

Are Cultural Dimensions Indicators of Corrupt Practices? Insights from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah*

Adebola Fawole

Summary

The abuse of power and corruption as the bane of the African continent, are major themes in many postcolonial novels. In Nigeria, Achebe's first, second and last novels, *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Anthills of the Savannah* respectively, reflect the pre and post-colonial life in Igboland and the fictional Kangan nation. In these novels, Achebe explores how social disintegration has caused and fuelled the abuse of power and corruption. Based on an analysis of the three novels and against the background of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, this article argues that leadership and the struggle for and abuse of power before and after colonisation, while a consequence of culture, has changed over time.

Opsomming

Talle postkoloniale romans oor Afrika neem as hooftema die magsvergrype en korrupsie wat klaarblyklik hierdie vasteland kwel. Achebe se eerste, tweede en laaste romans (onderskeidelik *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* en *Anthills of the Savannah*), beeld die lewenswyse van die fiktiewe Kangan-volk in die pre- en postkoloniale Igboland in Nigerië uit. In hierdie romans stel Achebe ondersoek in na maatskaplike verval, en hoe dit magsvergrype en korrupsie veroorsaak en aanstook. Hierdie artikel verskaf derhalwe 'n ontleding van die drie Achebe-romans aan die hand van Hofstede se Kulturele Dimensies, en illustreer hoedat die magspel en wedywing om leierskap vóór en ná koloniserings, weliswaar 'n uitvloeisel van kultuur, met verloop van tyd verander het.

Introduction

Novels from the African continent seem to support the claim grounded in the social sciences that African nations are entrenched in corruption for cultural reasons. This article examines three novels written by one of Nigeria's early writers, Chinua Achebe, with regards to the claim to this claim. These are his first, second and last novels: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease*

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(1960), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). It attempts to examine the lives of the people of Umuofia before and after the coming of the colonial powers as well as the administration of the fictional Kangan nation years after independence from colonial rule. It argues that corruption was unacceptable in Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* before the coming of the colonial masters, and that colonialisation caused a gradual decline in the moral fabric of the people in *No Longer at Ease* and in the state of affairs in the post-independence society portrayed in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Nigeria continues to be in the news with reports of corrupt government officials, embezzled money in overseas accounts, purchases of expensive real estates within and outside the country, hard cash stowed away in graves and different odd locations. The country is reported to be one of the most corrupt in the world with a 2016 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score of 28%. Even though such ratings are criticised for being pro West, the corruption in the nation cannot be argued away, as its impact is visible in all facets of the society. Numerous attempts by various governments and citizens at curbing corruption have been futile. As reported by various national newspapers on the 16th of September 2017, the nation is struggling to come out of a two-year recession allegedly brought on by the gross embezzlement of public funds. There have been reports from several media outfits including the Cable News Network (CNN) report of April 14 2017 that millions of local and foreign currencies were discovered buried in homes and cemeteries. An assessment of the problem of corruption in the nation suggests that it is deep rooted and not likely to be resolved by superficial or narrow solutions but a radical approach to significantly reduce the culture and practice. Alternatively, corruption may be left to continue its devastating rampage in the nation or at best be given palliative measures to keep the nation barely alive.

Achebe, as a true writer reflected and focused on the pre- and post-colonial African society in his novels. He initially wrote to provide rebuttals and explanations to the preconceived ideas of the colonial masters that Africans are backward, barbaric and in need of civilisation and also to address the White man's lack of understanding of the African culture. In addition to this, he highlighted and discussed the effects of colonialism on the people's way of life. In this way, his writings provide a veritable account of life before, during and after colonialism and show a gradual but drastic change in the culture and values of the people.

Some studies in the social sciences allude to the fact that corrupt practices are linked to the culture of a group of people and that the way of life of a people may predispose them to corruption (Husted 1999; Tsakumis, Curatola & Porcano 2007; Bukuluki 2013; Pillay & Dorasamy 2010). A number of such studies often relied on Hofstede Cultural Dimensions as a yardstick. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions consists of six independent dimensions derived from the analysis of 117,000 staff members of International Business Machines (IBM) corporation between 1967 and 1973. He based his analysis

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on the fact that nations have similar problems but have different ways of solving them and that nations can be classified along the lines of solutions they proffer to problems. These six dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence (Hofstede 2003).

Power distance relates to how different societies solve the problem of inequality (Hofstede 2003: 82). Uncertainty avoidance deals with how different societies deal with stress. The integration of individuals into groups is the focus of the dimension of individualism versus collectivism while masculinity versus femininity focuses on the distribution of roles between men and women. Long-term versus short-term refers to how people make plans for the future. Finally, indulgence is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised.

Hofstede (2003: 9) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.” Kluckhohn (1951: 86) cited by Hofstede (1980: 21) defines it as the “patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting”. Thus, culture is a mark of identity for people, and they may be expected to behave in a certain manner based on their culture. Hofstede believes that each society has some characteristics that makes it unique, some of which include biological ties, culture, the way of thinking, values, beliefs and traditions, all of which are major factors that bind and shape any group of people.

Scholars like Davis and Ruhe (2003) and Getz and Volkema (2001) have used the Hofstede Cultural Dimensions as a yardstick in highlighting the link between culture and corruption in the society and in identifying some cultural dimensions as more corrupt than others. High power distance and being a collectivist society are the two main predictors of corruption according to their studies. Hofstede relates the notion of power to inequality in the society and defined power distance as the rate at which the weak members of institutions and organisations expect unequal distribution of power (Husted 1999: 343). The main sources of power in high power distance cultures are family, friends, charisma and the ability to use force (Hofstede 2003; Javidan & Dastmalchian 2003). Hofstede argued that leaders are expected to become involved in scandals that will be covered up. It is also assumed that they are entitled to privileges and are expected to use their power to increase their wealth. Furthermore, if and when something goes wrong in the society, the less powerful individuals or those lower down the hierarchy are blamed. Leadership may change due to protests from people, but over time people looked upon as the “saviour” often end up repeating the same mistakes as their predecessors.

Hofstede (2003) further argued that family and friends look out for one another and security of life is guaranteed by social networks in collectivist

societies. Ethnic or other in-groups are also believed to support productivity as people strive to achieve great things for their communities. People act in the interest of their in-group and treat friends and family better than others. Decisions are not taken by an individual but through a collective decision making process where each individual is given an opportunity to contribute. Societies with short-term orientation often reciprocate greetings, favours and gifts and have respect for tradition. Leisure is important and they are likely to have little savings as they often seek immediate gratification of their needs.

Thus, Nigeria, according to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, can be classified as a high power distance, collectivist, masculine, indulgent and short term orientation country. In other words, Nigeria is expected to be a corrupt nation based on these dimensions. The classification of culture into categories raises the pertinent question of who is responsible for classifying and what bench-mark is being used as the measurement for the classification. Hofstede's classification however has been criticised by a number of scholars. Majority of these criticisms are summarised in McSweeney (2002) where questions are raised about Hofstede's focus on nations as homogenous entities and the fact that the study is outdated due to fast evolving changes in different societies. McSweeney also argued that Hofstede's use of Western parameters as a benchmark without an understanding of the nuances of non-western cultures is a major gap of the study. For example, according to the Hofstede's classification, many African, Asian and South American countries are classified as collectivist. However, Emenyonu (1978: xvii) described the Igbo culture, as shown in the Achebe's novels, as a society that is "excessively individualistic" – a clear contrast to Hofstede's categorisation. It establishes the fact that cultural classification depends on who is doing the classification and the benchmark that is used for measurement. But it is possible that a society can be both individualistic and collectivist at the same time. I argue that this is not only possible but that this is, in fact, the situation universally and it is essentialist to put a one size fits all label on several nations.

One of the misconceptions that Achebe's fictional works dispels is that Africans are inherently corrupt. His novels depict the influence of colonialism on the culture and values of Africans. Achebe is neither blind nor in denial of the problem and the inhumane activities and practices of the Umuofia society. He does not shy away from highlighting the practices of designating some people as Osu (outcasts), the killing of twins and human sacrifices as in the case of Ikemefuna in his novels. The belief of the colonial masters is voiced by Mr Green in *No Longer at Ease* when he says to the English Council man, "[T]he African is corrupt through and through." (Achebe 1960: 3) This assertion may not be unrelated to the fact that the Whites do not understand the customs of the people. Obierika wonders "[D]oes the white man understand our customs?" (Achebe 1958: 155). Yet, the lack of understanding does not stop Mr Green from reaching the conclusion that their customs are bad.

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I argue that the idea of a constant link between culture and corruption and that societies with high power distance and collectivist cultures are corrupt is essentialist. Hofstede's classification of high power distance societies as being corrupt appears to be true in *Anthills of the Savannah* but not in *Things Fall Apart*. There is a need to ask why there is a difference in both novels and to inquire if the people have changed from one context to another. I am of the opinion that a major reason for the shift is the effect of colonialism. Education and a new religion were introduced without a respect or understanding of the people's culture. People were punished for "crimes" against the Whites without the opportunity to defend themselves and have over time come to expect highhandedness from leaders. It also made people conscious of the need to protect their own interests against the other as depicted in *No Longer at Ease*. We see a gradual decline in the people's practice of their culture with the introduction of Christianity, education and alien ways of governance as seen in the novels between *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Cultural Dimensions in the Novels

Power Distance and System of Governance

Hofstede's typology of the behaviour of leaders and expectations of the people is found in Sam's leadership and administration in *Anthills of the Savannah* and *No Longer at Ease*, but very rarely in *Things Fall Apart*. The novels show a gradual descent from the ideals of the Umuofia community to the decadence of the Kangan nation. Ikem Osodi, the editor of the state-owned newspaper refers to the problem of leadership in Kangan as the "failure of our rulers to re-establish vital links with the poor and dispossessed of their country" (Achebe 1987: 141). The failure of the leaders to engage with the led, particularly the poor of the society, results in a lack of awareness of what really occurs in the society and further widens the gap between both groups. In addition, this makes it impossible to hold leaders accountable for their actions. Not being accountable creates leaders like Sam who seem to live in a world different from the ones the masses live in.

Social science studies as mentioned earlier speculate that high power distance societies are more prone to corruption than low power distance ones. It is worth noting that the systems of governance in the three novels differ from each other. These pre-colonial systems of governance differ from those in the colonial period which were more corrupt, thus suggesting that the introduced system of governance and not the original culture and system of the people was corrupt. Thus, the introduction of an alien governance system introduced corruption to the African society. Before the coming of the Whites, the Igbo society operated mainly on the basis of age and boss-subordinate relationships were virtually unknown. Individuals therefore took on the role

of leaders based on their age and achievements as determined by the gods. The colonial masters however chose and instituted leaders where there were none before to ensure that the laws they introduced were followed by the people of Umuofia. Governance in Umuofia before the coming of the Whites was decentralised without an individual designated as the leader, but led by a group of elders known as the *ndichie* (Achebe 1958). Decisions were not taken by an individual and passed down to others, rather the people met to share their views before a decision agreeable to the majority was taken. In these settings, every man is given the opportunity to speak. Okonkwo is reprimanded when he insults an untitled man in a meeting. It is not a requisite for a man to have a chieftaincy title to be a part of the decision making process when it concerns the whole clan. Ten Kortenaar (1993: 61) noted that:

information in the tribal model does not come from the top down, nor does it travel from the bottom up to the leaders. Instead, the leadership embodies the will of its citizen, and information is always shared because it is never divided.

Although, the elders are respected, they are not distinct or different from the citizens. As leaders, the elders are seen as members of the community who are equally bound by the same laws, and not as a different class. Being a leader does not create a distinct class of individuals above the laws that govern the community. Power and authority to make decisions were not vested in a single person or a group of selected individuals and the corruption of power was limited or non-existent.

A gradual change from this system is noticed towards the end of *Things Fall Apart* and throughout *No Longer at Ease* where the orders are issued by the Whites without consultations with the people. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, leadership is obtained and maintained by force in the Kangan nation. Sam comes into power after being invited by junior military officers who carried out a coup. One-man leadership supported by many yes-men is evident when the cabinet members seem to be more interested in keeping their jobs than in actually advising the president. In this context, followers are hesitant to speak the truth to the leader. The notion of collectivism is lost as every man seems to act in his own best interest and not those of the nation. Sam notes that the power he holds as the president of the Kangan nation needs to be legitimised by the people even though he was not elected into the position. His apparent desire to obey the will of the people is but a ruse as the people of Abazon region of the Kangan nation are punished for refusing to vote in his favour. Achebe, through Beatrice, casts a nostalgic look at the process of becoming a leader before the coming of the Whites. She notes that Idemili, the goddess, maintained the sanctity of the *ozo* title and:

If she finds him unworthy to carry the authority of *ozo* she simply sends death to smite him and save her sacred hierarchy from contamination and scandal. If, however, she approves of him the only sign she condescends to give –

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grudgingly and by indirection – is that he will still be about after three years. Such is Idemili's contempt for man's unquenchable thirst to sit in authority on his fellows.

(Achebe 1987: 104)

While leaders were chosen by the gods in the precolonial society, they were not consulted in the fictional Kangan society. While in *Anthills of the Savannah* there is a deviation from the process of attainment of power as depicted in *Things Fall Apart*, people still expect the gods to punish corrupt leaders. Elewa and the taxi drivers often say “God dey” when confronted with unjust and corrupt systems. Sam as a leader appears bigger than the Kangan nation as most cabinet members concentrate on satisfying him rather than engaging in developing the nation. It becomes clear that the high power distance that births corruption is not part of the original cultural practice but an alien one introduced and established among the people to further the cause of the Whites.

The use of power in *Things Fall Apart* is monitored or censored by the use of checks and balances through the gods and the people while in *Anthills of the Savannah* it seems free rein is given to the designated leader. Sanah (2004: 261) argues that corruption takes place in situations where leaders do not use power fairly and followers are silent about it. Leaders are punished for transgressions in *Things Fall Apart* regardless of their positions in the society. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, leaders seem to have unlimited power and authority to do as they please.

Ohadike (1996: xxvii) noted that the intrusion of and activities of the Whites in Igboland, led to the loss of respect for the traditional title of ozo. Of course, the loss of respect also meant lesser roles played by these chiefs to maintain law and order in the society through traditional means. Warrant chiefs were imposed on people as agents of foreign domination and power without the usual dialogue that the people were used to. The imposition of leadership without recourse to the will of the people and the gods, a new system of governance over the people and punishments by colonial powers in the use of jails, disgrace and guns made the people afraid and unable to question the powers that ruled them. It was therefore impossible to engage in dialogue with a gun or a man that does not understand one's culture and tradition. Hence, the people have over the years learnt to be silent in the face of colonial domination and subsequent leadership tailored to colonial ways even though they are manned by people of their own colour and language. It may be argued that the values highlighted by Achebe are reminiscent of the Igbo community and not all of Nigeria as depicted in *Anthills of the Savannah*. However, having an effective check and balance system seems to be the hallmark of most societies before colonisation. For example, the Oyo Mesi of the Old Oyo Empire could order an Alaafin to commit suicide if his rule was unsatisfactory to the people.

Integrity of Leaders

Another concern about the use of power in high power societies is the integrity of the leaders. Integrity is considered a valuable leadership trait in Umuofia. Okonkwo and Obierika agree that it is a shame that:

In Abame and Aninta the role (of ozo) is worth less than two cowries. Every man wears the thread of title on his ankle and does not lose it even if he steals.
(Achebe 1958: 61)

An elder loses his leadership position if he behaves contrary to societal norms. Thus, Okonkwo in spite of his achievements and having the respect of his clansmen still faces the consequences of his actions. This is against the ideas underlying cultural dimensions where leaders are expected to be involved in scandals, but have them covered up and do not face any punishment for their acts.

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarters stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of wars. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman
(Achebe 1958: 109)

Okonkwo, though one of the leaders and a hero of the people, does not have his faults covered but exposed and punished to serve as a deterrent to others. Corruption is expected to be rife in high power distance societies because citizens do not condemn corruption or wrong-doings if carried out by people from their local communities or families. This is found to be untrue in *Things Fall Apart* where Obierika, Okonkwo's best friend, is one of the men who razed Okonkwo's compound to the ground.

Failure of Followership

Unlike in Umuofia where the people carried out due punishment on an elder, the people of Umuofia in Lagos and the citizens of Kangan nation accepted the display of corrupt practices by their leaders and even made excuses for them. Achebe shows that the problem of corruption is not only that of the leaders but also of the led. Corruption no longer shocks the Umuofians. The process of desensitising the people to corruption which began in *Things Fall Apart* had become formalised in *No Longer at Ease*. By the time Obi is arraigned for taking a bribe, the people of Umuofia in Lagos had become used to the practice that began with the court messengers who increased fines for

their own gains in *Things Fall Apart*. Obi's kinsmen blamed him for "trying to do what everyone does without finding out how it was done" (Achebe 1958: 5). They were not shocked or appalled by the crime that he committed but by the fact that he gets caught due to inexperience.

The acceptance of corruption is further displayed in *Anthills of the Savannah* where Sam's cabinet members exist not to advise him but to stroke his ego. His mood determines whether the "[D]ays are good or bad" (Achebe 1987: 2). Chris describes the cabinet members as "intelligent, educated", "the cream of our society and the hope of the black race" (Achebe 1987: 2). They represent the vital link between the leader and the led; a role they have failed to perform. Chris and Ikem, Sam's childhood friends who should have been honest and forthright with him, are also complicit in the failure of the nation as they do not act until it is too late. Chris notes that "everything went wrong and rules were suspended" (Achebe 1987: 2), yet he does nothing to address these. He attributes his failure to take corrective actions to "inertia" or "sheer curiosity to see where it will all ... well, end" (Achebe 1987: 2).

Obi in *No Longer at Ease* struggles to live a corrupt free life in a society that has replaced old values with new ones. Obi lived in Umuofia, his home town, and only stayed briefly in Lagos, the cosmopolitan headquarters of the colonial government characterised by a mix of different cultures and values, before travelling out of the country to study. The cultural values of the people are better preserved in villages and he was shocked to see differences from the values he had imbibed growing up in his village. Lagos presented a place where the cultural norms and values of the people have been redefined and influenced by encounters with the West through colonisation. He leaves and comes back to his country with his values intact and unprepared for the changes in the country and his kinsmen. Azodo noted that:

The cultural shock which followed the encounter of the West and Africa has made the indigenous people "counterfeit coins", to use a very popular parlance in Nigeria, which is neither adequate for the old way nor the new. The reality of the new way is indeed at variance with his perceived new way of doing things.

(2004: 317)

He left a people who eschewed corruption in any form and came back to one that would endorse it if committed by one of their own. Gikandi (2008: vii) describes Obi as "living in a state of cultural limbo", unable to live successfully in any of the two worlds he finds himself.

The failure of the citizens to expect good governance, and a society free of corruption is also evident amongst its poor. True to Hofstede's claim of the led, the taxi drivers in *Anthills of the Savannah* expect their leaders to be rich and flaunt their wealth. They wonder why Ikem does not have a "big car" and "why he dey drive himself" (Achebe 1987: 138). This is contrary to the expectations of the people in pre-colonial times. Achebe, in *Anthills of the*

Savannah, appears to remove the middle class as the bureaucracy and seemingly notes that intellectuals cannot be rightly called middle class. There seems to be no group between the rich and powerful and the poor and downtrodden as seen with the decline in the purchasing power of the people. Aristotle (1932 Book IV) cited in Pressman (2007) noted that a large number of people in the middle class are vital to producing an effective administrative body and to keep a balance between the high and low income earners. Pressman (2007) also noted that when there is a robust middle class, the quality of democracy flourishes, there is better administration and they act as a buffer between the very rich and the very poor. The middle class are likely to feel successful and have a sense of personal accomplishment. Subsequently, their absence removes a vital check and balance on the leadership. Ikem as partly quoted earlier in this paper notes in *Anthills of the Savannah* states that:

It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being.

(Achebe 1987: 141)

Even though Ikem has an old car and is not chauffeur-driven as is the practice of many upper class individuals, he is not of the middle class. The taxi driver who picks up Elewa from Ikem's house rightly refers to that part of town as "una bigman quarter" (Achebe 1987: 34) in recognition of the vast differences in the economic status between the poor and the rich. Ikem cannot be classified as a wealthy man being a civil servant but the economic and intellectual gap between people like him and the poor of the society takes him beyond the middle class to the upper class.

Also in relation to the function of the common people to maintain high standard level of leadership, the society does not fall apart because of one man's transgressions and failure to adhere to the culture in *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo is punished to restore order in Umuofia after he mistakenly kills Ezeudu's son. Furthermore, the people do not break away from tradition for Okonkwo even though he commits suicide; they refuse to commit abomination by cutting down his body from the tree. The society is portrayed as larger than an individual. The situation is different in *Anthills of the Savannah* where Sam's actions go uncensored and unpunished and subsequently results in the death of some people and creates chaos and political unrest in the entire nation.

Things Fall Apart begins with the praise of Okonkwo as a wrestler who defeats Amalize, the cat; an act that brings glory to Umuofia. It is obvious that while the struggle towards victory is individual, the glory emanating from it is collective. Perhaps, in this sense, the society may be labelled collectivist. The work and the process are personal but the end result is collective. Each person seeks to be successful in order to win the glory for their community.

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This is different in societies that are considered individualistic where there are structures in place to aid the process of becoming. However, success is individual and achievements need not be shared by the community. The pressure to bring glory to the community may, perhaps, be a driving force in acquiring wealth by the people in collectivist cultures. However, in *Things Fall Apart*, before the coming of the Whites, bringing collective glory to the community is not hinged on materialistic wealth but is rather a result of hard work that is evident to everyone. Sudden wealth without antecedent labour would have been an anomaly. For example, if Unoka, Okonkwo's father, were wealthy in spite of his aversion to hard work, his wealth would have been questioned. Men took titles based on achievements through hard work. In Umuofia, "achievement was revered" (Achebe 1958: 7). Okonkwo "had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages" before he became wealthy.

The acceptance, perpetration and condoning of corruption can be traced to colonialism. The people in Umuofia see themselves as a single entity based on their cultural background. However, in *No longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, there is an amalgamation of different tribes resulting in a perceived need for people to protect their own kind against the others. The President of the Umuofia community in Lagos, in asking the people to contribute money for Obi's case, notes that "a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, and not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone" (Achebe 1960: 4-5). The people concluded that, "[T]he fox must be chased away first, after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush" (Achebe 1960: 5). In this case, the creation of the other as the "fox" makes it easy to condone corruption as it is seen as an act of protection against attacks from the enemies. However, in the case of a modern nation, the citizens see themselves as different entities and each tries to protect itself against the other. In this sense, being a collectivist society proves positive in Umuofia. The deeds of one man is seen to affect the entire clan and so steps are promptly taken to correct and punish any offender to cleanse and protect the land from evil. The people believe they all have a stake in the community and thus do all they can to protect it. Being a collectivist society also means that members of the society look out for one another as seen in Nwakibia loaning yam seeds to Okonkwo, thus giving him a break from the cycle of poverty he would otherwise have been subjected to due to his parentage.

The corruption evident in the leadership of the Kangan nation in *Anthills of the Savannah* may be related to the fact that Kangan citizens do not see themselves as an entity but as an amalgamation of distinct and disparate groups. They also see themselves as outsiders to others and find it difficult to punish erring leaders who belong to their tribes because it is a case of "we" against "them" and "we" need to protect our own people. In *Things Fall Apart*, the people see themselves as a single entity bound by the same cultural values.

Collectivism only becomes a problem when its values become corrupted through the advent of colonialism. Nothing is wrong with these cultural values but changes have brought about a displacement of the positives in them. There appears to be a move from collectivism to individualism without an attendant understanding of the operations of individualism because it is alien to the culture of the people. In *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, this shift results in the failure of the people being their brother's keepers, of followers acting as checks and balances and a shift from work-related achievement to accumulation of wealth. Colonialism permanently disrupts the way of lives of the Umuofia people and destroys a system that would have survived a long time without the imposition of foreign models and priorities (Korteener 1993; Lindfors 1996: 24).

A further problem is encountered by characters when they expect that individualistic tools will work in collectivist societies. Achebe shows this explicitly in *No Longer at Ease* where Obi is expected to share "his big salary" which are the proceeds of his education that was enabled from a communal purse as noted by an old man during a meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos:

"Thanks to the Man Above", he continued, we now have one of our sons in the senior service. We are going to ask him to bring his salary to share among us. It is in little things like this that he can help us. It is our fault if we do not approach him. Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting things in?

(Achebe 1960: 63)

The man's assertion brings to mind the role played by Nwakibie who gives Okonkwo his first seed yams. It is expected that successful people will help enterprising and hard-working people to get them started in life. This collectivist behaviour is carried over into an individualistic world where government workers receive a salary which unknown to the people is hardly enough to meet his own personal needs. Thus, the self-seeking educated elites described by Okunoye and Odebunmi (2003: 292) did not become such overnight but through a gradual erosion of cultural values due to their inability to meet the expectations of their communities with their salary alone. Meeting the expectation of the people was hinged on providing financial assistance in form of cash to suit the society that is no longer largely agrarian.

Conclusion

From the examination of the relevant texts, one can conclude that the belief that some cultures are intrinsically corrupt is not true. Rather, the texts support the assumption that the societies presented by Achebe in the three selected novels became corrupt as a result of the erosion of their precolonial values,

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norms and cultural practices. Achebe presents in *Things Fall Apart* a society held together and uncorrupted through a collectively accepted observance of its cultural values. These cultural values and ultimately the society in *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah* fall apart not because of the culture but due to a failure of the people to uphold and practice their culture and values correctly. This failure is traced to the introduction of alien systems by the colonial masters without taking into cognisance the culture of the people or taking time to understand them. It can also be attributed to an unqualified practice of Western culture and values by the people without a clear understanding of its rules of engagement.

Achebe, through his writing, acknowledges that there is nothing wrong with African cultural values but that their misinterpretation and application have been distorted due to colonial influence and as such the deployment of these needs to be scrutinised. It can be concluded then that Obierika's submission that the Whites have put a "knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe 1958: 156) is indeed true. For the society to begin a process to wholeness again, an understanding of African cultural dimensions is required with a proper application of both local and acquired Western practices for the benefit of all.

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Adebola Fawole
University of Zululand
fawolea@unizulu.ac.za