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THE PRINCIPAL ROLE AND IDEALISM OF ODILI IN CRYSTALLIZING THE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY WITH REGARD TO: A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses The Principal Role and Idealism of Odili in Crystallizing the Relationships within the Community. A Man of the People reveals how dysfunctional and uncivilized a colonizer's ideas can serve in another country, Nigeria. Lindfors contributes. Then, with the coming of the white man, things fell apart, and anarchy was loosed upon the Ibo world. The white men, in other words, were not bringers of light to a dark continent, as was popularly supposed, and their "civilizing mission" did not result in peace, order and harmony. Rather, they were ignorant servants of a powerful English queen who disrupted a well-ordered, cohesive, pacific society by imposing on it their own forms of government. It describes Nigeria in its post-independence phase, during which time the country became a 'cesspool of corruption and misrule' in the context of colonial-style social and economic development, a situation that resulted in conflict between the emergent, elitist middle class and the general population. Achebe's reputation as a novelist rests on his impartial understanding of, and ability to represent, the Nigerian environment. His realistic characterization, and diagnosis, of his country's malaise has the power to inspire a revolution informed by African ideologies.

Keywords: Cultural Infection, post-colonial, and Idealism.

INTRODUCTION

Achebe holds the magnificent and unique capability of analyzing and foretelling the historical events of his country, since only nine days after his country's republic downfall, he published A Man of the People. In this novel, he brings to surface a series of cultural and political issues that contaminate his nation. The term "cultural infection" is not only an evocator of pessimistic ideas about culture, but it is also a theory characterized by thought-provoking and insightful outcomes. Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People, his fourth book, encompasses this very same concept of "cultural infection"; by fragmenting the African democratic system of government and intentionally exposing the disposition of Nigerians, Achebe reveals powerful and significant perceptions about the effects of colonization on post-colonial countries. Achebe has used the English language in his writing to send a message to the western people to tell them that African become aware of their deplorable situation and of the western racism against Africa. At the same time, he wants to send a message to the Third World to stand up for their rights because they are a victim of the West. This paper makes an attempt to discuss the meaning of the West, from the post-colonial point of view as it is depicted in Achebe's novel A Man of The People. As a postcolonial write; Achebe serves his community by challenging the hegemonic western-imposed identity and by providing alternative accounts of his culture and people so as to reconstruct a new image of Africa and Africans in his texts. He realizes that it can never be achieved if his people lose the memory of what their history and culture used to be, and hence he 'keep(s) talking about it', trying to retrieve their memory in his novels. In this dissertation, I will look into the process of how Achebe reminds his people of their past, and the process of identity-reconstruction.

DISCUSSION

Nanga was overthrown, Odili and the C.P.C. were still not victorious, for Max was killed, and Odili was hospitalized. Many, like Achebe, blame the European colonizers for the "moral confusion and political chaos that beset African states" (Chinua Achebe: Novelist of Cultural Conflict, 1996). Colonization has thus achieved its purpose of changing the way a people think. Olawale Awosika, professor at Ambrose Alli University, tells us that "the African community may still have to wait". Achebe's masterpiece proves that colonizer's ideas were not after all "civilized", but rather dysfunctional and destructive to a society's people and culture. A Man of the People dramatizes political struggles between Africans, illustrates the continuing influence of Britain and other western countries on African economics and culture, and ends with a government being overthrown by a coup. The novel is set in a post-independence environment, after a period of colonial-style social and economic development has resulted in a conflicted situation between the emergent elitist middle class and the general population. Elite class is one influence of the West. It is as a result of Western education in A Man of the People. In the novel, the argument Nanga uses against Odili is that Odili is an intellectual who has a European style and education and thus is farther away from the common man. It is a good argument, but coming from the mouth of Nanga who knows

how to exploit these things for his sake, to support his position among his people. Nanga attacks on Odili accusing him as person who has Western education and thus his loyalty will be for the West. Nanga knows how to mislead his people well so people trust him. Nanga consider himself closer to the common man and he considers himself as a man of the people, and far away from the intellectual, who represents more European style of living and thinking. By presenting his country after colonialism, he has the incentive to stay as far away from the European style of life and politics as possible. A Man of the People can be classified as realistic. The characters are constructed within a particular environment and in a particular historical phase; they recreate their own history, whether living in a traditional community or resisting European colonialism. To achieve a realistic effect, Achebe created the protagonist, Odili Samalu, as an ordinary, sensitive young man who teaches at Anata Grammar School. Most of the other characters are middleclass and tend to have a rather dull and frequently unhappy existence with only occasional glimpses of beauty and joy. The novel is set in a post-independence environment, after a period of colonial-style social and economic development has resulted in a conflicted situation between the emergent elitist middle class and the general population. The Europeans had been replaced by a ruling class of politicians, most of whom were corrupt and controlled everything. According to Ngugi (1975: 47), "the disillusionment with the ruling elite is to be found in the recent works of most African writers". Achebe's A Man of the People reflects his distaste for post-independence Nigeria as a place where leaders who had fought for independence became traitors after attaining power, and sacrificed their country in exchange for middle-class comfort. Odili Samalu, the protagonist, mediates Achebe's vision that individuals must not "give up because ... this is a necessary stage in our growth" (Duerden & Pieterse, 1972: 13). In contrast to Achebe's earlier novels Things Fall Apart (1958) and No Longer at Ease (1960), A Man of the People delineates the conflict between morality and corruption by contrasting the protagonist Odili Samalu with his opposite, the Minister of Culture, Chief Nanga. These characters are worlds apart, with radically different ideologies. Odili is an idealist who has experienced the pain and suffering of his fellow citizens and has observed how the entire system supports corrupt politicians and the wealthy. Despite the fact that his country is now free from colonial rule, he has witnessed the continued exploitation of the general population in a new form. The imperialists have been replaced by new rulers, and the general population has no choice but to suffer and wait for a new government. Throughout the novel, Odili condemns this state of affairs; his disillusionment comes through by means of a detached first person perspective. Nanga, the villain, acts as a foil to Odili. Nanga is a politician who is a realist with an instinctive grasp of what the electorate wants; he has a genuine rapport with the people whom he represents. Not only does he claim their 'primitive loyalties', he also exploits them to a great extent. During the election campaign, Odili realizes that, ironically, in some ways, Nanga represents government 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' The relationship between Odili and Nanga mediates the ethos of public and private morality in a society that has forgotten its past and seeks only material rewards in its future. The story begins in 1964 when Nanga makes an official visit to Anata Grammar School, where he taught during his early career. Odili, a teacher at the school, views the ensuing celebration by the illiterate masses and the arrival of Nanga skeptically: As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun powder in honor of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical (Achebe, 1967: 2). The local song played on the old "Grammar-phone" (p. 1), women dancing to celebrate the occasion, and the gunfire by Nanga's hooligans all realistically portray this kind of situation and reflect how Nigerians can sacrifice national interest for personal interests. In the novel, Odili remembers his childhood when he praised Nanga as a model, honest politician. This image of Nanga was shattered during Odili's last visit to Parliament, when he watched the political assassination of the Minister of Finance, who was "a first rate economist with a PhD" (p. 3) in Public Finance. The Minister of Finance presented a complete plan to avert the financial crisis to Cabinet, but the government rejected it because it would result in its defeat during the upcoming election. Any politicians supporting the Minister of Finance were fired and the corrupt politicians accused the honest Minister of being a traitor, being un-African, and of "aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking" (p. 4). Odili was shocked to see these lies being used as political propaganda in local newspapers, one of which printed the following: 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 that only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people ... (p. 4). In his book, Achebe incorporates not only national issues but also the clan and village loyalties that are an integral part of Africa; the incident of Josiah and the blind man's stick is a good example. Nanga frequently exploits these Aspects of Realism in Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People minor loyalties, while Odili examines them in relation to a national consciousness. A Man of the People in which African got back the right to rule their land. However, the disintegration of traditional values makes people put stress only on individualism, and the pursuit of materialism which have brought corruption, strife, cynicism' (Agovi i 988:193) The society is beset with these problems. People's lives are no better than they used to be in colonial times. Achebe's disillusionment

th the independent nation and his anger at neo-colonialism are exhibited in the novel. Achebe finds no reason to go on exploring the past for mainly giving people dignity. Kolawole Ogtmgbesan observes that '(he)ere (in A Man of the People) he has forsaken his earlier duty to give back to his people their dignity. Now he focusses his gaze on the evils inflicted on the African societies not by an alien races, but by the Africans themselves. This is the case of Nigeria. Even though colonialism is over, the egacy of colonialism is apparent. In fact, this phenomenon is not only confined to the ruling class and intellectual class, but also the people in general. The symbol of success in this new society is no longer yams, but the motor car, a symbol of the Western world. In fact, Odili is vulnerable. He tries to cut himself off from the society but fails to notice that he is actually pat-t of it. He is no different from the common people he rejects. Though he dislikes Nanga, he still accepts Nanga's invitation to spend his holidays with him in the capital and see if Nanga could do something for his application of scholarship for overseas studies. He also fears being labeled as one of the snobbish intellectuals, with ambition, and a desire for post-graduate diploma from London. However, Odili never submits to 'lick any big man's boots,' explaining: In fact one reason why I took this teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil service job in the city with car, free housing, etc., was to give myself a certain amount of autonomy (p. 16). Odili's political views are inseparable from his character. His opinion of his girlfriend Elsie is also significant in revealing his character; he thinks that he has been unlucky in love, but Elsie is different: Elsie was, and for that matter still is, the only girl I met and slept with the same day – in fact within an hour ... I can't pretend that I ever thought of marriage ... Elsie was such a beautiful, happy girl and she made no demands whatever (p. 22). Achebe presents his foil Nanga as a political opportunist. Nanga has no concept of political morality; he has become rich through bribery, corruption, and intimidation, and knows how to work these things to his advantage. In the story, as in reality, Nanga and many others pursue self-interest with false promises of sharing with everyone. Odili is totally disillusioned at seeing such a debased form of politics in his country. Nanga begins his speech at Anata Grammar School in Pidgin English; by expressing local values and hopes, he appears to be a man from the grass roots and, ironically, a man of the people. He denounces the 'western – educated' Africans, claiming that "a university education alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture" (p. 4). As Minister of Culture, Nanga uses his privilege to attack the educated class in Africa, obviously vital to any country's development, but the villagers are far from understanding this fact. Along with his cunning manipulation, his friendly demeanor has an infectious effect on the villagers.

CONCLUSION

The paper analyses the Principal Role and Idealism of Odili in Crystallizing the Relationships within the Community in the novel A Man of The People and shade the light on it. He concludes that, under current conditions, European political concepts may be meaningless to the national structure, which is divided into numerous tribes and clans. The novel is narrated in the first person by Odili, a young teacher who is an idealistic intellectual. The story is told both in dialogue and in exposition through Odili's eyes. By using Odili's point of view, Achebe is able to take the reader along on Odili's journey of learning the full extent of corruption in his country. He is also able to show Odili's blind spots and weaknesses, such as his pride, by describing Odili's perceptions. Like Odili, the reader is at first hopeful the country can improve with a change in leadership, but it becomes clear the will of the people is not strong enough to fight the greed of its leaders. In colonial times, the colonisers justified and secured their conquest by berefting African of the means to defme themselves. They reduced the natives as uncivilized, inferior and barbaric, and imposed this identity on them. Colonizers stereotyped the image of Africa and African with their own imagination. Laclaus claims that 'the constitution of a social identity is an act of power' since, If . . . an objectivity manages to partially affirm itself it is only by repressing that which threatens it. Derrida has shown how an identity's constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles - man/ woman, etc. What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. It is the same with the black-white relationship, in which white, of course, is equivalent to 'human being'. Woman and black' are thus 'maxlc?' (i.e. marked terms) in contrast to the unmarked terms of 'man' and 'wbit&'. (Ladau; 1990:33) What made the colonisers most successful was not only that they excluded the black, made them as others, and set up the binary opposition - black I white, but also that they inscribed this value on the black's mind, which made them internalize this stereotype and see themselves in the sanie way. Hall points out that 'the colonial experience' is traumatic because: The ways in which black people, black experiences. were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and nonnalisation. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of know lede of the West by those regimes. (Hall 1994: 394). Emmanuel Obiechina also states that the European imposition of political control 'involved a conscious or unconscious devaluation of the African culture .Obiechina, Emmanuel, (1975).

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