

The Representation of Cultural Identity in the Select Novels of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Abstract

This present study portrays the representation of Cultural Identity in the Select Novels of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *No Longer at Ease* there is mention of Kola Nuts numerous times, in a particular meeting between the old villagers and the protagonist who was given scholarship by the villagers, they open kola nut to remember the cultural value of it. But what readers find is assimilation of culture, as Nigerians are converted to Christianity by this time. The novel *No Longer at Ease* is a continuation of *Things Fall Apart*, in which the white captured the village and missionaries converted them to Christianity in the end of novel, hence majority of people in second novel are Christians yet they follow their custom before every meeting and add Amen as a part of their new religion.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Identity, Christianity, religion

Chinua Achebe is one of the prominent fiction writers of twentieth century in Nigerian scenario. As a foremost representative of Nigerian literature, he has contributed a lot, his works aim in portraying the tradition and history of Nigerian culture in all its glory. He uses simple representations to create a vivid picture of Nigerian culture and it is this insignias that makes his novels a repertoire of cultural history. His representations are accurate in portraying the transformations that Nigeria has undergone after colonial period and it goes to the extent of representing Nigeria after colonial period, thus recreating a history with past and present. The writing of Achebe is heart-wrenching at times as many of cultural symbolisms that are portrayed have vanished during the colonial times, this paper could focus on one such cultural representations that appear frequently in his writings. The culture is an ambiguous term as in, it bears in it an immense scope to expand itself, it consists of both material and intangible emotions as a part of it. The culture surpasses food, religion, language, ethnicity, folklores, myth, art and many other components, yet it bears all these components as a part of it, to be known as cultural collectivity. Culture is contextual, culture is changing in nature, and it is manifestation of human creative enterprise. Most of the times, culture is used as a yardstick to measure the progress and growth of human development. The paintings in the caves by early man, to various architectural marvel today is the depiction of how human beings has mastered the living being, in the philosopher Rene Descartes term, human beings as a thinking machine is embodiment of cultural history in them and it is represented by our various practices. Achebe uses simpler images like Kola nut to represent the transformation in culture and he uses kola nut imagery in most of his novels. The kola nut, is crucial in Nigerian culture, as to respecting the visitors and to maintain friendship. Traditionally Kola nut was considered sacred and it was used as a communication with immortal and mortals, as it was a sacred nut, it was used as a mediator in all the business

transaction, any person who bought in a deal had to bring Kola nut along with him as it bore in it capacity to bring peace to the transaction. It was also considered the king of all nuts. Even in this story line, the readers find usage of Kola nut at various instances, in *Things Fall Apart*, before asking for loan Unoka takes it to Okoye.

"I have kola," he announced when he sat down, and passed the disc over to his guest.

"Thank you. He who brings kola brings life. But I think you ought to break it," replied Okoye, passing back the disc.

Similarly in the novel, *No Longer at Ease* there is mention of Kola Nuts numerous times, in a particular meeting between the old villagers and the protagonist who was given scholarship by the villagers, they open kola nut to remember the cultural value of it. But what readers find is assimilation of culture, as Nigerians are converted to Christianity by this time. The novel *No Longer at Ease* is a continuation of *Things Fall Apart*, in which the white captured the village and missionaries converted them to Christianity in the end of novel, hence majority of people in second novel are Christians yet they follow their custom before every meeting and add Amen as a part of their new religion.

Everybody stood up and he said a short prayer. Then he presented three kola nuts to the meeting. The oldest man present broke one of them, saying another kind of prayer while he did it. 'He that brings kola nuts brings life,' he said. 'We do not seek to hurt any man, but if any man seeks to hurt us may he break his neck.' The congregation answered Amen. (*No Longer at Ease*, 7)

The readers also notice how kola nut loses its importance in second generation and following generations after conversion, as kola nut which reminds of pagan custom is refuted by converts as a pagan symbol of idol worship and strictly against the christianity. The transformation of Kola nuts significance is important landmark, that Achebe tries to point out in order to make the readers understand, how Nigerian culture is diluted little by little in course of time and how the cultural assimilation in the first generation lead to erasure of past values of tradition and how totally westernised the new generations have become in course of time.

Indeed [...] '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.'

'Who talked about sacrifice? Here is a little child returned from wrestling in the spirit world and you sit there blabbing about Christian house and idols, talking like a man whose palm-wine has gone into his nose.' He hissed in disgust, took up his goat-skin and went to sit outside. (*No Longer at Ease*, 40)

Kola nut is a symbol of power and respect, it is used in various ways as in representing various leadership, in important meetings, it is given when a person comes home as guest, it is used to honour the person in ceremonies and functions. The usage of kola nut is almost inevitable in igbo culture and hence it finds numerous representations in the works Chinua Achebe. Kola nut is harvested from kola fruit trees which are a native of Africa, similar to Betel nuts in Indian culture. The kola nut

is primordial in representing the culture as it is used in various ceremonies of moral and cultural importance. Similarly in India, the value attached to betel nuts is irreplaceable and it is used as a part of every religious ceremonies and festivities. In India, the worship of God during poojas and worship of elderly is done with offering betel nuts to them, similarly the guests are offered betel nuts after food, as it aids in digestion. Women who are married are given betel nuts to symbolise their purity, Betel nuts are valued in regions apart from India, around Asia in the countries like Malay and Vietnam, kola nut bears equal amount of importance in African context. Kola nut was used as currency in the pre-colonial times, and during barter system kola nuts were considered as surety of payment. Kola nut also used to break the morning with prayer, after the colonial era, the Christians of Nigeria, embraced kola nut slogan into their period of mornings. Similarly kola nut will be broken and shared in funeral as a beginner of conversation to reminiscence the past. These uses make kola nut unbearably popular and irreplaceable till date in representing Nigerian cultural value. Kola nut is represented in various African literatures, apart from the mentions of Chinua Achebe, for example the novel *The Colour Purple* makes use of Kola Nut.

Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also mentions Kola Nut in her novel, *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*; Adichie also makes use of Kola Nut and its customary importance, but with colonialism the practices have changed. It is Ugwu who comes from village, still wants to keep the practice intact. When guests arrive, he is the first to offer them Kola Nut. The Kola nut which was representative and mediator between man and Pagan Gods are assimilated with the new found religion by natives. One of the characters, takes Kola nut and says, “May God bless this kola in Jesus’ name” Which is an illustration, of cultural assimilation. Similarly the language of natives when transformed to English, the master of Ugwu makes it a point to remind everyone to bless Kola nut in native tongue stating the following:

Master would say, “Doc, you know the kola nut does not understand English,” before going on to bless the kola nut in Igbo. Dr. Patel laughed each time, with great pleasure, leaning back on the sofa (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 60)

The kola nut is merely one example to prove the extent of cultural mentions that Chinua Achebe uses in the course of his novels, his representations are deep and hence he is rightly acknowledged as the best of Nigerian writers.

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