensation. His engagement with Clara breaks off and financial problems became so critical when he learns that Clara is pregnant. He manages to get the money for a bungled



abortion of Clara, but, unfortunately, Clara leaves him as she doesn't want that there should be the problems for Obi in his clan after marriage. On the other hand, Obi's mother dies and Obi doesn't attend the funeral of her. His absence from the funeral is called 'a thing of shame' (NLE, p. 126). His conduct was equated with the act of his father Isaac (Nwoye) who didn't attend his father's means Ogbuefi Okonkwo funeral. The President of Umuofia Progressive Union comments; "A man may go to England, become a lawyer or a doctor, but it does not change his blood. It is like a bird that flies off the earth and lands on an anthill. It is still on the ground" (NLE, p. 127-128). Obi's frustrations after the departure of Clara from his life, death of his mother and financial burden made him to accept the bribe of twenty pounds that the disgraceful thing occurs in the life of Obi, who suffers throughout the novel to know his real identity in Nigeria. Obi Okonkwo's moral decay cannot be blamed on the ecological syndrome or even on his contact with Western cultures. It is also inappropriate to assume that Western education and Western culture is a panacea for our moral ills.

Chinua Achebe's literature not only reshaped how African stories are told and perceived but also fostered critical discourse on identity, colonialism, and modernity. His enduring legacy lies in empowering marginalized voices and encouraging society to reflect on the complexities of history, culture, and humanity.

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