

Chinua Achebe: A Bio-Bibliographic Review

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In the late twentieth century Chinua Achebe arose as one of Nigeria's favored sons. Albert Chinualumogu was born in Ogidi, Nigeria, November 16, 1930, and later adopted Chinua Achebe (Ravenscroft, 1986, p. 5). His upbringing was privileged, his father Isaiah one of the early Christians in his Igbo village. A statesman, Kwame Nkrumah, also known as the "pride of Africa," represented the new African political leader and was an early influence upon Chinua Achebe, as Nkrumah's return from London to the Gold Coast (then a British colony) coincided with unrest throughout the colonial British empire (Burns, 1995, p. 100; Couto, 1995, p. 103).

Achebe's coming-of-age was during a time of great social unrest and his interest in fomenting political change rooted in these times. His career aspiration to be a political writer early was rooted in the nationalist state movement that swept Africa. After years of nationalist protest Achebe witnesses Nigeria's "resumption of independence" in 1960, thereafter serving as the first Director of external Broadcasting (Voice of Nigeria) in the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), he was a government aide. (Ravenscroft, 1986, p. 5) A decade later he served as Deputy National President of the People Republican Party.

Prior to the 1970s Achebe's writing, including *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960), focused upon clashes between traditionalists with African values and emergent leadership. The political writer's concerns, mainly with the quality of leadership in modern Ghana, produced *Anthills on the Savannah* (1988). The work shed light on how the resulting crisis in leadership brought on by ethnic strife, lack of patriotism and a false image deters progress in Nigeria. Beyond exploration of corruption, mediocrity, injustice and a lack of discipline Achebe identifies a "failure of leadership" as the foremost public policy issue in his homeland (Achebe, *Trouble with Nigeria*, 1983, p. 1). While Achebe's politics have been "concerned with universal human communication across racial and cultural boundaries as a means of fostering respect for all people," his role as a social change agent coupled with vibrant political interests led to his imprisonment (Ravenscroft, 1986, p. 6).

In Achebe's earlier literary works—and *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe portrayed the conflict between the traditional Igbo way and modern society. In *Things Fall Apart* a tragic hero, Okonkwo, adapted poorly to societal changes as a result of Europeans' arrival. In Achebe's sequel, *No Longer At Ease*, Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of the tragic hero in *Things Fall Apart* again experienced internal conflict. As a practicing Christian, Obi viewed himself as above adherence to the caste system based upon superstition and remained oblivious of the consequences. Central to the narratives was social conflict rooted in changing values and societal norms and tragic heroes, unable to respond to social transformation. In both *No Longer At Ease* and *Things Fall Apart* African leaders, who were unable to adapt to new social dynamics and operated outside the realm of what was the culturally acceptable, experienced tragic consequences.

The Nigerian Civil War left an indelible mark of the writer, as reflected by a more pronounced interest in political matters. During the War Achebe, an Igbo chief, served in the secessionist government and personally witnessed the death of many kinsmen. In *Anthills on the Savannah* leadership attempted to run a government without agreement of the working people, to the detriment of everyone. While Achebe offered discourse among the stakeholders as a solution to build bridges to unity across ethnic origins tribalism and other social divisions, he refrained from inviting peasants to the table, reflecting his own personal bias--the exclusion of peasants from dialogue perhaps being noted--as an intellectual. Notwithstanding, he offered an inclusive vision pointed toward expanded dialogue for Africa's response to future challenges. Achebe's literary works examined the effect of social change upon leadership in Africa.

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