

Restoring West Africa to its Past in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa*

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Abstract:

The article is inspired by Achebe's belief that human stories should be told from distinct perspectives to grasp all its intents. The story of Umuofia, the fictitious Igbo village, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) can be read intertextually in light of the non-fictional text of Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (1897) to underline the thrust of authenticity and fidelity of Achebe that makes his fiction true to life. This juxtaposition is further staged to question the stereotypical representation of Africa and Africans through the fictional texts of 19thc British writers such as Joseph Conrad, Rider Haggard among many others. Though it is not a purely historical text, *Things Fall Apart* is spearheaded against the reductive approach applied by 19thc British writers to deny Africa history and culture wholesale, presenting it on a dire need for the enlightenment and mission civilisatrice of the Westerners. Hence, the ostensible aim to enlighten the African heathens living in utter darkness, to free the African minds from the enslavement of superstition, to liberate African women from the sexual laxity endorsed by the barbaric morals of heathenism is counterpointed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Chiefly, Achebe states that the cultural practices of the African people in their particular African environment down through ages have catered them with particular insights into life that are the bedrock of values and outlooks shaping contemporary African life. The same insights are confirmed in Kingsley's text *Travels in West Africa*.

Keywords: Africa, culture, enlightenment, history, identity, Igbo, nativism, resistance, stereotype

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In Achebe's interview, "The Art of Fiction" (Brooks, 1994), he claims:

I believe in the complexity of the human story and that there's no way you can tell that story in one way and say, this is it. Always there will be someone who can tell it differently depending on where they are standing; the same person telling the story will tell it differently. I think of that masquerade in Igbo festivals that dances in the public arena. The Igbo people say, If you want to see it well, you must not stand in one place. The masquerade is moving through this big arena. Dancing. If you're rooted to a spot, you miss a lot of the grace. So, you keep moving, and this is the way I think the world's stories should be told-from many different perspectives. (p. 18)

This article is inspired by Achebe's quotation that human stories are harbored on distinct anchors. The story of resistance involved in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1994) (1) can be projected from another perspective to convey proportionally new insights of Achebe's mental state. The prospect is built upon the intertextual connection with the text of Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* (2) to give a touch of authenticity to the tragedy of Umuofia, the fictional Igbo village, in particular and West Africa overall.

Achebe levels a high criticism to Conrad for failing to conceive the humanistic side of African people where Africa is cloaked with an obscuring language rather than an illuminating diction. The language of Conrad denies the Africans the sense of variety that marks human nature. The heavy charge against Conrad is involved in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*". Nonetheless, if Conrad thematizes Europe and Africa as geographically and culturally antithetical, some Victorian women writers who traced the trail of Conrad, such as Mary Kingsley, present new realities and manage to assimilate the African cultural life that some philosophers too, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (2001), fail to "comprehend" (p. 110). In contradiction to the Eurocentric philosophers and writers, Achebe also writes back in his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) (3) to give the lie to their distorting representation, revealing save the "smoke" of "the burning land of Africa" to use Sartre's words (2003, p.17). Mary Kingsley's text *Travels in West Africa* (1897) (4) justifies this reading and helps to rehabilitate the image of West Africans being blemished by the Eurocentric canonical fiction. In their search for a clear-cut identity by interrogating the totalitarian representation of Eurocentric imperial writers, Achebe's and Kingsley's texts crisscross on many trajectories. Hence, the focus is going to be on the thematic intertextuality and the textual reverberations in both texts.

Undeniably, the cultural representation of West Africa is approached by many critics in both texts separately. Carroll (1990); Gikandi (1991); Osei-Nyame (1999); Whittaker & Msiska (2007); and Bloom (2010), for instance, argue for Achebe's depiction of the cultural stereotypes of the West Africans. Similar contention is assigned to Kingsley's text as regards other critics such as Stevenson (1982); McEwan (2000); Foster & Mills (2002). All too often, their critical thinking

is not well-founded and seemingly groundless. Readers believe only in facts, which are grounded in reality. To assess an interpretation, the evidences upon which that interpretation is built shall be put to reliability test, where only reliable information are firmly endorsed. As texts are not self-contained entities reflecting single coherent voices, critical readings move outside the text and bring into play knowledge beyond the text to gain currency. An intertextual reading would back up their textual interpretation given that meaning takes place horizontally as well as vertically in line with Julia Kristeva's thought. Subsequently, reading Achebe and Kingsley intertextually is a worthy object of investigation to validate the ideological bias of imperial writers by pitting their reductive portrayal of the African culture not only against native Africans' protest but also against white women's testimonies. Reading canonical imperial texts about Africa through the fictional story of Achebe, TFA, and the non-fictional account of Kingsley, TWA, downgrades their credibility and upgrade the authenticity of Kingsley and Achebe by projecting common cultural specificities of West Africa. The discursive relationship between both texts is also strategic, emanated from a reciprocal motivation, namely the quest for identity.

With a close inspection, the painting of West Africa by Achebe and Kingsley is somewhat compatible though the multiple identity differences between the two authors of different times, backgrounds, cultures, races, ethnicities, and genders. Reading the fictional text of Chinua Achebe, TFA, through the non-fictional text of Mary Kingsley, TWA, is contrived to interrogate the stereotypical representation of Africa through fictional texts such as those of Joseph Conrad, Rider Haggard, to state a few, intent to be authentic and realistic. As a travel narrative, rather than entertaining readers by underlining heroic acts, Kingsley's text sounds somewhat reporting facts as they really happen given that she is interested in forging an identity for herself through relation rather than exclusive practices, and is not disposed to present eye-catching heroic events for fear of being accused of falsehood and insincerity. She is in fact constrained by the social conventions imposed on her at home. Juxtaposing the text of Achebe TFA with Kingsley's TWA is bent to support the credibility of the fictional story of Achebe, playing a significant role in subverting the recurrent stereotype of 19thc canonical fiction about Africa and reciprocally confirms that Kingsley is interested in keeping faith with reporting facts rather than stressing fictional flourishes.

TFA is not wholeheartedly a historical novel in as much as a historical text is intended to fictionalize historic events and bring them to life with invented details, characters, dialogue, etc. And while *Things Fall Apart* does situate itself within a specific historical context (Nigeria at the moment of colonization), it does not attempt to recreate actual events or re-characterize real historical figures. (Bourenane, n.d, p. 7)

Namely, as it revolves around the historical issue of colonialism in Nigeria and Igbo culture, it attempts to recreate the past, but there is no real interaction between fictional characters and historical figures. Drawing on Igbo oral tradition to narrate the cultural specificities of Igbo people against the grain of the narratives of imperial writers such as Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad inter alios, TFA is plausibly spearheaded against the synopsis and curtailing of the African frame of reference into just a "reasonable paragraph" in the terms of the District commissioner, Mr. Smith:

[o]f this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself... One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. (Achebe, 1994, p. 208)

This story echoes the commissioner's imperial desire to deny the West Africans the diachronic and synchronic progress and present them in fervent need for enlightenment and civilization of the Western culture. In such a guise, Achebe's story and the like can be seen as an appropriation of the ethnographic mode of representation to propagate that the past of Africa "was not one long night of savagery" (Achebe, 1975, p. 45) and the African ritual festivities are neither barbaric nor superstitious. Hence, the ostensible aim to enlighten the African heathens living in utter darkness, to free the African minds from the enslavement of superstition, to liberate African women from the sexual laxity endorsed by the barbaric morals of heathenism is counterpointed in Achebe's TFA. In essence, Achebe trusts that the cultural practices of African people in their particular African environment down through ages have gratified them with unique insights into life that are the bedrock of values and outlooks, shaping contemporary African life (Ogbaa, 1980). The same insights are embedded in Kingsley's text, TWA.

Writing back for Kingsley and Achebe can be read as a quest for a lost identity under the patriarchal and colonial sway respectively: a quest for an identity of Victorian women abused by the white man throughout ages and a similar pursuit of an identity of the West Africans, blurred in a disconnected and discarded past of Nigeria by the same agent. Both struggle to break free from the coercion and tyranny of the patriarchal colonial white man. Kingsley comes close to intertwine with Achebe in the same postcolonial crossroads by fashioning a new identity for herself as a free subject rather than a subsidiary one in her white society and doing so questions the identity imposed on her and the subalterns, among them the Africans, by the Victorian framework. Trying to sidestep the colonial edge, both Achebe and Kingsley have to stand against the cultural mainstream representation of imperial and patriarchal writers to unveil their ideological bias.

Said (1978) proves that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is discursively fashioned, sustaining a relationship of "power and dominion" (p. 5). He takes the definition of discourse after Foucault as cultural "narratives" that generate and maintain "order" by revealing themselves as "truths", upholding a relation of inequity between the Westerners and non-Westerners. Such a discourse nurtures the concept of cultural hegemony as a "cultural form [that] predominated over others . . . a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans against all 'those' non-Europeans" (p. 5). This reading finds expression in many colonial writers such as Joseph Conrad, Rider Haggard, Richard Burton among many others.

TFA substantiates a sort of resistance to the cultural and economic commodification of Africa. It also strongly struggles against Schweitzer's dictum that "[t]he African is indeed my brother but my junior brother" (Achebe, 1977, p. 20). Resentfully, indeed, Achebe underscores Conrad's aversion of the "distant kinship" with the white man claimed by Marlow's helmsman. In his rage against Conrad, his text reads:

It is important to note that Conrad, careful as ever with his words, is concerned not so much about 'distant kinship' as about someone laying a claim on it. The black man lays a claim on the white man which is well-nigh intolerable. It is the laying of this claim which frightens and at the same time fascinates Conrad, 'the thought of their humanity—like yours. . . Ugly. (1977, p. 21)

Similarly, Achebe confirms that Conrad's text is far less about the degeneration of the European mind than the stamping of the "dehumanization of Africa and Africans" (1977, p. 21) throughout ages. He insists that "Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray- a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate" (1977, p. 25). TFA comes to set things right, to correct this stereotypic image, and to voice the "untold agonies" (1977, p. 23) of the Igbo people. It also discloses the omissions intended by some Western writers as well as their xenophobic textual violence against the Africans on the whole.

In an eye-catching quotation, Achebe suggests that the main duty of the writer is to help people reclaim their dignity and self-esteem:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. (as cited in Killam, 1973, p. 8)

In the same vein, Gikandi (1995) claims that Achebe,

was possibly the first African writer to be self-conscious about his role as an African writer, to confront the linguistic and historical problems of African writing in a colonial situation, and to situate writing within a larger body of regional and global knowledge about Africa. (p. 5-6)

Whittaker & Msiska (2007) also state that amongst the central justification of the British colonial regime is the replacement of the primitive social apparatus of pre-colonial Igbo by a civilized system based on "capitalism, governance, education, and Christianity". However, what eludes the Western grasp is that "African societies, such as that of the Igbos, already had highly evolved systems of agriculture, trade, religion and individual and collective democracy" (p. 26). Without trying to wipe-out the defects of the Igbo society, Achebe skillfully flies in the face of Conrad's stereotypical image of Africa while depicting Okonkwo's village:

[It] is orderly and serene. It does not have the sleek geometrical lines of European life, but it works. Men fall in Love, court and marry quite effectively without resort to the

dance hall, the engagement ring and the marriage registry. There is no code of laws, no police force and no judiciary, but law and order are not inseparable from these devices. (Obumselu, 1959, 37)

Igbo village life is specific and distinct from the Western style but it works well pursuant to the Igbo cultural idiosyncrasies. The tribal solidarity is well-proved in chapter II when a tribal man calls for an urgent meeting in the market. The message was the following: "[e]very man of Umuofia was asked to 'gather at the market place tomorrow morning'. Afterwards, "[i]n the morning the market place was full. There must have been about ten thousand men there, all talking in low voices" (Achebe, 1994, p. 10). This incident substantiates that Igbo people do not venerate chiefs or monarchs but public authority is in force. In an interview with Jonathan Cott, Achebe settles that it was not because the Igbos "didn't evolve to the stage of having kings and kingdoms", because they didn't like a mouthpiece for them but a democratic interaction to deal with every eventuality (as cited in Bernth, 1977, p. 77). If the discourse between Igbo people is taking place in the market place instead of the governmental palaces, it does not mean that the political system in terms of the public consultative assembly is inferior or ineffective but simple and adequate to the African frame of mind.

The discourse of Kingsley meshes with Achebe's in painting a picture of Africa disproportionate with the stereotypical commonly held image embraced by British imperial writers. For Elizabeth Claridge, Kingsley thinks that there "could be no justice for the African under the English flag without a proper- she used the word 'scientific'- understanding of his native institutions and religion" (1982, p. xvii). Earlier in TWA, Kingsley is alerted by her friends to abstain from thinking to visit Africa. An acquaintance who spent seven years in West Africa cautions Kingsley, "When you have made up your mind to go to West Africa, the very best thing you can do is to get it unmade again and go to Scotland instead" (Kingsley, 1976, p. 13). Her friends encourage her to make up her mind again and take new direction. "A percentage" of them claimed, "Oh, you can't possibly go there; that's where Sierra Leone is, the white man's grave, you know" (1976, p. 12). As a Victorian woman, she suspects the validity of male platitudes related to the patriarchal imperial agenda.

Kingsley is not willing to approve every claim about West Africa on the ground that most of her friends know nothing about its geographical and cultural idiosyncrasies (1976, p. 11). Initially, she manages to free herself from misinformation. Her text goes:

My ignorance regarding West Africa was soon removed. And although the vast cavity in my mind that it occupied is not even yet half filled up, there is a great deal of very curious information in its place. I use the word curious advisedly, for I think many seemed to translate my request for practical hints and advice into an advertisement that 'Rubbish may be shot here.' (1976, p. 17)

Kingsley is likely to interrogate the basic assumptions of the discourse of imperialism and transgress the cultural expectations of her era. She states: "one by one I took my old ideas and

weighed them against the real life around me and found them either worthless or wanting" (1976, p. 15). She goes on to clear herself from imperial writers' falsification and fantasy: "I have written only on things that I know from personal experience and very careful observation and stressing my own extensive experience of West coast" (1976, p. 80). With a shrewd eye for details, she attempts not to abandon her promise: "now I am ambitious to make a picture, if I make one at all, that people who do know the original can believe in- even if they criticize its points and so I give you details a more showy artist would omit" (1976, p. 17). To buttress her argument, she depicts the African space otherwise as follows:

To my taste, there is nothing so fascinating as spending a night out in an African forest, or plantation. . . . Still, it is good for a man to have an experience of it, whether he likes it or not, for it teaches you how very dependent you have been, during your previous life, on the familiarity of those conditions you have been brought up among, and your fellow citizens; moreover, it takes the conceit out of you pretty thoroughly during the days you spend stupidly stumbling about among your new surroundings. (1976, pp. 33-34)

Discursively, the narrative testifies that the African space is not just a prehistoric place, the only way out for the imperial hero to project his anxieties to find an anchorage for his battered psyche, but a source of self-knowledge or self-discovery going beyond the ideology of patriarchy of the Western society. The African jungle is a tough mentor as it "teaches" the British imperial hero how "very dependent" he is and "takes the conceit out of [him]" (1976, p. 76). The inclusive "you" in "it teaches you" is twofold. It may indicate Kingsley's engaging strategy to seek the approval of her readers of the accuracy of her account by creating a space in which the reader participates in the narrative. Secondly, the "you" address, in this case, intertextually, points to the imperial British hero in Victorian imperial literature to give the lie to his self-arrogance and Africa's distortion. In either case, the African jungle teaches him that his heroism is nothing but the effect of the ideology of patriarchy, where the codes of femininity and masculinity are just a social construct changeable consistently with time and space. In this reading, the African space serves to glorify the viewer, the speaker and the listener, supposed to be males in imperial men's memoirs, whereas in Kingsley's text, it belittles the beholder and makes him/her aware of his/her individual shortcomings.

Still, African people are positioned outside history and culture to rationalize the alleged aim of the imperial intrusion to bring them back to history. West Africans are denied history "until the lions have their own historians" (Achebe, as cited in Brooks, 1994, p. 4). Imperial writers have presented the history of colonized people with an ideological eye "glorify[ing] the hunter" (p. 4). Walder (1998) stresses this reading:

[v]iewing the early colonial past through the lens of later, predominantly Western, writings, obscures the existence of those civilizations and empires in South America, Asia, Africa, and in the Arab world which flourished and often surpassed Europe in various ways until at least the sixteenth century and sometimes later. (p. 27)

Respectively, the uprootedness of the West Africans and the exclusion of their history proceed from the imperial discourse yearning to dehumanize the colonized people earlier than the interference of the Western countries. McClintock (1995) aptly confirms:

Indigenous peoples are not supposed to be spatially there -- for the lands are 'empty' - they are symbolically displaced onto what I call anachronistic space, a trope that gathered (as I explore in more detail below) full administrative authority as a technology of surveillance in the late Victorian era. According to this trope, colonized people -like women and the working class in the metropolis -do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency the living embodiment of the archaic 'primitive'. (p. 30)

In a matching passage, she insists: "history is traversed backward. As in colonial discourse, the movement forward in space is backward in time. As much as they penetrate the wilderness as much as they backpedal to the tongueless zone of the pre-colonial darkness" (p. 10). In this regard, Marlow excitingly claims: "going back that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world" (Conrad, 1899/1902, p. 48). The same spirit is traced in *King Solomon's Mines*: "but here and there you meet a man who takes the trouble to collect traditions from the natives and tries to make out a little piece of history of the dark land" (Haggard, 1887, p. 15). The understatement in "a little piece of history" corroborates the stand that sub-Saharan Africans are out of history and have just insignificant oral history. Their primitive institutions and cultural backwardness are in dismal need of enlightenment and civilization by a superior Western guidance.

Culture exists either in tangible or intangible aspects such as cultural artifacts, traditions, history and ideology of a certain society. Cultural identity defines people and sets them apart from the rest by marking their own culture and history. Crossberg (2013) corroborates this reading:

On the one hand, culture becomes both a "general process" of "inner development," "of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development," and the practices and works of such intellectual and artistic activities. It refers to the "inner life" of imagination and the production of meaning and value and, as such (according to Williams [1977, 15]), provides a sort of "metaphysics of subjectivity," which is the necessary foundation for the epochal assumption that people make their own history, precisely through culture. Culture is the process of human self-making. (p. 457)

For Cabral (1994), culture is the outcome of history; therefore, as the imperial discourse denies "the historical development of the dominated people", it "also denies their cultural development" (p. 55). In this respect, Achebe does not only mourn the historical displacement and cultural loss of the Igbo society but tries to restore West Africans to their past to regain both of them. Thereby, the emancipation of Africa from its imperial stereotype partly revolves around restoring the Africans to their past. He claims accordingly:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. (as cited in Killam, 1973, p. 8)

Bringing the past of the Igbo society to the fore becomes an act of cultural survival for Achebe. He keeps up in "The Novelist as Teacher,"

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past- with all its imperfections- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. (as cited in Achebe, 1975, p. 72)

Reinstating the African dignity passes through challenging the self-humiliation of the African citizens by stepping back into the past and promoting resistance through recovering the stories and upkeeping the African culture. The text of Achebe is devoted to the African history so as to twist the colonial contention that the quasi-historical chronicle of Africa is not a mere one long night of savagery redressed by the advent of the European interference. To this end, Achebe takes on the job of a 'teacher' to deconstruct the colonial discourse that makes the Igbo people unteachable and self-denigrating.

Achebe works a great deal to "bring the people in, to humanize history", (Bhattacharya, 1983, p. 3) to write history from below or the history of marginalized Igbo people. The history of Igbo people is not necessarily a marginal history, but it is harder to write. It is the history that can't be written without getting involved in the casual life of populace. He traces the oral stories of the Igbo folktales to provide a textual map to remap the African space, and so doing to liberate it from the colonial mapping of imperial writers. The story of Umuofia provides Achebe with an inside look to identify West Africans for the readership so that to deconstruct the Western imposed identity. He sustains, "I write to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self abasement" (cited in Achebe, 1975, pp. 58-59), so as to call back their lost identity to embrace traditional culture within the context of postcolonial Igbo life. Achebe shares Stuart Hall's concept that identity is not fixed but fluid and mobile, marking the past and present. Hall (1994) confirms,

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some

essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power. (p. 78)

It follows that identity is a site of multiple positions informed by the intertwine of diverse parameters, and this provides the essential tool to rebuff the stasis of the colonial stereotype of fixed identities. In an interview with Appiah (1992), Achebe remarks, "It is of course true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African" (p. 72). In his frame of reference, identity is not static but subject to constant transformation. The Igbo traditional culture is the stronghold of beliefs and values, promoting a fluid identity and presenting the foundation of modern Nigeria.

More significantly, the loss of history for Igbo people is fatal for Achebe. It is a source of humiliation and disgrace for the Igbos in so much that their history is embedded in the European one to become just a "footnote" (Nasta, 2004, p. 61). The uprootedness of the Igbos makes them "bruised" people, psychologically unstable and morally damaged, overly in need to be "healed". The prescribed treatment is the mediation between the Igbos and their past. The opponents of this claim are critically addressed by Achebe while stating:

This is why those who say that the past is no longer useful to us are so mistaken. You cannot have a present if you do not have a past. The past is all we have. All we can call our own is what has happened, that is our history. If we consider the folk tales which our ancestors crafted, we must strive to do the same thing and communicate to the next generations what is important, what is of value, what must be preserved. If they decide to alter this and that, then that's fine, but they will be doing it in the full knowledge of what has gone before. (as cited in Nasta, 2004, p. 63)

The journey in TFA is a reverse one, a retreat to the past. As long as Igbo people delve deeply into their past, they find roots to anchor upon. They straddle the oral stories handed down from one generation to another to entrench a set of values and ethics, fostering a collective cultural identity and saving it from attrition and disintegration.

By translating the folk tales into English, Achebe strategically voices the history and culture of Africa. The mediation between the pre-colonial Igbo context and the British context by the dint of the English language gives the Igbo oral stories new dimensions, namely those of acknowledgement and legitimacy. For instance, the tale of the tortoise and birds has many implications:

'Once upon a time', she began, 'all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were very happy and began to prepare themselves for the great day.... . Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that happened in the world of the animals ever escaped his notice - he was full of cunning. As soon as he heard of the great feast in the sky his throat began to itch at the very thought. There was a famine in those days and Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for two moons. His body rattled

like a piece of dry stick in his empty shell. So he began to plan how he would go to the sky'. But he had no wings, 'said Ezinma'. Be patient, 'replied her mother'. That is the story. Tortoise had no wings, but he went to the birds and asked to be allowed to go with them. (Achebe, 1994, p. 96)

The cultural associations of the tortoise are diverse, reflecting cultural diversity and distinct attitudes of the general public throughout. Generally speaking, "people did not make a rough distinction between a turtle and tortoise". The latter is associated with many cultural connotations such as fertility, longevity, and resistance. Particularly, it is connected with "femininity" for the Chinese, "chastity in the Christian middle ages". In Hindu traditions, "the world rests on the back of an elephant, which, in turn, is standing on a turtle", and this is shared by the Native Americans too. In Africa, "the turtle is a sort of trickster figure, yet unlike other tricksters such as the Native American coyote, he is virtually never impetuous" (Box, 2001, pp. 155,158). Hence, the embedded tale is twofold. First, it presents the Igbo past as a legitimate repertoire shaping the image of pre-colonial Nigeria. Second, it reconnects the Igbo people with their cultural roots and boosts their self-esteem. Correspondingly, they regain their self-pride and resist the long-time imposed identity by the British colonial enterprise.

Oral stories and folk tales are staged to reclaim history, to stop the process of displacement, to call back and reestablish the customs and values of the Igbo pre-colonial society. The reclaiming of history is an act of cultural survival per se and a remedy for their battered cultural identity. Amongst the cultural frames that Achebe brings to the fore through the revitalization of the past are ancestors' worship, polygamy and funeral rituals.

Igbo people substantiate their identity through personal and spiritual relations. TFA often reads:

The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors (1994, p. 92).

Igbo people keep in touch with their ancestral spirit through ceremonial rites in times of distress and affluence. They believe in their ancestors' power. Unoka, for instance, prays to his ancestors for happiness:

As he broke the kola, Unoka prayed to their ancestors for life and health, and for protection against their enemies. When they had eaten they talked about many things: about the heavy rains which were drowning the yams, about the next ancestral feast. (1994, p. 6)

In time of affluence, The Feast of the New Year helps to hold the Igbos and their ancestors together for ages. Achebe recites:

The Feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umuofia was in festival mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other diety. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth. (1994, p. 36)

The Holy Feast underlines how closely the material and spiritual lives of the Igbos do overlap. The communication between the living and dead people is ensured by the spirit of sacrifice and gratitude, entailing the code of morality and conduct of the pre-colonial Nigeria. The festival is an "ancestor reunion" since the dead elderly are thought to move from the homestead to a higher abode from where they keep an eye on the people of the living world. They transmigrate to the homestead to celebrate with the people of their skin, reprimand them for their misdeeds and pray for a peaceful and delighted new year as they maintain a close contact with the Supreme God (Tomaselli & Wright, 2011, 119-121). The insertion of festival rites in TFA such as the Feast of the New Yam, Igbo words such as '*obi*' and '*chi*' and Igbo proverbs is meant to project and illuminate the cultural collapse of the pre-colonial Nigeria at the hands of the white missionaries as these rites are disintegrated. They are included in Achebe's story and thoroughly described to maintain the cultural identity of the Igbos by underlining the linguistic and cultural differences.

The Holy feast is also an incident where Achebe frustrates the negative formulaic image of the plural marriage by positing that polygamy is a unifying factor rather than a plight for women. In this light, the text reads:

The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man whose arm was strong, as the Ibo people say, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide. Okonkwo always asked his wives' relations, and since he now had three wives his guests would make a fairly big crowd. (Achebe, 1994, p. 37)

Relatedly, Carroll (1990) claims:

The most pervasive of these is the marriage system which dictates that women must marry into a different village from the one in which they were born. Exogamy in this way creates a system of affiliations and communications larger than that of the autonomous village. (p. 15)

As it is mentioned by Bloom (2010), polygamy is a sign of manhood and high standing in the pre-colonial Nigeria. Okonkwo, the protagonist of TFA, applauds his father's friend, Okoye, who "had a barn full of yams and Three wives", while he begrudges his father, Unoka, for having only one wife. He never hesitates to bully his wives regularly so that he breaks the week of peace by beating one of his wives (Bloom, 2010, p. 159). Although polygamy in Okonkwo's credence maintains the spirit of patriarchal culture and structure of feeling, in Raymond Williams' terms, as a cultural artifact, it creates a firm bond between the Igbo tribes. Anthropologist Hillman thinks that "polygamy is a function of social solidarity on the level of the extended family, the clan, and

the tribal or ethnic community". He goes on to explain: "Each new marriage sets up new relationships of affinity between two different kin groups" (as cited in Bloom, 2010, p. 159). Correspondingly, the polygamous marriage that Christian missionaries fail to assimilate is a cultural dictate to safeguard the unity of the Igbo family and to help women in bringing up their children and in household chores.

Very often, Okonkwo calls his wives to team up for the chores. The text goes on: "Okonkwo, called his three wives and told them to get things together for a great feast" (Achebe, 1994, p. 163). The solidarity between the wives is attested in the case where the youngest wife, Ojiugo, "went to plait her hair at her friend's house" and left her children with the second wife, Nwoye's mother,

'Where is Ojiugo?' he asked his second wife, who came out of her hut to draw water from a gigantic pot in the shade of a small tree in the middle of the compound. 'She has gone to plait her hair.' Okonkwo bit his lips as anger welled up within him. 'Where are her children? Did she take them?' he asked with unusual coolness and restraint. 'They are here,' answered his first wife, Nwoye's mother. Okonkwo bent down and looked into her hut. Ojiugo's children were eating with the children of his first wife. 'Did she ask you to feed them before she went?' 'Yes,' lied Nwoye's mother, trying to minimize Ojiugo's thoughtlessness. Okonkwo knew she was not speaking the truth. (p. 29)

Instead of plotting against the youngest wife, Ojiugo, the second wife, Nwoye's mother, fed her children and lied to mitigate Okonkwo's fury and scourge in order to abate her carelessness. She even ventured to assuage the rage of the violent Okonkwo as Ojiugo came back: "And when she returned he beat her very heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace, His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week" (p. 29). Rather than being wholeheartedly unscrupulous, polygamy is a moral safeguard against the laxity of the patriarchs. It proves to be a cultural dictate, yoking the tribal communities together by ensuring the lineage spreading out.

Another ritualistic event that brings people together is Funeral rituals. Rituals plays a major role in unifying people, reflecting cultural diversification. The belief in afterlife leads the communities to hold death ceremonies. The corpse of the Hindu is cremated and the ashes of the dead body are sprinkled on water. The corpse of a Muslim person is buried in the ground. Ritual practices hold central importance in the lives of less industrialized society such as the African (Schilbrack, 2004, 71). In the Igbo society, death is widely celebrated through the language of dancing and drums:

Ezeudu was a great man, and so all the clan was at his funeral. The ancient drums of death beat, guns and cannon were fired, and men dashed about in frenzy, cutting down every tree or animal they saw, jumping over walls and dancing on the roof. It was a warrior's funeral, and from morning till night warriors came and went in their age groups. Now and again an ancestral spirit or *egwugwu* appeared from the

underworld, speaking in a tremulous, unearthly voice and completely covered in raffia.... The drums and the dancing began again and reached fever-heat. (Achebe, 1994, pp. 123-124)

Looking inward, during the mourning and lamentation of the funeral of the worrier, EZeudu, the spiritual and the material are blended in a ceremonial festive time as much as in marriage ceremonies, reflecting the cultural idiosyncrasies of the pre-colonial Nigeria. Nketia (1965) explains:

The performance of music and dancing at traditional marriage ceremonies, however, is not as widespread or as intense as what one may observe at funerals where special ceremonial dirges; funeral songs and dances may be performed ... the funeral is thus an important focus for the performing arts- for music, dance and drama. (pp. 2-3)

Death becomes a social occasion to keep in contact with members of the clan and tribes. It is a unifying event, bringing people together in a festive time where the physical and spiritual are merged together through the appearance of the ancestral spirit or *egwugwu*. Hence, the ritualistic and liturgical events such as death ceremonies are part and parcels of the cultural specificities of the Igbo society, serving community bonding and spiritual revival. This cultural practice is looked with disdain by the Christian missionaries to put an end to the key foundations of the African unity and make things fall apart.

The ethnographic text of Mary Kingsley, *TWA*, confirms Achebe's mindset that West Africa has a history and culture. She pleads to spotlight the African culture through an accurate representation. She says: "now I am ambitious to make a picture, if I make one at all, that people who do know the original can believe in- even if they criticize its points- and so I give you details a more showy artist would omit" (Kingsley, 1976, p. 17). She overestimates the indigenous knowledge through her gratitude to many native characters: "I have a great reason to be grateful to the Africans themselves- to cultured men and women among them like Charles Owoo, M'bo, Saugogloss, Jane Harrington and her sister at Gaboon and to the bush natives" (p. 17). In this regard, she weaves the threads of her stories in West Africa through the light and assistance of her native guides, who are, in return, the writers of their own stories and their heroes.

She manages to put to test her background knowledge about Africa by field observation where she finds that the bulk of it is unfounded and unfeasible. Arguably, she states: "one by one I took my old ideas and weighed them against the real life around me, and found them either worthless or wanting" (p. 15). She goes on to release herself from falsification and fantasy: "I have written only on things that I know from personal experience and very careful observation and stressing my own extensive experience of West coast" (p. 80). In this vein, Stevenson (1982) puts: "with a keen eye for detail, Mary Kingsley recorded the dress, food, culture, architecture, and religion of various Africans she encountered" (1982, p. 103). Very often, Kingsley testifies to Stevenson's thought: "but before I enter into a detailed description of this wonderful bit of West Africa, I must give you a brief notice of the manners, habits and customs of West coast rivers in

general, to make the thing more intelligible" (1976, p. 23). In her representation of the African culture, she attempts to free herself from racial prejudices of the mainstream Eurocentric cultural representation of the nineteenth century.

Kingsley studies the African culture on the ground of social differences rather than on a biological basis. Manners, customs and stories reflect social and cultural practice. Stories are very significant in the course of histories. They pass on insights, values and attitudes from one generation to the next. Stories are used for educational purposes to teach youngsters the frame of reference fostered by a given community. As follows, records of the Igbo past can be employed to reinforce the unofficial history of Africa. Kingsley digs into the African heritage and legacy to reclaim popular culture images or history on the whole. In a very remarkable passage, she protests against the intrigue of missionaries endeavouring to alter or annihilate the African stories. She contends:

In places on the Coast where there is, or has been, much missionary influence, the trouble is greatest, for in the first case the natives carefully conceal things they fear will bring them into derision and contempt, although they still keep them in their innermost hearts; and in the second case, you have a set of traditions which are Christian in origin, though frequently altered almost beyond recognition by being kept for years in the atmosphere of the African mind. For example, there is this beautiful story now extant among the Cabindas. God made at first all men black—He always does in the African story—and then He went across a great river and called men to follow Him, and the wisest and the bravest and the best plunged into the great river and crossed it; and the water washed them white, so they are the ancestors of the white men. But the others were afraid too much, ... and they remained in the old place, and from them come the black men. But to this day the white men come to the bank, on the other side of the river, and call to the black men, saying, 'Come, it is better over here.' I fear there is little doubt that this story is a modified version of some parable preached to the Cabindas at the time the Capuchins had such influence among them, before they were driven out of the lower Congo regions more than a hundred years ago, for political reasons by the Portuguese. (1976, p. 161)

The story is an outcome of the simplistic imaginative production of the African's temperament that Kingsley considers a "beautiful story". Kingsley recites the story with a great deal of easiness and satisfaction with the African lore, justified by the epistemic modality, articulating her attitude to the story as a beautiful account with the auditory and visual implications of the lexical items, namely enjoyable recitation. However, she denounces the lie in the last lines that the beautiful story has been adapted by the Capuchins to fit the colonial argument, the superiority of white men. Fables and parables are seen as unquestionable sources of truth so modifying them to the colonial advantage is a most perverse act to justify their conquest. Though she doesn't believe in the truth of the story: "a modified version", she still considers it a beautiful story and not a source of derision and contempt.

Rather than a false reportage, Kingsley's text is predicated upon first-hand information. Indeed, the text inscribes the African life stream through direct information. It brings in its folds experiential sequences of stories about people and animals to highlight the African culture. In the pursuit of fish and fetish, Kingsley studies tribal differences in terms of diverse cultural practices. She gives a significant space to study the lifeless objects or fetishes cherished by the natives, believing that they have magical powers. In some other parts, the text of TWA turns to be a constant scrutiny of everyday social and cultural practices of the West African tribes to argue for the fact that other forms of religion beyond Christianity are worthwhile.

As it is mentioned by Achebe, religion in West Africa is matched up with clichés such as spirit, sacrifice, reincarnation and ritualistic funerals. To corroborate this reading, TWA reads: "[t]he life in Africa means a spirit, hence the liberated blood is the liberated spirit, and the liberated spirits are always whipping into people who do not want them" (1976, p.171). Spirits can also reside in plants, animals and charms, what is labeled animism. Kingsley affirms:

Idols are comparatively rare in Congo Français, but where they are used the people have the same idea about them as the true Negroes have, namely, that they are things which spirits reside in, or haunt, but not in their corporeal nature adorable. The resident spirit in them and in the charms and plants, which are also regarded as residences of spirits, has to be placated with offerings of food and other sacrifices... in cases of emergency a fowl with its blood is laid at the door of the fetish hut, or a great man or woman is very ill, goats and sheep are sacrificed and the blood put in the fetish hut as well as on the gateways of the village. (1976, p. 175)

Similar to the Holy Feast in TFA, the offering of sacrifices underlines how closely the material and spiritual lives of West Africa interfere with each other. The exchange between the living and the dead is safeguarded by the spirit of sacrifice and gratitude, implying the code of morality of West African people. The latter provide sacrifices to avoid "spirit possession" and to promote "the spirit's power and benevolence" (Adama & Doumbia, 2004, p. 8).

Reincarnation is also widespread in most parts of West Africa. Kingsley sustains:
The idea of reincarnation is very strong in the Niger Delta tribes. It exists, as far as I have been able to find out, throughout Africa, but usually only in scattered cases, as it were; but in the Delta, most – I think I may say all- human souls of the surviving soul class are regarded as returning to the earth again, and undergoing a reincarnation shortly after the due burial of the soul. (1976, p. 179)

Unlike Achebe, Kingsley reveals that oftentimes the reincarnated spirit is malevolent for the dead person's "relatives and friends" (p. 184). To prevent the wanderer souls from keeping turning up in the successive infants of a family, there should be a burial of the soul too (1976).

Though Kingsley does not explore the ritualistic ceremonies of the funeral as much as Achebe, she insists that West Africans, throughout, assign a great importance to funerals. She expounds:

To provide a proper burial for the dead relation is the great duty of a Negro's life, its only rival in his mind is the desire to have a burial of his own. But, in a good Negro, this passion will go under before the other, and he will risk his very life to do it. He may know, surely and well, that killing slaves and women at a dead brother's grave means hanging for him when their big Consul knows of it, but in the Delta he will do it. On the Coast Leeward and Windward, he will spend every penny he possesses and, on top, if need be, go and pawn himself, his wives or his children into slavery to give a deceased relation a proper funeral. (1976, p. 198)

With the same due significance, Kingsley mentions the great importance accorded to death rituals in West Africa. It is not a vocation but a duty in the West African frame of mind. It is an incident that reveals the range of *esprit de corps* of the African citizens. Her understanding of the West African community cult and rituals reverberates with Durkheim's conviction that "religious representations" are a "product of collective thought":

Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups. (Durkheim, 1995, p. 10)

Kingsley considers no difference between the West African traditional religion and Christianity since both of them are communal rites, reflecting collective thought pursuant to social needs. The spiritual vacuity relegated to West Africans by the Western propaganda exposes nothing but their incomprehension and precipitation. Paradoxically, it proves to be a token of cultural wholesomeness as far as, "increasing numbers of people ... view ritual positively- not as reversion to primitivism, ... as a healthy aspect of any human life, including the modern" (Schilbrack, 2004, p. 73).

Kingsley, also, argues for the cultural adequacy of polygamy for the West African Society. She believes that polygamy is a part of the social, cultural and economic idiosyncrasies of the African scheme of things. Contrary to the prevailing thought, she throws a new light upon the custom of polygamy in West Africa. McEwan (2000) posits that in the Western disposition, "the African women in polygamous marriages were treated as chattels" (p. 10). Kingsley thinks otherwise. Answering a question about the African women, she vindicates:

Her [the African woman] position has been greatly exaggerated by travelers and as most of them were men they had small opportunity for judging. As a woman, I could mix freely with them and study their domestic life, and I used to have long talks . . . and gleaned a lot of information. I believe, on the whole, that the African married woman is happier than the majority of English wives. (Frank, 2005, p. 219)

Considering the situation of the African married women better than the English wives, she thinks that the halt of polygamy would lead to a disruption of the social life in West Africa. Furiously, she outlines the dire effects of the civilizing mission on the Native tribes' course of life:

Nothing strikes one so much, in studying the degeneration of these native tribes, as the direct effect that civilization and reformation has in hastening it. The worst enemy to the existence of African tribe, is the one who comes to it and says: - Now you must civilize, and come to school, and low off all those awful goings- on of yours, and settle down quietly. (Kingsley, 1976, p. 158)

In this scope, polygamy is presumed as a vital aspect of the social matrix (McEwan, 2000) and economic regime of West African societies. The efforts to abolish it by missionaries is unpromising and backfired.

It is a social obligation considering that it is virtually impossible for a single wife to do the housework and provide for her husband. Kingsley admits:

Polygamy enabled a man to get enough to eat. This sounds sinister from a notoriously cannibal tribe; but the explanation is that the Fans are an exceedingly hungry tribe, and require great deal of providing for. It is their custom to eat about ten times a day when in village ... the women bringing them bowls of food of one kind or another all day long. ... there are other reasons which lead to the prevalence of this custom beside the cooking. One is that it is totally impossible for one woman to do the whole of housework- look after the children, prepare and cook the food, prepare the rubber, fetch the daily supply of water from the stream, cultivate the plantation. The more wives, the less work, say the African lady, ... But then there is that custom which, as far as I know, is common to all tribes, and I suspect to Asiatic, which is well known to ethnologists, and which one caused a missionary to say to me: 'A blow must be struck at polygamy, and that blow must be dealt with a 'feeding bottle'(5)

The socioeconomic factors dictate a distinct social structure based on polygamy to meet the cultural particularities of West African people. It is farfetched, from Kingsley's standpoint, to employ Androcentric value judgments to evaluate concepts such as polygamy, ancestor worship, and diverse ritual practices in so far as their assimilation cannot be ensured by decontextualizing them. The abrogation of these cultural practices would lead to a social destabilization and a "moral mess" (1976, p. 83). It is obviously so hard for a single wife to provide for her family and hence preserve its social security. The abandonment of one's wife as long as she is suckling makes her husband susceptible to adultery and forbidden love in a permissive society.

Equally significant, polygamy is presented as a preventive safeguard or a safety measure for traders since it ensures their security. As the most prevalent way to get rid of enemies is the cooking pot and what goes into it, traders need to have a wife in each village to look after their safety. TWA reads:

But trader is not yet safe. There is still a hole in his armour, and this is only to be stopped up in one way, namely, by wives. . . . Now the most prevalent disease in the African bush comes out of the cooking pot, and so to make what goes into the cooking pot . . . safe and wholesome, you have got to have someone who is devoted to your health to attend to the cooking affairs and who can do this like a wife? So, you have a wife- one in each village up to your route. I know myself one gentleman whose wives stretch over 300 miles of country, with a good wife base in a coast town as well. (1976, pp. 136-137)

The African woman is a temple of security for the African man and the bedrock of his economic thrive. Kingsley goes on to confirm:

security can lie in women, especially so many women, the so called civilized man may ironically doubt, but the security is there, and there only, on a sound basis, for remember the position of a travelling trader's wife in a village is a position that gives the lady the prestige. (1976, p. 137)

Plausibly, the whole process might be suspected by the White man, envisaging that polygamy exists to satisfy male sexual appetites. However, TWA carries an implied message from Kingsley for the Westerners to reconsider their criteria of appraisal and focus on West Africans' customs from diverse perspectives to get a clear and accurate insight into them.

Mary Kingsley too has worked a great deal to popularize history, to write history from below or the history of abject groups. It is the history being knit through a fieldwork study by means of getting involved in the casual life of marginal groups such as the Fans. Arguably, it is more realistic than the fictional fantasy accounts narrated by Western writers such as Conrad, Kipling inter alios in so far as it gives a free space for the natives to identify themselves rather than being marginalized by a commander-in-chief occupying an ivory tower. Kingsley traces the oral stories of native Africans to provide textual maps where she remaps the African space, and so doing she liberates it from the colonial mapping of the Western writers, reflecting the psychology of some Victorians craving to maintain cultural dominance.

There are more than one history and official histories exist in parallel with oppressed others. Achebe's text also writes the smothered history of Igbos "from the inside" to lend his narrative a sense of authenticity and to rectify the reductive stereotypical portrayal of Western authorities. The "inside perspective" (Snyder, 2008, p. 156) carries in its folds an ethnographic representation of the cultural specificities of the Igbo people. The South African writer Gordimer posits that "the novelist is able to deal in a way in which historical process is registered as the subjective experience of individual society; fiction is able to give us 'history from the inside'" (as cited in Barbre & al, 1989, p. 40). Carroll describes the fictionalized story of Achebe to write history from a reverse power structure, namely from the perspective of the subalterns, as a new axis of power, reshaping the geography of knowledge: "[w]ith great skill Achebe . . . combines the role of novelist and anthropologist, synthesizing a new kind of fiction. This is where his essential genius lies" (as cited in Snyder 2008, p.162). The synthesis between anthropology and fiction

translates the subjective collective experience of the Igbo society that the colonial officer Smith longs to stifle in the cradle. Against this predisposition, Achebe employs fiction to write history from the point of view of the oppressed, resisting the grand narratives and opening textual spaces for the Igbos to come into sight as historical deep-rooted subjects.

By explaining that he was born at the "crossroads of cultures": "[o]n one arm of the cross, we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other, my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols" (2008, p. 158), Achebe underwrites his cultural affiliation and detachment at once. In this crisis, the ethnographic study of Achebe meets Kingsley's close rapport with the natives in her fieldwork study. Kingsley is a cultural outsider, but startlingly she is a cultural insider too as long as she shares with the natives some senses of frustration and alienation, indulging herself in much less common conducts by identifying with them and fighting for their interests. This odd liminal experience is the source of the complicity/resistance dialectic that makes the study of women of empire a critical dilemma. Indeed, they are controlled by the same colonizer, the white man who marginalizes and constrains the female point of view. They share with the native people the same position of the subaltern with feelings of displacement due to the ambiguities of racial superiority and sexual inferiority. Partly, their struggle against racial and gender restrictions leads to their alignment in applying similar strategies such as the appropriation of the English language to subvert patriarchal and colonial subjugation, putting Fanon's claim into question (6). Therefore, with the benefit of analogy with Kingsley's text, Achebe "indigenizes the English language, reproducing attributes of African oral tradition in a written text" (as cited in Snyder, 2008, p. 162) to posit his text as a "competent source of the cultural information of the ...Igbo society" (p. 159).

In a nutshell, Achebe's text, TFA, intersects with Kingsley's text, TWA, in many trajectories especially in questioning the stereotypical representation of Africa and Africans in the fictional texts of 19th c. canonic literature. However, admittedly, both, Achebe and Kingsley, have not thoroughly celebrated the native culture, especially Achebe who is daring enough to spotlight at once serious "flaws" of the Igbo society so that he is charged with "internalizing colonialist ideology" (Mamuna & al, 2013, pp. 97,100). Notwithstanding, their texts attest that the cultural practices of West African people in their peculiar African environment down through ages have catered them with unique insights into life that are the bedrock of values and outlooks shaping contemporary African life.

Implicitly or not, through a fieldwork study and cultural affiliation with the African culture, Kingsley and Achebe respectively endorse that the invented image of Africa produced by the legacy of colonialism has to be resisted by displacing the nostalgia of Africans about their past and rewriting the history of Africa from the perspective of the native African. The shuttle between the coming back to the indigenous culture and the colonial configuration translates Achebe's and Kingsley's thirst to activate the memory of West Africans after the colonial dismemberment. The ongoing engagement with the West African identity as a state of being and a process of becoming testifies to the postcolonial fragmentary identity of the Africans overall. For Kingsley, the representation of West Africans is very revealing as it testifies against the network of imperialism

and hence peculiarly attests to another trajectory to negotiate identity and senses of being and becoming for the subalterns. Tracing empirical knowledge echoes a restless psyche capitalizing on any opportunity to shape a new identity distinct from the misshapen one imposed on her by the Victorian society. For Achebe, the underlining of the West African identity passes partly through preventing "epistemicides" (Sabelo, 2015, p. 205), namely eradicating the African heritage.

Overall, reading the story of Umofia, the fictitious Igbo village, in Achebe's TFA in light of the non-fictional travel text of Mary Kingsley's TWA helps to enhance the credibility and authenticity of Achebe, making his fiction slanting towards historical fiction. The same juxtaposition helps Kingsley to question the ideology of gender and imperialism predicated upon the dialectic of dominion: man dominates woman the way the colonizer subjugates the colonized. Thus, the common denominator between them is the subjection of woman and the colonized people. So doing, both texts question the stereotypical representation and process of othering of Africa and Africans through the fictional texts of 19thc British male writers such as Conrad and Haggard among many others. The latter discourse as a technology of representation and a technology of surveillance shapes the prevailing attitude of the Victorian audience towards the English presence in the outposts of empire. As a counterdiscourse, Kingsley and Achebe endeavor to restore the cultural practice embodying traces of African history after it has been distorted by the colonial intrigue. Their manoeuvre may be read as –"a cultural resistance" to imperialism in Said's words, which is defined as a form of –"nativism used as a private refuge . . . to fight against the distortions inflicted on the [native's] identity . . . to return to a pre-imperial period to locate a pure native culture" (Said, 1994, p. 275).

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Footnotes:

- (1) Originally published in 1958
- (2) Mary Kingsley, (1976), *Travels in West Africa: Abridged and Introduced by Elspeth Huxley*, originally published in 1897.
- (3) Hereafter refers to as TFA
- (4) Hereafter refers to as TWA.
- (5) A reference to the customs whereby a man forgoes sexual relations with his wife so long as she is suckling and infants are kept at the breast for up to three years, Kingsley, op cit, pp. 81-82.
- (6) Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) thinks that "to speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture" to secure the consent of the colonizer *vis a vis* his humanity. Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*. France: Editions de Seuil, 1952, p. 21

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