Censuring the Praise of Alienation: Interstices of Ante-Alienation in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer At Ease*, and *Arrow of God*

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Censuring the Praise of Alienation: Interstices of Ante-Alienation in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease,* and *Arrow of God*

Interrogating Abiola Irele's praise of alienation, this essay examines the equally dangerous externalization in Chinua Achebe's African trilogy: social alienation preceding colonial alienation, which challenges Négritude's paradisiacal view of Africans always being happiest within their traditional culture.

A country's novels reveal its social condition.

F. J. Pedler, *West Africa*

Many analyses of alienation in modern African novels are circumscribed by the tendency to view it as resulting primarily from external forces operating upon natives, and to overlook former detachment. Colonial alienation is sometimes a meta-alienation, following natives' prior separation from their culture. In his landmark essay, "In Praise of Alienation," Abiola Irele's broad assessment is correct: "All of our modern expression in literature and ideology has developed from a primary concern with the pathology of alienation as inscribed in our experience as a colonized people" (Irele, "Praise" 202). His observation that "the writer who ... engaged our responses most forcefully upon the problem of alienation is Chinua Achebe" ("Praise" 203-204) is also accurate. Irele continues to deserve plaudits for his insightful mind and courage in taking the road less traveled on this and other topics. However, our reverence for the great scholar should not blind us to an important shortcoming in his polemic, which has surprisingly gone unchallenged. He overgeneralizes when he contends, "What runs through *all* [my emphasis] this literature is the feeling that it is within our traditional culture that we are happiest" (Irele, "Praise" 204). Moreover, he adds, "The whole movement of mind in Black cultural nationalism, from Blyden to Senghor, leads to a mystique of traditional forms of life" ("Praise" 205).

This essay interrogates Irele's claim about happiness within traditional culture. The "feeling" he refers to depends on a static view of Négritude, on what he calls "a romantic myth of Africa" (Irele, *African* 68), or what Gregson Davis identifies as nostalgia for an ideal state located in traditional African culture (Davis 181). Irele's remark on the romanticism of traditional culture in Camara Laye's work (Irele, "Praise" 204) is easily affirmed, especially in *The African Child*. Yet his painting of Achebe with the same brush, albeit with a more tentative stroke—"It

[the mysticism] is not altogether absent from Achebe's novels" ("Praise" 204)—must be disputed. Following is a re-examination of alienation primarily in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer At Ease*, but also in the very work Irele considers Achebe's "masterpiece" ("Praise" 204) on the topic: *Arrow of God*. This investigation focuses somewhat on externalization after colonial incursions or international travel by the colonized, which engender ambivalence and trauma stemming from negative feelings about native culture relative to the colonizer's culture. But the main thrust of my examination is the subtler and, I argue, equally dangerous agent of externality: ante-alienation, or social alienation within traditional African culture, which precedes colonial alienation, and challenges Négritude's paradisiacal view of that culture.

Achebe's trilogy illustrates that alienation also results from *intra-national* migrations, which sometimes result from colonial schemes. But sometimes they predate colonialism, and cause interstices in cultural continuity. Pre-existing breaks enable the success of colonial interventions in that, as a result, natives are turned into objects. My exposition leads naturally to questioning a few of Irele's other positions, especially regarding modernity. For instance, disputing the value of traditional culture and differentiation resulting from Négritude, he argues, "Traditional culture produces children better adapted for life. But it depends what life: in the village or in the city, in the traditional culture or in the modern culture" (Irele, "Praise" 214). I am neither making a case for alienation, nor purporting the false hope of returning to tradition as part and parcel of a cultural nationalism that arguably never was. I am, instead, concerned with if these novels image pure coherence in traditional culture and *if* alienation advances the African's ability to cope with modernity's demands, as Irele implies.

I

Passages surrounding Enoch's unmasking of the egwugwu in *Things Fall Apart* may be misread as Achebe's mysticism of traditional culture. As the narrator observes, "One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an egwugwu in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige" (Achebe, *Things* 186). Furthermore, of the consternation following the unmasking, we are told, "It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming—its own death" (*Things* 187). Viewed holistically, however, these passages remind us of Achebe's seamlessly merged formal and symbolic elements. The unmasking of the egwugwu, far from evidencing mystique, marks Achebe's unmasking of tradition. That is, the egwugwu have already been symbolically unmasked in the text, when the egwugwu gather to administer justice in Uzowulu and Mgbafo's case: "Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second egwugwu had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of egwugwu" (*Things* 89-90). The women recognize and willingly preserve the performative aspects of

the exercise. Achebe deconstructs any potential romanticism of even this most sacred cultural element by bringing this awareness to the readers' attention, and by signifying the participants' perception.

In literary criticism social alienation is often treated as a problem of the colonized intelligentsia. Though Okonkwo is among his society's elite, his estrangement does not result from intellectual pursuit. It is the punishment according to his clan's laws, before the imposition of foreign rule. It is therefore intra-cultural: "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent" (*Things* 124). The crime's binary designation, "male and female," and its coincidental hierarchizing signature mark gender inequalities within Umuofia, evidence of what Simon Gikandi identifies as "elements of alienation and disjunction" (Gikandi 34), which the Umuofian order cannot obscure. Women are already separated within the culture, signified, for instance, by their place at communal ceremonies, which they observe "from the fringe like outsiders." Also, Okonkwo's greatest fear, womanliness, or that "he should be found to resemble his father" (*Things* 87, 13 respectively), indicates both his rejection of the female as a significant force within himself and the community, and his struggles with feeling an abject figure in society because of his father. These are signs of incohesion.

Umuofia's gender cleavage prefigures the gendered, colonial imagination of landscapes to be conquered and natives to be subdued: "He [Okonkwo] trembled with the desire to conquer and subdue. It was like the desire for woman" (Achebe, *Things* 42). Furthermore, Okonkwo's violent demonstrations of masculinity, while suppressing femininity, are consistent with the male-dominant culture and contribute to his exile. This is underscored ironically in his exile among his female ancestral line. As Uchendu declares, "We are only his mother's kinsmen. He does not belong here. He is an exile" (*Things* 133). Yet, Okonkwo's exile is an occasion for reminding him of his culture's greater, harmonic gender outlook, an opportunity to reject dislocating, hyper-masculine ideals: "A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland" (Achebe, *Things* 134). Irele's notion that "Alienation in its positive aspect is the generating principle of culture, the condition of human development" (Irele, "Praise" 222) has some bearing here. As Will Harris remarks, Okonkwo's exile is consistent with "the heroic quest—often a form of exile—the voyage during which the voyager is isolated from familiar circumstances and 'permitted' to learn" (Harris 94). Yet Okonkwo shows no interest in learning.

In *Things Fall Apart*, alienation also results from the colonial process exacerbating pre-existing disconnectedness; Nwoye's conversion is a good case in point. His failure to exhibit manly characteristics makes him an outcast in his home and community, as he is forced to deny a part of himself: "Nwoye

knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell" (*Things* 53). To be representative of the entire culture, that "self" must include both masculine and feminine. Therefore, his rejection of "female" stories is a form of self-denial and denial of a part of the larger culture, women. Like his father, he becomes dislocated from the whole. Okonkwo's rebuke of his preference for female stories marks a stage of his alienation: "That was the kind of story that Nwoye loved. But he now knew that they were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him" (*Things* 54). These sanctions sever him from home and community, an additional sign of an intra-cultural gap.

Another passage of Nwoye's ante-alienation is Ikemefuna's killing: "Something seemed to give way inside of him, like the snapping of a tightened bow" (*Things* 61). This snapping indicates a psychological disturbance already triggered by his difficulty accepting the clan's treatment of twins, predating colonialism: "Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell. [. . .] Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in, that night after killing Ikemefuna" (*Things* 61-62). His emotional disconnection is one way in which he is othered: he becomes extrinsic to the tribe's myth of itself as holistic. Twins are anathema to the tribe, which seems unable or unwilling to confront dividedness. This disavowal of twins is somewhat similar to the discriminatory, discursive colonial practice illustrated by Homi Bhabha: "Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the *reference* of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as a condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid" (Bhabha 111). Twins are the tribe's "bastards" or literal doubles; whereas they are physically cast away in the Evil Forest, Nwoye joins those emotionally displaced. The literal mutations, twins, engender a greater hybridity of dispositions among the tribespeople, another step in Nwoye's condemning his tribe's beliefs and practices.

In the latter respect, Nwoye's exile also resembles the experience described by Edward Said somewhat:

Even intellectuals who are lifelong members of a society can, in a manner of speaking, be divided into insiders and outsiders: those on the one hand who belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming sense of dissonance or dissent, those who can be called yea-sayers; and on the other hand, the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned. (Said 52-53)

Though at this point in the novel he is not yet Said's type of "intellectual"—schooled in the colonizer's language, traditions and values—Nwoye's response to his culture's gender expectations and to its treatment of twins and Ikemefuna excludes him from his society. Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: "an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment" (wa Thiong'o 28). Nwoye is captured by the white man's religion more because it helps him escape his own culture's alienating realities:

It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. (*Things* 147)

Nwoye's senses are distanced from their normal habitat, one form of social alienation. His conversion marks the ultimate stage of his othering, his opposition to and exclusion from the clan's beliefs and ways.

Because it involves education, this last stage is also consistent with the disaffection typical of colonized intellectuals: "He went back to the church and told Mr. Kiaga that he had decided to go to Umuofia where the white missionary had set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write" (*Things* 152). As Franz Fanon points out, "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (Fanon 38); Nwoye's adoption of the colonizer's culture will be that much greater as he learns to read and write their language. Mr. Kiaga's response illustrates the greater portent of Nwoye's conversion: "Blessed is he who forsakes his father and his mother for my sake" (Achebe, *Things* 38). Forsakes here implies Nwoye's movement from a sense of not belonging to a rejection of his family and culture. More evidence of that abandonment is that his (re)education and corresponding cultural dispossession involve his renaming: "He [Mr. Brown] had just sent Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who was now called Isaac, to the new training college for teachers in Umuru" (*Things* 182). This dispossession through colonial schooling is exactly the worry of the Diallobé chief in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*: "If I told them to go to the new school,' he said at last, 'they would go *en masse*. They would learn all the ways of joining wood to wood which we do not know. But, learning, they would also forget. Would what they would learn be worth as much as what they would forget?'" (Kane 30). Irele appears undaunted with such concerns. After all, he insists, "We could do with a little more alienation" (Irele, "Praise" 219), that is, one assumes, as an improving mechanism in the quality of African life. The ante-alienation or intra-cultural fissures seen in *Things Fall Apart* show that Achebe does not fit squarely among those who idealize traditional African culture.

II

While not overwhelmed by the pre-colonial past, Achebe does not believe blindly in the modern future. *No Longer At Ease* exposes colonialism's exacerbation of preexisting Umuofian alienation and connotes that alienation does not encourage positive development or improve life quality. It is, therefore, not worthy of praise. As in its prequel, hubris is a significant factor in the slide of Isaac's (Nwoye's) son, Obi Okonkwo, towards corruption. The narrator presents Obi's perspective of his succumbing to bribery: "Why had he not swallowed his pride and accepted the four months' exemption which he had been allowed, albeit with a bad grace? Could a person in his position afford that kind of pride? Was it not a common saying among his people that a man should not, out of pride and etiquette, swallow his phlegm?" (Achebe, *No Longer* 156). Obi's tragedy also results from racially based, colonial alienation. A good example concerns his language usage while in England: "When he had to speak in English with a Nigerian student from another tribe he lowered his voice. It was humiliating to have to speak to one's own countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own" (*No Longer* 49). Obi's fear here pertains to the myths perpetuated in the ideological war waged upon Africans: that the colonized needed the European gift of language or, at least, literacy; that the African had no history or culture before colonialism. In the international setting (London), a would-be intra-national social exchange is mediated by that fear.

Stephen Criswell rightly sees a similarity between Obi and Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson: "Native African protagonists, who find themselves trapped between traditional African society and Western values and culture; both novels' protagonists are isolated, alienated, disconnected individuals" (Criswell 45). In inscribing the sense of individuals caught between cultures, Achebe anticipates a common postcolonial trope: hybridization. Hybridized language suggests burgeoning hybridized selves. Ibo or Pidgin English is dropped while speaking English, but that "compositeness" is the other side of disconnectedness. One example occurs when Clara is upset at Obi: "'Leave me, *ojare*,' she said, snatching her hand away" (*No Longer* 19). Characters also switch between their native tongue and English, or Pidgin, which demarcates either social distance or cultural intimacy. For instance, when Obi is seasick while returning from England, Clara brings him medication: "'I noticed you were not looking very well,' she said in Ibo, 'so I brought you some tablets of Avomine'" (*No Longer* 25). Obi feels a sense of shared language, intimacy, and cultural bonding in this gesture: "But then she had spoken in Ibo, for the first time, as if to say, 'We belong together: we speak the same language.'" (*No Longer* 25). This contrasts with his feeling like a snubbed outsider the second time he meets Clara, enough so that he takes "a firm decision not to show any interest in her" (*No Longer* 25). Language plays a part in that exclusion because Clara is conversing in English with Mrs.

Wright and Macmillan, a colonial administrator: “Clara introduced herself as Miss Okeke. ‘I think we have met before,’ said Obi. Clara looked surprised and somewhat hostile. ‘At the N.C.N.C. dance in London.’ ‘I see,’ she said, with as much interest as if she had just been told that they were on a boat in the Liverpool Docks, and resumed her conversation with Mrs. Wright” (*No Longer* 23).

Another example of alienating language occurs when Obi discusses his intent to marry Clara, an Osu (outcast/untouchable), with Joseph: “‘Look at me,’ said Joseph, getting up and tying his coverlet as a loincloth. *He now spoke in English* [my emphasis]. ‘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 had made him a stranger in his country” (*No Longer* 71-72). Alienation here is not merely implied in Joseph’s accusation regarding Obi’s European influences. It is also connected to the social alienation inherent in his contemplation of marrying an Osu, thereby defying his society’s caste system, which already bears the seed of separation. Cultural detachment is further signified in Joseph’s shift to English to emphasize a point, as if Ibo is inadequate for the purpose. Joseph consistently defers to the colonizer’s language as the carrier of important information: “Joseph always put on an impressive manner when speaking on the telephone. He never spoke Ibo or pidgin English at such moments. When he hung up he told his colleagues: ‘That na my brother. Just return from overseas. B.A. (Honours) Classics.’ He always preferred the fiction of Classics to the truth of English. It sounded more impressive” (*No Longer* 77). He appears to be among the Nigerians ineffectively negotiating the tension between what Gikandi designates as “claims of both colonial modernity and their previously degraded African mode of life” (Gikandi 82). One indication of Joseph’s participation in modernity is his attempt to speak “standard” British English (or as much of it as he can) when on the phone. Irele is quite right in observing, “Western civilization [. . .] provides the paradigm of modernity to which we aspire” (Irele, “Praise” 202). To Joseph, the phone is a technological symbol of that modernization correlative to the “development” of his language in the form of the mimicked accent. The message to be conveyed is that through the phone and through his “brother,” he is connected to “overseas” and is, therefore, himself important. But, no matter how well executed, mimicry is not the thing itself, and Joseph’s poor mimicry and empty message are merely signs of his mental underdevelopment. His alienation is certainly not serving him well and is, therefore, not worthy of praise.

There is some irony, of course, in the desired impressiveness of Classics over English: in the colonial context, British English is often seen as most impressive. Joseph’s deference to British English marks a variation of Fanon’s sense of the native returned from the mother country: “The fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation” (Fanon 25). Of course, in this case it is the friend of the returned person who is vicariously transported abroad. Yet

Joseph is not alone in holding British English in high esteem and deferring to it in a way that initiates dislocation. The pattern is observable in the members' response to the secretary of the Umuofia Progressive Union's speech welcoming Obi back from abroad, suggesting something of the process through which they may be transformed into objects of colonialism: "What a sharp young man their secretary was, all said. He deserved to go to England himself. He wrote the kind of English they admired if not understood: the kind that filled the mouth, like the proverbial dry meat" (*No Longer* 32).

Obi's alienation, then, does not result strictly from going to England: it is also the consequence of detached states occasioned by the forced creation of the protectorate, nation-state, Nigeria, out of pre-existing kingdoms within which there were many separate tribes whose cultures were not always compatible. As Gikandi points out, "The nation in Africa is an arbitrary and often fictional colonial creation" (Gikandi 8), which is one of the reasons why the Umuofians "see themselves as foreigners in the national community" (Gikandi 85). Given its arbitrary construction, that "national community" is emerging tentatively and in a hybrid fashion. Hence, the pronouncement by the Umuofia Progressive Union's president of the Lagos branch, "We are strangers in this land" (*No Longer* 6). The foreign feeling is similarly behind the narrator's remark, "Six or seven years ago Umuofians abroad had formed their Union with the aim of collecting money to send some of their brighter young men to study in England" (*No Longer* 7). Consistent in these quotations is the sense of natives being abroad in what, for all extensive purposes, is their own nation. While the colonial power has supposedly created one nation out of many clans, the clansmen continue to define themselves separately, according to their nations that predated the formation of the larger nation-state. Umuofians see themselves as intra-national foreigners of sorts, as "strangers" in Lagos, and the narrator represents them as being "abroad."

Within the new "nation", the attitude towards those who have gone abroad helps to enforce social alienation. As a sign of the "progress" made by individuals on behalf of the whole, the expectation is that persons returning from abroad will become physically separated from their people. This is suggested when Obi considers lodgings after returning from England. He asks Joseph about sharing his place as he had done before leaving and Joseph retorts, "What will the people of other towns say when they hear that a son of Umuofia returned from England and shared a room in Obalande?" (*NL* 36). Joseph's question suggests that separation is expected. As a sign to all others of Obi's and, equally important, *their* progress, even the Umuofia Progressive Union's executive agrees with Joseph that Obi "should be put up in proper fashion at a hotel" (*NL* 35). Obi's playboy friend, Christopher, makes one of the more critical observations in the text concerning Clara, that sheds light on the politics of alienation in the work: "You may say that I am not broad-minded, but I don't think we have reached the stage where we can ignore all our customs" (*NL* 144). Part of the irony here is that they would indeed do well to reconsider some of their socially

ante-alienating customs, such as the caste system. Yet the central connotation is that Obi's experiences abroad have left him *abroad-minded*, to the extent that he is willing to ignore many of his customs. His experiences have made him alien to his culture. Hence, one of the other patients of the doctor who performs Clara's abortion is not far from the mark in declaring of Obi, "Foolish man. He tink say because him get car so derefore he can do as he like. *Beast of no nation!*" (NL 152, my italics). This sentiment is reinforced later when Obi foregoes cultural custom by not going home for his mother's funeral: "Someone else wanted to know, by the way, why that beast (meaning Obi) had not obtained permission to go home" (NL 159). Like Joseph's phone, Obi's car is a marker of modernization, but these symbols merely appear to improve lives when, instead, they further communal fissures.

Obi cannot return home: he is doubly alienated from it, through his studies of English both at home and abroad and through British hegemony in Nigeria, which make him and others like him feel abroad while still at home. Equally important, because of the ruptures preceding, exacerbated, and created by colonial hegemony, many of those who remain at home also become infected with an abroad-mindedness. Will Harris insightfully views the African hero's journey described by Clyde Ford as mirroring "the 'monomyth' of Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye" (Harris 95). But the pattern of the hero's journey from home into a "literal or metaphoric (exilic) underworld" does not fit exactly for the colonized, whose quest involves going to the "mother country" or attending the mother country's institutions in his or her own land. The colonized given such opportunities is trained to think he is going not to the underworld, but to the over-world, against which his home can never measure up.

III

Set in the 1920s, after British inroads among the Ibo, *Arrow of God* could give the impression that external forces cause alienation therein. For example, very early, the narrator describes: "A great division had come to the six villages and his [Ezeulu's] enemies tried to put it on his head. For what reason? Because he had spoken the truth before the white man" (Achebe, *Arrow* 7). The land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi is also exacerbated by colonial interference: "What they should tell us is why, if the land was indeed theirs, why they let us farm it and cut thatch from it for generation after generation, until the white man came and reminded them" (*Arrow* 22). Notwithstanding these passages, the text's structure reveals that Achebe's return to depicting traditional life is not about mystique: colonial estrangement follows intra-cultural ante-alienation. Ibo society's complexities include its historical foibles, which antecede British impact. First, the risk of alienation within Ezeulu's family is spawned by inheritance politics. This is why Edogo, Ezeulu's eldest son, complains to Akuebue: "A man should hold his compound together, not plant dissension among his children" (*Arrow* 142). The narrator next summarizes Edogo's rationale for his resentment:

“Edogo told him [Akuebue] that the reason why Ezeulu sent Oduche to the new religion was to leave the way clear for Nwafo to become chief priest” (*Arrow* 142). These details indicate that family favoritism, not solely colonial evangelism and administrative politics, engenders familial ruptures. Secondly, the filial conflict within Ezeulu’s household is a microcosm of the corresponding divisiveness among other relatives, and among the collective tribes: “And yet Akuebue felt sorry for Edogo. He knew how a man’s first son must feel to be pushed back so that the younger ones might come forward to receive favour. No doubt that was why in the first days of Umuaro, Ulu chose to give only one son to his Chief Priests, for seven generations” (*Arrow* 143).

Filial jealousy also informs Ezeulu’s estrangement from his half-brother, Okeke Oneniyi:

Okeke Oneniyi always said that the cause of the coolness between him and the present Ezeulu, his half-brother, was the latter’s resentment at the splitting of the powers between them. ‘He forgets,’ says Okeke Oneniyi, ‘that the knowledge of herbs and *anwansi* is something inscribed in the lines of a man’s palm. He thinks that our father deliberately took it from him and gave to me. Has he heard me complaining that the priesthood went to him?’ (*Arrow* 166).

The feud has causes other than that just given: “But there were others like Akuebue who knew Ezeulu better who retorted that there was something which Okeke Oneniyi did to Ezeulu. It was not very clear what this thing was. All that was known was that it was not a thing which a brother should do to a brother” (*Arrow* 166). The narrator adds: “‘But you forget that Okeke Oneniyi has a big grudge against Ezeulu,’ the others might say. ‘You forget that in their childhood their father led Okeke to think that he was going to succeed to the priesthood’” (*Arrow* 166-167). In other words, the rift regarding Umuaro’s priesthood is generational. These examples indicate a pattern of hereditary dissension not conducive to happiness within traditional culture. Achebe’s enunciation of this discord intimates that he is far from romanticizing traditional culture. That antipathy delimits Irele’s reading of social cohesion prior to Western contact in the images of traditional culture in modern African literature, especially in Achebe: “Implicit in this image is an idea of the past and of our traditional culture as a universe of pure coherence” (Irele, “Praise” 204).

The lack of cultural cohesion in *Arrow of God* is also palpable in the contentious relationship between Ezeulu and Nwaka and their respective villages. The conflict arises from a power struggle predating European intervention, beginning with the formation of the six-village collective and the installation of their common deity, Ulu (*Arrow* 16). The cynical motives are connoted when Nwaka wins the debate with Ezeulu over going to war with Okperi: “Nwaka came from a long line of prosperous men and from a village which called itself first in Umuaro. They said that when the six villages first came together they offered the priesthood of Ulu to the weakest among them lest it became too powerful” (*Arrow* 17).

The disunity over the chief priest's location is conveyed further in the sprouting conflict after Oduche risks killing the sacred python, a pretext which re-ignites the long-standing feud between Ezeulu and Nwaka, and Nwaka's spiritual guide, Ezidemili:

He [Ezeulu] knew that the priests of Idemili and Ogwugwu and Eru and Udo had never been happy with their secondary role since the villages got together and made Ulu and put him over the other deities. But he would not have thought that one of them would go so far as to set someone to challenge Ulu. It was only the incident of the sacred python that opened Ezeulu's eyes. (*Arrow* 45)

The cause of the enmity is reiterated when Akuehue visits Ezeulu to discuss the Oduche scandal: "Everybody knows those two," said Akuehue. "We all know that if they knew the way to Ani-nmo they would go to quarrel with our ancestors for giving the priesthood of Ulu to Umuachala and not to their village" (*Arrow* 147). Here, Ezidemili is one of the two; Nwaka is the other. Akuehue's declaration to Ezeulu poignantly signals a problem within native culture, ante-alienation triggered by fraternal and intra-cultural politics: "It looks like the saying of our ancestors that when brothers fight to the death a stranger inherits their father's estate" (*Arrow* 250). This proverb sums up nicely my point about colonial intrusions benefiting from ante-alienation. But on that same note, the tragedy of the novel must therefore be seen at least in part as a result of the lack of congeniality in traditional Ibo society.

Irele sees the pathology of alienation effectively expressed in Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*. "The hero, Samba Diallo," he says, "is the archetype of the divided consciousness, of the African who suffers in his mind the effects of cultural dispossession" (Irele, "Praise" 203). Samba's consciousness is divided. But how ambiguous is his adventure really? Katherine Woods's claim that Kane "makes no suggestion, in regard to the problem he presents" (Woods vii) seems misguided. Her assertion, "There is no violence" (Woods vi) in the text is also troubling. There is great irony in the title, since Samba dies violently due to the adventure, at the hands of a "fool" who had taken a similarly adventurous journey to Europe and, obviously, paid a high price. These ruminations bring to mind the related problems of Tambu, the central protagonist in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. At the point of writing her story, a milestone in her self-exploration, her "expansion" (Dangarembga 204), Tambu's alienated consciousness is still somewhat divided. However, it is a consciousness in pursuit of wholeness. It is, after all, not just her story: "The story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men" (Dangarembga 204). This positive outlook succeeding social and colonial alienation seems to validate Irele's point that Africans could benefit from more alienation. Yet, if so, that outlook simultaneously disproves his declaration that all of modern African literature projects Africans locating their essential correspondence between themselves and the world in traditional culture. *Nervous Conditions* suggests that Tambu's

questioning things (Dangarembga 204), including both the socially alienating gender politics of her community and the psychologically alienating, colonial brainwashing, instead of resulting in her happiness in traditional culture, helps to bring her into closer proximity with a more empowered African consciousness.

Of course, Irele's "In Praise of Alienation" appeared about one year before Dangarembga's text was first published. But as we have seen in this essay, the tragic outcomes of the interstices of social alienation within traditional culture portrayed by Achebe suggest that, though he may not embrace colonialism's purported benefits wholeheartedly, he would concur with Irele's sentiment that "The resources in ideas, techniques, and in certain respects values offered by our traditional cultures are simply not adequate for our contemporary needs and interests" (Irele, "Praise" 213). In other words, texts Irele was quite familiar with at the time of his engaging interjection on alienation, in particular *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer At Ease*, and *Arrow of God*, challenge the notion that *all* of modern African literature portray Négritude's deference towards that culture.

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