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The Igbo People and Influence of Acculturation: Taking a Lead from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*

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ABSTRACT

It is often perceived that we have advanced as a Nation due to Westernization, but taking a closer look at it, one discovers that the Igbo people have been enslaved without their knowledge to adopt Western culture of injustice, disobedience, bribery, corruption and so on at the expense of their rich cultural heritage that promotes communal living, hard work, truthfulness and justice. Though Westernization emancipated the people from cruel practices but it ought not to wean them away from their culture. Therefore, to extricate the culture from extinction, the Igbo people need to retrace their steps and cease from neglecting the culture, but rather, welcoming it back from the long years of negligence, compensating it with quality appreciation as we discover the rich beauty inherent in it.

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Introduction

Since there is no society without a culture and no culture can be said to be superior to the other, it is of a good interest to probe the effect of Western influence on our culture, with reference to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Western influence began to gain ground into our socio-cultural milieu despite the fact that it distorted the pace of our cultural growth. The profound consequences of Western influence have had its toll on our religion, our people's social lives as well as our entire being, which is seen as an unbridgeable cultural gap between our culture and people. This gap can be attributed to the Western interference on our culture, which resulted in the precipitous decline of traditional cultural pursuit. Be that as it may, as pointed out earlier, no culture is said to be superior to the other.

With our culture being subjugated, westernization began to outgrow our rich cultural heritage, which paved way for Western culture to wean our people away from their culture, just as Diwan Sai succinctly puts it, "School was used to wean Africans away from their indigenous culture in order to accept the superiority of the white race" (12). As a result, our people to were made to consider our cultural ways of doing things as inferior, primitive, backward, archaic, barbaric, disgusting and unacceptable in the public domain. Not only that our culture is now considered devilish and "unchristian", but certain aspects of it has been totally destroyed beyond any imaginable recovery, thereby making every effort geared towards cultural progress to become somehow impracticable. Just as Mimiko rightly puts it:

The social fabric was completely devastated and a new culture of violence was implanted. Traditional African system of conflict resolution was destroyed and in their places nothing was given. The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution was brutally uprooted and replaced by

authoritarianism. A new crop of elites was created, nurtured and weaned on the altar of violence and colonialism armed with the structures of the modern state to continue to carry out the ail of subjugation on the mass of the service of colonization (641-42).

From the foregoing, one will understand that Westernization in the guise of civilization is an imposition of new culture over our cultural values. It is important to emphasize fundamentally that urgent steps are needed to be taken in order to reverse this ugly trend of cultural emptiness without which our culture may experience seasons of extinction, as Christianity which is a product of Western civilization has crushed our cultural beliefs and methods of social control such as divination and dispute settling methods as regards to the consultation of oracles. The place and authority of dead ancestors have been doubted and questioned, as the Westerners are so glad whenever they see the converts throw away the traditions of their homeland in enthusiasm to embrace a new faith. Healthy institutions like marriage that commands respects for husbands and love for wives, and ensures social security through curbing the issues of flirting, for the healthy growth of the society as it extends life to the posterity which is the bedrock of our ancestral worship.

Thus, while human sacrifice, unreasonable war that emanates from time to time to disturb the societal peace, etc have been discarded and new ideas begin to evolve, an "ozo" titled man believes that he has made a covenant with the ancestors, to stand on justice, truth and solidarity at all times but with Western influence, it was replaced by widespread injustice, lies, betrayals, armed robbery, bribery and corruption, indiscipline, disobedience and desecration of the holy places. No doubt, some havoc has been caused to our culture as a result of misdirection, misrepresentation and misunderstanding caused in turn by sentiments and overzealousness.

It may be wrong to outrightly condemn the Western culture in its entirety. However, there is need to reject the negative impact of Western influence on our culture so that policy makers can begin to see the need to reappraise their policies that contribute to the cultural dearth of our culture. A consideration of the recent happenings in the way we do our own things becomes pertinent here. Recently some countries of the Western world threatened to boycott our bilateral agreements with them just because Nigeria refused to sign for gay marriage. The same people, it is good to say, would not want anybody mention polygamy because it is against their cultural belief, and should therefore not be talked about by anybody.

Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a story of Okonkwo and his down fall. In the novel, Okonkwo struggles with the negative legacy of his father - a shameless debtor, who is good at nothing except playing the flute - as well as the complications and contradictions that arise when white missionaries arrived in his village, Umuofia, to explore the terrain of cultural conflict, particularly the encounter between Igbo tradition and Christian doctrine.

In *Things Fall Apart* the reader is introduced to Okonkwo, a wealthy and respected warrior in the nine villages of Umuofia clan. He does everything within his reach in order not to be like his father and so did all he could to achieve greatness by becoming a farmer, a warrior, taking as many titles as possible and marrying many wives to produce more hands that will work on his farmlands as well as providing for the family. Coincidentally, he had a son named Nwoye whose lazy attitudes made him afraid and he thought that the boy might later in life, bring shame to him as it seems to him that the boy has his father's (Unoka's) silly attitude.

As it turned out, there arose a dispute between Umuofia and Mbaino as a result of the wife of a tribe's man (Ogbuefi Udo) who was killed in Mbaino's market and for peace to reign, Mbaino offered a virgin to replace the woman and a boy for sacrifice. The virgin was given to Ogbuefi Udo as his wife and the boy, Ikemefuna, was on Okonkwo's custody for his safekeeping. He finds in Ikemefuna an ideal son and Nwoye looks up to him. Not minding that Ikemefuna calls him "father" he does not want to show his affection for him. He stayed with Okonkwo for three years before the coming of locust.

Again, during the Peace Week Okonkwo attempted beating his wife, Ojiugo, to death for neglecting her domestic duty due for the fact that she went to make her hair. He mercilessly beats her contrary to the dictates of tradition, and broke the peace of the sacred week. He showed remorse by offering sacrifice and this shocked his community greatly. Then as the people were happy in collecting locust because it is edible when cooked, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, came to tell Okonkwo, privately that the oracle wants Ikemefuna killed but warned him not to have a hand in his death because he calls him "father". When Ikemefuna asked about where they were going to, Okonkwo lied to Ikemefuna, that they were taking him back to his village to see his mother and though he was afraid, the thought of his mother and sister made him happy but Nwoye who sensed the impending doom bursts into tears.

On their way after they had walked for several hours, the man at Ikemefuna's back raised a machete to kill him but missed doing it. Then he confidently ran to Okonkwo, whom he believed will save him but to his utmost dismay Okonkwo

drew his own machete and cut him down in order not to be seen as a weak person in the sight of his people.

Okonkwo, returned with a moody feeling and Nwoye seeing his mood, realized that his friend is dead.

Okonkwo was greatly depressed that he neither ate nor slept. In a bid to come out of this mood, he visited his friend Obierika whose daughter was getting married. Okonkwo's daughter Ezinma fell ill but with the help of leaves gathered in the bush, she was healed.

The death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu was announced through the *ekwe* and Okonkwo felt guilty because he remembered that the last time Ogbuefi visited him was to warn him against having a hand in Ikemefuna's death. In the funeral, Okonkwo's gun exploded and accidentally killed Ogbuefi Ezeudu's sixteen year old son, which was considered as an abomination against the earth goddess and this attracted his seven years exile with his family. For this reason, Okonkwo had to take solace in his maternal home at Mbanta and his hut in Umuofia was burnt by Ogbuefi Ezeudu's men and his animals killed in a bid to cleanse the village from Okonkwo's sin.

On his arrival at Mbanta, his uncle Uchendu and others received him warmly; they helped him to build new huts and lent him yams to start farming and make a fresh start in life. He was devastated for his misfortune but he reconciled himself to his motherland. Obierika brought bags of cowries for him which was from his farm proceeds. Obierika told Okonkwo the ill news of Abame, which was destroyed by the white men. Later, six missionaries travelled to Mbanta where they were given an evil forest to build their church after which Okonkwo went back to his fatherland having finished serving his punishment for the offence he committed. Through an interpreter named Mr. Kiaga, their leader Mr. Brown spoke to the villagers and told them that they are worshipping false gods and termed them idolatrous and introduced the Almighty God which they did not understand. On the other hand, the missionaries also aimed at converting residents of Umuofia to Christianity. Mr. Brown did not allow his followers to antagonize the clan.

When Mr. Brown was ill, he was replaced by Rev. James Smith, who released the zealous converts to desecrate the land by turning everything up-side-down. Enoch unmasked an *egwugwu* in one of the annual ceremony to honour the earth deity, which to villagers was tantamount to killing an ancestral spirit. The next day, the *egwugwu* burnt Rev. Smith's church and Enoch's compound, and this incident attracted the intervention of the District Commissioner who requested that the leaders of Umuofia should visit him. When they came, they were handcuffed and put in prison; they suffered all forms of insult from the officials, and later they were fined heavily.

When they were released, the people held a meeting during which five court messengers came to warn them to dissolve their meeting and Okonkwo saw it as another insult. He rushed and killed one of the messengers expecting others to do the same but they relented, allowing them to escape which shows that they are not ready for war and he being the scapegoat went home and hanged himself due to the fact that he needs no humiliation from the Whiteman again.

When the District Commissioner arrived at Okonkwo's compound, he found out that Okonkwo had hanged himself. His friend Obierika and one of his friends led the commissioner to the dangling body explaining to him that suicide in their land is a great abomination and according to

their custom, that none of his clansman should touch his body. The commissioner, who was writing a book about Africa, considered the story of Okonkwo's rebellion and death as a nice material that will make an interesting paragraph in his book titled: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

Achebe's novel, *Arrow of God* (1964, was published six years after the first novel; in fact, *Arrow of God* was his third novel. It explored the intersections of Igbo traditions and European Christianity. Set in the village of Umuaro at about the start of the twentieth century, the novel tells the story of Ezeulu, a chief priest of Ulu. Shocked by the power of British intervention in the area, he orders his son to learn the foreigners' secret. Unfortunately, just like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Obi in *No longer at Ease*, Ezeulu is consumed by the resulting tragedy.

The story of *Arrow of God* is about Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, a god worshipped in the six villages of Umuaro. It was when the village of Umuaro was fighting against a nearby village Okperi, over a piece of land that Ezeulu told them that they should desist from the fight because the land does not belong to them but they did not heed to his advice until Mr. Winterbottom intervened. When the war ended the Christian missionary, John Goodcountry, arrived in Umuaro to preach to them about a Christian god. Due to their intimacy, Ezeulu sent his son Oduche to learn the white man's ways through the church, and be his eyes and ears. At this point the enmity between Ezeulu and Nwaka has grown to the point of using poison. Nwaka maintaining a good relationship with Ezeidemili, the priest of Idemili, who fortified him thereby creating an unhealthy competition between the two priests, and this, was almost dividing the village of Umuaro into two antagonistic groups, creating unhealthy suspicion among brothers.

The unhealthy rivalry spread like wild fire to an extent that the Christian missionaries called on the new converts, and in a bid to express their belief sent Oduche to kill the sacred python. Oduche in trying not to disappoint his mentor captured and imprisoned the snake in the box instead, and this was discovered by the family members when the box started moving. It was considered as an abomination doing such thing to the royal python which belonged to the god of Idemili and when the priest of Idemili heard about it, he sent message across to Ezeulu, asking him how he intended to purify his family as regards to the wrath of the god that his son had incurred but Ezeulu neglected this enquiry.

Later Captain Winterbottom considers Ezeulu as the man qualified to rule the people of Umuaro as their chief and sent someone to call him but he refused to go but later changed his mind and went. He was detained though the servants were afraid, and they made him comfortable in the guard room, pretending that it is a guest room. After the first night he envisioned that the battle was with his own people not the white men as he saw Nwaka challenging Ulu and the people spitting on him. He equally envisioned that the Whiteman took the advantage of the division among them to sow the seed of destruction. He hoped that Captain should prolong his detention so he could plan his revenge better. After several months of detention, he was offered the post of chief but he refused and was locked again on Captain Winterbottom's order, until he had learnt to cooperate but when Clark realizes that he has no legitimate reason to keep Ezeulu in prison he released him; as he heeded Winterbottom's advice against creating warrant chiefs he released Ezeulu to go.

At home, Ezeulu realized that his anger was directed not against his real neighbours but against an idea that they were mocking Ulu and disrespecting Ezeulu. With that, he withheld the announcement of the feast of New Yam even when his assistants came to remind him but he sent them away. So, when the people came to enquire why the date for the New Yam has not been announced, he told them of the three sacred yams that is still remaining due to the fact that he could not finish it as a result of being locked up in Okperi, so they should wait for another three months which is the period it will take him to finish the yam and the men were horrified, because by that time their crops would be in a heap of ruin and then there will be great famine. Despite the fact that they begged Ezeulu to eat the yam quickly and if there should be any consequence at all let Ulu visit it on their heads but Ezeulu refused and insisted that they must wait.

Mr. Goodcountry recognizing this opportunity told them to bring their tubers of yam to Almighty God as their first fruit harvest, so that they can harvest their yam with the protection of the Almighty God; so they did that. Meanwhile Obika, who was sick was asked to help in the funeral preparation of Amalu by carrying the mask of Ogbazulobodo, the night spirit and chasing after day, runs fast and hard to the extent that he dropped dead when he returned. The people summed it to be a judgment against Ezeulu, as Ulu had spoken. Ezeulu had become stubborn and proud and the god did not take sides with him against the people. Though, that was a bad time to humiliate the priest, as it allowed the people to take their liberties, to harvest yam in the name of Christian God and with that, Christianity gained an upper hand over the worship of Ulu, the traditional god. Thereby, humiliating the chief priest and turning the people away from the original life which they have been accustomed to since the days of their ancestors.

The Effect of Western Influence on Our Culture in *Things Fall Apart*

The novel, *Things Fall Apart*, depicts the serene peaceful nature of Igboland before the coming of the Westerners through hero of Umuofia village called Okonkwo, who showed how it was our way of life to appreciate hard work, tolerance, discipline, love for one another, etc. But as the Westerners appeared on the scene, they struck the bond that held our culture together and things fell apart. The church that was built in an evil forest converted many people, who were encouraged to come and worship a true God on the seventh day of the week. The Westerners succeeded in brainwashing the people, being their new converts, to believe that they do not worship the true God, succumbing to the fact that only the Western God is authentic.

In trying to concretize the worship of the portrayed true God, Mr. Kiaga taught people like Nwoye to disobey their parents by backing it up with the religious quote which has it that "Blessed is he who forsakes his father and his mother for my sake". He intoned that "those that hear my word are my father and my mother" (122). Truly, Western influence brought sorrow to parents like Okonkwo as well as others, who were custodians of a culture that maintained high degree of respect for parents and elders, to watch his first son join the religion which is seen as an abomination to the land. Children without the consent of their parents joined the church and instead of teaching them obedience to their parents, taught them disobedience by encouraging them to continue with their independent decision of worshipping a foreign god despite their parents' vehement opposition.

Consequently, Western influence emancipated most people of whom the greater number was women from the burden of incessant killing of the twin babies and the practice of *Osu* and outcasts thereby making everybody equal.

This he supports with the statement, "Before God, there is no slave or free; we are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers" (125). Though it thrived in good condition but thoughtless converts that ought to direct the white man on the areas that the culture needed modification turned out to be the people with the silly zeal of desecrating the culture of the land by killing the sacred python which is the epitome of the water god that protectively looked after the land as it crawled harmlessly around.

The wives cooperated with their husband to see that the household or community task was done wonderfully well together with their children as our cultural values and unity; there was togetherness of family as well as kinsmen, but the coming of the Westerners made the younger generation to consider themselves wiser than their parents (133), owing to the fact that they do not understand how strong the bond of kinship is due to the nature of the religion they practiced. They were advised to leave their fathers and their ancestors just like the hunter's dog that suddenly went mad and turned against his master. This carefree attitude left nothing but pangs of fear in the hearts of the elders.

In a bid to embrace the church properly, Ogbuefi Ugonna, who has taken two titles, cut his anklets that were symbols of his culture to adopt the Western ways instead. The masquerade cult that settles all forms of dispute amicably was replaced by Kotma, who now presides over the case of the people of Umuofia. But despite the fact that the Whiteman did not speak the native tongue nor did he understand the culture, he ended up calling it a bad culture and the silly converts accepted it. Though the people were initially amused at the white man's foolishness and allowed him to stay, they later won over our brothers, and our clans no longer act as one. He put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (141). And the conflict that escalated was as a result of lack of understanding and each party did nothing but called the other fool due to the fact that they failed to recognize their differences.

It was in the apex of the unimaginable Western influence of desecrating the land, that Okonkwo, the great hero of Umuofia claimed his life by committing suicide due to the fact that he could not continue to fold his hands and watch his rich custom deteriorate without making any move to salvage it and this quest for emancipation led him to kill one of the court messengers who had come to stop the clan's meeting. Unfortunately, instead of moving together to fight the common enemy as it was before, the people stood rooted to the ground watching what will happen to their brother from afar. At the end, when the District Commissioner came and Obierika narrated the story that surrounded Okonkwo's death to him and its implications on the culture, he realized that it was capable of providing materials for the book he was writing which he called *The Pacification of Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

The Effect of Western Influence on Our Culture in *Arrow of God*

In *Arrow of God*, we are presented with the joy that heralded the new moon that peered through the sky as it has been an inherent culture in Umuaro. Through the gallant role played by Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu who served as a vigilant watchman of the people and an epitome of truth. It

was his responsibility to announce the New Yam festival and Pumpkin leaf feast and nobody dare to challenge him because he is seen as a bridge between the gods and man.

Ezeulu unveiled the truth as an eye of the gods on earth which endeared him to Captain Winterbottom and alienated him from his people because he dissuaded Umuaro (his people) from going to the war against Okperi over a piece of land that belonged to the people of Okperi. From that point, cold war started and as the saying goes that any kingdom that fights against itself is bound to collapse. So that was how Umuaro stripped themselves naked before the foreigners who stepped into their case in the name of extinguishing violence but truly sowing the seed of discord silently among them.

The Westerner, Mr. Winterbottom invited Ezeulu to make him a chief of his people. But his refusal earned him imprisonment from Mr. Clarke, who insisted that he will be confined in prison until he had learnt how to cooperate. So for that reason, Ezeulu was not able to finish the sacred yam as supposed. Then, he being so angry that his people did not intervene on his behalf decided to eat the yam as he ought to do but before he could finish it people had no alternative than to send their sons with some tubers of yam to the Christian God as thanksgiving to obtain the immunity with which to harvest their yam. Due to the fact that nobody wants his crops to spoil Ezeulu lost many traditional believers with that single attitude of neglecting the people's yearnings.

It was in a situation like this that the Westerners gained much ground in Umuaro. They started teaching the converts how to destroy the culture which when contradicted by Moses that Mr. Goodcountry said that "such is not fit to be heard in the house of God" (49). And to support his view on instigating the people to kill the royal snake, he urged somebody to speak up for the Lord; then Oduche raised his hand and supported the issue with a passage in the Bible. He went ahead to execute it by imprisoning the Idemili python in his school box which he left in their hut as the python was discovered when the box started to perform the wonders of moving around not knowing that it was the royal python that was struggling to be freed. This incident magnified the cold war which had been going on between Ezeulu and Ezeidemili. The Whiteman that stepped in between them has gun, machetes, bow and carried fire in the mouth to make it clear that he does not fight with one weapon.

Finally, Ezeulu thought of Whiteman's goodwill towards him but realized that this goodwill brought shame and indignity for him. The inhuman treatment thrived as displayed by Mr. Clark to Ezeulu in locking him up unjustly and Mr. Winterbottom for whipping Obika mercilessly. Therefore, it is important that people should come back to their senses just as Ezeulu advised Oduche, "Though it is good to know the Whiteman's ways but should not allow it to transform one into destroying the way of life of his own people as it is good that one should dance the dance prevalent in his time". So, the Christian harvest succeeded in taking many people away from the traditional religion thereby threatening to lead our culture into extinction because since this incident happened none has cared to appreciate the culture again, as the people were like freed birds that never remembered their home nests.

In this study many aspects of our culture has been evaluated starting from the pre - western time which has shown the serene nature of our society with their rich cultural heritage which has been extolled above every other thing. But immediately the white men stepped their feet on the African

soil with their numerous weapons seeing that the people are not organized as remarked by J.C Anene but still they were united and fought for their common right.

The Westerners flashed their peaceful religion and school to gain the approval of a few people, and enough ground before they started to teach people like Oduche and Nwoye how to destroy their culture, which destroyed Okonkwo and Ezeulu, who were the epitome of our culture. The Westerners gave the thoughtless ones among Umuofia and Umuaro villagers the effrontery to question the authorities of the culture and then realized that their culture that has been a source of life to them right from time is nothing but a mere fallacy.

So, at the appearance of this Westerners, the bond that held our culture together fell apart; our culture in terms of literature, in form of storytelling, our religion of ancestral worship, the art of carving masks, our food, our means of health care through the use of herbs and roots, our marriage that is held supreme with all its rites, our sports and games that boost togetherness in the society, etc were considered archaic and relegated to the dust. Then Western literature which is a clear picture of Western culture is what our people have now embraced as the dominant literature and it has taken the place of our own culture.

Therefore this work seeks to enjoin people to retrace their steps to our rich cultural heritage in order to end the Western miseries such as gay and lesbian marriages, injustice, disrespect, bribery and corruption, Boko Haram, etc brought by Westerners due to their influence on our cultural heritage, and embrace our beautiful culture which provides a good shield from all these prevailing raging storms so that we can live once more in a happy environment where togetherness and freedom are practiced without any form of fear.

Conclusion

Since our culture has been modernized, it is worthy of note that we emulate the good aspect of the Westerners and merge it with our own culture for the sole aim of achieving happiness, peace and unity. It is worthy to note Achebe's opinion:

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 people all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. ("Role" 1 57)

This is to show how a well-knit Igbo society became divided after exposure to Western institutions such as the church and school. It revealed how individuals suffered psychological distress because they had become "men of two worlds" who could not reconcile the African and Western elements of their personality, and as result, the people fell apart in the villages. The effect of Western influence on our culture brought confusion which made it now next to impossible to find stable moral values in our societies and in individuals who are mired into the Western mess. So contrary to their belief, they did not bring light, peace or justice to the "dark communities" but instead it succeeded in establishing chaos to what had once been a well ordered world. Therefore,

all we ought to do is to retrace our steps to the rich cultural heritage that gave life to us. And cease every form of maltreatment given to our culture as a result of long years of negligence and appreciate it with an open heart to bring back the beauty which we were once known for.

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