This thesis examines Prafulla Kar’s theory of a “Vanishing African” as it relates to African male characters in Chinua Achebe’s precolonial and postcolonial novels. The study is based on the premise that the African male has been transformed as a result of colonization. Kar’s Vanishing African theory and William E. B. DuBois’ theory of “Double Consciousness” are used to demonstrate the profound effect that the British colonists had on the transformation of the African male and although other African novels are discussed in this study, Obi Okonkwo in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart serves as a basis for identifying precolonial African male traits. The research suggests that he experiences double consciousness slightly but sets a precedent for the male characters in later novels. Achebe proves the theory of the “Vanishing African” to be true, as things fall apart in Okonkwo’s Ibo society.
IMAGES OF MASCULINITY IN SELECTED WORKS
OF CHINUA ACHEBE

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INTRODUCTION

Prafulla Kar’s theory of a “Vanishing African” has distinct similarities with Leslie Fiedler’s theory of a “Vanishing American.” The correlation between the two theories is possible because the loss of self is such a prevalent theme in literature. In his approach to American history and culture, Fiedler attempts to preserve the image of the American Adam from the labyrinth of history in an effort to formulate an idea of a changing culture. Until recently, American studies have suggested or implied that to be an American is to be or to aspire to become white, protestant, middle class, male, and probably to be from the Northeast. This explains why Longfellow, Emerson, Hawthorne, and others have traditionally represented the essence of American culture. In the last thirty years or so, those illusions have been shattered and the concept of American identity broadened (Kar 149-50). For example, Americans are female as well as male, black and white, poor and affluent. They represent many diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Says Fox-Genovese:

Our new eclecticism has included considerable soul-searching about what we mean by culture, with a general tendency to move toward a broad definition that can include any people’s activities, practices, beliefs, and it has questioned the artificial hierarchies that privilege forms of cultural expression over others. The immediate casualty has been the willingness to accept the special place of ‘high’ literary culture in national self-representation. The long-term casualty has been the possibility of acknowledging an American national culture (qtd. in Kar 150-51).

According to Fiedler, the American in his “Edenic” state has been transformed as a result
of years and years of technological advance. For the African, Kar believes a more psychological and emotional change has occurred as a result of Africa’s political and social unrest. For example, *Things Fall Apart* has as its hero, Okonkwo, who personifies the classic African male. He is tall and huge with an almost abnormal aversion to being considered weak. As the typical precolonial man, Okonkwo worth is defined by his masculinity.

American culture is linked to American identity; similarly, African culture is linked to African identity. Achebe cites one of his primary reasons for writing African literature as wanting to create a clear and accurate picture of the African experience. Says Achebe in “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation”:

> When I think of this I always think of light and glass. When white light hits glass one of two things can happen. Either you have an image which is faithful if somewhat unexciting or you have a glorious technicolor which though light is really a distortion. Light from the past passes through a kind of glass to reach us. We can either look for the accurate, though unexciting image or we can look for the glorious technicolor (157).

*Arrow of God*, Achebe’s only other precolonial novel, continues his legacy of depicting historic African reality. This time the hero is Ezeulu, a traditional priest, who is very much a product of his time. He is a slightly more modern African who is resolved to find his place. In broad contrast to Okonkwo who is devastated by Nwoye’s interest in white religion, Ezeulu sees opportunity in his son’s joining the missionaries. Set in the 1920s, Achebe’s Ezeulu has evolved from the classic Okonkwo to a more liberal yet loyal African.

*No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* depict postcolonial Africa. The chief protagonists bear less resemblance to Okonkwo than Ezeulu. One almost feels sorry for Obi Okonkwo who desires to eradicate corruption in Africa. Chief Nanga, however, is
an opportunistic cad who merits little sympathy. If Okonkwo does represent the
archetypal African male, then Achebe has described in Nanga that African
male who is grossly detached from his ancestral roots (Kar 149-51).

Like most Americans who reject the traditional literary canon because it does not
represent them, so do Achebe and supporters of his work reject the African literary canon
that existed for so long. If a canon ignores a particular group of people, it is not likely
that it will be embraced as the highest expression of that group or person’s identity.
Thus, the belief that culture is a powerful articulation of identity is born. Says Fox-
Genovese, this attitude falls in line with the writings of those who struggled to find their
own identity, such as W.E.B. DuBois and Chinua Achebe (qtd in Kar 50-51).

DuBois writes from the perspective of the African American but the reality of his
theory transcends across the waters. Achebe, after meeting African-American author
James Baldwin for the first time, declared to him: “Do you realize that we were not
supposed to meet, because if we meet, the connection between colonialism in Africa and
slavery in America will become all too embarrassing” (Champion xi)? This statement is
important because it helps to identify the link between the African experience and that of
the African American. DuBois is best known for The Souls of Black Folk. It is in this
book that he describes “double consciousness” as:

[. . .] a peculiar sensation [. . .] this sense of always looking at one’s self through
the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in
amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness [. . .] two souls [. . .] two
thoughts [. . .] two warring ideals [. . .] (8-9).

A correlation exists between this theory and Achebe’s chief male protagonists because
the theory implies a state of exclusion from a normal sense of nationalism. In Things
Fall Apart, for example, Okonkwo is destroyed because he refuses to see himself as
anything other than African—proudly participating in all traditional practices of his native land. Because of his inflexibility, he does not experience “double consciousness” like the characters in Achebe’s later novels. Jonathan Peters says this about African writers: “Each in his distinctive way, has been concerned in his writings with African experience, African modes of consciousness, with traditional or historically transformed images, rituals and social structures of their own common but diversified culture” (4).

Another black writer, Aime Cesaire, headed a political movement called Negritude that supports DuBois’ theory. A Martinique poet, he writes,

‘I have always thought that the black man was searching for this identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are [. . .] that we are black [. . .] and have a history [. . .] and that Negroes were not, as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important civilizations [. . .] and that this heritage . . . could still make an important contribution to the world’ (qtd in Peters 4-6).

In an interview with Robert Serumaga in 1967, Achebe revealed his motives in writing his novels:

What I’ve decided to do really is to oscillate between the past—the immediate past and the present. Things Fall Apart is about a hundred years ago; No Longer At Ease is today; and I want to go back now to not quite the time of Things Fall Apart but a little later (i.e., the early nineteen twenties, setting of Arrow of God), because I think there’s a lot of interesting material there; and the fourth one A Man of the People would be today (Duerden & Pieterse 4).

Achebe is successful in achieving his goal. Each novel is specific to a particular historical period. In the precolonial society characterized by Okonkwo, position is determined by wealth. Wealth, of course, is determined by strength of arm and strength of character. Later, as the archetypal African is transformed, Achebe characterizes a less noble, more opportunistic man. Says Okafor, “the male characters in Achebe’s novels from Okonkwo to Odili Samalu represent a general change from intransigence to
compromise, the kind of compromise that characterized the relationship between women and men according to Igbo history, legend, and tradition” (85).

Chinua Achebe’s precolonial novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* along with his postcolonial novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* suggest that the African man has undergone a transformation of identity owing to the clash of cultures which occurs during colonization. Prafulla Kar’s theory of the “Vanishing African” along with William E. B. DuBois’ theory of “Double Consciousness,” is used to illustrate this transformation.
CHAPTER 1

*Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian Ibo author, deals with colonialism and its impact on African society, but he is more concerned with history as a transforming process. According to Prafulla Kar, he can be compared to William Faulkner whose interpretation of the end of the old South stems from a “philosophical conception of culture in transformation.” Faulkner believed the Civil War was merely a catalyst in the shift from an agrarian South to an industrial one. Likewise, Kar believes that the British administration quickened a process of change that was inevitable. The result of this change is a “Vanishing African” theorized by Kar who believes the traditional African male has been transformed as a result of the cultural and societal changes in Africa (149-59).

Initially, in *Things Fall Apart*, everything is entirely African. One sees no trace of any white presence. Achebe has successfully recreated the past. Champion states,

> he talks freely about African customs and traditions and he admits to the reader that his people did practice human sacrifice, did throw twins into the forest because they believed they were the work of the devil, that they were superstitious, but [...] they believed in a supreme God and were heirs to all the weaknesses of the flesh (104).

*Things Fall Apart* has as its chief protagonist, Okonkwo, whose image will serve as the basis for identifying images of masculinity in African males. He is fearless, strong and loyal to tradition (Booth 78). He takes pride in performing cultural rituals and excels
among his tribesmen as a result. It is his inability to accept that his world is changing that causes his demise. Says Alberto Moravia, "there is no greater suffering of man than to feel his cultural foundations giving way beneath him." This quotation serves as a perfect summation of Okonkwo’s situation in *Things Fall Apart*. He is transformed from cultural icon to cultural outcast. Although fictitiously based, many an African leader has suffered Okonkwo’s fate. Achebe does an excellent job at depicting African life before and after the arrival of the Europeans.

The fact that Okonkwo, as the tragic hero, does not compromise his values is important. He is destroyed but not because he compromises his values. Rather, he is destroyed because he does not compromise traditional tribal culture. Okonkwo is the last to represent traditional African male identity because Achebe’s later works depict a society already bustling with colonialism (Peterson & Rutherford 78). Of course, with colonialism comes a sense of “double consciousness” that transforms the African male and validates Kar’s theory that the African male has vanished.

Before the missionaries descend on Umuofia and the fabric of the society comes unwoven, there are clear images of masculinity. Nwoye, for instance, is the epitome of weakness in his father’s eyes. He prefers his mother’s stories to those of war and hunting. A man, according to Okonkwo, must be able to control his women and children. Okonkwo often beats his son as incentive for him to become more masculine. However, Okonkwo is exiled and Nwoye converts to Christianity and shames his father by abandoning his ancestors’ way of life. In contrast, Obierika, Okonkwo’s friend and confidante, symbolizes a loyalty and reverence indicative of the older men of the tribe. It is Obierika who sells the majority of Okonkwo’s yams in his absence. In fact, he sells
some and gives some to sharecroppers in order to preserve Okonkwo's financial status.
In a sense, he is like Uchendu who receives Okonkwo and his family when they are exiled to the motherland.

Further, when Okonkwo has trouble understanding the impact that the colonists have made on society, it is Obierika who explains the situation as it is upon his return from exile:

'It is already too late,' said Obierika sadly. 'Our own men and our own sons have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the White man in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuaru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame' (TFA 159).

Perhaps the best example of the African male's potential comes from Ogbuefi, an elder and leader of the Umofian tribe. This is so, not necessarily because he delivers the message of death, as decreed by the Oracle, for Ikemefuna and warns Okonkwo to have no part in it, but because he was a great warrior and respected man among the tribesmen (Iyasere 129).

However, Okonkwo is the one who earns more titles and rises above his father's shameful status to gain wealth sufficient to support three wives and children. He easily demonstrates the clash between the missionaries and the older clansmen. Okonkwo undergoes the greatest changes throughout the novel. First, he is exiled after an accidental shooting, which delays his encounter with missionaries in his village; and second, he is robbed of his heritage by the missionaries. Interestingly, the Europeans have been in Nigeria for only seven years and already the traditional society has been lost. This provides an idea of how quickly the colonial influence has spread. It is no wonder that the traditions and values of the old society are gone, resulting in
feelings of profound cultural dislocation, and loss of identity. However, Okonkwo knows who he is and that is why he refuses to compromise. His kind is vanishing!

Okonkwo’s loss of identity and/or masculinity is twofold. First, his life’s accomplishments are reduced at his own hands as a result of the tribal laws governing the clans when he accidentally kills a clansman and is exiled. Achebe is careful to let his readers know, though, that the villagers’ decision is not personal: “They have no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo in sending him away. His greatest friend Obierika was among them. They are merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo has polluted with the blood of a clansman” (TFA 125).

Achebe only hints at the turmoil that this character must feel. However saddened, Okonkwo collects his things and his family and obeys. According to the critic Irele,

The mental condition into which he falls as a result is not really explored, so that we are not led into the inner workings of his mind as a fully realized individual. Even at his moment of greatest turmoil—in the immediate aftermath of the killing of Ikemefuna—we are provided with hardly any insight into the happenings within his troubled soul. Instead the narrator narrows our gaze, to focus on what is essential to his make-up: Okonkwo was a man of action, not of thought (24-32).

Okonkwo’s personality changes while he is in the motherland. Unable to act like a man among men, he establishes a major premise of the novel: a man’s identity and masculinity are directly related to cultural and societal expectations and values.

Second, the changes brought on by the missionaries are overwhelming. For instance, the former system of trade has been replaced with a cash-based economy. Further, the Ibo have been used to a direct democracy in which every mature male has an equal voice (Wren 83). A hierarchy has never been established:

You were never allowed [. . .] to become too powerful, either politically or even economically [. . .] the way they ensure this was to say to you, ‘you must take Titles [. . .] after that, you take the second [. . .] and the third, at greater cost, and
even (rarely) a fourth [. . .] they used to have the fifth title, title of king [. . .] and the reason this went out of use was that you were required to pay the debt of every member of your community before you could become their king.

Because of the profound changes caused by the missionaries, Okonkwo can be compared to a fish out of water. However, as much as his surroundings change, he remains the same.

Ironically, Okonkwo's attributes—strength, honor, and pride—all but foreshadow his fate. Okonkwo is a warrior who rises to greatness as a result of his own determination and hard work. His success chronicles the proverb that "as a man danced so the drums were beaten for him" rather than an elder's remark that Okonkwo is one of those whose "palm kernels have been cracked for them by a benevolent spirit" (TFA 24). The irony of his success is that it is controlled by fear. Achebe states that:

Okonkwo ruled his house 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 of magic [. . .]. It was not external but lay deep within him. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father [. . .]. And so Okonkwo ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness (TFA 12-13).

Another extreme consequence of Okonkwo's deep-seated feud with the colonial administration is the slaying of the messenger who interrupts the tribal meeting: In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body (TFA 204). This action seals his fate. The great warrior cannot suffer imprisonment because to do so would be equivalent of a slow and merciless death. Therefore, Okonkwo takes his life and violates tribal law. He deprives himself of a
proper burial. Okonkwo is unable to compromise his masculinity, partly because it is wrapped up in the psychological turmoil he feels against his father, Unoka. Indeed, Unoka and Nwoye are somewhat the same in Okonkwo's eyes because they represent failure in precolonial society. Both fail to exhibit the masculine traits prized by the society and paramount in gaining Okonkwo's respect. Thus, this act of killing the messenger is Okonkwo's last attempt to remove the outsiders from his homeland, and the final vindication of his manhood. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that while Okonkwo is the major objector to the new ways, his maternal relations also resist.

Okonkwo comes in contact with missionaries in exile who exemplify the conflict between the old religion and the new. Unlike those who have converted to Christianity in Umuofia, these villagers remain loyal to their indigenous beliefs. For them, double consciousness as it relates to religion is inconceivable. They are as rigid as Okonkwo in their beliefs and do not have any intention of learning about Christianity or converting to it. Says Peters, "the account is one of the many gems of Achebe's narrative genius" (106). One of the missionaries speaking through an interpreter informs them that they worship false gods whom they must now replace with the one true God. The villagers indulge him with questions but in the end are not moved.

If we leave our gods and follow your God [...] who will protect us from the anger of our neglected Gods and ancestors?" "Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm," replied the White man. "They are pieces of wood and stone". When this was interpreted to the men of Mbanta they broke into a derisive laughter. These men must be mad, they said to themselves. How else could they say that Ani and Amadiara were homeless? And Idemili and Ogwugu too? And some of them began to go away (TFA 132-133).

The missionaries underestimate the extent to which the villager's religion is a part of their lives. This is important because this commitment to traditional values separates them
from the males in Achebe's later novels. In Things Fall Apart many of the villagers believe the white man and his religion are a joke. The fact that missionaries accept the evil forest when it was the consensus of the villagers that no sane man would have taken it confirms this. Okonkwo and the others remain loyal while referring to the converts as efulefu or worthless men.

Following his banishment to the motherland, Okonkwo returns to a village that is bustling with colonialism. A product of a time when the social, religious, and aesthetic life of the African was one, Okonkwo finds the task of incorporating British policies into African customs impossible. It becomes clear to Okonkwo after he returns from exile that there is a new order among them. The white man with his policeman, teachers, etc. has made his presence known among the clan. Nonetheless, Okonkwo never cooperates with the British and is eventually arrested with several other tribesmen. The archetypal male, for all his glory, cannot co-exist and accept a "double consciousness." Consider the following:

The need for modifying or restructuring a leisurely traditional society to meet the compelling demands of a highly structured and fast-paced technological culture is incontestable. Must such change, however, involve the sacrifice of a whole pattern of life including the best in a community-oriented society where the individual had dignity and a strong moral duty to set the welfare of the community above his own? Will it not lead to chaos when an individual born into the old and then thrust into the new proves unequal to the task of accommodating two contradictory codes of ethical values within him (Peters 130).

At the end of the novel, Okonkwo's dilemma is a testament to the disruption that the colonists have been. Prior to their coming, a man earned more respect as he grew older. This was said to be the result of his drawing nearer to ancestors and becoming wiser. He gained titles through hard work and diligence. Okonkwo, who has worked hard and
achieved some success, has only earned two of the four titles, though. He sees his seven years in exile as wasted years. Further, he knows that he can never earn more titles unless the new order is removed. Okonkwo is unwilling to yield in any regard to the British influence. He chooses to fight for the life that he has known. According to Peters, “As the popularly known ‘Roaring Flame’, Okonkwo yearns not only for personal revenge for his maltreatment but also for a restoration of the old order under which alone he can succeed” (Peters 110). With the realization that this is impossible after the slaying of the messenger, Okonkwo takes his life as a final defiance to the British and the clansmen whom he believed had turned weak. Okonkwo’s final act symbolizes the vanishing African.

In summation, it is necessary to understand the profound influence that the white man had on Umuofian society in order to fully understand Okonkwo’s predicament at the end of the novel. The societal changes that Kar refers to in her Vanishing African theory are occurring. Before the arrival of the colonists, the two-tiered system allowed a man to gain more respect as he became older and accumulated titles as a result of hard work. Okonkwo is a successful farmer before he is exiled but he has not earned all four titles. His lifetime dream has not been realized. Colonialism has destroyed his hope of achieving his goals and so Okonkwo mourns the loss of the simple life that has been taken from him.

The colonial administration, unfortunately for Okonkwo, is not only different but unequal. The Africans who become powerful are not part of Umuofia. Instead, they are strangers from Umuaru—a neighboring village. Even after the mission school is established, it is the outcasts who benefit. This is primarily true because those
respected in the community are extremely skeptical of the white man’s teachings.

Consequently, the traditional order is upset by the new order of the mission school.

Mr. Brown’s school produced quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers, and from Umuofia laborers went forth into the Lord’s vineyard. New churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them. From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand (TFA 181-82).

Achebe does a superb job of foreshadowing Okonkwo’s end. He gives reference to a farmer’s suicidal hanging resulting from a bad crop due to poor weather conditions. Likewise, Okonkwo’s uncle refers to an incident of greater adversity but is careful to acknowledge that Okonkwo did not hang himself in spite of his troubles. Perhaps the best example comes from a report of the hanging of a man by white authorities because he had killed someone in a dispute over land. The difference, of course, is that Okonkwo takes his own life. His father’s comments after Okonkwo’s first bad crop help us to understand his act.

Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone (TFA 23).

Not surprisingly, the District Commissioner is not moved by Obierika’s indictment that the new government has driven Okonkwo to commit suicide. Captain Winterbottom’s point of view is made clear at the end of the novel in the following passage:

The commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and
hanged himself would make interesting reading. 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. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger (TFA, 208-09).

Jonathan Peter's comments on this final paragraph are worth quoting.

This passage is tellingly ironic in its capturing of the Commissioner's pose in front of the so-called 'natives.' His insouciance in the face of Okonkwo's tragic end is in part dictated by his assumed racial superiority, in part by his preoccupation with the people of Africa not as human beings but as material for a book he is planning to write. Weighing the title of his projected book against our knowledge of the highly evolved society that Achebe depicts in Part I of Things Fall Apart, his own conduct as a judge who (we learn in an authorial comment) is known to 'judge cases in ignorance,' it is not difficult to understand the depth of insight that this expert on African customs will put into his masterpiece (113).

The fact that Achebe ends the novel with Winterbottom's thoughts symbolizes the new administration's power over Umuofian society. The Ibo culture as defined in the beginning of Things Fall Apart has been reduced to "primitive" (113) while the people of the Lower Niger have become warring "tribes" that must be pacified.
CHAPTER 2

*Arrow of God*

Kar's theory may also be used to examine *Arrow of God*, Achebe's third novel. In this work the British have established a place in Nigeria, and the traditional society is fast crumbling. The chief protagonist, Ezeulu is more progressive than Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. As the chief priest of the God Ulu, Ezeulu assumes a very powerful role. He initiates the rituals that structure village life—the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves and that of the New Yam (Carrol 89). By means of these two festivals Ezeulu controls both planting and harvesting, and the village year which is dependent upon them. Ezeulu resembles Okonkwo in the first novel, although he experiences none of Okonkwo's inner doubts. Like Okonkwo, however, he still represents early Africans.

Achebe characterizes the African past in *Arrow of God* with the same brilliance that he does in *Things Fall Apart*. He desires to portray a way of life as told by legends of his childhood so that Africans can feel proud of their precolonial history. Speaking at a conference in 1964, he says,

[. . .] it would be foolish to pretend that we have fully recovered from the traumatic effects of our first confrontation with Europe. Three or four weeks ago my wife who teaches English in a boys' school asked a pupil why he wrote about winter when he meant the harmattan. He said he would be laughed out of class if he did such a thing! Now, you wouldn't have thought, would you, that there was something shameful in your weather? But apparently we do. How can this great blasphemy be purged? I think that it is part of my business as a writer to show that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that the palm-tree is a fit subject for poetry [. . .] (The Role 204-05).
Like *Things Fall Apart*, the values of the man as well as the village are identified early in *Arrow of God*. The transition from Okonkwo’s world to that of the new culture has taken place. It is here that one sees the contrast between the “African” that Okonkwo was and the more receptive, open-minded “African” of the new society. As Kar points out, “The façade of traditional culture is still present in the setting of *Arrow of God*, but its inner force and vitality is lost (Kar 149-59).” Achebe’s male characters are transformed as a result of colonialism which becomes the basis for a dual consciousness.

Ezeulu, unlike Okonkwo, understands that he must make a conscious effort to live in a world that includes the African and the colonists. He is resolved to make the best of this society. Of particular interest is Ezeulu’s decision to have his son trained by Christian missionaries while Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is devastated because of Nwoye’s interest in Christianity. Okonkwo would not have approved. “Ezeulu contemplates this power struggle and in a visionary decision, makes up his mind that the only way to deal with the power of the White man is to understand its source” (Champion 19). He tells Oduche who is his oldest son,

The world is changing [. . .]. I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: ‘Men of today have learned to shoot without missing and so I have learned to fly without perching.’ I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow (AG 46).

Ezeulu’s motives are understandable. He understands that he can never defeat the white man unless he understands him. He does not abandon his own culture, though. He teaches his children to preserve local customs. For example, he tells Oduche, “When a
handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing [. . .] Your people should know the custom of the land; if they don’t you must tell them (AG 13).

Regardless of his intentions, however, Ezeulu fails to appreciate the influence that the Christian education will have on undermining the African culture and consequently, the African male. For example, Oduche wears a singlet and owns a slate chalk. These are supplies received from the Christian mission. Further, while the family participates in a traditional storytelling session; he sits alone, immersed in his new book on the alphabet. Thus, Oduche’s transformation has begun, and Ezeulu, like Okonkwo, loses his son to the Christians.

In deciding to have a relationship with the British, Ezeulu finds himself defending his decision to send Oduche to a Christian school to the clan. Akuebue accuses him of doing so to please Captain Winterbottom. Ezeulu responds:

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 a 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 the death-cry gurgling through the blood that we want to hear? No, my friend, we do it because we have reached the very end of things and we know that neither a cock nor a goat nor even a bull will do. 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 [. . .]. That was why our ancestors when they pushed beyond the end of things by the warriors of Abame sacrificed not a stranger but one of themselves and made the great medicine which they called Ulu (AG 133).

Ezeulu’s sense of identity is complicated by the fact that he alone represents Ulu. He masks his own personal desires behind the divine will of Ulu. As a result, he sees his testimony against his people, his decision to send Oduche to the mission school, as well as his delay in announcing the New Yam festival as the will of his God. This attitude is
carried over in his dealings with Winterbottom. Ezeulu's attitude towards Winterbottom is a direct result of DuBois' theory of double consciousness. For example, on one occasion, he tells Winterbottom to come to his hut if the commissioner desires to see him because traditionally the Chief Priest never leaves. Nwaka reminds him, however, that his friendship with the white man makes Winterbottom's invitation acceptable. In fact, he is quick to remind Ezeulu that he has set a precedent for such an invitation by testifying against the clan. With each decision Ezeulu makes, there are serious consequences with the British that the Chief Priest fails to realize.

Ezeulu's position toward Winterbottom has its consequences. It costs him power within the British system of government. Nonetheless, he is determined to prove himself to his rivals in Umuaro. Achebe gives two plausible interpretations of Ezeulu's motives for this stance and his people must decide which one they will accept.

Commenting on Ezeulu's decision, Carol states that:

According to the logic of his priesthood, he is acting quite consistently: he must speak the truth as Ulu decrees and he must not obey any authority but that of his god. But his actions can be construed more simply as self-interest. When the clan inclines to the second view, Ezeulu knows with some satisfaction that the time has come to force the dispute with his people to a final issue. On the next morning he walks to Okperi and hands himself over to the district commissioner who has just signed a warrant for his arrest (109).

Ezeulu's willingness to surrender to imprisonment shows a change in the African male since Okonkwo's time. He intends to use his imprisonment as a wake-up call for the clansmen unlike Okonkwo who chooses death instead. Ezeulu is still not inclined to believe that his past dealings with the British have compromised his status as Chief Priest.

For years he had been warning Umuaro not to allow a few jealous men to lead
them into the bush. But they had stopped both ears with fingers. They had gone on taking one dangerous step after another and now they had gone too far [. . .]. Ezeulu’s muscles tingled for the fight. Let the White man detain him not for one day but one year so that his deity not seeing him in his place would ask Umuaro questions (AG 161).

Ezeulu uses every situation supposedly to exalt Ulu. He is released thirty-two days later and is surprised to find that there are many villagers who still support him. Nonetheless, Ezeulu’s imprisonment shows the inferiority of the tribal power to the British laws.

The African and European worlds repeatedly collide in the novel. The colonial administration employs secular values while those of Umuaro are religious. Coincidentally, the groups do not see themselves as rivals. Many Ibo people accept the European god and find a way to coexist with the European administration. On at least one occasion the dichotomy that exists in the society becomes painfully obvious to Ezeulu when he is able to hear the Christian rituals as they are performed near his compound. He hears the sound of their bell as he contemplates the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves.

Ezeulu remembers his initial feelings about the new religion as he tries to justify what can only be considered as his attempt at achieving a balance between his two worlds. He had known that it was spreading quickly and proved a threat to the old order but he had not known how to handle the situation. He had considered removing Oduche from the school but remembered the prophecy from the oracles that the white man would take over and control the land. This was sufficient cause for him to leave his son there (Peters 121).

Unfortunately, Ezeulu’s clash with the clan is further exacerbated by Oduche’s sacrilegious act concerning the python. He holds the sacred animal captive in a box. In
doing so, he offends the clan by insulting their religion. When Akeube questions Ezeulu about the matter, Achebe hints at the inner turmoil that Ezeulu is feeling. Ezeulu says, "I am not blind and I am not deaf either. I know that Umuaro is divided and confused and I know that some people are holding secret meetings to persuade others that I am the cause of the trouble" (AG 130). Akuebe listens but warns Ezeulu that no man wins judgement against a clan: "You may think you did in that land dispute but you are wrong. Umuaro will always say that you betrayed them before the White man. And they will say that you are betraying them again today by sending your son to join in desecrating the land" (AG 131). He does not succeed in explaining to Ezeulu that his power is dependent on the consent of the tribe.

Oduche commits this grave act because the converts experience double-consciousness as well. He contradicts Unachukwu’s (the most famous convert) argument that neither the Bible nor the tribal religion encourages the slaying of the python or snake exposing their reverence for tribal religion as well. Oduche declares, "It is not true that the Bible does not ask us to kill the serpent. Did not God tell Adam to crush the serpent which deceived his wife" (quoted in Carrol 104)? In response, Unachukwu challenges him to kill a python. According to Carroll,

Oduche is determined to accept the challenge, but gradually the sanctions of Umuaro undermine his resolution. Finally, he compromises by locking a sacred python in the wooden box made for each convert by the mission carpenter. The python would die for lack of air, and he would be responsible for its death without being guilty of killing it. In the ambivalence of his present life his act seemed to him a very happy compromise (113).

Even so, it is Ezeulu who must bear the shame of his son’s act. As the chief priest, the villagers hold him responsible for even this blatant disrespect for tribal religion.

In the past, Okonkwo strongly believed the white man could not be trusted.
Unfortunately, Ezeulu sees himself as a friend of the British administration and does not understand that he is not. The British do not see him as an ally although that does not stop them from exploiting the social order of Umuofia to legitimize colonial rule. For example, the British introduce the position of Chieftain, and Captain Winterbottom is sure that Ezeulu is their best candidate for Chief of Umuaro. However, having offended Winterbottom by summoning him to his hut, Ezeulu says that he will not be anyone's chief except Ulu (AG 174). Despite Ezeulu’s local power, Winterbottom becomes angry and Ezeulu is imprisoned. His power has been challenged and tested; Ezeulu is becoming the vanishing African.

After Ezeulu is released from prison, he refuses to eat more than one yam at the next new moon. This delays the feast of the New Yam and the harvest cannot be gathered. His people experience hunger and suffering while the yam rot in the ground. Ezeulu appears to be reversing the function of his office. He brings disaster to his people instead of protecting them from it. Obika’s sudden death finally ends the tension between Ulu, Ezeulu, and the clan. Obika has a fever but assumes the role of night spirit in a burial ceremony. He is possessed as he runs throughout the village and collapses. “At this supreme moment of crisis within Umuaro the event can only be interpreted in one way—Ulu disapproves of the conduct of his Chief Priest (Carrol 116). The personal loss and public humiliation is too much and he lives his last days in torment. It is the people’s affirmation that no man is greater than his people but Ulu’s defeat of his priest is ironic in the end (Omotoso, 63-64).

If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold this wisdom. In destroying his priest he had also brought disaster on himself, like the lizard in the fable who ruined his mother’s funeral by his own hand. 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 a few days after Obika’s death saw more people than even Good country 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 to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam that was harvested in the man’s fields was harvested in the name of the son (AG 230).

Ezeulu is much too self-absorbed to see the reality here: that he will never satisfactorily achieve a balance between the two worlds. Like Okonkwo he becomes consumed by grief. In Achebe’s words,

At any other time Ezeulu would have been more than equal to his grief. He would have been equal to any grief not compounded with humiliation. Why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal with him, to strike him down and cover him up with mud? What was his offense? Had he not divined the god’s will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in its palm? [. . .]. But today such a thing had happened before the eyes of all. What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things? (AG 229)

Moreso than anything, Achebe has depicted a study of the loss of power with *Arrow of God*. Like Okonkwo, Ezeulu finds himself at odds with his own people. For example, his village decides to go to war with a neighboring village against Ezeulu’s better judgement. Ezeulu’s position results in an alliance with the British. Ezeulu’s proud, uncompromising nature leaves him isolated and detached from the Ibo and the British. In agreement is Gerald Moore who writes,

As in Achebe’s other novels, it is the strong-willed man of tradition who cannot adapt, and who is crushed by his virtues in the war between the new, more worldly order, and the old, conservative values of an isolated society. While like Okonkwo in his desire to be respected and to excel in the community, Ezeulu, too, loses his good standing among his people (18).

Ezeulu is not a weak character. He does exercise some tribal loyalties, leaving the reader with the impression that his masculinity is not so much tied to his ancestors as his determination to survive. Unfortunately, it is Ezeulu’s pride that causes extreme turmoil.
He anguishes over whether or not his power is of real substance. He cannot fathom himself as being simply a liaison between the God and the villages (Carrol 91). Thus, many of the same concerns expressed in *Things Fall Apart* surface in *Arrow of God*. The discrepancy between human and divine values is apparent. Both Ezeulu and Okonkwo are convinced that they must strictly obey the commands of the gods. The problem with Ezeulu, though, is that he can not always differentiate between his wishes and the god’s.

Of the characters in Achebe’s precolonial novels, Ezeulu is more liberal than Okonkwo as well as more opportunistic. He believes that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time (Larson 150). Gone are tribal customs such as the tribal facial marks that were once customary. They are now considered old fashioned and no longer used. In place of the old customs is a new religion symbolic of the new era that is born out of colonialism. Clearly the values of the archetypal male are no more.

In conclusion, Prafulla Kar’s theory of the Vanishing African is validated in *Arrow of God* because Ezeulu is an individualist. For example, he rejects the colonial government’s offer of Chieftainship and refuses to eat the yams signifying the days of the year. In refusing to honor this tribal ritual, he is set apart from Okonkwo who has a much greater reverence for tribal law. Tragedies, such as the death of his son, follow as a result of his decision and the people of Umuofia are unsympathetic (Obiechina 86).

So in the end only Umuaro {the village} and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors that no man, however great, was greater than his people. That no man ever won judgment against his clan (AG 230).

Ezeulu’s decision to send his son to the Christian school is evidence of his individualism as well. For instance, as Chief Priest, he should be the most resistant to
colonial authority. Instead, the decision to send his son to the Christian school can be construed as an instrument for subversion of the old tribal system. Although his decision is rational and based on a recurring proverb: "A man must dance the dance prevalent in his time," it undoubtedly undermines the traditional way of life. It is easy to see the difference between Okonkwo and Ezeulu. Ezeulu recognizes the significance of the new order and attempts to come to terms with it (Obiechina 238-39).

Oduche is somewhat of a sacrificial offering and precipitates Ezeulu’s crises. Apart from becoming a converted Christian, he attempts to suffocate a python which is considered a sacred animal. Oduche’s actions cause Ezeulu’s enemies to think that he has only his best interest at heart. In fact, even Akuebue who is Ezeulu’s best friend has trouble reconciling with his friend’s decision. He makes his reservations known:

> When you spoke against the war with Okperi you were not alone. I too was against it and so were many others. But if you send your son to join strangers in desecrating land you will be alone. You may go and mark it on that wall to remind you that I said so (AG 134).

Ezeulu, like Okonkwo, fails to receive the support of the clan at a crucial time—a personal war with the White administration. For example, when he seeks advice from the clan after refusing to go to Captain Winterbottom immediately after he is summoned, a fellow clansman responds:

> The white man is Ezeulu’s friend and has sent for him. What is so strange about that? He did not send for me. He did not send for Udeozo; he did not send for the priest of Idemili; he did not send for the priest of Eru; he did not send for the priest of Udo nor did he ask the priest of Ogwugwu to come and see him. He asked Ezeulu. Why? Because they are friends. Or does Ezeulu think that their friendship should stop short of entering each other’s houses? Does he want the white man to be his friend only by word of mouth? Did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace? It seems to me that Ezeulu has shaken hands with a man of white body (AG 144).

In spite of his relationship with the British administration, Ezeulu—like Okonkwo—is
isolated at a time when unity is a man’s greatest strength.

Like *Things Fall Apart*, there is a historical basis for *Arrow of God* that validates Kar’s theory as well. According to Dr. P.C. Lloyd,

> In attempts to ‘find a chief,’ men were often selected whose traditional roles had little to do with political authority. They were ritual experts or merely presided over councils of elders with equal status. Indeed the introduction of Indirect Rule on the Northern Nigerian pattern to the Ibo peoples and their similarly organized neighbors of Eastern Nigeria proved impossible. From the beginning of the century, administrative officers had created ‘warrant chiefs’ – men who often had no traditional authority but who seemed powerful enough to act as British agents in recruiting labour (quoted in Obiechina 242)

Through Ezeulu, Achebe tries to bridge the gap that developed in *Things Fall Apart* with the arrival of colonialism. Ezeulu is a strong-willed elder who is half-man and half-spirit. Unfortunately, in spite of his similarities to Okonkwo, Achebe’s concluding picture of Okonkwo is one of an insane man. The archetypal qualities of the African vanishes again!
CHAPTER 3

No Longer at Ease

Just as Prafulla Kar’s theory of the Vanishing African may be used to examine Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, so may W.E.B. DuBois’ theory of ‘double consciousness’ be used in a study of No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People, Achebe’s two novels set in postcolonial Nigeria. No Longer at Ease, published in 1960 is Achebe’s second novel. Ravenscroft suggests that the story can be read as a sequel to Things Fall Apart but warns readers that to do so might “excite expectations that Achebe has no intention of fulfilling” (18). It takes the themes of the other novel into the 1950s. Here the values of the old Umofian society still exist although the Nigerian capital, Lagos, is the home of the affluent.

As previously stated, DuBois explains the theory of ‘Double Consciousness’ in The Souls of Black Folk. He writes,

a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness [...] two souls [...] two thoughts [...] two warring ideals [...] whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (8-9).

As a contemporary male, Achebe’s character in No Longer at Ease experiences this double consciousness as a result of a new Umofian society. Obi, like his grandfather, Okonkwo, is not content to live in two worlds. In this novel, Achebe gives many examples of Kar’s theory that the African male has been transformed. One example
comes at the reception given to Obi upon his return from England. Because the people of Umuofia had educated him, they expect to see a changed man. They are disappointed, however, when Obi appears in short-sleeves because of the heat as opposed to his travel companion who “as soon as Lagos had been sighted had returned to his cabin to emerge half an hour later in a black suit, bowler hat and rolled umbrella, even though it was a hot October day” (NLE 35). Obi is one of the new generation, though, who expresses his independence by honoring a few selected African customs. This is an important example of Obi deviating from the normal expectations of the people.

The villagers’ reception of Obi is far better. They welcome him as,

a returning hero, without any suspicion of his cultural dislocation. For them, he is not only a Umofian but also a son of their village and a key factor in inter-village rivalry. They greet him in the same terms with which they dispatched him to England; he is a modern successor of the great warriors Okonkwo, Ezeulu, and Obierika (Carrol, 72).

Obi’s disillusionment with the clan is, in the beginning, as profound as his grandfather’s disillusionment with Umuofia after his return from exile. Initially, Obi, like Okonkwo, has a clear set of values. His distaste for the injustice of bribery begins when he witnesses his driver bribing the police on his first visit back to the village. The tragic irony in No Longer at Ease is that, in the end, Obi stands trial for the very crime that he detests, as a testament of the times and a reminder that the integrity of Okonkwo’s village is dead. Ironically, everyone’s concern seems not to be the widespread corruption but the naivete of their favorite son (Ravenscroft 21). “He should not have accepted the money himself. What others do is tell you to go and hand it to their house boy. Obi tried to do what everyone else does without finding out how it was done” (NLE 7).

The corruption in No Longer at Ease originates back in Things Fall Apart. In both
novels there is an alienation between the individual and society. However, in the later novel, the African male experiences a societal double consciousness. Obi is twice removed from his past. He is born into a Christian home, for example, as a result of a father who has rejected traditional religion. Second, while studying in England, he becomes estranged from this adopted religion. He wonders, "What would happen if I stood up and said to him: 'Father, I no longer believe in your God'?" (NLE 56). Obi reminds us of Nwoye whose acceptance of the Christian religion shames his father. In the past, neither Okonkwo nor Ezeulu sacrifices his religion.

Obi's difficulty in dealing with the crisis in his life is contributory to his moral decay. His troubles begin at an early age. As he grows up, each parent stresses the teachings of at least one aspect of village culture. For example, his father insists on a Christian-based education while his mother takes every opportunity to teach him native folklore. The two aspects of his heritage frustrate each other. He finds it difficult to translate Bible lessons and cannot recite folktales either. Also, he and his siblings are not allowed to accept food from the others in the village because they worship idols (Carrol 73). Achebe writes, "That fact alone set her children apart from all others for, among the Ibo, children were free to eat where they liked" (quoted in Carrol 73). Obviously, the fabric of the traditional Umuofian society has already been unwoven.

Also contributory to Obi's moral decay is the fact that his upbringing and education give him an individualism, which contributes to, if not causes, his selfishness. As he speaks to his friend Joseph about his plans to marry Clara, Joseph responds by asking him, "What sort of encouragement will you give to the poor men and women who collected the money?" Obi's response is cowardly at best: "It was only a loan, remember. I shall
pay it all back to the last anini” (NLE 86). Obi is not obliged to hold any values near and
dear—old or new, unlike his grandfather. Okonkwo would have honored his obligation
to the clan. To his credit, though, Joseph recognizes that it is not entirely Obi’s fault. He
tells Obi, “You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an Osu is?
But how can you know?” In that short question, he said in effect, that Obi’s mission-
house upbringing and European education have made him a stranger in his own country
(NLE 82).

Obi’s father is reminiscent of Okonkwo when he decides to honor tribal law regarding
the Osu, although he is a Chrisitan. He laughs when Obi tells him of his plans to marry
Clara. Obi tells him that they cannot accept the Osu prohibition, but he replies:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring
the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and
your children’s children unto the third and fourth generations 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 daughters?
Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians,
but we cannot marry our own daughters (NLE 152).

In this matter, there is a reversal; Obi finds refuge in Christianity while his father reverts
to tribal law.

Obi’s career causes just as much turmoil. The demands of Obi’s people conflict with
his job as civil servant. As a result, he experiences distress and becomes disillusioned
about life (Cook 23). He realizes that his obligations to the clan are important because it
was the Umuofian Progressive Union who had contributed through taxes for his
scholarship so that he could study law in England. It is their hope that Obi will return
home to handle their issues dealing with their land. In a speech given upon Obi’s return
from England, the secretary expresses this sentiment on behalf of the others. He says,
“Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that of 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 honor” (NLE 36). The tragedy here, with regard to the identity and function of the society, is that this is just one side of the story. Obi admits,

[. . .] his people had a sizeable point [. . .]. They had taxed themselves mercilessly to raise eight hundred pounds to send him to England. Some of them earned no more than five pounds per month. He earned nearly fifty. They had wives and school-going children; he had none. After paying the twenty pounds he would have thirty left. And very soon he would have an increment which alone was as big as some people's salary [. . .]. What they did not know was that having labored, in sweat and tears to enroll their kinsmen among the shining elite, they had to keep him up 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’ (NLE 113).

Obi is an educated man torn between two worlds. According to G-C. Mutiso, the dilemma is “whether the literati allow themselves to become absorbed by the traditionalists by keeping the traditional obligations, or whether or not they muse [sic] and perhaps break away [. . .]” (22). Unfortunately, Obi is very much both African and European. On one occasion he comments that driving back from the mainland in Lagos to his flat is like “going from a bazaar to a funeral.” He explains that the “two cities [. . .] reminded him of twin kernals separated by a thin wall in a palm-nut shell. Sometimes one kernal was shiny-black and alive, the other powdery-white and dead” (NLE 20).

At a reception in his home village, Obi is compared to his grandfather and other great men. The elders declare he is “Ogbuefi Okonkwo come back” (NLE 62). He is honored by the remark but uneasy, none the less, when the realities of what his obligations to the clan are manifest themselves (Peters 131-32). He is asked to use his
influence to acquire jobs for members of the union who have been fired. Unlike his
grandfather, the once honorable Obi experiences a "double consciousness" and finds
himself torn between his loyalty to the clan and the European government. Similarly, in
*Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is torn between his feelings for Ikemefuma and tribal laws.
Unlike Obi, however, the fact that he is honoring the laws of the clan is sufficient cause
for his actions.

Unfortunately for Obi, he never experiences the wholeness that his grandfather
possesses before the arrival of the Europeans. His entire life has been a constant
manipulation of a "double consciousness" and he cannot be at ease. Like his grandfather,
his inability to find a balance causes his tragic end. Noteworthy is the fact that Obi has
characteristics that his grandfather would be proud of. Having been educated by the
British, he is idealistic and gutsy. Further, like his grandfather, he is an emotional being
but does not allow this fact to compromise his masculinity. This fact is made evident by
his torment over his affair with Clara—the "Osu." Because she is Osu, he will never
acquire his family's blessing for the relationship. He struggles internally between two
worlds and loses Clara.

Historically, in *No Longer at Ease*, two generations have passed since Okonkwo when
Obi is introduced. The clan rituals have been replaced by Christian prayer meetings
conducted by Nwoye who has been renamed Isaac. The missionaries have not won a
clear-cut victory, though. Consider the Christian convert named Mary as she prays:

> Oh God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob, she burst forth, the
> Beginning and the End. Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not big
> enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife;
> we can not eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight. We are
> like little children who only wash their stomach when they bathe, leaving their
> back dry [. . .]. She went on and on reeling off proverb after proverb and painting
picture after picture (NLE 10).

The gospel as seen in *Things Fall Apart* has been Africanized over the years. The new religion is seen as the status quo. As Kar suggests, technological advance has its effect on the colonized. They desire European education and its power which is why they send Obi away to school. He is their attempt to realize this prophecy. Reverend Ikedi explains this to Obi in religious terms. “In times past, Umuofia would have required of you to fight in her wars and bring home human heads. But those were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the Lamb of God. Today we send you to bring knowledge. Remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (NLE 12).

*Things Fall Apart* depicts cultural and societal stereotypes in their elementary stage unlike *No Longer at Ease*. Says Carrol,

We saw the White men with no toes through the eyes of the Umuofians and the primitive tribes of the lower Niger through the eyes of the district commissioner. Now, however, these images are in conflict within Obi’s mind as he moves from Africa to England and back again. Thanks to his degree in English literature (he refused to read law) he is equipped to articulate the conflict: at one extreme, in his absence, Nigeria is translated into the terms of English pastoral; at the other extreme, on his return, it becomes the decaying wasteland of the twentieth century (Carrol 67).

Obi understands that he is a product of Umuofia as well as Lagos and Europe and they are a part of him. He turns the guilt and despair into a new realism. His sense of right and wrong does not allow him to abuse the regulations too blatantly, so in the end he compromises himself by taking a bride that is not even profitable. Carrol writes, “His apprehension by the police at the end is a release from a dilemma which has no end” (85). According to Peters,

[...] when the government of a country is seen by its citizens as ‘an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without
getting into trouble’ (NLE 37), one can expect to find that utter dissociation of individual and social values which makes the hybrid Obi Okonkwo who is no longer at ease in the old dispensation equally uncommitted to the new except in a superficial way; and it is the absence of a center that can hold in Obi’s visionary world that brings him down and alienates him from us (140).

Finally, Prafulla Kar states that the African has been transformed as a result of years and years of technological advance (149-59). The European influence on Africans support this statement. For example, in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi falls in part because of the pressure put on him by the “civil servant system to maintain the standards of the colonial bureaucrat in terms of cars, dress and ritual, and also the pressure from his own people on one who had a white man’s job” (Mutiso 36). What is interesting in this novel is that his family and social pressures cause the temptation that lead to his demise, as opposed to the church. With *No Longer at Ease* Achebe depicts a world in which colonialism has established roots that are contributory to Obi’s tragic end.

Obi embodies some characteristics of his grandfather, but the honor among men in Okonkwo’s day is no more. For instance, he refuses the bribe from the young lady seeking a scholarship. He tells her, “I’m sorry, terribly sorry, but I don’t see that I can make any promises” (NLE 105). The fact that he pays monthly on his debt to the Umuofia Progressive Union, sends money to his parents and pays his brother’s school fees is also admirable. However, Obi disappoints readers later when he recants his decision not to take the young scholar up on her offer. Further, he accepts a bride for financial gain and seals his own fate as a result of all of the pressures he faces. Says Mutiso,

Although he falls, what one should recognize is the pressure put on him by the civil service system to maintain the standards of the colonial bureaucrat in terms of cars, dress and ritual, and also the pressure from his own people on one who had a white man’s job. All this, together with the personal loss of his mother and his girlfriend,
made him a supreme cynic (36).

There is a break in tradition as seen in Okonkwo and Ezeulu, even though Obi’s historical circumstance is different. There appear to be basic differences between the conflicts of precolonial and postcolonial society. Says Obiechina,

We saw from the discussion of Okonkwo’s Umuofia that the ancestral religion affects every facet of life within the traditional society and underlines not only the structure of social relationships but also the patterns of economic, political and kinship relationship, the system of rights and obligations, the moral outlook of individuals and the general attitudes prevailing within society. Christianity on the other hand brought with it an authority rival to the authority of the ancestors and an appeal to the universal brotherhood of man which contradicts the narrow appeal of the traditional system to the brotherhood of those bound by common ancestry and marriage. The immediate result of the pulls of the two systems was to undermine the sense of tradition and collective solidarity in the traditional society (258).

The image of the traditional African has all but vanished in Achebe’s No Longer at Ease. With colonialism firmly rooted in Africa, a new African male image has emerged. It is acceptable, for example, for men to mix precolonial traditional practices with the new Christian religion. For example, Obi comes home from England and is greeted by kinsmen in his father’s house. As was traditional in Okonkwo’s time, kola nut is offered but there is a moment of embarrassment because the guests are both followers of the traditional religion as well as the Christian faith.

‘... bring us a kola nut to break for this child’s return.’
‘This is a Christian house,’ replied Obi’s father.
‘A Christian house where Kola nut is not eaten?’ sneered the man.
‘Kola nut is eaten here,’ replied Mr. Okonkwo, ‘but not sacrificed to idols’ (59).

Perhaps the best example of the change in the African comes when the oldest man adheres to tradition and breaks the nut. He then says the following prayer: “Bless this kola nut so that when we eat it, it will be good in our body in the name of Jesu Kristi. As it was in the beginning it will be at the end. Amen” (NLE 60). This exchange would
have been impossible in Okonkwo’s time. In this regard, the archetypal African male has vanished!
CHAPTER 4

A Man of the People

A Man of the People (1966) Achebe's fourth novel, portrays conditions in Africa in the mid 60s. The story is set several years after independence, and things are still falling apart. With this novel Achebe chronicles the new African whose values are so far removed from those in Okonkwo's time that there is no doubt that a transformation in the African male has occurred, and that double consciousness has played an active role. The protagonist here is the Honorable M.N. Nanga, Minister of Culture and Odili Samalu, a young educator. As the story unfolds, Achebe is able to educate his readers on African politics, and the lengths some African male leaders will go to uphold the status quo in order to remain in office.

In the first few chapters, the relationship between Odili and Chief Nanga is presented. The story opens with Nanga visiting the school where Odili teaches, and where he once taught. Achebe allows the reader to witness the event through the disillusioned eyes of Odili.

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun-powder in honor of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you—as my father did—if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune
placed in his mouth (NLE 2).

Initially, Odili wants to become a part of the privileged class whose symbol is the car. He gets a driver’s license in the middle of pursuing his degree but is put off by the idea when a professor becomes a corrupt permanent secretary. Odili chooses instead to become a teacher rather than an employee of the city which would have given him several amenities including a loan to purchase an expensive car. Here one can see evidence of Okonkwo’s integrity in the modern more opportunistic African after all.

Achebe portrays Odili as an honest character in the beginning but Odili later enters politics for less than honorable reasons. His character becomes questionable based on his reaction to such things as the furniture in Nanga’s guestroom:

The first thing critics tell you about our minister’s official residences is that each has seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms, one for each day of the week. All I can say is that on the first night there was no room in my mind for criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me. When I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a lappa I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one forever (NLE 2).

Nanga, a man of considerable moral decay, captivates Odili who stands in awe of his ability to be dramatic and seemingly get away with anything. Obi witnesses his extramarital affairs and approves of this until Nanga sleeps with his girlfriend. With Nanga, the basic code of ethics characterized by the precolonial African society has been forgotten. In the old world order of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, it would have been unheard of to violate a fellow clansmen in this way. Now, respecting one’s clansman is not a priority.

Odili is charmed by Nanga and seduced into his opportunistic way of thinking in
the beginning (Cook 21). Achebe describes Nanga best:

Chief Nanga was a born politician; 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’s of this world will continue to get away with anything. He had that rare gift of making people feel—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 my presence that he distrusted our young university people and that he would rather work with a European. I knew I was hearing terrible things but somehow I couldn’t bring myself to take the man seriously. He had been so open and kind to me and not in the least distrustful. The greatest criticism a man like him seemed capable of evoking in our country was an indulgent: make you no mind’am.

Achebe says further:

This of course was a formidable weapon which is always guaranteed to save its welder from the normal consequences of misconduct as well as from the humiliation and embarrassment of ignorance. For how else could you account for the fact that a Minister of Culture announced in public that he had never heard of his country’s most famous novel and receive applause—as indeed he received later when he prophesized that before long our great country would produce great writers like Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austin, Bernard Shaw and raising his eyes off the script—Michael West and Dudley Stamps (Achebe 73).

Unlike Nanga, Odili uses his cultural background to enlighten those around him. For instance, he corrects a guest in Nanga’s home who comments that a wooden figure of a god carved by a local artist is bad. The man in question makes this assumption after witnessing an old lady shaking her fist at the figure in a public square.

Odili responds:

Did you say she was shaking her fist? I asked. In that case you got her meaning all wrong. Shaking the fist in our society is a sign of great honor and respect; it means that you attribute power to the person or object. Which is quite true. And if I may digress a little, I have since this incident, come up against another critic who committed a crime in my view because he transferred to an alien culture the same meanings and interpretation that his own people attach to certain gestures and facial expression (MP56).

After Nanga sleeps with Elsie, and the two men become enemies, Odili’s determination to punish Nanga is immature at best. Odili decides to run for office and
tries to win by destroying Nanga’s credibility. Both men are consumed by selfishness.

Odili proves his immaturity again when he decides to slander Nanga by exposing any and all of his unscrupulous dealings in an effort to bias the Prime Minister against him.

According to Peters, “If one considers the full extent of Odili’s conflict with Nanga, his ‘monumental gesture’ is not only a monumental failure but also far from disinterested” (47).

Odili explains best the circumstances behind his eventual hatred of Nanga:

I find it difficult in retrospect to understand my inaction at that moment. A sort of paralysis had spread over my limbs, while an intense pressure was building up inside my chest. But before it reached raging point I felt it siphoned off, leaving me empty inside and out. I trudged up the stairs in the incredible delusion that Elise was calling on me to come and save her from her ravisher. But when I got to the door a strong revulsion and hatred swept over me and I turned sharply away and went down the stairs for the last time (MP 78).

Nanga's affair with Odili's girl causes Odili to seek revenge. He decides to pay Nanga's insult measure for measure. The narrator demonstrates to us his ability to act “viciously and selfishly” on the level of personal relations (Carrol 134). Achebe hints at the fact that Odili is no more a man of the people than Nanga because his motive for running for election is revenge as opposed to the best interest of the people.

Odili’s controversy with Nanga is so obviously personal. Conflict of this degree between male villagers in the precolonial novels is unheard of. Odili is an antagonist who tries to expose Nanga but ends up under scrutiny himself. Initially, Odili is ambitious and has a love of luxury that causes him to be around Nanga longer than is prudent. He does not possess the ruthlessness of his once mentor, but Odili remembers that Nanga, himself, was once a harmless school teacher. Therefore, even the contemporary African male continues the “inevitable change” described by Kar
Achebe’s description of Nanga depicts the African who is the farthest removed from Okonkwo. He has no integrity or shame in his public life. He does not consider his constituents first. He is manipulative, opportunistic and dangerous. Nanga and Odili’s styles are really contrasted when the two characters meet at one point in the novel. According to Carrol, one of the most effective means of contrast “is the speech of the two men” (133). Odili who is sophisticated and educated, uses correct English to articulate his disapproval of Nanga and the group that he represents. Chief Nanga, a man of the people, counters with African West Coast pidgin:

Later on in the Proprietor’s Lodge I said to the Minister: ‘You must have spent a Fortune today.’ He smiled at the glass of cold beer in his hand and said: ‘You call this spend? You never see some thing, my brother. I no keep anini for myself, na so so troway. If some person come to you and say ‘I wan’ make you Minister’ make you run like blazes comot. Na true word I tell you. To God who made me.’ He showed the tip of his tongue to confirm the oath. ‘Minister de sweet for eye but too much katakata de for inside. Believe me yours sincerely’ (MP 16).

The Honorable Nanga uses the speech as a method of combating European values. However unscrupulous, he draws his strength from the people and is simply not disturbed by the disapproval of intellectuals such as Odili.

Politics breeds violence in the new technological society (Taiwo 141). Odili joins a rival political party and he is severely beaten by Nanga’s thugs. He even loses a close friend who is murdered. In Things Fall Apart, however, Okonkwo is exiled because of an accidental shooting. In his day, it was considered a very shameful thing to take the blood of a clansman unless it was ordained by tribal law or necessary due to war.

Achebe’s interpretation of African cultural progression over the last three generations is illustrated by Odili’s view of the responsibility of the individual to the group.
society in *Things Fall Apart* has order and peace before it falls to European colonialism. Now the values of the archetypal society are diminished with each novel. Commenting on this difference between the worlds of the novels, Achebe states:

A man’s position in the old society was usually determined by his own wealth. All the four titles were taken, not given, and each one had its price. But in those days wealth meant the strength of your arm. No one became rich by swindling the community or stealing government money. In fact, a man who was guilty of theft immediately lost all of his titles. Today we have kept the materialism and thrown away the spirituality which should keep it in check. Some of the titles and doctorate degrees we assume today would greatly shock our ancestors (qtd in Peters 153).

With technological progress comes the death of spirituality. The once observed religious rites and sacrifices are replaced by cynicism and apathy.

Odili’s honorable attributes cause him to believe that national interests will always come second (Carrol 127). Before he dies in an election battle, Odili’s friend writes a poem entitled, “Dance-offering to the Earth Mother.” Odili has a copy of the poem and reflects back on a time when he and Max share it:

[... ] I will return home to her—many centuries have I wandered
And I will return home to her—many centuries have I wandered
I will rebuild her house, the holy places they raped and plundered
And I will make it fine with black wood, bronzes and terra-cotta.

Afterwards Odili writes,

I read this last verse over and over again. Poor black mother! Waiting so long for her infant son to come of age and comfort her and repay her for the years of shame and neglect. And the son she has pinned so much hope on turning out to be a Chief Nanga (MP 91).

The archetypal African described by Kar has vanished and along with him the order and peace of the archetypal society. The change occurs as a result of the loss of value in the old tribal customs beginning with *Things Fall Apart* and ending with *Arrow of God*. The consequence of the shift in values is reflected in Obi’s inability to balance
materialism and morality in *No Longer at Ease*. By the time of *A Man of the People*, there is no clear loyalty to any group values or interest (Peters 152-3).

The end of spirituality is one of the best examples of the decline of the African of Okonkwo’s time. No longer do the men observe religious rites and sacrifices in a world peopled with gods and spirits. As has been observed, these practices have been replaced with cynicism and apathy. *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* depict corruption and its anarchic effects. Like Obi, Nanga is alienated from all the traditional values of the old society of Okonkwo and Ezeulu’s time. Odili has honorable traits, but it is questionable whether he is really any more a man of the people than Nanga.

*A Man of the People* is concerned with contemporary society, but it is not historical in the sense that Achebe’s precolonial novels are. With this novel, anarchy is the new archetype mainly because the political structure is in shambles. Achebe uses Odili and Nanga’s political association to characterize the politics in the novel. Odili’s morality takes the upper hand in the end and he criticizes his fellow citizens for their cynicism and hypocrisy (Peters 148):

> Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government, newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants—everybody said what a terrible lot; and it became public opinion the next morning. Politicians including Nanga, were elected to their same posts in spite of the fact that the election had been called after the public scandals. And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise-singers followed with song and talking-drum wherever they went. Chief Koko in particular became a thief and a murderer, while the people who had led him on—in my opinion the real culprits—took the legendary bath of the Hornbill and donned innocence (MP 166).

Unfortunately, the commoners characterized believe they have to take whatever comes to them. The following is a testament to their cynicism: “Honourable {sic} Chief Nanga is
my brother and he is what white man call V.I.P[ . . ] me na P.I.V.—Poor Innocent Victim[ . . ] Yes me na P.I.V[ . . ]. A bottle of beer cost only five shillings. Chief Honourable Nanga has the money—as of today (108). Therefore, when one is tempted to believe that the cynicism in the politicians such as Nanga causes the downfall of the government, Achebe provides something else to consider:

[ . . ] political commentators (say) that it was the supreme cynicism (of the politicians) that inflamed the people and brought down the government[ . . ] that is sheer poppycock. The people themselves, as we have seen, had become even more cynical than their leaders and were apathetic in the bargain. Let them eat, was the people's opinion, after all the white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide? Of course not. And where is the all powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around. The important thing then is to stay alive; if you do, you will outlive our 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 may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share[ . . ] (MP 161-2).

No where is Kar's theory of the vanishing African more validated than in A Man of the People. In spite of the fact that the novel does not have the historical basis of Achebe's earlier ones, it does an excellent job at satirizing the African who is a corrupt politician as well as the African who maintains a certain degree of integrity. In this postcolonial novel, there is little resemblance to the archetypal Africa or the archetypal African male.
CONCLUSION

While African writers have responded differently to imperialism and Eurocentrism, they have responded. They have addressed the social, psychological, and moral dislocations and readjustments that have played a part in Africa’s development. Achebe is one of the most important writers to date not only because of the literary merit of his work, but because of its emphasis on the African predicament. Born in 1930 in Ogidi in Eastern Africa, he published *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. At this time, Nigeria was ruled by the British. His last novel was published in 1987, long after the impact of colonialism. Through his works, he succeeds in characterizing a traditional Ibo man in *Things Fall Apart* the likes of whom is hardly seen again throughout Achebe’s subsequent novels.

Interestingly, Prafulla Kar’s theory of a “Vanishing African” is based on the premise that there is an archetypal African male who possesses specific precolonial traits. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is the archetypal male. Okonkwo has definitive characteristics. He is strong, loyal to tradition and fearless. Says Achebe,

He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their houses could hear him breathe. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had had no patience with his father (TFA 4).

Achebe gives other examples to prove this. For example, during one of the worst
farming seasons Umuofia has ever seen, it is Okonkwo who beat the odds and succeeded with his crop. His masculinity does not only manifest itself in his strength, however. Okonkwo is bold and dedicated to preserving his culture. It is the combination of these characteristics that differentiate the archetypal African male from Achebe’s later protagonists.

*Things Fall Apart* was written to portray a more accurate picture of Africa. Achebe, himself, is an Ibo from the village of Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria. It is not surprising, then, that *Things Fall Apart* is set in a small Ibo village community that happens to be the focus of a cultural and political history that expands to embrace a “widening gyre” (Peters 94). Both the title and epigraph are taken from Yeat’s poem, “The Second Coming”:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer,  
> Things Fall Apart; the center can not hold.  
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.  
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere  
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
> The best lack all correction while the worst  
> Are full of passionate intensity.

Jonathan Peters thinks that the title and epigraph carry the motif of the whole novel (94). The anarchy described by Yeats occurred at the end of the Great Year, which was calculated from the birth of Christ. It was believed to be a sinister transformation of values as outside forces challenged civilization with antithetical values. In the midst of the conflicting forces all innocence was lost to anarchy. Achebe believes the white man’s “coming to Umuofia to be a comparable phenomenon” (Peters 94).

Achebe attempts to educate with *Things Fall Apart*. It is his desire to characterize traditional African life—its order, poetry, and beauty. In order to be objective, he reveals
the society's shortcomings as well. In addition to educating the reader about traditional
African life, Achebe tries to describe the colonial experience and the impact
that it had on traditional culture. Obiechina says that, "after cataloguing some of the
damaging and false views of blacks and their world contained in European writing on
Africa, Achebe reaches the conclusion that a writer is obliged to join in the restoration of
the past as a means of strengthening the present" (Language 83).

The white man's presence in *Things Fall Apart* turns the traditional African setting
into one of a conflict of cultures. Outside forces not only intrude on African life but also
succeed in replacing Umuofia's value system. However, throughout *Things Fall Apart*,
Achebe is successful in teaching others that:

African peoples 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 peoples all but lost in 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 dignity and self-respect [. . .]. A writer who feels the need to right
this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated not only
for the enlightenment of our detractors but even more for our own education (The
Novelist 157).

Okonkwo's fate demonstrates the loss of dignity that the African endured during the
colonial period. In an interview in "African Report" Achebe concedes, "[. . .] I think in
Okonkwo's time, the strong men were those who did not bend and I think this was
a fault in the culture itself" (20).

Okonkwo's legacy to the African male is not one to be ashamed of. Ezeulu in *Arrow
of God*, is slightly more modern but resembles Okonkwo. When one sees Ezeulu holding
a title—Chief Priest of Ulu—one is reminded of Okonkwo. In spite of their obvious
differences surrounding Christianity, Ezeulu tries to the best of his ability to honor
tradition. Unfortunately, his choices are often self-centered. He has evolved with time but it is unclear whether or not this is beneficial to him. Ezeulu underestimates the white man in his quest to understand him.

Achebe’s works support Prafulla Kar’s theory of a Vanishing African because throughout them he characterizes the African who has been emotionally and psychologically changed as a result of colonialism and its impact on African society. In a sense, he can be compared to William Faulkner whose characterization of the old South was derived from a “philosophical conception of culture in transformation.” Just as the Civil War was a catalyst in the shift from an agrarian South to an industrial one, so was the introduction of colonialism a catalyst in the shift from a precolonial society to a postcolonial one (149-51).

Achebe’s novels set a precedent that allows us to explore Kar’s theory through African literature just as Fiedler has in American literature. Prior to texts such as Things Fall Apart, African books were stereotypical reflections of European views. Unfortunately, literature has historically given us European images of non-European countries, and these images have been interpreted as reality. Actually, some may never be able to offer a true analysis of the culture of a country because it is not their own. The movement to re-educate blacks on their history and to restore their identity was initiated by Aime Cesaire, the Martinique poet previously mentioned who wrote,

I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are [. . .] that we are black [. . .] and have a history [. . .] and that Negroes were not, as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilizations [. . .] and that this heritage [. . .] could still make an important contribution to the world (qtd in Peters 4-6).

When used in conjunction with Kar’s “Vanishing African” theory, W.E.B DuBois’s
theory of "Double Consciousness" explains the circumstances under which the traditional African is transformed because the reality of his theory transcends across the waters. Achebe, after meeting African-American author James Baldwin for the first time declared to him, "Do you realize that we were not supposed to meet, because if we meet, the connection between colonialism in Africa and slavery in America will become all too embarrassing" (Champion xi)? This is an important question because it identifies the link between the African experience as a result of colonialism and that of the African American as a result of slavery. Achebe writes in order to re-teach Africans their history and tradition. His goal seems to be to restore their identity.

DuBois’ theory is applied primarily to Achebe’s postcolonial novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*. In these novels, the archetypal male has vanished. The chief protagonists—Obi Okonkwo and Chief Nanga—bear less resemblance to Okonkwo than Ezeulu. Obi Okonkwo is so obviously a fallen hero and in this sense reminds us of his grandfather, Okonkwo. Like his grandfather, his shortcomings are a result of the dual world in which he lives. Initially, he is a grandson of whom Okonkwo would have been proud. Not because he had received a Western education but because he had a sincere desire to eradicate the corruption that polluted Africa. At any rate, “One thing that he wasn’t unreliable about was his own feelings, and that saves him as a human being, as somebody who puts his own feelings under the microscope and analyses them honestly, seeing where he’s behaving badly and so on. I think such a person is worthy of respect” (Wilkinson 51). Unfortunately, Obi does not possess the fortitude and determination of his grandfather. A product of a new era, he accepts bribes and loses his standing among the people. Okonkwo’s legacy to Obi is forgotten.
No where in Achebe’s works is the tragedy of change in African society so obvious as in *A Man of the People*. Here the anarchic effects of corruption are revealed. Achebe has depicted in Nanga a person who has been alienated from all meaningful elements of traditional culture. Nonetheless, he is a “man of the people”:

No one can deny that Chief the Honourable (sic) M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in his country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the People. I have to admit this from the onset or else the story I’m going to tell will make no sense (MP 1).

Time and time again he exploits his own people for personal gain. For him and the majority of politicians, Achebe describes in the novel, there is no evidence of personal integrity being sacrificed. For example, he sells off national concerns to the highest bidder. According to Achebe, Nanga has not had a “university education which in his own view only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people” (quoted in Okafor 93). But, says Okafor, “he delights in the academist connotation of his initials—M.A., and has shown “such excitement over the LL.D arranged for him from some small, backward college” (MP 29); and above all, he is truly and ironically “above his people” whom he, together with others of the dominating group/class, continues to oppress and exploit (93). As a leader and male figure, he has few desirable attributes. This alone sets him apart from the archetypal male of precolonial society. Achebe uses his narrative genius to show the reader how superficial Nanga really is. More importantly, he allows for a transformation in Odili that gives some hope for the future. Perhaps Peters sums it up best:

In *A Man of the People*, gone are the former rulers who once occupied the single sheltered alcove of privileged dominance. Instead of attempting to build a general sanctuary for all their people, those who had reached the shelter first—“the smart and lucky and hardly ever the best”—go two steps further than the former
overlords: they barricade themselves in their inner sanctum of power and call out for an extension of their privilege at the expense of all the P.I.V.'s or Poor Innocent Victims, as Nanga's own relation puts it, who are now even more oppressed from prolonged exposure to the cold and the rain. The chances are that, by all accounts, the masses will have a poor chance of reaching the shelter at all, of drying their bodies and of putting on new clothes (151).
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