An Existential Appraisal of Selected Nigerian Fiction

Jim Nesin Omatseye

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AN EXISTENTIAL APPRAISAL OF SELECTED NIGERIAN FICTION

A Thesis
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

by
Jim E. Nesin Omatseye
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AN EXISTENTIAL APPRAISAL OF SELECTED
NIGERIAN FICTION

APPROVED April 24, 1975:

K. W. Clarke
Director of Thesis

Robert K. Chideka

E. N. Gray
Dean of the Graduate School
PREFACE

Within the last few years the academic community has become aware of the necessity for interdisciplinary programs that would meet the need of our society which is fast becoming technocratic. Concerned students (including myself) and educators who are no longer comfortable with the smallness of the world of traditional academicians have longed to see flexible programs that would allow students a wider latitude in their choice of subjects. I wish to thank Western's Dean of the Potter College and the faculty for their thoughtfulness in introducing the Humanities program which now consists of Philosophy, Literature, and History.

With Philosophy as one of my two areas of concentration Dr. Bond Harris of Kentucky Wesleyan College had set my searching heart on fire as an undergraduate in Owensboro. The fire had been further rekindled here in Western Kentucky University by Dr. Ronald Nash's philosophy class, Existentialism, 4050. The course provided me with a fresh insight into the Existentialism of great thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Soren Kiekegaard, and a host of others. For the first time I discovered that there was more to philosophy than rationalism and since then more questions about ultimate reality have arisen in my mind. In fact, the seeming radicalism of the Existentialists, when approached
with an open mind, would rouse anyone (including myself) from his dogmatic slumber. Although this philosophy lends itself as one of the avenues to ultimate truth it is not without some flaws.

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Kenneth W. Clarke, whose interest in African literature has been a source of inspiration to me. His encouragement has got much to do with my choice of this thesis topic. As the director of this research, Dr. Clarke's untiring effort to help and his patience with me during some of my late night telephone calls will always be appreciated.

Dr. Robert Johnston's helpful advice and keenness as a proofreader has meant much to me. A hearty "thank you" to Dr. Johnston. I am also grateful to Miss Cam Collins for her kindness and the direction she has provided in my interest in African literature.

Words cannot express my indebtedness to my wife, Kate Omatseye, who spent many nights typing the first manuscripts of this thesis. I apologize to my son, Jim Oritsetimeyin Omatseye Jr., whom I deprived of many hours of attention during those hectic days of research.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................. 1

Chapter

I. THE WILL TO POWER ........................................... 12

II. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATION OF AFRICAN
    MORALITY .................................................. 37

III. A RECURRENT VISION OF HUMAN REALITY ............. 65

CONCLUSION ..................................................... 89

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................. 99
One of the two aims of this research was to elucidate from a philosophical perspective a selected body of Nigerian fiction. The second objective has been to investigate the dominant themes of the two selected novelists and relate them to existentialism.

The most essential theme was found to be colonialism and its disruption of the African culture. It was implied in the works of the novelists that authentic African culture was dislocated by British imperialism in Nigeria. The use of force and other features of power was manifested in the takeover. Through various literary devices and innuendo they suggest that the social values of their people had been altered to the advantage of the Europeans. They, however, blame the Nigerians as well for their lack of will power to stabilize things. One of the most important findings is the fact that man will always seek his well-being first before caring for others.

The philosophy of the existentialism in whose light the African situation has been analyzed points out that power is the underlying factor in all human situations. Since power determines who gains the upper hand in life’s struggle the existentialists alert man to the notion that everyone has his own existence to guard. To relate this idea to the Nigerian
situation, it then means that the Nigerian has his destiny to guard. This is found to be the coded message of the Nigerian novelists to their people.
INTRODUCTION

In the last few years the wind of change in the academic community has turned things in favour of African literature in the Western hemisphere. What seems to be a new realism has cooled off the generally hostile attitude with which European critics used to deal with African writings. Since the works of many African novelists, poets, and dramatists have generally had as their theme the protest and conflict of the colonial era, the former reaction of the European critics was perhaps understandable. In the works of Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi, Cyprian Ekwensi, Timothy Aluko and others, we find portrayed the grim reality of European imperialism in Africa with its dehumanizing effect on the people. The indelible mark that the colonial experience has left on the people has forced some to live in what Jean-Paul Sartre would describe as "Bad Faith." Another existentialist, Martin Heidegger, in a similar situation would refer to such people as "unauthentic." To be in the situation that the two philosophers describe is to fall short in asserting one's self as a creative human being whose existence cannot be taken for granted.

Generally, African literature consists of works by black African writers. The leadership that Nigeria has provided in this circle is undisputed as evidenced by the contributions made by Chinua Achebe and Timothy Mofolorunso Aluko. Their
works will serve as the basis of this investigation. At a time when many African writers were nostalgically idealizing the tribal life which the intrusion of the white man had set tumbling downhill from its delicate equilibrium, Chinua Achebe has distinguished himself. He has not allowed any trace of chauvinistic idealism or any neurotic assertion to colour his perception of the Nigerian society in transition.

The same tribute can be paid to Timothy M. Aluko. The way the two men have handled the ethnic conflicts, the tension between the urban and the rural sectors--and above all, the full horror of the colonial situation--is remarkable.

Since Nigerian novelists such as Achebe and Aluko are not known to be in any way associated with any philosophical movement, little or nothing has been done to analyze their work from a philosophical perspective. However, as satirists and advocates of social and cultural awareness in a society where individual freedom has started to suffer, these Nigerian novelists have much in common with existentialist philosophers. Scattered here and there in the novels of Achebe and Aluko, one can find portrayed certain "existential" concepts. This comparative study is an attempt to examine the Nigerian situation as portrayed by the novelists from an existential point of view. The exercise will include a thematic consideration of several aspects of the epoch. The themes that are dominant in the fictions will be analyzed in light of several existential doctrines that are appropriate. In this regard, the views of such existential thinkers as Friedrich W. Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre will be discussed.
These thinkers have addressed themselves to problems similar to the ones the Nigerians wrote about. Other existentialists like Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger will receive attention as well.

The novels that this study will cover are Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People*, and Timothy M. Aluko’s *One Man One Wife*, *Kinsman and Foreman*, *One Man One Matchet*. These novels which came out in the late fifties and early sixties mirror the social and political milieu of the traditional African society up to the post-independence era. What appears to be of utmost concern for the novelists is the demoralizing effect of colonialism and its aftermath. It was a traumatic experience for the multitude of Nigerian citizens to have had their freedom curtailed by the heavy hand of the colonial masters. Achebe and Aluko have touched on aspects of the helplessness of the Nigerian, particularly of the creative individuals who found their freedom stifled by the colonial situation. Their books dramatize in a small scale the plight of a people whose society is in transition. The all-encompassing authority of the alien government does not seem to provide any breathing space for the natives. The feeling of being gagged that the situation generated amounted to self-abandonment for some. A situation such as this would normally give rise to literary naturalism—which depicts a surrender to an insurmountable problem or force.

It is under such a circumstance that "existential" remedies became appropriate. John Killinger has commented
concerning the usefulness of existentialism:

And existentialism proclaims the evangel of freedom in an effort to deliver man from the anonymity of the mass, whether the mass be a philosophical system, a state, a culture, or a religion. As Francis Jeanson said in opening a discussion among several Parisian existentialists, 'Existentialism constitutes an effort to rehabilitate man in his own eyes, to restore him to himself.'

In another statement on existentialism Killinger further tells us that:

... existentialism is by its very nature a way of thinking and not a system, there is inevitable confusion of tongues among its leading thinkers, with Paris generally regarded as its Babel.

No matter in what tongue existentialists speak, however, they all believe that man must make the best use of his existence and assert his freedom as a human being before anything else follows. It is this insight into human reality around which Achebe and Aluko have structured their novels. In defining the doctrine of atheistic existentialism Jean-Paul Sartre writes,

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with great consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man or as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that first of all man exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards. Thus, there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. . . .


2 Ibid., p. 5.
Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.  

Basically, this comparative study deals with the resistance and submission of the common man against both the forces of imperialistic subjugation and the tyranny of corrupt African politicians who took over the Nigerian government after the Europeans left. What stands out most in this situation as portrayed in the novels, is the role of power. The bid for power and its use by both the imperialist and the Nigerian was significant in that it led to the helplessness of the common man. Nietzsche, whose philosophy of the "Will to Power" can perhaps be illuminating in this context, regards human conscience as a proud knowledge of responsibility, the consciousness of freedom, and the power that the individual has over himself. The German philosopher's concept is explained by H. J. Blackham in the following statement:

It is not until a people is subjugated by a more powerful race that conditions for the "Bad Conscience" are provided. Then the natural aggressiveness of the subjugated is forcibly checked; repressed, it turns inward against the natural life of the human animal. This inhibiting function of thwarted aggression redeploy the energy of life into other channels and occasions the development of new ideals.

From what one can gather from the novels of Achebe and Aluko the African response to the challenge of colonialism has not been adequate, the reason being that the Nigerians

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were unprepared for its assault. Plagued by ignorance, poverty, and disease, the mass of people of the third world were taken advantage of by the Europeans who levied a vigorous attack on African values from all fronts. Because of the inherent weaknesses of the various African institutions it was difficult for the people to hold out against the annihilating forces of Western influence. The diversity in language and culture constituted an enervating effect on African institutions.

Substitution of European values for the type of life the African had known placed the people in a dilemma. Driven by economic necessities the imperialists had come with the motive of securing raw material for ever-expanding industries in their home country. Once in Africa the Europeans could not but display the rugged individualism that characterizes the capitalist world. This the poor African had to adjust himself to. In many cases he found himself a victim of economic exploitation. Since Africa had no one to help mitigate the excessive drive for wealth and money the plight of the common man who was exploited remained discouraging.

On the religious front, Christian Europeans saw the necessity to take the gospel to the non-Christian Africans. For the missionaries who came to Africa there was a feeling of moral obligation to disrupt the existing religious life of the non-Christian African. This automatically meant the dislocation of his culture, which was inseparable from his religion. The altruistic ideals of the Christians which led
to the building of schools, hospitals and churches for the Africans strengthened the European grip on Africa. Although an existentialist like Nietzsche with his anti-Christian bias might see the role of the church in Africa as a way to exercise its power over the people, the overall result of its activities might better be seen as a partial blessing for Africa. This does not by any means, however, excuse the dubious activities of some missionaries. What it all means is that some good came out of the evil of colonialism.

The novelists admit that the coming of the European was part of the cure that Africa needed for the social injustice that some of her cultural norms had previously condoned. Achebe refers to such practices as slavery, human sacrifice, throwing away twin babies and other bad practices. Aluko also mentions the fact that the white man helped to put an end to such bad practices. One seems to have the impression that it was the price of these evil practices that Africa was paying with its servitude to a smaller continent like Europe. Caught like a huge elephant in a trap, 'Mother Africa' had to lament as she bowed to the military and political superiority of Europe. To put it in the language of the existentialist, Nietzsche, hers (Africa's) was the happiness of the weak, and oppressed, with their festering venom and malignity, among whom happiness appears essentially as a narcotic, a deadening, a quietude, a peace, a 'Sabbath' an enervation of the mind and relaxation of the limbs—in short a purely passive phenomenon.5

For those who believe in man's existential possibilities, however, the type of picture that Nietzsche has painted above should not be the case. Sartre's existential cure for this type of condition seems to be more appropriate. Unfortunately, the problem that surfaces from a reading of Nigerian literature is whether those trapped in the African situation are actually willing to take such a bold step as Sartre envisions. For one thing an existential solution does not eliminate misery. It is not a "Pollyanna" solution as many seem to want; instead it seeks only to distinguish the real human being from the one Heidegger calls an "unauthentic being." For Sartre, the individual alone must make his choice in accordance with the prevailing circumstance. He writes,

The absoluteness of choice does not do away with the relativeness of each epoch. At heart what existentialism shows is the connection between the absolute character of free involvement, by virtue of which every man realizes as himself in realizing a type of mankind, and involvement always comprehensible in any age whatsoever and by any person whatsoever, and the relativeness of the cultural ensemble which may result from such a choice.6

Even though the Europeans are no longer in control, there are still other problems that Aluko and Achebe believe will still make self-fulfillment difficult in Nigeria. The Europeans left a legacy of a stratified society where the class system has become more pronounced. The artisan, the farmer and peasant do not seem to stand a chance of improving their lot under this condition. As the following chapters

6Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, pp. 39-40.
will indicate, it is almost too late for the African in Nigeria to assert himself in a meaningful way. His culture has been so totally downtrodden that the Nigerian would need an unusual zeal to raise his head above the water.

The first chapter of this study deals with what could be regarded as the source of the African problem—power. The overcoming of the Nigerian people by the British is typical of Nietzsche's philosophy of power; but so too is the dilemma of Okonkwo, whose quality of fighting back against whatever threatens his existence seems to fit well the mold of the Nietzschean Superman. The failure of Chinua Achebe's hero, Okonkwo, in Things Fall Apart is reminiscent of those who give themselves to existential possibilities. But the forces of colonialism were too much for him as an individual to fight all by himself.

Chapter two will provide additional background with an examination of the religious basis of African morality which the European failed to recognize. Because the colonizers, owing to their prejudice, could not see anything good in African culture they regarded most vital African traditions and customs as primitive. The Africans, being on the weaker side, seemed to succumb to the European judgment. The strong influence of Christianity and the Western system of education which many Nigerians had forced a dual loyalty on them. People vacillated between the dictates of Nigerian culture and Western standards. The chapter will attempt to establish that African religions which form part of the culture constitute the very root of what is morally acceptable in the
Nigerian society. The degree of acceptability however still varies slightly from one community to another depending on the religious qualms of the area. In fact, the term "African morality" is intended to serve as an umbrella under which a wide variety of cultural norms is covered. The chapter, thus, illustrates the complexity of the aftermath of colonialism.

The third chapter discusses a recurrent vision of human reality as found in the writings of the Nigerian novelists. Basic to the thought of Aluko and Achebe is the fact that self-interest in human beings will make them respond to certain situations in a fairly similar manner. However, this is not to suggest that these authors understand life according to rigid deterministic view of human behavior. The members of the Nigerian lower class thought that the departure of the white man and the taking over of power by Nigerians would restore their freedom and lead to self-fulfillment. That part of the study seeks to establish that race has nothing to do with man's inhumanity to man. The novelists, however, have by various literary devices attempted to break the vicious cycle in which creative individuals have been virtually compelled to deny the essence of their existence owing to pressure.

The conditions that Achebe and Aluko present in their novels do indicate that Nigeria has not overcome the dilemma into which the colonial situation has plunged her. Like the existentialists, the novelists have suggested that their countrymen should assert themselves as human beings ought to.
The following chapters describe the circumstances that have led to the present condition in Nigeria as seen through the eyes of two Nigerian novelists. To assist us in this process, these writers will be viewed as to their affinities with existentialist philosophy.
CHAPTER I
THE WILL TO POWER

The controversy that has arisen as a result of the British colonization of Nigeria towards the end of the nineteenth century has mostly been described in its social context. Historians and novelists who have been interested in the conflicts and the repercussions have made only passing references to how power has been a factor in the conflict between the two cultures. But in fact, power can be regarded as the underlying factor since both the conquerors and the vanquished have in some measure displayed a considerable degree of strength during the encounter. It was through negotiations and a little show of power that the British first gained the upper hand over the Nigerians.

In order to have a clearer understanding of how significant the role of power was in this encounter which eventuated in one race ruling the other, it will be helpful to examine the power struggle in light of Nietzsche's philosophy. As the foremost exponent of the philosophy of power, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's concept of the Will to Power when related to the content of the body of literature under consideration will shed valuable light on the issue. Nietzsche's philosophy calls for a re-evaluation of power which the individual must exert. He believes power is the underlying factor in
all of life's processes. The Nigerian novels included in this study reflect this attitude to a considerable degree. There are two sides to the Nietzschean concept of the Will to Power. The first deals with the great strength and courage that is typical of his ideal man, the Superman or Overman. The second applies to a more powerful race subjugating a weaker one.

In the first half of this chapter an attempt will be made to establish a relationship between the Nietzschean Superman and a Nigerian character who symbolizes the African resistance to colonialism. The second half of this chapter will reflect Nietzsche's other point of focus in regard to power—the domination of weaker races by the strong. It will center on the intensity of the British display of the Will to Power in subjugating the Nigerian people.

Power Individually Expressed

The Nietzschean Superman does not subscribe to that democratic ethic which presupposes a society composed of weak, sickly, feeble individuals seeking power for themselves, power that more naturally belongs to the chivalrous and aristocratic whose attitudes presuppose physical strength, exuberant health, and the safeguards of its preservation, such as combat, adventure, and war games. Obviously, the weak and the effeminate have little chance when it comes to human survival. The philosophy of Nietzsche was an act of rebellion against the

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teachings of philosophers whose views he once held in high esteem. One of these was his former professor, Schopenhauer, whose ethics of pity Nietzsche regarded as a capitulation to "the decadent morals of Christianity." Nietzsche detested the altruistic conduct which characterized Judeo-Christian ethics. The philosopher saw this as a situation that would weaken a society and deprive it of its potency.

Rather than pity or democracy, such terms as life affirmation, instinct for freedom, and power may be said to characterize Nietzsche's thought. They permeate Nietzsche's philosophy in such a way that the use of one is interchangeable with the other. In the absence of power, life becomes stagnant or even degenerates. Our personality becomes distorted when instinct is extirpated. For Nietzsche, when power is not given expression decadence follows and the Superman ceases to be. The end of Nietzsche's ideal man is hastened in the absence of reason. Rationality which is a manifestation of the Will to Power demands a sublimation of instinct. But the type of rationality in question here is hard to come by as long as self-affirmation which characterizes the Will to Power holds sway. With such limitations and other inherent problems the question then arises whether a Superman can in reality be found on the human scene. Georges Chatterton-Hill and a few other admirers of Nietzsche do not think that the philosopher's wish is destined to be fulfilled. But William S. Sanakian tells us,

Although the Nietzschean Superman may be visualized as a cross between a Caesar and a Jesus, in the final analysis Superman has never appeared on the human scene: 'Never
Nietzsche believes that the only man who had some qualities of his Superman was Napoleon. He has no regard for the leaders of the French revolution who were mob heroes. The support of the masses is not essential for the effectiveness of the Nietzscbean Overman because he does not care about their support. Instead he despises the mob and looks down with disdain on those seeking refuge in the crowd. In Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, the hero, Okonkwo seems to share some qualities with Nietzsche's Overman. Okonkwo lives at a time when his fellow villagers have started submitting weekly to the white man's religion and government. The hero and a few others who are distressed by this act feel the need to revolt against the intruders. This feeling however does not reflect the attitude of most people at the time. In his book, Prospero's Magic, Dr. Philip Mason outlines the three phases of colonial revolt: acceptance, rivalry and challenge, and crisis. In Things Fall Apart, it would seem that the Nigerians are in the period of acceptance. But Okonkwo does not seem to see any reason why the new religion, Christianity and the white man's government, should be tolerated at all. He is ready to fight against the white man even if his clansmen are unwilling. Initially, the type of people who have accepted

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2Ibid., pp. 252-153.

Christianity have been outcasts and the lowest members of society, but after some time people of means and titles have joined as well. In Achebe's own words the first Christian converts are mostly the kind of people that were called efulefu, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an efulefu in the language of the clan was a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called converts the excrement of the clan and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up.4

In contrast with the type of people that the preceding epitomizes, Chinua Achebe writes the following about his hero:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and magic, the fear of the forest, and the fear of nature, and malevolent, red in the teeth and claws.5

One can easily infer from Achebe's novels that the illiterate Nigerian villager does not make any distinction between white men. Whether one is a missionary and the other is a government officer, they are all 'brothers.' When the Nigerian villager rejects any white institution, it does not matter whether it is religion or government. Okonkwo fits this mold. He rejects all that the white man stands for, because he feels his freedom will be inhibited and the customs and traditions of the clan will be jeopardized if he submits. Gerald Moore aptly describes the situation this


5Ibid., pp. 16-17.
Oko n kwo could not reconcile himself to the paralysis of will which he senses around him. His instinct has always been to fight fearlessly whatever threatens the unity of the clan. At last the egwugwu, maddened past bearing by the arrogance of some of the converts, burn the church. Instantly they are summoned by the District Commissioner, imprisoned by trick, humiliated by court messengers, and only released when a collective fine has been extorted from the village.6

Opposing both convert and white man Okonkwo is a victim of his will to power. He should have known that the white District Officer would not let him and his gang get away with the destruction of the church. But reason seems to elude him in his encounter with the white men. Since rationality is an important manifestation of the Will to Power, Okonkwo by this action has fallen short of the standard set for the Overman. Still propelled by this strong instinct for freedom, he is not the type who will yield ground because of the white man's sophisticated weaponry and military threat. The philosopher, William S. Sahakian, describes what happens to an inhibited man like Okonkwo with:

Societies that impede the free expression of the will for power are retrogressive, often they build up a tremendous degree of inward tension that eventually is discharged in terrible and ruthless hostility to individuals within the society and the world without.7

William S. Sahakian's statement effectively fits the situation as we watch Okonkwo seek a course of action after the white man and his agents have humiliated him and his colleagues.


7William S. Sahakian, System of Ethics, p. 254.
As he lay on his bamboo bed he thought about the treatment he had received in the white man's court, and he swore vengeance. If Unuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself. He thought about wars in the past. The noblest, he thought, was the war against Isike. . . . 'Worthy men are no more,' Okonkwo sighed as he remembered those days. 'Isike will never forget how we slaughtered them in that war. We killed twelve of their men and they killed only two of ours. Before the end of the fourth market week they were suing for peace. Those were days when men were men.\(^8\)

In Achebe's Things Fall Apart Okonkwo seems to represent the free moving spirit that is not properly guided by reason. The strong drive for personal liberty seems to overshadow the quiet voice of reason that Okonkwo's friends represent in the novel. He refuses to listen to his friends, Ezeudu and Obierika, who counsel patience in such important matters as the sacrifice of the slave boy, Ikemefuna, who called him father. Achebe's hero has not learned to sublimate his impulses. Nietzsche would probably frown upon Okonkwo's uncontrolled impulses as he goes about seeking revenge.

Walter Kaufman writes:

Nietzsche believes that a man without impulses could not do the good and create the beautiful anymore than a castrated man could beget children. A man with strong impulses might be evil because he has not learned to sublimate his impulses, but if he should ever acquire self-control he might achieve greatness. In that sense there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine just men, if the latter are just only because they are too feeble ever to have sinned.\(^9\)

The philosophy of Nietzsche is often attacked by critics who say it is prone to chaos. Walter Kaufman defends Nietzsche

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\(^8\)Achebe, Things Fall Apart, p. 206.

by stressing the importance that the German philosopher attaches to self-control while power is being exerted. The organic harmony which results from an organized chaos, states Kaufmann, leads to that culture which is truly a transfigured "Physis" which is the law of nature.\(^\text{10}\)

After Okonkwo and the other five village leaders have been released from prison he murders one of the court messengers sent to disband the village meeting which was summoned to discuss the imprisonment of their leaders by the British administrator. Very likely Okonkwo has no idea about the Western concept of democracy but he is not unaware of his people's fundamental human right to assemble and discuss matters that are vital to their existence. The District Officer who has an axe to grind exerts his own will to power by denying the natives their right of assembly.

It seems fair that the British administration should share both in the blame that is meted out to Okonkwo for killing the messenger and in his own suicide later on. Nevertheless, Okonkwo has acted unreasonably by killing the court messenger who is not directly responsible for the oppression of his people. His action even to the end is a misapplication of the Will to Power, for his eventual suicide removes him from the scene of action completely. This would probably be seen by Nietzsche and others as irrational. Walter Kaufman explains such a situation in this way:

\[^{10}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 227.\]
Rationality . . . gives man mastery over himself; as the will to power is essentially the 'instinct of freedom' it can find fulfillment only through rationality. Reason is the highest manifestation of the will to power, in the distinct sense that through rationality it can realize its objective most fully.\textsuperscript{11}

After all rationalization is completed, Okonkwo still might be blamed for his action. But in fairness to him, one possibly could seek to excuse him on existential grounds. For Okonkwo has not asked to be created the way he is. Neither does he blame anyone unduly. Martin Heidegger would probably say that Okonkwo has only responded to the mood that his surroundings have created. The mood, as Heidegger explains it, is not a succession of psychic events proceeding from within a person. It is external in that it is neither objective nor subjective since it transcends the categories.

Explaining what Heidegger means by the term 'mood,' John Wild writes,

The mood is rather an existential mode which in its way reveals my being-in-the-world. It is centered in the factual place where I am and discloses the naked facticity of this situation in which I am thrown. I feel myself thrown into a situation that weighs on me, that I must solve as best as I can in order to pass on.\textsuperscript{12}

Okonkwo's situation seems to illustrate Heidegger's concept of mood, which is explained by another term 'Thrownness.' His strong instinct for freedom suddenly throws Okonkwo into a situation where he has no one to share with him what he stands for. He probably feels that others around him are too feeble to brave what he has done. He has no God to call on

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 230.

and it does not seem he even needs one—not even the village
gods whom he has defied many times with his individualism.
His body can not be buried in the town like others because
the village gods forbid it.

Some existentialists feel that there comes a time in the
life of every individual when he must take complete responsi-

13 Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions

14 Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," Existentialism,
p. 179.
fights without safeguard for his life and dies in the process fights no more but the man who fights and runs away only to resume again is more heroic. Albert Camus shares a similar view in the Myth of Sisyphus in which the hero, Sisyphus, is confronted with an insurmountable task of rolling a huge stone up a steep mountain. The fact that Okonkwo, unlike Sisyphus, has given in with his suicide makes his courage less heroic.

Albert Camus concludes that:

... Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.15

From our first meeting with Okonkwo we saw in him a man who said yes to life in the manner of the Nietzschean Superman. We had every reason to believe that he would live up to expectation. Chinua Achebe gives us more reason to believe he would when he states,

But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his chi (personal god) says yes also. Okonkwo says yes very strongly so his chi agreed. And not only his chi but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. That was why Okonkwo was chosen to carry a message of war to their enemies.16

On the basis of what we now know of Okonkwo it will be difficult for anyone to disagree with Nietzsche's Zarathustra who believes that all men are too much alike to be significantly different when it comes to the exercise of the Will to

15Ibid., p. 183.
16Achebe, Things Fall Apart, p. 29.
Power. The fact that many a great man has opted for suicide instead of facing the challenges that life poses is a case for the nonexistence of the Nietzschean Superman. Although Camus' Sisyphus has displayed an admirable quality by staying with his task it does not mean that his zeal and courage are as sustaining as the Superman. For this reason he is not indefatigable. All this confirms the frailty of man who automatically falls short of the Nietzschean standard.

The Will to Power manifests itself in more than what the Nietzschean Superman represents, even with possible existentialist qualifications. The practical ideology for which any country or race would take up arms to subjugate another is itself an aspect of the Will to Power. Apart from the use of military might Georges Chatterton-Hill delineates two other ways in which the Nietzschean Will to Power manifests itself:

Just as our theory of knowledge represents an instrument in struggle for existence, an instrument for maintaining the species and increasing its power, so do the various systems of morals in presence represent the tendencies of various races struggling both for existence and supremacy. For there is no such thing as repose; everything is a process of Becoming, and that which remains stationary perishes. 17

Later in this chapter more will be said about the theory of knowledge as an instrument for existence and supremacy. And in the next chapter considerable attention will be given to how various systems of morals constitute a part of the encounter of the two countries in question. But in this

context, we need to discuss the circumstance under which the Europeans came to Africa.

**Power Collectively Expressed**

The spirit of adventure and colonialism which led the Europeans to the discovery of the Americas persisted even after the United States had fought for and won her freedom after a bloody war. With the loss of North America, it became apparent that the third world would become the next bone of contention for the power-hungry Europeans. But first it was necessary for groups like the Association for the Exploration of Inner Africa and individual explorers like Mungo Park, Clapperton, the Lander Brothers, and David Livingstone to break the ice in the early 19th century.

Considering the prospective economic benefits and the opportunity to dominate a less powerful race, Great Britain and France took the lead in seizing the most fertile and promising areas. Great Britain proceeded in accordance with her usual conservative and generally more successful method of colonization, and moved in many cases to the point where revenues and expenditures came close to balancing.

Despite whatever success any European power might have had in world politics at the time, its task was just starting after it had acquired its share of Africa. Most of the areas acquired were not without their Okonhwo's who would at the expense of their own lives resist the presence of foreign intruders. Robert O. Collins describes the procedure in this way:
Once the technical criteria of occupation had been settled, however, the European powers were free to occupy Africa, exerting control with an ease more apparent than real. Equipped with superior weaponry and resources, a relatively small number of Europeans, usually assisted by African troops or allies, were able to impose their control over large African populations. The conspicuous facility by which the Europeans asserted their authority seemed to indicate a moral, as well as technical superiority, at least in the minds of the imperialists, while often obscuring the reality of African resistance.  

Historical data seem to indicate that the British were less radical than the French in the European effort to dub the African a little European. Nevertheless, the Nigerian novels included in this investigation are full of evidences of the European move to undermine the integrity of the Africans. It is in this context that the Africans' responses, including their resistance as well as their accommodation, must be explained. According to at least one school of thought it can be viewed as rational calculations of self interest, not simply irrational, instinctive reactions. Such a positive view is held by A. B. Davidson, who emphasizes that the resistance took different forms at different times. Africans, he said, were not merely 'objects' in the scramble, but interested subjects whose means, organization, and aims have been largely ignored by historians oriented to European imperialism in Africa.  

With so much colonial pressure on the Africans, some Nigerians through ignorance might tend to swing from the


19 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
Sartrean being-for-itself which upholds our humanity to what Sartre on the other hand calls the being-in-itself which has no self consciousness. The masses who were not aware of the damage that colonialism was doing might fall into the being-in-itself category.

As we have seen in the case of Okonkwo in Achebe's Things Fall Apart an individual effort to resist amounts to almost nothing. James Ngugi, a prominent East African novelist, puts the situation this way:

The period of acceptance follows after the indigenous people have been conquered. Economic and political institutions are moulded on those of the metropolitan power. The aim is to create the good docile native—a willing source of raw materials and cheap labour. And if he is not willing there is always the police and the army to do a little pacification. So through the fear of the Bible and the sword, the native at first acts as if he accepts the situation. The educational institutions—remember the church—Attempts to strengthen his faith in the status quo. The native is a clean slate on which anything can be scribbled. He is subjected to a constant barrage of hints that the Western culture is all in all.

Chinua Achebe and Timothy Aluko have been quite outstanding in stereotyping the British administrator in their novels. Here is Chinua Achebe's description of one of those he refers to as 'Coasters' in his Arrow of God:

Captain Winterbottom was the District Officer. The Union Jack flying in front of his bungalow declared he was the King's representative in the district. He took the salute at the Empire Day at the march past of all the school children in the area—one of the few occasions when he wore his white uniform and sword. Mr. Clarke was his Assistant District Officer.

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As would be expected, Captain Winterbottom's administration includes other young Englishmen who are in charge of the prison, the local police detachment, and the public works department. An army unit is always near to be mobilized in case of any uprising by the natives. Knowing how savage the attack of the natives could be, some imperialist agents were no less than slave masters.

When Great Britain introduced the 'Indirect Rule' in Nigeria (a system whereby native chiefs and kings would be used as middlemen) it was thought to be a good idea. Enlightened Africans became critical when they realized how humiliating the method of appointing the warrant chiefs was. The administration's contempt for them added to the complaints of the Africans. Part of this ill treatment of village heads is recorded in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu, the priest of Umuaro, is locked up in jail by Captain Winterbottom and his assistant because the priest has indicated that he would rather be represented by his son at a conference with the District Officer since it is against the tradition of their clan for a priest to be away from the village for days. The priest is detained in prison for over one month when he again refuses to be the administration's warrant chief.

During one of those occasions when the colonial government wants to make the revenues and expenditures come close to balancing, Mr. Wright, who was in charge of the roads, obtains permission from the District Office to use free labor for the completion of a new road. Despite the fact that their labor is free, the young villagers working for
Mr. Wright are treated as slaves. One of them is thoroughly whipped by Wright for coming late to work.

When the whipping incident is reported to Winterbottom he orders an inquiry but Mr. Clarke, the Assistant District Officer who has conducted the findings, lies in his report in order to protect Mr. Wright, his friend, who denies ever whipping anyone. Expressing disgust later, Mr. Clarke says,

You know I was thinking the other day about British love of Commissions of Inquiry. That seems to me to be the real difference between us and the French. They know what they want and do it. We set up a commission to discover all the facts as though facts meant anything. We imagine that the more facts we can obtain about our Africans the easier it will be to rule them.22

Even Captain Winterbottom, who has identified himself with the status quo because of his long years of service in the colonial army and the civil service, still thinks that the administration is too easy on the Africans. He tells his assistant,

We British are a curious people doing everything halfheartedly. Look at the French. They are not ashamed of teaching their culture to backward races under their charge. Their attitude to the native ruler is clear. They say to him: 'This land has belonged to you because you have been strong enough to hold it. By the same token it now belongs to us. If you are not satisfied come out and fight with us! What do we British do? We flounder from our expedient to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure old tyrants on their thrones or more likely animal skins—we not only do that but we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before.'23

Timothy Aluko takes up the same theme in his One Man One Matchet. He depicts the Englishman as one assuming the

22Ibid., p. 135.
23Ibid., p. 43.
role of a savior of some kind for the African who is seen as a child to be protected against his follies and ignorance. This seems to reflect the European notion that the African is only a child of nature. Henry is a young Agricultural Officer just arrived in the colony. Not long after assuming duty in Nigeria he decides to cut down cocoa trees that are infected by disease. When one of the African chief's questions the wisdom behind his recommendation he quickly suggests to the District Office that the chief should be locked up in jail. He tells his companion,

These bloody Africans need to be protected against themselves and against their own ignorance. . . . They need to be protected against our own fancy notion of democracy. Just because we in Britain have evolved a system of government by discussion and argument which somehow seems to work we think we must use the same methods in tropical Africa.24

The African to whom all this has been said and done has himself within the years come a long way in education. His new awareness is now enough to make him demand freedom and he does so. Politically he is becoming restless. Jim Stanfield, the District Officer, reminds his impatient Agricultural Officer, "You'll remember the keynote of last year's second Wiltshire course. In all we do we must carry the [African] intelligentsia with us."25

Udo Akpan, a young Cambridge-educated African in Aluko's novel, belongs to the few intelligentsia that the administration is carrying with it. Although Aluko presents Mr. Jim

25Ibid., p. 10.
Stanfield as a well-intentioned British administrator, he takes the opportunity to make a general statement that seems to reflect his own background and experience. Aluko, who has himself received part of his training in England, states:

Udo Akpan accepted Stanfield's friendship with concealed misgiving. He thought he knew his kind from his student days in Britain. They meant well, and spoke well. They invited the African student to their homes to show they regarded him as a fellow human being: his colour did not matter. But Udo always felt that however much they tried there was always an indefinable something that stood in the way of complete understanding between the African and the Englishmen, something that always gave expression even to the most understanding of Englishmen that the understanding African is an exception, and that beneath his dark skin swarm the germs of savagery, and ritual murder and sex.26

As the first African District Officer in the area, Udo Akpan is not unaware of the pressures that his position would put on him since the bureaucratic demands of his work are somehow incompatible with the African way of doing things. The African chiefs with whom he is working do not understand his limitations and what powers he has. They quickly name him Black White man because he has adopted the white man's mannerism in dealing with them. If the pressure from his fellow Africans were the only problems it would have been better. The colonial administration also does not give him a free hand.

Fettered by the British government machinery and outside pressures, Akpan resigns because "the meagre resources at the disposal of government are woefully inadequate for tackling the immense problem of African administration." Akpan's

"honest effort as a cog in the huge wheel of government has been completely stultified by the fact that” he has access to "the minutest fraction of government." He further states that his "humble efforts have been fettered by General Orders, Financial Instructions and other aspects of Civil Service bureaucracy" that include "our adopted system of Justice" which is "an object of ridicule." He would rather quit before the prevailing condition brings "a complete disintegration of law and order in this country."27 We find from the foregoing that even when the African was given some opportunity to preside over his own affairs, his path was still laden with hindrances that made him unable to function effectively.

Power Intellectually Expressed

The use of the theory of knowledge as an instrument of power in the colonial era took the form of literature. Nietzsche considers knowledge as an instrument of combat since certain ideas that are accepted as universally valid merely prove such concepts as a means of maintaining one's hold on life. Some Africanists feel that colonial literature did more damage to the African image and the struggle for freedom from colonialism than other devices. The Russian writer, A. B. Davidson confirms this when he writes:

Colonial novels played a most painful part in the spreading of colonial theories. The formulation of the traditional colonial literature was closely linked with racial theories. Colonial literature was born out of scornful treatment of African peoples and in its turn favoured the

27 Ibid., p. 159.
taking root of racial prejudices. Literature of this kind caused damage to the study of the African people's struggle because it spread wrong ideas.28

Speaking in an interview on the role of the African writer in a New Nation, Chinua Achebe makes a passing reference to the question of race in literature and politics. He said,

We must begin to correct the prejudices which generations of detractors created about the Negro. If these prejudices were expressed by the unenlightened they would disappear. But men of distinction have been known to lend support to them. Thomas Jefferson, the great theorician of American freedom believed—that at least in his active years—that Negroes have a lower grade of talent than whites. The poet Kipling said something about black men being half-devil and half-child.29

Chinua Achebe in his *Arrow of God* gives us an insight into what colonial literature is like. In the chapter we meet Mr. Clarke, the young English Assistant District Officer feeding his ego with George Allen's book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. George Allen concludes his book with the following:

For those seeking but a comfortable living and a quiet occupation Nigeria is closed . . . and until the people live under something like sanitary conditions. But for those in search of strenuous life, for those who can deal with men as others deal with materials, who can grasp great situations, coax events, shape destinies and ride on the crest of the waves of time Nigeria is holding out her hands. For the men who in India have made the Briton the law-maker, the organizer, the engineer of the world this new, old land has great rewards and honourable work. I know we can find the men. Our mothers did not draw us with nervous grip back to the fire of boyhood, back into


the home circle, back to the purposeless sports of middle life; it is our greatest pride that they do--albeit tearfully--send us fearless and erect, to lead the backward races into line.30

Towards the end of the colonial era, knowledge as an instrument of power was no longer confined to the British. The literate Africans in a countermove responded in the language of their detractors while trying to put their own house in order as well. Unlike Okonkwo who rejected totally all that the white man stood for Ezeulu in Achebe's Arrow of God had thought that since the white man had come with great power and conquest it was necessary that some people should learn the ways of his own deity. That was why he had agreed to send his son, Oduche, to learn the new ritual. He also wanted him to learn the white man's wisdom.31

With the emergence of African intellectuals the move to dissipate the European notion of African inferiority shifted from armed confrontation to politics and an intellectual offensive. Like their other African counterparts, the Nigerian literati expropriated, when necessary, the literary techniques of the West and their related perceptual values to postulate an African or even anti-Western point of view. The novelists in particular consistently borrowed Western historiography in order to destroy the obnoxious Western myth that Africans had no meaningful historical past to relate to.

Chinua Achebe is foremost among Nigerian novelists in the use of European techniques in establishing a similarity between the historical evolution of Europe and Africa. Thus

31Ibid., p. 51.
he borrowed the title of his first novel, Things Fall Apart, from William B. Yeats' poem, "Second Coming," and from T. S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi," Achebe derived the title of his second novel, No Longer at Ease. Lloyd W. Brown writes:

Achebe accepts the historiographic principle which allows Eliot to telescope multiple cycles of history into one moment, to compress repetitive conflicts between Christendom and paganism or between hostile cultures, into a single event or personal experience. But Achebe also exploits this material in order to assert the validity of pagan values which the Christian feels impelled to minimize or deny.32

Most Nigerian novelists attacked the imperialists as well as their countrymen who in one way or the other have undermined the effort to build a better society. Their targets range from the villager to the urban dweller, the intellectual to the politician. This does not mean that the writers themselves are without their prejudices. Although the English-speaking West African writers with their French-speaking counterparts attack colonialism, the former do not significantly belong to the Negritude movement which consists of black writers whose theme generally glorifies being black. Most Nigerian writers reject the Negritude movement that is now a vogue among the French-speaking West Africans. The movement is led by President Léopold Senghor of Senegal who is also a poet and writer. There seems to be an attitude among Nigerian writers that the theory of knowledge which is a manifestation of the Will to Power should not necessarily

lead to the formation of a clique of writers of one race.

Martin Banham quotes Wole Soyinka who once wrote of

... the inherent invalid doctrine of Negritude ... The duiker will not paint 'duiker' on his beautiful back to proclaim his duikeritude; you will know him by his elegant leap. The less self-conscious the African is, and the more innately his individual qualities appear in his writing, the more seriously he will be taken as an artist of exciting dignity.33

Sartre, the French existentialist who supports the Negritude movement, is quoted by Gerald Moore as describing poetry [an arm of Negritude literature] as a torch which passes from one hand to another. Sartre believes that the torch is in the hands of the Negro race now because it is their moment of revolution, their emancipation, their throwing off the shackles of servitude. Gerald Moore further quotes Sartre who in his "L' Orph'ee Noir" was asking the Western critics these rhetorical questions:

What did you expect to hear when you took the muzzle off those lips?
Did you expect to hear yourself overwhelmed with praises and love?34

Whether we agree with the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka or Sartre, another Nigerian, P. C. Owuachi states what he believes the Negritude movement could achieve:

The importance of any historical recapitulation in Negritude is, in my own opinion, merely for the purpose of seeking the ideological predication for objective resolution of realities of white institutional racism against the Black Peoples. For us, in the African perspective


and in Negritude, communal spirituality is not an opiate of the people, but rather the animating or the vibrant force that helps a people define all that they do, or can do, or want to do in their existence. It is all diffusing and all encompassing in human life process. It is the very basis of African communalism.\(^5\)

Freedom from the Will to Power of a stronger country is not without responsibility. The challenge that freedom poses is existential in nature. Sartre states this idea clearly when he writes,

Thus, existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. And when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not only mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.\(^6\)

In a world where power struggle constitutes an essential part of human survival it is only important for the weak to wake up from his slumber. It is unwise to count on the sympathy of others as a way of getting by. Although Nietzsche and others believe that his ideal man, the Overman, cannot be found in real life it is, nevertheless, helpful to have a race of people who will not allow themselves to be pushed around. What the Nigerian novelists have done is to bring to our awareness that to some extent the African was not just an object that was tossed around during the colonial era. They, however, acknowledge the fact that he was on the weaker side in the struggle. Part of the African self-assertion and the hindrances that it faces is the subject of the next chapter.

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\(^{36}\) Sartre, \textit{Existentialism and Human Emotions}, p. 16.
CHAPTER II

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATION OF AFRICAN MORALITY

The choice of titles for Chinua Achebe's trilogy was not accidental. When he named his first book *Things Fall Apart*, he meant to say that the imposition of Western morality upon the Africans under the British colonial rule had not only dislocated the African culture but had also meant that things would no longer be at ease. For this reason he gave the title *No Longer At Ease* to his second novel. Chinua Achebe is one example of many contemporary African writers who have adopted this theme. Playwrights like Wole Soyinka and poets like John P. Clark have joined novelists like Achebe in their yearning for a return to truly authentic African values—a situation that would no longer make them live in what Sartre calls "Bad Faith." These gentlemen would no doubt hate to hear their countrymen referred to as people with "unauthentic beings" in the sense of Heidegger's use of the phrase. But Chinua Achebe himself would, in a different language, describe the "unauthentic" Nigerian as a man who has sold his matchet and wears its sheath to battle.

The African novelists have suggested in their works that the British who colonized Nigeria rejected almost every aspect of the people's morality, determining from the beginning to change their culture. Armed with the notion that the
African traditions and customs were worthless, the colonists imposed various systems of European morality on the Africans and used them for self-aggrandizement as well.

This chapter is partially sympathetic with some views that humanistic ethical thinkers hold. They believe that the understanding of man’s nature and the understanding of values and norms for his life are inseparable. According to Erich Fromm,

... Our knowledge of human nature does not lead to ethical relativism but, on the contrary, to the conviction that the source of norms for ethical conduct are to be found in man's nature itself.¹

But from what we know of the Western man from Nietzsche and other philosophers his ethical conduct is also deeply rooted in the Christian religion. This, one is led to believe, is so much so that it becomes difficult to imagine morality without religion, although very few have argued to the contrary. The interrelatedness of ethics and religion is stated by Stephen Toulmin who puts it this way:

Where there is a good moral reason for choosing one course of action rather than another, morality is not to be contradicted by religion. Ethics provides the reason for choosing the 'right' course: religion helps us to put our hearts into it.²

Henceforth this relatedness between morality and religion will be used to establish a basis for African morality.

The very basis of African morality, which is religion, was purposely overlooked by the British imperialists. It is


quite clear that to these colonizers an African religion was not considered of any moral significance. Owing to this negligence it is evident to us why things were not easy. As John Dewey states it,

We have to take into account the forces of existing traditions and customs; of the pattern of action and belief that already exist. We have to find out what forces already at work can be reinforced so that they move toward the desired change and how the conditions that oppose change can be gradually weakened. Such questions as these can be considered on the basis of fact and reason.

Achebe and Aluko seem to suggest in their works that the ethnocentrism of the British imperialist obscured his sense of reality in this regard. The reality of the Nigerian situation was the fact that African morality is more or less a network of tradition, customs and several religious beliefs so interwoven that it would take more than force to untangle them. According to Arthur C. Danto,

Moralities are evolved, as natural phenomena, in answer to a need to hold societies together, to insure their perpetuation, and help contain the drives and impulses which could, without some check or sublimation, threaten or destroy the fabric of the group. A combination of circumstances determines the character of a morality, and as Zarathustra somewhat heavily puts the point, 'If one first knows the need, the land, the sky, and neighbours of a people, one can readily make out the law of its overcoming, and why it climbs towards its hope upon this ladder.'

There is nothing to suggest that the Europeans described in the Nigerian novels were concerned about understanding the

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religious motives of the African morality; rather they were dismissed as primitive.

Philosophically, it can be argued that whatever is described as morally good denotes a property of ultimate and absolute being. Certainly anthropologically, this can be shown to be the case. In almost all the known cultures of the world the good as opposed to evil has always been associated with some ultimate reality. In most cases the ultimate reality is a Supreme Being. He is called by as many names as there are those who conceive such notions. Thus behind the African's belief in what is good, it is hardly surprising to find a belief in a Supreme Deity who delegates powers to several subordinates. These lieutenants are conceived as carrying out certain obligations on behalf of the Supreme God. Victor Ferkiss describes well Africa's religions when he writes,

The traditional religions of Africa are often described as animalistic, that is, as attributing spiritual personality not only to man but to animals, trees, rocks, etc., thus making them objects of worship. This is misleading. Africans do believe in the universality of Spirit and that the order of causality is such that the acts of the spirit affect daily life and can be influenced through religious practices. . . . They recognize, however, a hierarchy of spiritual beings, and all traditional African religious systems conceive of spirits as holding their power as surrogates of a Supreme Power."

African historians as well as novelists contend that the African concept of God was by no means borrowed from the

Christians. Contesting this claim, a Ghanaian philosopher, Willie E. Abrahams, argues,

If Onyame is the central name of God, then it must express a strikingly theological meaning. And, from the proliferation of minor deities which the Akans claim to be an avenue to God's Munificence and bountiful protection, I am led to believe that the correct and proper derivation of Onyame or Nyame is nya: to get... and meet: be satisfied. The derivation would appear to be confirmed by the assiduity and frequency with which the Akans appeal for all sorts of help to the minor deities whom they conceived as lieutenants of the Supreme Being, almost even as the expression of his omnipotence.6

Although Chinua Achebe speaks from his background as an Ibo, nevertheless, other Nigerian ethnic groups would share his notion of God as expressed in his novels. In Things Fall Apart Chinua Achebe introduces a dialogue between a Christian missionary and an Ibo elder. In the conversation Akunna, the African elder, tells his European friend, the Reverend Brown,

You say there is one Supreme God who made heaven and earth... We also believe in Him and call Him CHUKUVU. He made all the world and the other gods.7

And when the Christian disputes the validity of the existence of 'the other gods,' Akunna tells him, "He [God] finds that he cannot do the work alone and so... he appoints the smaller gods to help Him because His work is too great for one person."8

From the preceding it seems that Achebe, with his character as a mouthpiece, would want to draw a parallel between the

7Achebe, Things Fall Apart, p. 185.
8Ibid., p. 186.
views that are expressed in Christianity and their equivalents in African religious concepts. The African religion appears to be more anthropomorphic because of the fact that the African culture is more person-oriented. When the African concluded by telling the "reverend gentleman" that it was more reasonable to approach a great man through his servants, he meant to say that God was not to be approached directly. If the missionary had given a second thought to his own religion he would have found the African equivalent to the idea of a mediator in Jesus Christ, although the latter is regarded as a son and not a servant as the African sees the smaller gods. Although many Africans believe in a Supreme God who is surrounded by several lieutenants it is inappropriate to think of these Africans as having just one religion. The fact that different ethnic groups emphasize certain things more than others would be a reason to believe that there are several religions in traditional African societies.

One of the reasons why people are known to cling to different religions is the hope of avoiding one calamity or another in the future. In Christianity some believe in order to avoid languishing in hell fire; in Hinduism it is the despair which haunts believers owing to the law of Karma, and so on. Most African religions are plagued by the same experience. The concern of people in the African situation is not so much of what happens to one after his death but how to ward off immediate threat to life and property. This threat could come from some angry deities or from enemies. Local situations determine the solution that a tribe finds
to its problem. Sango worshippers, for example, would think of how to please their god before he sends thunder to destroy them. In his novel Arrow of God Chinua Achebe describes how a village solves its problem by installing a deity.

Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to houses and carry men, women, and children in slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu.9

The Africans also believe that the smaller deities do cater to their needs such as increasing farm yields, and bringing other forms of prosperity. Ezeulu, the hero of Arrow of God, explains to his son, who does not understand what one of the village deities is like:

There is no cause to be afraid, my son. You have seen Eru, the Magnificent, the one that gives wealth to those who find favour with him. People sometimes see him at that place in this kind of weather. Perhaps he was returning home from a visit to Idimeli or other deities. Eru only harms those who swear falsely before his shrine. . . . When he likes a man wealth flows like a river into his house, his goats produce threes and his hens hatch nines.10

These little deities are not only thought of as protectors but are also believed to be able to punish severely when displeased. People are frightened when they think of terrible little gods like Amadiora and Ekwensu that Chinua Achebe describes in his novels as bringers of evil and destruction. Many anthropologists believe that fear is certainly an important factor in religious conviction. They

9Achebe, Arrow of God, p. 17.

10Ibid., p. 10.
feel that it would be restrictive to define religion in terms of beliefs and customs alone. But Melville J. Herskovites states,

The mere fact that powers greater than man are conceived in the universe, means that some element of fear enters, especially when there exists a complementary belief that some act of human omission or commission may provoke retaliatory acts of hostility. The ethical role of the so-called "great" religions has received much emphasis and has been advanced as the primary differentiating factor that sets them off from the religions of non-literate people. But concepts of right and wrong, of acceptable and inacceptable behavior, can be found among all groups. As has been stated, one of the principal tasks of the supernatural beings that inhabit the universe is to punish violations of the traditionally sanctioned code, even where positive rewards are not held to follow proper behavior.11

Timothy Aluko has demonstrated a considerable skill in depicting Sango, the god of thunder, as a frightening deity when he describes his reaction when his followers were turning to Christianity. He writes,

The sky was overcast with thick, grey clouds drifting in the direction of Idasa. That meant rain... lightning flashes momentarily parted the clouds. They were followed at varying intervals by the deep rumbling of thunder, behind the clouds. Shango, the god of lightning and thunder was registering his anger at this strange talk of a new God taking hold of simple folk who were once unquestioning votaries of his order. The malady must be nipped in the bud.12

When fear is related to religion, a pattern of response is often evolved. When people whose religions are more prone to generate fear are converted to another religion, they are believed to find it much harder to break with habits and


beliefs held before their conversion. Beliefs once held are an integral part of one's consciousness. They linger in such a way that the holders have a hard time getting rid of them. This seems to be the case with the Africans who were always haunted by some superstition or fear of one deity or another that they had known before their conversion to Christianity.

This dilemma of the African is suggested in Timothy Aluko's One Man One Wife. In Isolo where the story is set, Shonponna, the god of smallpox, is conceived as the author of smallpox and will punish people by inflicting the disease on his victims when he is offended. With an outbreak of a smallpox epidemic Christians and pagans alike conclude that Shonponna is out to avenge his loss of followers to Christianity. To appease the deity the traditional sacrifice is usually done with witches and sorcerers and other undesirables in the village. Although everyone knows what is to be done, the fear of the white man's administration and the dual loyalty of some native Christians pose a problem for the village elders who are gathered to find a solution to the plague. As a result of this dilemma the people are confused and dismayed by the situation. Neither government intervention nor the teaching of Christianity has eliminated the confusion of the natives. In their minds the god Shonponna is very real.

Beliefs are hard to get rid of. To the villagers in Aluko's One Man One Wife nothing could be more real than the existence of ghosts and witchcraft. The new Christians are no exception. They too are as superstitious as everyone else. An outsider of a typical African village like Aluko's
Isolo may not realize how much influence the milieu of horror created by a mass of tribal superstition and acquired habits have on the lives of natives. The problem is enormous when any change is attempted.

Achebe and Aluko have in almost all of their novels depicted many prosessed African Christians as exhibiting simultaneously this dual loyalty to both the newfound faith and their traditional religion. The question that lies behind this situation is whether the African Christian is truly committed to his new religion. The two authors do not seem to agree that some loyal African Christians would abandon traditional beliefs contrary to Christianity. Apart from the influence of traditional religions Islam has had a significant influence in some areas of Nigeria. This seems to add to the confusion that already exists. The presence of these religions contradict the popular western notion that Africa is irreligious. In a critical review of John Mbiti’s African Religions and Philosophy, G. O. M. Tasie states,

John Mbiti has tried to repair the 'misinterpretation, misrepresentation and misunderstanding' of African religions. He makes his points clearly in African Religions and Philosophy; with manifold illustrations, to show that the continent has not only religion, but religions; for the African, he says, to be is to be religious: '... He also stresses the thread which runs through the book, that although African religions might be polytheistic, there is the Supreme God at the head: 'without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being.'

Whether or not there is more than an African religion, what

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is important is the depth of commitment that the African has for religion. With such a wide range of religious influences in Nigeria the Western notion of morality with its Judeo-Christian attachment has had a hard time taking root in Nigeria. This is because traditional religion has had too strong an impact to let other influences be felt in a significant way. This has been to the disappointment of the Europeans who had intended to make European morality universal.

One of the stereotypes of the African brand of Christianity is to be found in Aluko's One Man One Wife. Joshua, a respected member of his community, has accepted Christianity and played an active role in his church as an elder. In spite of the zeal he has shown in his new faith he cannot reconcile himself with the idea of marrying only one wife. It is almost conventional that a man of his status in his community should have more than one wife. Since Christianity teaches monogamy he finds the restriction that his new faith places on him cumbersome and so looks for a way of getting around it.

Not only does Joshua discard the Christian idea of monogamy, but he also clings tightly to his traditional beliefs in witchcraft and ghosts. He confides his secret belief in Royasin, a friend of considerable education and Christian background, who is called by his professional name, 'teacher,' by the villagers:

"Even Christianity cannot explain certain mysterious things in this country. Even the white man's magic cannot explain these things. Teacher, there are ghosts."
Teacher’s face registered a momentary set-back. For he, too, believed it in his heart of hearts. The white man’s magic becomes inadequate in matters of ghosts and witchcraft . . . and everyone knew it save the white man.14

In moral and religious matters Aluko and Achebe portray the African Christian as someone with a considerable capacity for compartmentalization. The overwhelming influence of their remaining cultural norms makes some actions of these African Christians ridiculous. Chinua Achebe in his No Longer At Ease presents Isaac Okonkwo as a devout Christian. As a priest he is portrayed as an African who would do all that is humanly possible to free himself from the traditions and beliefs of his people. He stops his children from mingling with the children of his neighbors who are non-Christians. He deprives his wife and children of the African pastime of telling folktales because he believes such tales are "immoral." Recalling his past experiences as a Christian he tells his son, "I went through fire to become a Christian. Because I suffered I understand Christianity more than you will ever do."15

With this type of background it is hard to imagine that Isaac Okonkwo would refuse to let his son marry the daughter of an Osu. In Ibo customs an Osu is a man given to idols and afterwards he becomes an outcast from whose family nobody else can marry except a person of similar background. The girl that Okonkwo’s son intends to marry is herself a Chris-

14Aluko, One Man One Wife, p. 34.

tian. In spite of his professed faith in Christianity Isaac Okonkwo's answer to his son's request is clear and straightforward:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generation, will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. Who will marry your daughter? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son; we are Christians.16

Obi, Isaac Okonkwo's son, has already suggested that Christians are not to encourage the pagan practice of the Ibo that makes a fellowman and his family outcasts because tradition has set them aside for some deity. Isaac Okonkwo is not convinced, however, by his son's logic. His loyalty on this point does not lie with Christianity which preaches that all men are the same and equal in God's sight. He would rather stick with his cultural norms.

Inept preaching is only one of several instances found in Nigerian literature where religious shallowness or unbelief placed people in a state of dilemma. Nietzsche, who lived in the late nineteenth century, can perhaps help us to better understand this phenomenon, though his concern was, of course, not contemporary Africa, but the hypocrisy of his fellow Europeans in regards to Christianity. Since Nietzsche was an atheist, he was more concerned with European morality than with Christianity. But given the fact that the former was grounded in the latter, the philosopher decided to attack

16Ibid., p. 127.
also the root of European morality, Christianity. One of Nietzsche's strategies was to prove that his fellow Europeans did not believe in Christianity as they claimed. If this was true it meant that the very foundation of their morality had cracked and was about to crumble, and there would need to be a re-evaluation of all their values. Their morality would have to be based on something other than Christianity.

For those who claimed that they did not believe in God but still held tight to the Judeo-Christian values Nietzsche gave the parable of the Madman in his essay, "The Joyful Wisdom." According to Nietzsche in the parable, a madman with a lighted lantern in hand ran into a marketplace on a bright morning calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" Unfortunately, as one might suspect, those present in the marketplace at the time claimed that they did not believe in God, and instead, made fun of the madman. Finally, the insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances and said, "I mean to tell you! We have killed him,—you and I! we are murderers!"\(^{17}\)

The audience of the insane man was greatly startled by his accusation that they were murderers, since the Judeo-Christian tradition has made murder abhorrent. The fact that they were disturbed by his accusation indicates a degree of belief in God. The self-styled atheists would hate to know that they were not the atheists they claimed to be because they acknowledged the blasphemy in the mad man's

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accusation. Little did they realize how inseparable their morality was from Christianity. By the same token Isaac Okonkwo would hate to know how much of his traditional African beliefs he retains in spite of his effort to rid himself of what he describes as pagan. Like many Europeans in Nietzsche's time who were not aware of what they believed in, Okonkwo was also unaware of the depth of his native beliefs.

Broadly speaking, if Nietzsche was right in observing that Christianity, which constituted the basis of European morality, was facing a threat then African morality might be judged as being in double jeopardy. For not only has the African himself been unable to remain true to his new-found faith, but the newly found faith has also been part of a collapsing European morality.

Although the contemporary African novelist appears negative in his attitude toward Christianity his is only a reaction against the dubious roles of some missionaries whose activities have distorted the African image in the eye of the Western world. Other than stereotyping some of these missionaries, it does not seem that the novelists have any special malice against Christianity per se. Many of them are products of mission schools. Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* describes two missionaries thus:

Mr. Brown's successor was the Rev. James Smith, and he was a different kind of man. He condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were in mortal conflict with the sons of dark-
ness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal.¹⁸

The holier-than-thou attitude of fundamentalist preachers like the Rev. Smith damaged the image of the missionary. Filled with religious dogma some missionaries made themselves objects of suspicion. According to T. O. Beidelman,

Missionaries entertained inconsistent notions about the signs of right conscience or the nature of Christian conduct. They describe their goals as essentially Spiritual and religious, yet—we find missionaries legislating against wearing Muslim or pagan dress, against beer, tobacco and dancing, against wearing traditional jewellery, against use of traditional names, against traditional cosmetics and hairstyle, and endorsing consumption of European cotton goods and Western hygiene. Clearly missionaries view Christian life as a totality, involving every facet of cultural life, from domestic organization and inheritance to forms of punishment, amusement, and grooming. Much of this is, of course, in no way prescribed by the formal literature of Christian teaching, any more than the underlying notions of reasonability, propriety, and goodwill are delineated in legal literature, even though these affect many aspects of legal interpretation.¹⁹

Local African politicians could not convince themselves that the church was not another arm of British imperialism. The fact that the Anglican Church was a state church in England added to the suspicion. Referring to Akpan, one of his characters in One Man One Matchet, Timothy Aluko gives expression to what seemed to pass through the mind of some college educated Africans during the colonial era. He writes,

¹⁸Achebe, Things Fall Apart, p. 190.

In the United Kingdom he [Akpan] had attended Student Union meetings where budding nationalists read long theses to prove that the Church missions were in fact an advance army of British imperialism and that their real mission was to prepare the mind and keep the eye of the converted African on the blessings of the Kingdom in heaven while the British imperialist carried away the good things of the kingdom here on earth.20

Although the African may not have had anything to quarrel with about Christianity, the dubious activities of some missionaries did raise some questions in the minds of the natives. Like their countrymen in government most of the missionaries were no less paternalistic in their attitude toward Nigerians. In many things they kept their distance from their supposed Christian brothers.

In fact, with the new awareness on the part of the educated Nigerian, he does not seem to find a justification for the supposed superiority of the Christian-inspired morality of the Europeans. He might as well join another European, Nietzsche, who makes the following observation:

There is little to be learned from the historians of morality (especially Englishmen): they themselves are usually, quite unsuspiciously, under the influence of a definite morality, and act unwittingly as its armour-bearers and followers—perhaps still repeating sincerely the popular superstition of Christian Europe, that the characteristic of moral action consists in abnegation, self-denial, self-sacrifice, or in fellow-feeling and fellow-suffering. The usual error in their premises is their insistence on a certain consensus among human beings, at least among civilized human beings, with regards to certain propositions of morality and thence they conclude that these propositions are absolutely binding even upon you and me; or reversely, they come to the conclusion that no morality at all is binding,

20Aluko, *One Man One Matchet*, p. 129.
after the truth dawned upon them that to different peoples morality valuations are necessarily different.21

In his novel, One Man One Matchet, Aluko writes about something that stands in the way of complete understanding between the Englishman and the African even when they appear to be on the best of terms. Achebe seems to share that view when Mr. Brown whom he has described as a compromising missionary turns out not to be quite so. When the missionary finds out from the village elder, Akunna, what the African concept of God is, his effort has been to obliterate the African belief that is rooted in the African culture. According to Dr. Lloyd W. Brown,

... Mr. Brown's grasp of Ibo religion does not include real understanding or a systematic recognition of the African morality. The missionary's 'lesson' is merely an intellectual insight into the dynamics of a culture that he is determined to destroy. The European ignorance of African language (and culture) therefore complements the ethnocentric bias of his Christianity.22

The works of Aluko and Achebe leave one with the impression that the African is pragmatic in religious matters. The African is portrayed as someone who is continuously searching for the true religion. He is not dogmatic and would not shut his door to new ideas. Practicality seems to be his watchword. His flexibility does not make his commitment to one religion induce him to seek to convert others to that one. In Achebe's Arrow of God the priest of the village deity sends his son to join the Christian church. Because the


22Brown, "Cultural Norms and Modes," p. 29.
white man has come with great power and wisdom he has thought it would be better to let his son "learn the ways of the white man and his deity."  

In the same book Achebe describes how the farmers are unable to harvest their crops owing to the stubbornness of the priest of the village god, Ulu. It is against the people's custom to harvest their crops when the priest has not performed his ritual for the harvest. In desperation the villagers turn to the church, which receives part of their harvest after they have been told that the Christian God would protect them. Theirs is an attempt to please any god who could protect them against the wrath of another.

Owing to the rebellion of the people, Ulu punishes Ezeulu, his priest, by bringing destruction to his household.

In his conclusion Achebe states,

In destroying his priest he had also brought disaster to himself . . . for a deity who chose a time such as this to destroy his priest or abandon him to his enemies was inciting people to take liberties; and Umuaro was just ripe to do so. The Christian harvest which took place after . . . saw more people than ever Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many an Umuaro man had sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam that was harvested in the man's field was in the name of the man's son.  

In the mind of the African, the Supreme Deity has the image of a kind old father whose kindness is taken for granted most times.

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23 Achebe, Arrow of God, p. 51.
24 Ibid., p. 287.
The African does not deal with God in exactly the same manner that he deals with the lesser deities. There is a considerable degree of precariousness when dealing with the smaller deities. It depends on how powerful the particular one in question is conceived to be. Because of the African's tendency to lean toward polytheism, the Judeo-Christian God is sometimes mistaken as one of the lesser gods. This notion is contained in the passage in Achebe's *Arrow of God* in which the villagers sent one or two yams to the church hoping to obtain immunity from a God. It should be noted, however, that this may not always be the case in most African churches. The local church leaders, no doubt, make a distinction between Judeo-Christian God and the lesser gods of the local religions.

Achebe and Aluko try to show in their works that the African sometimes adopts what could be described as a quasi Nietzschean attitude toward morality. His instinct for power can make him very defiant. Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* participates in killing Ikemefuna, the slave boy that he has kept for the village. In doing so he is defying the moral law of the African society that forbids a man to kill a child who had once called him father. His friend, Obierika, reminds him that the goddess of the Earth could wipe out his family for such action. Okonkwo on the other hand believes he has done the will of the goddess whose messenger he has obeyed. Gideon-Cyrus Mutsio, however, feels differently when he states,

Okonkwo is not supposed to have anything to do with the sacrifice but he accompanies the clan elders when they go to kill Ikemefuna. When the boy is struck and runs toward
him, Okonkwo cuts him down because he is 'afraid of being thought weak.' This is the beginning of tragedy for him. Later he accidentally shoots and kills a clansman. He must be exiled and everything he owns is destroyed to appease the tribal gods.25

On morality, James Ngugi is one of those who see a parallel between the European-African relationship and the Prospero-Caliban story of Shakespeare's The Tempest. Like Caliban the African, Ngugi says, has learnt many things from the European who on many occasions has failed to practice what he preaches. When the educated few realize this, they organize the discontent of the natives into a weapon aimed at the throat of the matter. It should be recalled that Caliban reminded Prospero, his master, that his education had among other things enabled him to curse. According to James Ngugi,

... some of these weapons of conquest, education for instance, are double edged. The people watched the institutions of the master, noting their weaknesses: the disparity between religious ideals and practice, between the economic power of the white, often settled, minority, and that of the black majority. The peasant and urban workers feel the pinch of taxation and appalling living conditions.26

While some similarity exists between the Caliban-Prosp-ero encounter and what happened during the age of British imperialism in Nigeria it is objectionable to conceive the African as an equivalent to Shakespeare's Caliban. The African did not learn his culture from the Europeans as Caliban did from Prospero. It is, however, true that the


European morality has had some influence on the African culture. The Nigerian writers, while accepting some of the alterations that European influences have brought to the Nigerian culture, do object strongly to a total destruction of vital aspects of African morality. Some African writers would probably agree with Nietzsche’s attack on the weakening effect of Western morality when he urges:

Let us speak out this new demand. We need a critique of morals values, the value of these values is for the first time to be called into question—and for this purpose a knowledge is necessary of condition and circumstances out of which these values grew, and under which they experience their evolution and their distortion (morality as a result, as a symptom, as a mask, as Tartuffism, as disease, as misunderstanding; but also morality as a cause, as a remedy, as a stimulant, as a fetter, as a drug), especially as such a knowledge has neither existed up to the present time nor is even now generally desired.27

When the African accepted Western institutions which constituted a medium of disseminating European morality, it was not altogether an act of free will. To some extent he was not left with much choice but to accept what the prevailing situation had imposed upon him. Little did he realize how much of his valuable culture would be diffused by the alien culture. At the same time the Western institutions were not without their advantages. As in many other human situations the African was caught in the middle. Since he could not eat his cake and have it, he had to sacrifice some vital aspects of his culture for the benefit of the European institutions that have been somehow helpful.

When the African received Western education and embraced Christianity and occasionally displayed European mannerisms, he would hate to know how much of his identity he has lost. Since people are naturally afraid of knowing how much freedom of action they wield, they shy away from such knowledge. This shying away from the knowledge of their freedom is analogous to what is expressed in Sartre's concept of "Bad Faith."

Mary Warnock writes,

The concept of Bad Faith, as the device which protects us from the anguish of recognizing that we are freer than we like to think. . . . 'Values' says Sartre 'spring up around us like partridges' when we take a step in any direction. But every now and then, perhaps because of some war or revolution, perhaps because of some personal crisis, people are forced to think about their values, and it will be then that they face their freedom in anguish.28

Strictly speaking there is scarcely anyone who does not at one time or the other fall a victim of the Sartrean Bad Faith. Even when we are doing our very best in life Sartre believes we are living in Bad Faith since Bad Faith itself is derived from the ultimate structure of human reality. There are certain things that we ordinarily wouldn't want to do. But many times society demands and compels us to do such things or to behave in a certain way. In order to conform with societal demands we sometimes cease to be ourselves. It is at such times that we bloom in Bad Faith according to Sartre. One of Sartre's popular anecdotes to illustrate Bad Faith is his cafe-observation. He describes the activities of a waiter in action in a restaurant in this way,

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. . . . We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a café. 29

The waiter's employer and the customers whom he serves expect selfless service. In order to meet their expectation the waiter behaves in a manner that is probably not reflective of him as a person when he is not at work. For Sartre this is Bad Faith at its best. It is very likely that those living in Bad Faith are generally not aware of it. Even when they realize the true situation they don't want to admit it. The same situation seems to operate with Nigerians who have exchanged their true African manners for Western mannerisms. The situation that Aluko places Akpan in in his One Man One Matchet seems to me to be a paradigm of Sartre's type of Bad Faith in African literature. Akpan is a young Nigerian with a brilliant educational career from Cambridge. His training has earned him the rare opportunity of becoming the first African District Officer in the area under British imperialism. Although he does not have all that his white counterparts have he decides to do his best for his fellow Africans. Although he is deprived of vital information about the administration he presses on with his work. His task is made more difficult by old African chiefs who demand to be respected in the African way. This means that Akpan as a younger man would have talked to them almost on his knees. His effort to please his employer as well as those he serves has altered

his behavior considerably. This attempt to be more than what he is suggests Bad Faith.

Although Sartre's concept of Bad Faith has served as a medium of appraisal of the African response to European morality, it does not mean that African novelists necessarily subscribe to Sartrean pessimism. Sartre's basic philosophy of Nothingness might even be rejected by some. Mary Warnock observes a weakness in Sartre's Bad Faith when she writes:

If the anecdotes which Sartre relates (for instance about Bad Faith) are illuminating, as they are; if they bring to life a particular kind of human behavior, practiced by a particular, recognizable kind of person, then it cannot be right to ascribe this kind of behavior to everyone, all the time necessarily. If we are all guilty of Bad Faith all the time, then Bad Faith ceases to be an interesting accusation to levy against any individual. For Sartre is arguing from the possibility of Bad Faith to the existence of a human consciousness, compounded partly of Nothingness, and he shows that Bad Faith is possible by showing that in some cases it is actual.30

African morality has at almost every stage of its evolution been influenced by the colonial experience. The blending of traditional African culture with the part appropriated from European morality has, to some extent, not been too much to the disadvantage of the African and Africa. The fact that no known culture has evolved without external influences would be enough consolation for Africa. The fact that the African has appropriated some part of the European culture does not make him inferior in any way. According to John Wild,

Moral judgments are the result of historical accident. It is silly to believe that anyone is more or less right than another... There is, of course, nothing new about this type of ethical relativism. What is new is

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30Warnock, Existentialism, p. 97.
the intellectual arrogance with which this time-worn point of view is dogmatically asserted with no rational defence, except for an appeal to the authority of modern science, and with no careful consideration of opposed positions. This sterilization of ethics is a reason for the breakdown of philosophy.\textsuperscript{31}

Although the problem of European colonialism in Africa has been considered unprecedented in the history of Africa, some Africans feel that the curse is not without its few blessings. Considering the fact that some aspects of the African culture needed changes very badly it would be dishonest if this is not acknowledged as Africa counts her blessings. According to Willie Abraham,

\begin{quote}
Africa, of course, has a great deal for which to be thankful. It must be grateful that the slave trade, having been established was, in the end abolished; it must be grateful for schools, for education, for scientific medicine and scientific agriculture and control of pests; it must be grateful to missionaries for their works of evangelization, reformation, education, and medicine; to the explorers for making possible the opening up of the continent and its more effective integration through vastly improved communications; to several government officials for their selfless administrative work.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Notwithstanding all he has enumerated Willie Abraham contends that the European was not in Africa for Africa's well-being as such. The moral legacy which Europe has bequeathed to Africa along with the by-products that Abraham has listed above will remain as a scar of European will to power. According to Chatterton-Hill,

\begin{quote}
The moral law is but a symbol of the will to power, of a force which has become idealized, in order that, by means of its identification with the world of alleged noumena, its value as a means of affirming the power of those who
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{32}Abraham, \textit{The Mind of Africa}, p. 160.
invented it, as a means of combat, may be enhanced. In the world of morals as in the world of knowledge, the metaphysical idea of truth is the purest fiction. Truth is in morals as in knowledge merely a means to an end; and the end is the affirmation of a certain race, of a certain type, of a certain species.33

As much as Achebe and other contemporary African novelists lament the de-Africanization of the African morality by Western influence the African is yet to rid himself of what Nietzsche describes as "Bad Conscience." If he blames the European for other things, who does he blame for some of the inhuman practices that have emanated from his own culture? One of the clearest admissions that certain things were wrong in African morality comes from Ezeulu, through whom Chinua Achebe in his Arrow of God seems to make the following admission:

We did many things wrong in the past, but we should not therefore go on doing the same today. We now know what we did wrong, so we can put it right again. Our sages have said that a man who does not know where the rain started to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. We are not like that. We know where this rain began to fall on us.34

Satire in Nigerian literature is directed against the Nigerian much more than anyone else. Like Nietzsche in nineteenth century Europe, the novelists seem to be asking for a re-evaluation of the African values, for a redefinition of the nebulous and incoherent standards of morals that seem to characterize the African society. This is precisely the type of service that Nietzsche has rendered Christianity. Of Nietzsche's service William S. Sahakian writes,

33Chatterton-Hill, The Philosophy of Nietzsche, p. 162.
34Achebe, Arrow of God, p. 163.
... For on a social and ethical plan, he has been Christianity's severest critic, not to mention Judaism's and Democracy's. It is desirable to have a critic play the devil's disciple to keep one mentally alert and one's philosophy tested by the severest blow possible, hence preventing one's succumbing to lethargy and resting content with a worthless and indefensible position. Nietzsche has rendered this service par excellence; if he has done nothing else, he has certainly awakened Judeo-Christian philosophers from their dogmatic slumber.35

As satirists the African writers set themselves certain standards and criticize society when and where it departs from these norms. They first of all try to convince us that theirs is neither an imitation of an alien morality nor that part of the African culture that needed to be done away with. Once the novelists have got us, their readers, on their side they induce us to join them as they pour derision and ridicule on society's failures. As we have been able to observe, the African novelists have, at least, made a case for the basis of the African morality in that they have tried to dispel the wrong notion that the African culture was too primitive to be reckoned with. It has been argued that the African morality has its root in traditional religions which the West has failed to recognize.

35 Sahakian, System of Ethics and Value Theory, p. 256.
CHAPTER III

A RECURRENT VISION OF HUMAN REALITY

Towards the latter days of British imperialism in Nigeria fervid nationalists had become restless about the colonial administration. The educated Nigerians were more militant in their agitation for independence. They urged their countrymen to throw off their shackles of servitude by forcing the Europeans to leave. The common people were told that their lives would be better for it. Achebe and Aluko have exploited this political milieu of the late fifties in their novels. Their satires have been directed to every section of the Nigerian society. Neither the greedy politicians nor the docile populace who were exploited by the new rulers was spared. What the novelists have been able to make clear to us is the fact that man, irrespective of the colour of his skin, will naturally seek his own well-being first before he thinks of others. This is the recurrent vision of human reality which surfaces in the works of the two novelists picked for this study.

In Nigeria during the post independence era, the problem was more than only the seeking of one's own well-being first before others. It was greed coupled with corruption at the highest level of government. The peasants and workers whose support was needed to achieve freedom realized too late that
they had been taken advantage of. Under the white regime the politician was in most cases like anybody else. He could not share power with the British as such until after independence. As soon as power was handed over to him he clamoured for more power and wealth, which he never had. The bid for more possessions by the politician made him trample on the poor whose life turned out to be no better than it was under the imperialists.

Since human beings behave similarly we can learn something of the vision of human reality portrayed by Achebe and Aluko if we compare it with certain aspects of Karl Jaspers' Existentialist thought. No claim whatsoever is made here that the German philosopher knew anything about the Nigerian situation; it is only that he had a profound understanding of man as man. Jaspers' existentialism is particularly noteworthy because it reflects some useful notions that other great philosophers have not been able to communicate in full. In his introduction of some of Karl Jaspers' works Robert C. Solomon writes,

Like Kant, he is interested in the limits of experience, the limitation of science. Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, he is interested in the individual, in 'philosophizing as an exception.' Philosophy for him is an activity, one developing out of the need to communicate to others one's own Existenz. Existenz is a notion Jaspers takes directly from Kierkegaard to refer to the authentic self. Existenz is, still following Kierkegaard, lived and not merely an object of knowledge. It is an experience of subjective freedom within certain boundary situations, exemplified by death and guilt.1

Jaspers believes that human action is determined both by one's Existenz and by another aspect of man which he calls Dasein. Though different, these two aspects of man are inseparable. Dasein is myself regarded as an object, the whole of my empirical reality. Existenz on the other hand is free. The interplay of these two aspects of man accounts for the unpredictability of what his next line of action will be.

Karl Jaspers' concept of the boundary situation stresses the idea that man is always having possibilities. In order to take advantage of this he would go out of his way to reach his goals. John Wild explains the Jasperian notion in this way,

Man is ever ahead of himself in the pursuit of possibilities which are never finally achieved. Two basic paths are open. He may give himself over to existential possibilities.²

The second alternative which is giving oneself to existential possibilities would include a bold step towards living an 'authentic' life. In the absence of this he falls short of what a real human being should be according to Jaspers.

Applying the Jasperian notion of man's pursuit of possibilities to the Nigerian situation as described by Achebe and Aluko it seems the pursuit by the privileged few has been done at the expense of the common folk. In the language of the existentialist it may be said that the ordinary citizen of the Nigerian society has not given himself over to existential possibilities. He has been apathetic and docile. He has not asserted himself in a way to convince his exploiters

that he should be taken seriously. The drive for self-fulfillment which has led to the oppression of those in the lower cadre by the educated and the powerful politicians might be attributed to the influence of the Jasperian Existenz. The fact that the ruling class had more knowledge and wealth accounts for their advantage. The novelists do not give us any indication that the peasants and workers are ready to overcome their resignation to fate. Their rationalization is reminiscent of a naturalist. According to Clarence H. Holman,

... The naturalist tries to be objective, even documentary, in his presentation of materials; to be amoral in his view of the struggle in which the human animal finds himself, neither condemning nor praising man for action which he cannot control; to be pessimistic in his views of human capacities—life, he seems to feel, is a vicious trap, a cruel game; to be frank and almost cynically direct in his portrayal of man as an animal driven by fundamental urges—fear, hunger, and sex; to be deterministic in his portrayal of human actions, seeing them as explicable in cause-and-effect relationships; and to exercise a bias in the selection of characters and simple violent actions as best giving him 'experimental conditions'.

In Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People one finds this attitude of surrender spelt out in unmistakable terms. Because the people are left helpless while the men at the top in government do all the eating Achebe sums up their reaction thus:

The people themselves as we have seen had become more cynical than their leaders, and were apathetic into the bargain. 'Let them eat' was the people's opinion 'after all when the white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?' Of course not, he ate and he went.

But we are still around. The important thing then is to stay alive; if you do you will outlive your present annoyance. The great thing as the old people have told us, is reminiscence and only those who survive can have it. Besides, if you survive who knows? It might be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring your share.4

This type of reasoning was not completely without some justification. Most of those who have made it to the top are sons and daughters of these peasants and workers. After all the extended family system which is still prevalent in Africa has made it possible for distant relatives to share in the wealth of anyone in their family. This apathy on the side of the ordinary citizen was further encouraged by tribal loyalty. Many people condoned any wrong-doing as long as the corrupt official was from their own village or ethnic group. They had the satisfaction of having their own man at the top. Whether or not they shared in the wealth and fame of their clansman people felt obliged to support him.

All this seems to be part of the making of a nation which the great German philosopher Spengler talks about. As it will be seen later on, Nigeria did not exist as a country in the minds of many Nigerians. People saw themselves as belonging to one village or the other. For this reason the making of Nigeria, like all other countries, must be seen as a continuous process going beyond the mere acquisition of independence. Quoting from Spengler's writing John Wild states,

A civilization (Kultur) is born at the moment when, out of the primitive psychic conditions of an ever infantile humanity a mighty soul awakes and extricates itself; a form out of the formless, a limited and exchanging existence out of the unlimited and stable. This soul comes to flower on the soil of a country with exact boundaries to which it remains attached like a plant. Conversely a civilization dies if once this soul has realized all its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, creeds, arts, states, and sciences and thereupon goes back into the proto-soul from which it first emerged.5

In the novels of Aluko and Achebe three classes of Nigerians seem to stand out. These are the politicians who constitute the ruling class, the educated elite and the populace. As in many parts of the world only the lower class, the populace have not had their share of the good life that the white man relinquished after the Nigerian independence. Other than the simple reason that the populace do not have as much drive as the Jasperian Existenz may inspire, one does not find any other explanation for their backwardness. The next few paragraphs will deal with the social distance that separates the educated elite from the usually illiterate mass in the lower cadre of the society. The last few paragraphs will be devoted to the excesses of the politicians. In each case the lower class has been the victim of the situation.

During the early days of colonialism when missionaries built schools and churches it was not a common practice for rich people to send their children to school. Only less favoured children and servants were sent to school. Little did anyone realize then that these children would turn out to

5Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism, p. 43.
be the middle class of the Nigerian society of today. Since almost all those in this class received British education, all the inherent evils that went with it could not be left behind.
The trend was isolationism from the Nigerian mainstream. The few who studied in Britain returned home influenced by European individualism which was totally incompatible with African communalism. In fact they had to live in two separate worlds at the same time. Chinua Achebe and Timothy Aluko whose works serve as a basis for this investigation belong to this class of educated elite. According to Mr. K. W. J. Post in his introduction to Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, people in this category write more about their background. He writes,

Themes which they explore are, quite naturally, those which are of concern to the intelligentsia, and we may identify three main ones. Firstly, the novelist is concerned with personal problems which face the educated Nigerian, placed as he (or she) is between two worlds, the traditional one which in a number of important respects has survived the impact of European conquest and colonial rule, and the modern life to which he has been introduced by his education. A second theme though rather less exploited to date, is that of the intricate hurly-burly of politics as developed in the fifties. Of major concern to Achebe himself has been ... the traditional life of the village before the coming of the white man, and the erosion of that life by the white missionaries and administrators after the European conquest.6

Before independence the British imperialists had adopted a quasi open door policy. This made it possible for a handful of educated Nigerians to hold a few top administrative posts

in the public service. This little gain for the African
before independence gave some the privilege to enter what had
been the white man's world. Man being what he is the privi-
leged Nigerians quickly adopted the manners and modes of
the Europeans with whom they now had to work. Their British
education made the transition easier. The social distance
which had separated the whites from all Africans since the
beginning of imperialism was further inherited by this new
breed of Africans.

Obi Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* is a
good representative of this educated elite. With reference
to Obi Okonkwo's situation Achebe writes,

> Going from Lagos mainland to Ikoyi on a Saturday night
> was like going from a bazaar to a funeral. And the vast
> Lagos cemetery which separated the two places helped
> deepen this feeling. For all its luxurious bungalows
> and flats and its extensive greenery, Ikoyi was like a
> graveyard. It had no corporate life—at any rate for
> those Africans who lived there, of course. It was once
> a European reserve. But things had changed, and some
> Africans in 'European posts' had been given houses in
> Ikoyi. Obi Okonkwo, for example, lived there and as he
> drove from Lagos to his flat he was struck again by
> these two cities in one. 7

Achebe and Aluko have shown how the new African Bour-
geoisie have tried to be less African. In some cases their
less privileged relatives have encouraged this type of action.
When Obi Okonkwo returned from the United Kingdom, Joseph,
his friend, would rather not let him eat Nigerian food—the
reason being that it was too inferior. He told Obi that no
decent restaurant in Lagos would serve Nigerian dishes. In

order to give Obi what his people called proper lodging before he would settle down they arranged to have him live in a hotel. It was thought improper to let him live with his friend instead of in an expensive hotel that, they believed, matched his dignity as a man with a college degree. The idea of downgrading anything Nigerian had been copied from the Europeans who did not see anything good in the Nigerian way of doing things. It was a sad irony that some educated Africans carried on the same practice which the Europeans initiated in their attempt to render the African culture worthless. About this appalling situation Willie Abrahams states the following thought,

But added to this must be the fact that the purposes of deculturisation did not refer to Africa, but were oriented towards the needs of Europe. Educated persons who were personally successful were so oriented to the extent to which they identified with the new, but alien culture. One finds mushrooming of ladies’ societies in which some of the regulations were that the African ladies should neither speak African languages nor wear African clothing. Salvation and refinement consisted in an assiduous, if not complete, cultivation of European manners and modes. 8

A closer look at Obi Okonkwo’s relationship with his kinsmen and clansmen will give more insight into how the average educated Nigerian has fared in his society. Obi is presented in Achebe’s No Longer At Ease as an idealist. In a mild sense Achebe had intended the story to be tragic. For this reason the novelist made Obi so naive in a way that he could not sustain our sympathy in spite of all that happened to him. According to Arthur Ravenscroft,

This formlessness of Obi's contradicts the intellectual Nigerian officialdom. Not that Achebe endows him with a powerful intellect—his gravest flaw is indeed a priggish romantic idealism, a tendency to react all too easily to the glib public sentiment and to inflated talk about public service. The absurd poem, 'Nigeria' that he wrote in London in the style of a nineteenth century English hymn, is understandable as a young student's nostalgic effusion in a foreign city, but he smiles complacently when he comes across it in a melancholy mood after his first quarrel with Clara.9

The satire in No Longer At Ease is aimed at middle class Nigerians as well as the Europeans whose manners the former have tried to imitate. Obi, just fresh from England, criticizes the corruption and inefficiency of the civil service. He plans to participate fully in reviving his country's public service and wiping out all the old traces of corruption that do not befit a new nation like Nigeria. Faced with so many expenses Obi finds himself in financial problems. Before he realizes what he is doing he succumbs to accepting a bribe and he is charged in court with official corruption.

Achebe's derisive ridicule of the Europeans themselves is reflected in the following statement by Arthur Ravenscroft who says,

The treatment of the few Europeans who figure in the novel is justifiably satirical, for Achebe naturally sees them from the receiving end of colonialism in Africa. Thus in Obi's childhood, for a Nigerian teacher to throw an arrogant white inspector to the floor is likened to unmasking an ancestral spirit—an superbly ironic reversal of the climactic unmasking in Things Fall Apart.10

What Chinua Achebe seems to insist on is the fact that the


10Ibid., p. 20.
educated elite of Nigeria have no justifiable reason to reject African values in favour of an alien lifestyle. This would evidently isolate them from their people. It would be conceding to the Europeans who see Africans as their inferior.

It might be argued in some quarters that it does not matter whether any class of Nigerians chooses to be isolated from the rest. Such an argument would be justified if that class has made it to the top without communal efforts. But rarely does any individual make it entirely on his own without help from the family or community at large. This is the basis of African communalism. Obi Okonkwo is an example. Obi owes his education to his clansmen who toiled day and night to pay his expenses through college. Obliged as he is to show his appreciation for their help he finds his private life invaded by the intrusion of the Umuofia Progressive Union president who questions his right to be engaged to his fiancée who is known to be a descendant of a family of outcasts according to Ibo tradition. As an educated man Obi Okonkwo now sees things differently. His position as a holder of 'European post' tends to make him think in terms of being more a Nigerian than a descendant of Umuofia. In response to the address of welcome presented by the Umuofia Progressive Union he promises to justify the confidence they give him. His prepared speech lacks the spontaneity that characterizes an African's speech in a gathering of that type. While Obi talks in terms of the betterment of Nigeria at large, his clansmen insist on the well-being of members of the Union alone. This is reflected in their address, part of
which reads,

Welcome Address presented to Micheal Obl Okonkwo, B.A. (Hons.) London, by the officers and members of Umuofia Progressive Union on the occasion of his return from the United Kingdom in quest of the Golden Fleece. Sir, we ... present with humility and gratitude this token of our appreciation of your unprecedented academic brilliance. ... The importance of having one of our sons in the vanguard of this march of progress is nothing short of axiomatic. Our people have a saying 'Ours is ours, but mine is mine.' Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that which it can say, 'This is mine.' We are happy that today we have such an invaluable possession in the person of our illustrious son and guest of honour.

Overlooking the low educational level of members of the Union as reflected in the address, the sentiment cannot be mistaken.

Judging from the evidence before us, a clear communication problem exists between Nigerian intellectuals and their less literate clansmen. This is because they see things differently. The intellectual approach which the intelligentsia tends to take turns off their illiterate 'brothers' who feel betrayed. A middle ground does not seem to exist. People who are outside the situation only exacerbate the situation by tending to be sentimental in taking sides. Those whose sympathy lies with the uneducated masses for example tend to be paternalistic and anti-intellectual on the other hand. It is, therefore, for this reason, that John F. Povey warns us in his introduction to Barbara Abrash's Black African Literature, that

11 Achebe, No Longer At Ease, pp. 36-37.
... We must gain insight into the new Africa becoming westernized in some sense and yet born to a tradition that is an indivisible part of its consciousness. ... No one who has read No Longer At Ease can fail to understand the pressures which are imposed upon the young educated African. No one can read Weep Not Child without seeing in a new light the African struggle for independence and individual dignity in the face of a quicksand of social and political changes.\(^\text{12}\)

This quicksand of social and political changes has not tilted the scale in favour of the lower class. Although most people in the middle class have owed their success to those in the lower cadre the latter has not always had its fair share of the country's resources. There has been a great disparity between the 'Haves' and the 'Have nots.' For example Obi Okonkwo who, in spite of his big salary, still finds himself broke is forced to concede to his less fortunate clansmen (who wonder what he does with his money) that he has little reason to complain. Admitting the fact he defensively states that his people had a sizeable point. And he adds,

What they did not know was that, having laboured in sweat and tears to enroll their clansman among the shining elite, they had to keep him there. Having made him a member of an exclusive club whose members greet one another with 'How's the car behaving?' did they expect him to turn around and answer: 'I'm sorry, but my car is off the road. You see I couldn't pay my insurance premium?' That would be letting the side down in a way that was quite unthinkable. Almost as unthinkable as a masked spirit in the old Ibo society answering another's esoteric salutation: 'I'm sorry, my friend, but I don't understand your strange language.'\(^\text{13}\)

So far we have only touched on the relationship between members of the educated elite and the rest of the society.


\(^{13}\text{Achebe, No Longer At Ease, p. 96.}\)
The educated Nigerian is as estranged from his extended family as he is from his clansmen. Aluko's novels deal with that aspect in an intimate manner. In *Kinsman and Foreman* Aluko depicts Titus, the main character, as a sort of rebel in his family. When he returned from England where he qualified as a civil engineer, Titus was given a big family reception. All the members of his extended family including great aunts and uncles showed up. As usual in the African society, prayers were rendered on behalf of Titus as all the elders of the family invoked the spirits of their ancestors. It was a great family reunion. After so many years in England some of the African rituals performed on the occasion were no longer appealing to the young engineer. Secretly, Titus was afraid of some kind of pressures from his extended family later on.

Titus' fear becomes known when he objects to being posted to his hometown as the District Engineer for the public works department. The situation is made worse when his corrupt uncle, Simeon, is assigned to work under him as the road foreman. The young man until now does not realize that he must deal with a doting mother who would insist on a close family tie with everyone. To do this in the African society means pleasing everybody in almost everything. Aluko gives us an account of Titus' helplessness in the midst of older family members when he states,

Titus began to have the feeling that he was gradually coming under some strange influence that he could not explain. Something deep down in him was telling him in a thin voice that he should run out of the airless room.
into the fresh atmosphere outside—an atmosphere that was free of ancestral spirits. But he found himself completely powerless to carry out his desire. He found himself unable to resist whatever he was ordered to do by his old great uncle.14

The cases of Obi Okonkwo and Titus are only a few examples of instances of alienation that exists between the African intelligentsia and the rest of the society. Their alienation can perhaps be further illumined by comparison with existential thought. Seen from this perspective the young men's alienation centers in the fact that they are faced with family pressure that seeks to rob them of the freedom to choose what they want for themselves. Because the average member of the middle class is surrounded by many needy members of his extended family he is usually unable to meet the demands that are made. He is then forced to isolate himself to avoid all eyes that are on him. Whether or not this is right is a personal question that members of the educated class must answer. Existentially speaking, it is a sign of defeatism to refuse to face the reality of life. It is unreasonable to avoid confrontation when necessary. Unless people are told the true position of things, man is involved in self-deception. This happens when a person avoids those he should make things clear to. Whether or not his explanations are accepted is not the determining factor. What is important is to make them.

It is unreasonable to expect that a time will come when misunderstanding can be done away with in life. If members

of the extended family were allowed to have their way, their middle class brother would be reduced to a pauper. On the other hand it would be selfish for the privileged member of the family to deny everybody everything. Aware of this power struggle in life about which Nietzsche was deeply interested, Walter Kaufman puts down the following thought:

... Nature is nothing but the phenomenology of the will to power, and its craving for power cannot be fulfilled short of the development of reason. But impulses [passion] and reason [spirit] are manifestations of the will to power; and when reason overcomes the impulses, we cannot speak of a marriage of two diverse principles but only of self-overcoming of the will to power. This one and only basic force has first manifested itself as impulses and then overcomes its own previous manifestation.15

Self-overcoming of the will to power which both the African intellectual as well as the rest of society needs in order to have a considerable degree of harmony is not easy to come by. The more people are conscious of the need for it the better it will be for the African society.

In areas where the educated elite has not been too successful in relating to the ordinary citizens of the Nigerian society the politicians have been generally more effective. According to some Nigerian novelists, politics in some new emergent African nations does not attract the best minds in the countries. This might be said to be responsible for the corruption in government. Achebe and some other Nigerian writers feel that the politicians who are usually not well educated are uneasy with the intelli-

15Kaufman, Nietzsche, As Philosopher, pp. 234-235.
gentria of the country. The tension that their relationship generates is reflected in Chinua Achebe's novel, A Man of the People.

Left to himself, the politician would rather deal with common people whose seeming resignation to fate suits him. Introducing us to the story and the author of A Man of the People K. W. J. Post writes,

Over against the politicians in this story stand the intelligentsia, the more highly educated, whose close but hostile relationship is personified by Nanga and Odili. Chinua Achebe was a student at the University College of Ibadan, Nigeria's first university, in the early fifties and he obviously draws heavily upon his experience there of the frustration felt by the more sensitive and idealistic students as they watched the behavior of politicians who were beginning then to take power from the British--'the smart and the lucky but hardly ever the best.'16

In his A Man of the People Chinua Achebe leaves one with no doubt that the budding politicians of the post-independence era have thoroughly taken advantage of the passive masses. Chief Nanga, one of the two main characters, represents a member of a corrupt political system. Achebe describes Nanga as a born politician. By this the novelist means

... He could get away with almost anything he said or did. And as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the chief Nanga of this world will continue to get away with anything. He had the rare gift of making people feel—even while he was saying harsh things to them—that there was not a drop of ill will in his entire frame. I remember the day he was telling his ministerial colleague over the phone in

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16 K. W. J. Post, "Introduction" to Chinua Achebe, A Man of the People, pp. ix-x.
my presence that he distrusted our young university people and that he would rather work with a European.17

Odili, the second main character, in whose presence Chief Nanga was talking is himself one of the young university people that the half-literate Minister of State dislikes.

With less than high school formal education Chief Nanga was a village school teacher before he entered politics. Odili was once a pupil in Nanga’s class. Within a few years in politics Chief Nanga had risen to the rank of a cabinet minister. To people like Nanga the presence of well educated Nigerians would naturally be a threat. In what seems like a verdict on the situation involving Chief Nanga and many other Nigerians Chinua Achebe states,

A man who has come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation—as I saw it . . . was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say, 'To hell with it.' We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us—the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best—had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers that the first phase . . . of the struggle had been won.18

From the look of things, to use Achebe's language, it seems the peasants and workers will never get out of the rain. The persuasion of the corrupt politicians still falls on patient ears. The condition that Achebe describes here is strangely reminiscent of what Nietzsche described as being

17Ibid., p. 62.
18Ibid., p. 34.
the relationship between Christians and their church leaders. Nietzsche believed the priest was primarily concerned with pacifying Christians while he made himself comfortable at their expense. Explaining Nietzsche's thought Blackham writes,

It is the function of the priest, the ascetic type par excellence, himself satisfying his own will to power ascendency and the practice of his arts, scorning rather than hating the men of military power, to divert the resentment of the subjugated by concentrating it upon themselves as the authors of their own miseries, so they become preoccupied with a God that demands too much, and seek salvation and the consolation of another world, finding in this interpretation of their lot the truth about the human situation in the highest good for man. 19

In the Nigerian situation the politicians have taken to a different method of pacifying the masses. They have generated in their people a tribal loyalty in order to cause a division among the ranks. Chief Nanga for example tells his people about putting those from his village in top civil service posts before letting people from other tribal groups have their share of the so-called 'national cake.' He arranges to obtain a government scholarship for his clansman, Odili. Summarizing the feeling in some quarters about Achebe's A Man of the People Lloyd W. Brown makes the following observation:

The 'nation' over which Nanga presides is nonexistent because most of the individuals within its boundaries do not perceive themselves as components of an organized whole but as members of specific communities described by the limits of village or tribes. This has nothing to do with the African's allegedly inherent incapacity to view or verbalize his condition in western terms. It results from colonial experience in which the African

19 Blackham, Six Existentialist Thinkers, p. 27.
acquired dual perspectives on government and politics. The central authority was formerly an alien white power, operating on principles and within the physical boundaries that conformed with western's spatial and sociopolitical concepts of nationhood.\textsuperscript{20}

Lloyd W. Brown’s observation is based on the presentation that we have in Achebe's \textit{A Man of the People}. The political process as reflected in the electoral process leaves much to be desired. The rivalry during the time of election was far from being a healthy situation. The political milieu was reminiscent of the law of the jungle. James Ngugi, the famous East African novelist, gives us his assessment about this politics of 'dog eats dog' as described in Achebe's novel when he writes,

Chief Honourable Nanga, M.P., is the uncultured Minister of Culture in a corrupt regime of a newly independent African state. In a country where the majority of peasants and workers live in shacks and can only afford pails as lavatories, the Minister lives in a princely seven bath-roomed mansion with seven gleaming silent action water closets. He arranges for the tarmacking of roads, but only when his buses are about to arrive. The ten luxurious buses have been supplied to him by the British Amalgamated on a never-never basis. Elections are a democratic farce in which bribery, thuggery, and brutal force are used with the connivance and financial backing of British commercial interests to enable Nanga and his henchmen to return to power unopposed.\textsuperscript{21}

For Odili and Max who attempted to oust incumbents like Chief Nanga and his henchmen it was an uphill battle. The two young intellectuals did not realize that politics in Nigeria was a matter of life or death. This became clear to Odili after Max had been killed in cold blood by his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20}Brown, "Cultural Norms and Modes," p. 53.
\item \textsuperscript{21}Ngugi, "Satire in Nigeria," p. 59.
\end{itemize}
opponent's car on the day of election. In rage Max's girlfriend shot Chief Koko on the spot and avenged her lover's death. If anything is clear from what we can gather in Achebe's novel it is that politics in post-independence Nigeria has been a game of every-man-for-himself since there has been no national consciousness. At the village level the forces of tradition have still been a controlling factor. At the highest level of government it has been the people who were supposed to keep the peace that have been involved in brutal murder and thuggery in order to be returned to power. Pondering over the political struggle which has almost wrecked his life Odili concludes philosophically,

My father's words struck me because they were the very same words that the villagers of Ananta had spoken ... the village had a mind, it could say no to sacriilege. But in the affairs of the nation, there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless. And Max was avenged not by the people's collective will but by one solitary woman who loved him. Had his spirit waited for the people to demand redress it would have been in waiting still, in the rain and out in the sun.22

Like Chinua Achebe, Aluko believes that nobody can get away with sacriilege at the village setting. This is the subject that he takes up in One Man One Matchet his novel about a village politician, Benjamin Benjamin. With less than high school education Benjamin Benjamin in his village is a one-eyed man in the country of the blind. To his fellow villagers he is a bibliophile in whom resides all the wisdom and knowledge of the white man. As the self-appointed political adviser to the town's illiterate king, Benjamin takes

22Achebe, A Man of the People, pp. 140-141.
advantage of his position to instigate the people against the
agents of the colonial administration. By so doing he
feathers his own nest. Among other things Benjamin Benjamin
urges the villagers to refuse the tax assessment which Akpan,
the new African District Officer, has approved for the area.
He takes advantage of the fact that the new government offici-
cial is of another ethnic group, accusing him of partiality.

Playing upon the naiveté of the villagers he seeks to
revive an old land case which his people had lost in court.
Benjamin Benjamin launches an appeal fund. He whips up the
sentiments of the common people in such a way that most
people feel compelled to contribute toward his illegal fund
drive. This many villagers feel they would rather do than
pay their taxes to the state. A large sum of the money
later unaccounted for is collected in this manner.

The helpless Chiefs and elders who cannot understand
how two supposedly educated people like Benjamin Benjamin and
Akpan could disagree in spite of what they have in common are
disillusioned. Finally Benjamin Benjamin is murdered by one
of his victims whose money and property he has embezzled.
Once again the village says no to the sacrilege of Benjamin
Benjamin. Aluko makes the issue clear when he speaks through
the new African District Officer who replaces Akpan.

There is one thing that worries me about the Benjamin
Benjamins in our midst. . . . You see, the ordinary folk
cannot easily distinguish the half-educated and the spiv
from the honest educated individuals like ourselves. To
the old Oba and the people of Ipaja Benjamin Benjamin and
you Udo Akpan belonged to the same class—the class of
those who can read and write and speak the white man's
language. And when the ordinary folk discover the dis-
honesty and worthlessness of the Benjamin Benjamins, to them it is not the Benjamin Benjamins that have failed but all of us... And when the Oba and his people begin to distrust us, my God, it will take a long time before we can win back their confidence.23

Whenever there is a crisis people involved are always finding excuses to point their fingers at others. Neither the politicians nor the educated elite are willing to take responsibility for the social and political problems that have wrecked the post-independence Nigeria. Yesterday it was said to be the white man's fault that the common man in the country could not improve his lot in a country with so many resources. Today it is seemingly nobody's fault because the new black rulers will not accept any blame for the present upheaval. Little wonder then that Achebe concludes his A Man of the People with the following:

... I had felt, like so many other educated citizens of our country that things were going seriously wrong without being able to say just how. We complained about our country's lack of dynamism and abdication of leadership to which it was entitled in the continent, or so we thought. We listen to whispers of scandalous ideals in high places—sometimes involves sums of money that I for one didn't believe existed in the country. But there was really no hard kernel of facts to get one's teeth into.24

Achebe and Aluko have treated a theme that runs through Nigerian literature in modern times--the oppression of those in the lower class by the privileged few who seek to enrich themselves at the expense of everyone. Man is naturally inclined to seek his own well-being first, before he considers the needs of others. This fact of the human situation is

23Aluko, One Man One Matchet, p. 196.
24Achebe, A Man of the People, p. 34.
both the grim reality and the faint ray of hope of the common man in post-independence Nigeria. As one can conclude, the salvation of the common people (if it is to come) lies in their own hands. Neither the corrupt politicians in government nor the educated citizens have so far risen beyond unhelpful indifference. Maybe a change of heart is possible if only the people are willing to move in the right direction. Implicit in the works of Achebe and Aluko are suggestions which are aimed at spurring the oppressed to action. The novelists would rather not write manifestos.
CONCLUSION

Man is only what he does, yet is always beyond what he does, without being anything in substance or in essence within himself: he confronts his empirical self and his historical existence in the actual world, and becomes human by what he makes his own and what he repudiates and what he projects--although of course he more commonly hides from himself in the labyrinthine forms of inauthenticity.1

The preceding statement by H. J. Blackham about man and how he operates in the world best puts the African in focus during and after the colonial era in Nigeria.

The works of Aluko and Achebe leave one with an impression of a people on trial for an offense that is yet to be disclosed. The plight of the African people as presented by these two notable novelists might be compared with that of the hero of Franz Kafka's novel, The Trial. Kafka's hero, K, was arrested, tormented, tried in the court and finally killed for an alleged offense that was never revealed to him. Before his arrest K was a free man who went about his job in the bank unmolested. Little did he know he would become a victim of an indifferent law enforcement agency for an undisclosed reason. Likewise the free African in his society before the arrival of the Europeans gave no thought to a time when an alien power would conquer and put him under firm control. The African novels reveal the humili-

tion of the African by the colonial authorities. Like Kafka's character K the only clue that the African could find for his overlord's subjugation was his power. All that was done to the African was in the name of a monarch that was unknown to him. K was also tormented in the name of a faceless bureaucracy of the state which to him was as vague as the British monarch was to the African. Commenting on Kafka's novel, Stephen D. Ross remarks,

If we grasp immediately and directly what Kafka is suggesting by innuendo and various literary devices—that the world of man is oppressed, irrational, absurd, and permeated by guilt, that order only apparently prevails yet we are ultimately responsible for our acts even when we have chosen on the basis of the little we really know—we would find the world unbearable to face. Moreover, since Kafka, along with Beckett, Ionesco, and Genet, is concerned primarily with the absurdity, irrationality, and disorderly nature of the world we live in, it may be held that rational analysis is out of place, virtually self-contradictory. Lurking behind the rational and intelligible is the dark and unforeseeable.

Like Kafka, Achebe and Aluko would have a hard time explaining the absurdity of the colonial experience and its ordeal for the African people. The two men saw European domination as the root cause of the African problem. The quest for a new identity which has been a source of frustration for the African is attributed to the dislocation of the African culture by various Western institutions. The writers are not calling for a return to village life. Theirs is rather a coded message to their countrymen to be themselves. The fact that the politicians take undue advantage of their

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position to enrich themselves, they insist, should make the people rethink and part with apathy. By presenting the mass of the people as spineless weaklings the Nigerian novelists have intended to spur them to action. Chinua Achebe in his first novel, Things Fall Apart, exemplifies Okonkwo as his ideal Nigerian. Okonkwo symbolizes the African resistance to colonialism. Although Okonkwo's irrational approach and his consequent failure are symptomatic of several African failures like their inability to get rid of the European or succumbing to his pressures, his resistance served a useful purpose. In his further attempt to define what the African response to colonialism should be, the novelist introduces another character in the person of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Umuaro in his Arrow of God. Adopting a nonviolent approach as a response to the oppression of colonialism, the Chief Priest shows himself a more rational man than Okonkwo. For Ezeulu, it is better to fight the European with his own weapons—Western education and religion. For this reason he sends his youngest son to the white man's school and church to learn the latter's skill and wisdom.

Relating the foregoing to the existential approach Achebe has illustrated both the use of force as displayed by Okonkwo and the theory of knowledge which itself is a manifestation of the Nietzschean will to power. The success of the Europeans' conquest in Africa was because of their superior weaponry as well as their use of colonial literature. It is for this reason that the Africans must evolve a system of education which should be tailored to the social and
economic needs of their people. While the use of brutal physical force remains a part of man's solution to his problems, intellectual warfare appears to be more prevalent today. Unless a country is educationally prepared for any assault it will be disastrous for its people. Already the Africans have sacrificed almost all that they valued most to the current change that Western influence has brought. Vital aspects of the people's culture have been dislocated by Western civilization which still does not fit in squarely with the people's main aspiration. This influx of alien culture which has made some of the people strangers to themselves is the main concern of the novelists. The novelists have felt a moral obligation to satirize such African misfits in their works.

Notwithstanding the evils that colonialism has brought it is not without its few blessings also. In ways where the experience has been profitable Achebe calls for more sacrifices from his countrymen. His reason is that Africa has come to a point where she must either bend or break. According to the novelist "we have reached the end of things."

Achebe explains:

A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs. When we want to make a charm we look for the animal whose blood can match its power; if a chicken cannot do it we look for a goat or ram. if that is not sufficient we send for a bull. But sometimes even a bull does not suffice, then we must look for a human. Do you think it is the sound of death-cry gurgling through blood that we want to hear? No, my friend, we do it because we have reached the end of things and we know that neither a cock nor a goat nor even a bull will do it. And our fathers have told us that it may even happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things and their back is broken and hung
over a fire. When this happens they may sacrifice their own blood. This is what our sages meant when they said that a man who has nowhere else to put his hand for support puts it on his own knee. That was why our ancestors when they were pushed beyond the end of things by the warriors of Atan sacrificed not a stranger but one of themselves and made the great medicine which they called Ulu.3

The demand which Achebe makes in the foregoing proverbial statement connotes the Judeo-Christian motif of a sacrificial lamb. Achebe may not have had the death of Christ in mind when he made his proverbial statement but it certainly contains some elements of the Christian faith. Although the concept of man's atonement for sin that involves the loss of another human life is Christian, Achebe, nevertheless, suggests that it is shared by Ibo religion. In both cases the purpose is for rededication on the part of the living. With such a supreme sacrifice the novelist would want the end result to be worth the effort. With Ezeulu as his mouthpiece in Arrow of God Achebe has pointed out what the African has done wrong in the past. He does not want a continuation of such dubious practices. In fact, what is called for is a new beginning.

Implicit in the work of Aluko and Achebe are suggestions for reforms which are existential in nature. When well spelt out, theirs is an attempt to rouse people from their apathy and their resignation to fate. Existentialism is a philosophy of possibility. The novels indicate that many are not even aware of what chances there are when they try to demand their

freedom. Owing to pressure from within and without, the African problem is believed to be serious enough to demand a radical solution. The novelists tell us that British commercial interests in Nigeria have aided the corrupt African politicians to entrench themselves in power while the common man has been left in the cold to suffer. It is not surprising that some of the Nigerian writers have been labeled Marxists by some European critics who try to repudiate the charges that the novelists levy against them.

In order to keep up with modern trends, the Nigerian people would have to be willing to give up some traditional values that have outlived their usefulness. African communalism which some Africanists have nostalgically insisted on preserving must be overhauled drastically. Although this African style communism has been useful in cementing ethnic solidarity, it has done so at the expense of national unity. It has sustained tribalism. While it cannot be disputed that it has contributed significantly to individual needs the pressure that the system puts on the modern young Nigerian adds to that which urban life bears with it. Creative individuals are virtually crushed by the weight of societal demands. Obi's story in _No Longer At Ease_ is enough to make one reject African communalism. The fact that his clansmen in the Umuafia Progressive Union have loaned Obi the amount he paid for his education should not be a license for the union's president to interfere with Obi's right to marry whomever he loves. This is part of the old social system
which no longer works. Obi's failure must be attributed to pressure from both family and society.

If African communalism is to survive the present impasse of a technocratic society the whole system must be reshaped to make allowances for individual self-fulfillment. People irrespective of their age or family origin must be respected for what they are and can contribute. Discriminatory practices which rob individuals of their freedom to operate unhampered in a free society must be done away with. Aluko makes the same point in his *Kinsman and Foreman*. He blames an old African clergyman who fails to recognize the difference between Titus, the little chorister whom he used to know in the village church and Titus, the full grown District Engineer of Ihalo. Although age will continue to have its place in the African culture the writers suggest that there has to be additional criteria for leadership in modern Nigeria.

Aluko and Achebe portray the Africans as people with a strong aptitude for religion. This urge to be identified with one deity or another, the writers claim, has led them to Christianity. Compared to traditional religions the new faith has been a source of hope for many like the outcasts, rejected twin children, and other so-called undesirables that the traditional religions have condemned. Unfortunately, at a time when most African converts have started to identify themselves with Christianity some missionaries have started to display an arrogance that is not becoming of those who are looked up to for an example of Christian love. The clerics
in this category have been no less paternalistic than their
other European counterparts working for the British crown.
Some of these individuals, the novelists believe, have
twisted the scriptures to suggest that the bulk of African
culture is of no use. This travesty has led Aluko and
Achebe to create a middle ground which will enable people to
relate Christian teachings to the African experience and
culture. While agreeing on the fact that the church has been
helpful they also insist on preserving the traditions which
unite the people. They want a situation which will allow
for a forceful participation by individuals in private
religious communities in which the depth of human self aware-
ness and interaction can be nurtured and experienced. For
example, in his Arrow of God Achebe suggests through his
character Moses Unachukwu that a person can be a Christian
without destroying such beliefs that bind the people together.
Though a Christian, Unachukwu is still against killing the
sacred python because it is against the custom of the clan.

European critics have accused Achebe and Aluko of biting
the fingers that fed them. This is because the two men
have received British education. The fact is the men have not
been educated to sheepishly follow the status quo. Knowing
how much the Europeans look down on the Africans, the novel-
ists are naturally more sensitive to the former's attitude
which they resent. It is for this reason that the changes
they demand are radical and far reaching. As a people with
unique experience the new emergent Africans will not compro-
mise on the question of identity. For this reason the objec-
tive idealism of Hegel which denies the reality of matter or idea except as a part of a "World Spirit" may not be a popular idea among many Africans. This kind of blending will blur the distinct new image that is believed to be in the making since the end of colonialism. Nietzsche, whose philosophy has been used considerably in this study, disagrees sharply with Hegelianism because he believes consciousness reduces the reality of the individual to averageness--the kind of levelling that causes loss of identity.

The contemporary African novelists cited in this study reveal a consistent recognition of the dilemma that the post colonial experience has posed and the need for far reaching remedies. The suggested solution implicit in this body of fiction appears to be consonant with the strong dose of philosophical cure that Sartre prescribes for situations such as Aluko and Achebe present. This radical existentialism propels the individual to action--a drive for freedom about which Sartre himself writes:

Therefore in the name of this will for freedom, which freedom itself implies, I may pass judgment on those who seek to hide themselves from the complete arbitrariness and the complete freedom of their existence. Those who hide their complete freedom from themselves out of a spirit of seriousness or by deterministic excuses I shall call cowards: those who try to show that their existence was necessary, when it is the very contingency of man's appearance on earth, I shall call stinkers.4

Although Sartre has been criticized for his position on the question of complete freedom, his existentialism is, never--

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theless, admired by many as an effective cure for the docile masses of the people.

The two Nigerian novelists and the great existentialist thinkers do not see life as a bed of roses. They see human consciousness as dominated by fear and guilt. This is so much so that man is afraid to face reality. The novelists share the belief with the existentialists that life is pure possibility. It is for this reason that their works end with a note of optimism, however faint at times. Achebe and Aluko believe the Nigerian people owe it to themselves to make the best use of their existence.
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