

**From binary to dialogic:  
Chinua Achebe's critique of colonial stereotypes in *Things fall apart, No  
longer at ease* and *Arrow of God***

by

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## SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

This study examined Chinua Achebe's representations of non-African characters in the African Trilogy, with the goal of determining how Achebe's representations of characters with whom he did not share a cultural background shifted across the trilogy. These characters were examined using Fishelov's typology, as well as against a context of readings to determine the extent of binary readings of the cultural encounter in the trilogy and finally according to Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and polyphony. It was discovered that while the characters of *Things fall apart* remain typical, according to Fishelov's typology, and the novel is generally monologic, using Bakhtin's terms, there was a shift in the later novels; the study found that although *No longer at ease* remained monologic within a Bakhtinian reading, the non-African characters were characterised using a wider range of types of characters on Fishelov's typology, thus expanding the understanding of the cultural encounter. Several interpretations of the cultural encounter in the novel also suggested a move away from a binary view of the encounter towards one of "borderlands", zones where multiple cultural ideas can coexist with one another. *Arrow of God* made use of all four types of characters on Fishelov's typology in characterising the non-African characters; furthermore, *Arrow of God* demonstrates a profound degree of polyphony and dialogism, according to a Bakhtinian reading. Aspects such as carnivalesque elements, the autonomy of the characters' consciousnesses and the lack of finalisation of the characters' words suggested that this can be classified as a polyphonic, dialogic novel.. It was therefore concluded that the representation of non-African characters across the trilogy does move from one which is stereotypical to one which is dialogic, and it was postulated that this forms a useful model for moving from a binary approach to what is here defined as a dialogic approach to characterising characters with whom an author does not share an ethnic or cultural background.

**Key words:** Chinua Achebe; Mikhail Bakhtin; dialogism; polyphonic novel; African Trilogy; stereotypes; binary; characters

## ISIFINYEZO SEDEZITRESHINI

Lolu cwaningo luhlolisise izethulo zikaChinua Achebe zabalingiswa okungebona bazase-Afrika kuyiTrayiloji yase-Afrika, ngenhloso yokuthola ukuthi ukumelwa kwabalingiswa baka-Achebe angabelani nabo ngemvelaphi yamasiko kudlule kanjani kuyitrayiloji. Laba balingiswa bahlolwa kusetshenziswa ithayipholoji kaFishelov, ngaphakathi komongo wokufundwa ukuthola ubukhulu bokufundwa okwenziwe iziqu ezimbili zokuhlangana kwamasiko kuyitrayiloji futhi ekugcineni ngokusho kwamathiyori kaBakhtin enkulompendulwano kanye nepholidoni. Kutholakale ukuthi ngenkathi abalingiswa *Things fall apart* behlala bejwayelekile, ngokusho kohlobo lweFishelov, futhi inoveli ngokuvamile iyimonoloji, isebenzisa amagama kaBakhtin, kube noshintsho kumanoveli akamuva. Ucwaningo luthole ukuthi yize *kungasekho* ukuhlala ngokukhululeka kuhlala kuyimonoloji ngaphakathi kokufundwa kweBakhtinian, abalingiswa abangebona abase-Afrika zazibonakaliswa ngokusebenzisa izinhlobo ezibanzi zezinhlobo zabalingiswa ngokuya kwethayipholoji kaFishelov, ngaleyo ndlela kwandise ukuqonda kokuhlangana kwamasiko. Ukuhumusha okuningana kokuhlangana kwamasiko kule noveli kuphakamisa nokuqhela embonweni owenziwe iziqu ezimbili obhekise kwelinye "lamaphethelo emingcele", izindawo lapho imibono eminingi yamasiko ingahlangana khona. *I- Arrow of God* isebenzise zonke izinhlobo ezine zabalingiswa kuyithayipholoji kaFishelov ekuboniseni abalingiswa abangewona ama-Afrika; ngaphezu kwalokho, *i-Arrow of God* ikhombisa izinga elijulile lepholidoni kanye nenkulompendulwano, ngokusho kokufundwa kweBakhtinian. Izinto ezinjengezakhi zekhanivaleskwi, ukuzimela kwemicabango yabalingiswa kanye nokuntuleka kokuphothulwa kwamagama wabalingiswa kuphakamise ukuthi lokhu kungahlukaniswa njengenoveli yepholidonikhi, neyinkulompendulwano. Ngakho-ke kuphethwe ukuthi ukumelwa kwabalingiswa okungebona base-Afrika kuyo yonke itrayiloji kusuka kokunye okunamandla kuya kuyilompendulwano, futhi kwabuye kwabekwa ukuthi lokhu kwakha imodeli ewusizo yokuhamba isuka kunqubo yeziqo ezimbili iye kulokho okuchazwa ngokuthi indlela yengxoxo yokufanisa abalingiswa umbhali angahlanganyeli nabo ngemvelaphi yobuzwe noma yamasiko.

**Amagama abalulekile:** Chinua Achebe; Mikhail Bakhtin; inkulompendulwano; amanoveli ayipholidonikhi; iTrayiloji yase-Afrika; izitiriyothatiphi; okwenziwe iziqu ezimbili ; abalingiswa

## OPSOMMING VAN VERHANDELING

Hierdie studie het Chinua Achebe se uitbeeldings van nie-Afrikaan-karakters in die Afrikaan-trilogie bestuur. Die doel hiervan was om te bepaal hoe Achebe se uitbeelding van karakters met wie hy nie 'n gemene kulturele agtergrond deel nie, oor die trilogie heen verander. Fishelov se tipologie is gebruik om die karakters te ondersoek. Dit is binne 'n vertolkingskonteks gedoen om die omvang van 'n binêre vertolking van die kulturele ontmoeting in die trilogie te bepaal en uiteindelik ook op grond van Bakhtin se teorieë oor dialogisme en veelstemmigheid. Daar is vasgestel dat onderwyl die karakters in *Things fall apart* volgens Fishelov se tipologie steeds tipies gebly het, en die roman oor die algemeen 'n alleenspraak is, daar ooreenkomstig Bakhtin, tog 'n verandering in die latere romans is. Die studie het bevind dat hoewel *No longer at ease* op grond van 'n Bakhtiniaanse vertolking monologies gebly het, die nie-Afrikaan-karakters op grond van Fishelov se tipologie deur die gebruik van 'n wyer reeks karaktertipes gekarakteriseer is. Laasgenoemde verruim dus die begrip van die kulturele ontmoeting. Etlike interpretasies van die kulturele ontmoeting in die roman suggereer ook 'n wegbeweeg van 'n binêre siening van die ontmoeting na een van "borderlands", sones waar veelvoudige kulturele idees naas mekaar kan bestaan. *Arrow of God* het van al vier karaktertipes in Fishelov se tipologie in die karakterisering van nie-Afrikaan-karakters gebruik gemaak; *Arrow of God* demonstreer ook voorts 'n diepgaande mate van veelstemmigheid en dialogisme ooreenkomstig die Bakhtiniaanse vertolking. Aspekte soos karnavalagtige elemente, die outonomie van die karakters se bewustheid en die gebrek aan die finalisering van die karakters se woorde, suggereer dat dit as 'n veelstemmige, dialogiese roman geklassifiseer kan word. Die gevolgtrekking is dus dat die uitbeelding van nie-Afrikaan-karakters regdeur die trilogie wel wegbeweeg van 'n stereotipiese na 'n dialogiese uitbeelding en die postulasie is dat dit 'n nuttige model vorm om vanaf 'n binêre benadering te beweeg na wat hier gedefinieer word as 'n dialogiese benadering tot die karakterisering van karakters met wie die outeur nie 'n gemene etniese of kulturele agtergrond deel nie.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Chinua Achebe; Mikhail Bakhtin; dialogisme veelstemmige roman; Afrikaan-trilogie; stereotipes; binêre; karakters





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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The characters within a novel's text are integral to the idea of a novel itself. Questions such as the characters' role in relation to the plot, what relation characters bear to "real people" and the representation of a character as progressing or remaining static in his or her essential character traits have formed the basis of a wide range of theoretical work on the novel. Characters, similarly, are perhaps the most useful elements of a novel's text with which to explore cultural representation and the cultural encounter within the genre. This study seeks to examine the representation of characters in a novel who do not share the author's culture or ethnic background, by closely examining the shift in Chinua Achebe's approach to his non-African characters from his first novel, *Things fall apart*, to the last book in his African Trilogy, *Arrow of God*.

### 1.1 BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It was with the intention of rectifying the gross misrepresentation of African characters that Chinua Achebe wrote his first novel *Things fall apart*, published in 1958 to great critical acclaim (Adichie 2010: vii; Nnolim 2011: 39; Osei-Nyame 1999: 148, 149). Achebe's first novel broke new ground in responding to western, colonial literature which stereotyped African culture and especially African characters, frequently portraying the latter as a faceless mass, bearing no more importance within the plot or as people than the scenery (Achebe 2016: 21; see also Fanon 2008: 104). In this respect, Achebe's first novel is immensely successful, drawing a lively, unique image of pre-colonial society, which does indeed demonstrate that these societies were not void of their own systems of justice, art, culture and philosophy (Osei-Nyame 1999: 148). Indeed, Okonkwo, the hero of *Things fall apart*, has been critically hailed as among the most iconic figures of literature (Murty 2013: 90 – 93).

Abdullahi (2014: 170), as well as Osei-Nyame (1999: 148), both analyse the way in which Achebe's characterisation of his African characters has a deliberately pedagogical nature, intended to counter the extreme stereotypes of African peoples which had become so prevalent among the western colonial texts, and which Achebe (2016: 14) himself identifies particularly in *Heart of darkness*. Abdullahi (2014: 173) explores how Achebe is able to emancipate African people from being "objects of someone else's story" by examining many positive reactions to the character of Okonkwo. He describes Okonkwo as "larger than life", stating further that "*Things fall apart* thus celebrates an epic standard of achievement and dignity found among several characters of western literature". He is thus able to demonstrate that Achebe successfully recreated the "image of Africa" and most especially the image of African characters (Abdullahi 2014: 175). This fits with Achebe's stated concern with "'reinvesting the [African] continent and its people with humanity, free at last from those stock situations and stock characters never completely 'human' that had dominated European writing about Africa for hundred [sic.] of years'" (Achebe in Abdullahi 2014: 178).

This characterisation, which pays attention to an individual's character and circumstances, and the many complex issues which constitute his or her make-up, is also evident in *No longer at ease* and *Arrow of God*, the final two novels of Achebe's African Trilogy. Brian May (2008: 899: 904) discusses Obi, the main character of *No longer at ease*, as a prime example of an "individual" character—that is, one who is complex, or "round", in Forster's (1962) original terminology. Adichie (2010: xii) furthermore suggests that *Arrow of God's* Ezeulu is more enduring and richly complex than even Okonkwo. She describes him as "wondrously unwieldy" and remarks that it is "his deep complexity [which] lends *Arrow of God* much of its enduring power".

It could be argued that this individual characterisation is extended even to the secondary characters within all three novels. Okonkwo's friend Obierika, as well as Okonkwo's wives and children, and notably the boy Ikemefuna, are all individual characters, who are described in rich textual detail, creating a lively sense in the novel of a real society, made up of multiple different personalities, each conforming by and large to the traditions and norms of the society, yet each in his or her own way, and with his or her own personal reservations and compromises, a notable example being Obierika's discussion with Okonkwo about being among the party who went out to kill Ikemefuna (Achebe 2001: 48). The same is true of the societies described in both *No longer at ease* and *Arrow of God*—the latter being of particular note in its portrayal of Ezeulu's arch rivals, Ezedimili and Nwaka, who provide further evidence of layers of assent, compromise and change within one society.

Achebe's novels have, rightly, become hallmarks of postcolonial literature, and are generally read in the context of general postcolonial theory (see Ikuenobe 2006: 117; May 2008: 899; Quayson 1997: 137, among others). Fry (2012: 289) notes the "mutual and interdependent binary opposition of self and other" which dominated early postcolonial theory, suggesting a preoccupation with a binary way of creating self- and cultural identity, and especially the dominance of the binary within the context of the cultural encounter. This is echoed in other postcolonial writing, such as Fanon's (1967: 27) suggestion that "decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men". As noted by Osei-Nyama (1999: 148) and Abdullahi (2014: 173), Achebe himself saw at least his first novel as clarifying the way African people were viewed by western writers, thus again focussing on the opposition of colonised/coloniser. The question must be raised, however, whether a purely binary reading adequately accounts for every aspect of Achebe's characterisation, especially as one moves to the last two books of his African Trilogy.

Achebe's success in restoring the dignity of Africa's pre-colonial past to readers and his keen characterisation of his African characters are important achievements which deserve the celebration they still engender today (see Abdullahi 2014: 174; Adichie 2010: ix; Murty 2013: 95; Nnolim 2011: 39). However, a close reading of the trilogy formed by *Things fall apart*, *No longer at ease* and especially the culmination in *Arrow of God*, seems to suggest that reading Achebe's novels in the binary manner outlined above is less and less appropriate as one progresses through the trilogy. The inadequacy, by *Arrow of God*, of this binary reading is seen



most importantly, for the purposes of this study, in Achebe's characterisation of his non-African characters—that is, those characters with whom the author did not share a culture.

A reading of *Things fall apart* suggests that the non-African characters in this novel can easily be identified as stereotypical. They stand for a simple category, and have no individual traits to distinguish themselves from other members of that category (Fishelov 199: 426). This simple stereotyping becomes less pronounced in *No longer at ease*, where the peculiar pressures of the postcolonial situation make it less easy to identify pure stereotypes. Although Mr Green, the principal non-African character to be represented in *No longer at ease*, certainly fits a simple category, the text does not treat him as indistinguishable from this category in quite the same way as the non-African characters in *Things fall apart*. This subtle transition away from a stereotypical portrayal is seen most clearly in *Arrow of God*. Although the attitudes of the non-African characters within this novel are not very different from those portrayed in *Things fall apart*, the narrative is far more complex, and their individual characters are presented quite apart from the stereotypical category in which they might be placed.

This shift, and the inadequacy of the binary opposition of coloniser/colonised to thoroughly explain the characterisation in *Arrow of God* can be seen in light of Morrison's (2018: 16) argument that "what Achebe is interested in exploring is the possibility for dialogue between precolonial and colonial epistemes, signs of negotiation and accommodation taking place amid the noise of violent struggle". Morrison (2018: 16-17) goes on to quote Achebe as claiming a "cultural 'middle ground'" in his writing, seeking to employ what he regarded as a fundamentally Igbo principle of dialogue.

Neena Gandhi (2012: 55) provides a further exploration of the complexity of the issues involved in Achebe's characterisation in her analysis of cultural identity in Achebe's novels. She describes the move from an "essentialist" cultural identity, which can be seen in a novel such as *Things fall apart*, to Rosaldo's postmodern definition of cultural identity more typical in *No longer at ease* (Gandhi 2012: 55 – 56; 59). Rosaldo's definition sees cultural identity as being formed in the encounter between cultures (Rosaldo in Gandhi 2012: 55). Gandhi quotes Rosaldo's suggestion that "'human cultures are neither necessarily coherent nor always homogenous. More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds'" (Rosaldo in Gandhi 2012: 55).

Achebe's (in Morrison 2018: 16-17) description of the "middle ground" he sought to claim as his working space, as well as Rosaldo's (in Gandhi 2012: 55) understanding of "border zones" and "pockets and eruptions" suggest the usefulness which Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and polyphony can have in an analysis of representations across a cultural divide. Central to Bakhtin's work on the novel is his notion of dialogism—the idea that all utterances exist only among and interacting with other utterances (Bakhtin in Peterson 1995: 90). He proposes, furthermore, that the novel is unique as an art form because of its ability to be "multi-voiced", made up of many unfinalised, fully independent consciousnesses and voices (Bakhtin 1984: 6; 16). It is this

concept of “polyphony” which “allows for the intermingling of different class and social registers” (Quayson 1997: 140); fundamental to the concept of polyphony is the idea that an author’s own voice, background or ideology does not have the power to finalise the utterances of a character (Bakhtin 1984:25). Bakhtin (1984: 6) describes a truly polyphonic novel as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses”. Bakhtin (1984: 6) contrasts this approach to novels with a “monologic” approach, where the voices allowed to express themselves in the novel and the subjects upon which they voice themselves are constantly under the direct control of the author, and are in fact merely manifestations of the author’s own voice. He describes this as “a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness . . . [where a character’s discourse serves] as a vehicle for the author’s own ideological position” (Bakhtin 1984: 6–7). Within a polyphonic novel, Bakhtin (1984: 18) suggests, the reader becomes a participant in the dialogue, and does not merely accept the characters’ words in their finalised form, already affirmed or repudiated by the author.

Because of the possibilities of dialogue and the independence it accords characters within a novel, a Bakhtinian analysis provides a useful tool with which to analyse Achebe’s characterisation of the non-African characters across the trilogy. There seems to be a clear shift across the trilogy, from a more monologic representation of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* and, to a lesser extent, *No longer at ease*, to a fully polyphonic representation in *Arrow of God*.

This shift has significance for fiction writing; no writer in this portion of the twenty-first century can escape the need to write across cultures, thus characterising characters of a different culture to the writer becomes a relevant concern. Bakhtin’s explanation of a novel’s unique ability to contain many independent voices seems like a fertile platform on which this cultural encounter can be explored through fiction. Applying the model to Achebe’s move towards a dialogic portrayal of non-African characters could provide a useful template of how a productive and positive representation across a cultural boundary may be attempted..

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary focus of the research is thus the shift in presentation of the non-African characters across Chinua Achebe’s African Trilogy. The main question which is addressed is: does the shift in the representation of non-African characters from *Things fall apart* through *No longer at ease* to *Arrow of God* demonstrate a move from a “binary” towards a “dialogic” representation of characters of a different culture to the author?

The central question is supported by several others:

- What light does Fishelov’s (1990: 426) work on typical and individual characters shed on the characterisation of the non-African characters in all three novels of the trilogy?
- What do readings of the trilogy with regard to the cultural encounter suggest about the characterisation of the non-African characters in all three novels?

- How does a Bakhtinian analysis of all the characters and their discourse in the three novels elucidate the shift in the representation of the non-African characters across the trilogy?
- What can be deduced from this move towards dialogism about the nature of “dialogic” representations in fiction?

### 1.3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical argument of the research will be that there is a shift in how Chinua Achebe portrays non-African characters through his trilogy *Things fall apart, No longer at ease* and *Arrow of God*. This shift can be analysed in terms of Bakhtin’s (1981; 1984) theories of dialogism and polyphony, and indicates a move from a binary, monologic understanding of cultural encounters towards a dialogic one.

### 1.4 METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study will undertake to analyse the position of the non-African characters in each of the three novels. In order to do this, a close reading of several passages will be provided. These will then be analysed according to two principal studies of characterisation; firstly Fishelov’s (1990: 426) typology will be applied to gain an understanding of where the character fits on a scale of stereotypical or individual, and then Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and polyphony will be applied to each of the novels, in order to explore the role of the non-African characters’ individual utterances in the work as a whole. In order to provide a background in which to explore the usefulness of Bakhtin’s model, several readings of the three novels which discuss the novels’ presentations of culture and the cultural encounter will be presented..

### 1.5 CHAPTER OUTLINE

#### **Chapter 2: Theoretical framework**

This chapter will explore the central tenets of theories of characterisation and Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism and polyphony. A general theoretical framework will be constructed using these theories, which can then be applied to each of the three novels.

#### **Chapter 3: *Things fall apart***

In this chapter, the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* will be examined, both individually and as a group, using the theoretical framework devised in Chapter two. The characters will be examined from the perspective of general characterisation techniques, several issues regarding the contextual reasons for stereotyping in this novel will be discussed, and finally an analysis of the non-African characters according to Bakhtin’s theories of polyphony and dialogism will be provided

#### **Chapter 4: *No longer at ease***

The techniques applied in Chapter three will be used here to analyse the representation of the non-African characters in *No longer at ease*.

**Chapter 5: *Arrow of God***

Once again, the theoretical framework will be applied to the non-African characters in *Arrow of God*; some attention will also be given to the different aspects of polyphony present within this novel, evident in the novel as a whole and not only in those sections which deal with the non-African characters.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The findings of the three close readings will be compared, and further theoretical analysis made in terms of a comparison among the three novels with regard to the shift of representation of the non-African characters.

Conclusions will be drawn as to whether this shift in the representation of non-African characters from *Things fall apart* to *Arrow of God* demonstrates a move from a traditionally “binary” towards a “dialogic” representation of characters of a different culture to the author. The usefulness of the model in representing characters of a different culture will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### GENERAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyse Chinua Achebe's representations of the cultural "other" in his novels *Things fall apart* (first published 1958), *No longer at ease* (first published 1960) and *Arrow of God* (first published 1964; second edition published 1974<sup>1</sup>) and to examine them in the light of a model drawn from Bakhtin's (1981; 1984) concepts of "dialogism" and "polyphony" as well as theories of stereotyped and individual characters as described by Fishelov (1989: 426), with some reference to Pickrel's (1989:181) classification as well. The purpose of examining these representations is to decide if there is a shift in Achebe's portrayal of characters across an ethnic barrier from the author himself. The study aims to decide if there is a significant shift from a more binary and stereotypical portrayal of Achebe's non-African characters in *Things fall apart*, to a more uneasy ambivalence in *No longer at ease*, culminating in a portrayal which is more dialogic in *Arrow of God*.

This chapter defines the terms "binary" and "dialogic" representations as they will be applied in this study. Following this, a model for analysing the novels will then be developed, drawing on Pickrel's (1989:181) and Fishelov's (1990:422) notions of types of characters as well as Bakhtin's (1981;1984) notions of "polyphony" and "dialogism". By combining aspects of these theories, a framework will be developed whereby Achebe's representations across cultures can be analysed.

Studies of character in early postcolonial literary theory have tended to focus on the representation of previously colonised people groups (see Achebe 2016), with a focus on correcting the stereotype to which these groups were subjected by even the most well-intentioned colonial writing. This was a necessary shift in thinking which has led, on a practical level, to some of the world's most enduring fiction. The aim of this study, however, is to analyse whether the focus in early postcolonial literature led to a reverse stereotype (remaining, in essence, binary), and whether a more nuanced perspective can be gained through an understanding of a "dialogic" approach to characters with whom a writer does not share a culture or ethnic background. This "dialogic" approach can be understood in accordance with Wilson Harris's (in Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Maley (1997:16)) claim that cross-culturalism has been a present and pertinent factor in the world for centuries, and that a binary approach to the cultural encounter does not take into account the ways in which people groups have been inextricably linked to one another for centuries. A "dialogic" analysis is therefore proposed below, whereby it may become possible to examine an author's representation of characters

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<sup>1</sup> It is the revised second edition which will be used throughout this study.

whose culture he or she does not share in terms beyond simply those of stereotype and individuality, thus allowing more productive nuance and ambivalence into the discourse.

## 2.2 BINARY REPRESENTATIONS

Critique of characterisation across a cultural or ethnic boundary was at the heart of early postcolonial literature and literary criticism. Both in criticism of colonial writing (Achebe 2016:14) as well as in their own fiction (Achebe in Osei-Nyame 1999:148), writers in the early postcolonial period addressed the idea of how non-western characters are and should be portrayed in literature. Osei-Nyame (1999:148) reports Achebe's goal as being "representing an African worldview through narratives that speak for themselves", and quotes Achebe's own articulation of his aims as being to "teach my readers that their past . . . was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them". Abdullahi (2014:178) also quotes Achebe's vision of "'reinvesting the [African] continent and its people with humanity, free at last from those stock situations and stock characters never completely 'human' that had dominated European writing about Africa for hundred [sic.] of years.'" The preoccupation is clearly with narrating from an African perspective, from inside a truly "individual" African character's head in order to demonstrate that literature and literature's most enduring characters are not only European or Europeanised individuals.

Achebe's (2016:21) criticism of Conrad was concerned with the idea of stereotypes, where race and political position with regard to the coloniser/colonised opposition predetermine every aspect of a character. Achebe (2016:14) criticised Conrad for this type of racial stereotyping, noting that every African character in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of darkness* fitted into a particular western preconception of what "African" meant. In Achebe's (2016:21) statement that "Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist", he highlights the dehumanising of an entire race, where African characters form no more than a part of the background scenery in which Kurtz's mental breakdown takes place. The African characters in Conrad, Achebe (2016:17) suggests, are no more than props, as the boat or the river or the trees might be, and do not possess any individualising traits, anything which might make one character a recognisable human in the reader's mind.

Achebe (2016: 17) also notes that when Conrad does focus on one specific character instead of simply "Africa in the mass", the depiction is no more human than the faceless mass previously encountered. Achebe (2016: 17-18) notes two examples from Conrad, the first of which is described as "the savage who was fireman", and the second Kurtz's African mistress. In both instances, he demonstrates Conrad's inability to describe these characters as humans, and how Conrad constantly settles for characterising his African characters only by the qualities in them which are opposed to those "civilising" qualities which the narrator Marlow<sup>2</sup> suggests

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<sup>2</sup> Achebe (2016: 19–20) makes some interesting claims about whether these views are simply those of the narrator, not shared by Conrad as the author, or whether Marlow is simply acting as a voice for Conrad in this instance; it is interesting to note that Achebe seems to suggest that Conrad does not distance himself properly from the views of his narrator, and that Marlow as the narrator therefore does not assume views independent of Conrad as the writer. Achebe (2016: 20) therefore seems to suggest that the views apply to both Marlow and Conrad. The question of the

are the property of Europeans. Achebe (2016:18) points out that Kurtz's African mistress, while being portrayed in what could, at a stretch, be called a positive light, this is only because "first, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval; and second, she fulfils a structural requirement of the story; a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman [Kurtz's fiancée]."

Achebe's article highlights a critical problem which was encountered by many early postcolonial critics and writers as they reviewed colonial writings: the utter failure of most colonial authors to represent characters with whom they did not share an ethnic or cultural background in any but a decidedly stereotypical manner. The result was that most colonial writings placed African and other non-European characters in opposition to the "civilised" European. Es'kia Mphahlele's (1956) study of "The non-European character in South African English fiction" spends much time labouring the point that, to most non-African writers of fiction, the African is either "a passive creature of history" or merely part of a group. Mphahlele (1956: 19;21;23;24;29) notes that African characters in most English South African fiction during the colonial era appeared in the stereotypical roles of "fighters" or "servants" and points out that in general African characters are "merely labelled" or unrealistically romanticised. Mphahlele (1956:29) seems most concerned with the fact that in general an African character is consistently regarded not as an individual, realistic human being, but rather merely as a stock type.

The above draws attention to the immense task which novelists of the postcolonial era, such as Achebe, Ben Okri, Ngugi Wa'Thiongo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Zakes Mda and many others have successfully carried out in the decades since Achebe's first novel was published and a new era in fiction writing emerged: that of correcting the stereotypical presentation of African characters. The success with which they have accomplished this task has been well documented (cf. Abdullahi 2014:175).

However, having corrected the imbalance pointed out in the early days of postcolonial theory, and especially as the twenty-first century leads the world further and further towards globalisation and extensive cosmopolitanism, a new issue arises: that of stereotyping *any* character according to his or her race or position in the colonised/coloniser opposition. In correcting the stereotype against Africans, the question must be raised whether the stereotype has simply moved to the European characters. There is good reason, for instance, to suggest that Achebe's portrayal of the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart* (Achebe 2001:151 - 152) is a stereotypical representation, where the District Commissioner represents merely the type for "colonial administrator".<sup>3</sup> While it was necessary to make this reversal, the pockets of ambiguity in *Arrow of God* sug-

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narrator's relationship to the author, as far as Conrad and Marlow are concerned, is not one which will be addressed in this study; however, the relationship between the character's idea and the author's idea, and especially the independence of the character's views from the author, is one which Bakhtin (1984) contemplates in detail, and which will be examined in light of Achebe's books.

<sup>3</sup> This suggestion will be substantiated by a careful study of the text in the next chapter.

gest that the cultural encounter is more complex, and cannot only be understood in terms of a binary opposition between one “species” of person and another (see Fanon 1967: 27). Harris (in Moore-Gilbert *et. al* 1997:16) rejected the idea of a focus on the binary, claiming that a binary distinction between “indigenous” and “European” is irrelevant because “‘indigenous’ and ‘European’ systems of being are locked together”. Especially in the context of this portion of the twenty-first century (and as the shift in *Arrow of God* seems to indicate), one could suggest that a mere swapping of the stereotyped characters from the African characters to the European characters does not fully address the question of what it means to live in and write about a globalised, inescapably cosmopolitan world (see Harris in Moore-Gilbert *et. al.* 1997:16; Rosaldo in Gandhi 2012: 55).

For the purposes of this study, therefore, the term “binary representation” will be used to denote a characterisation technique which is entirely informed by a particular character’s position in the binary opposition between coloniser/colonised.

### 2.3 BEYOND BINARY: DIALOGIC REPRESENTATIONS

As has been hinted at earlier in Harris’s (in Moore-Gilbert *et. al.* 1997:16) statement regarding the “cross-cultural” state of the world, there is good reason to suggest that it is no longer appropriate to look at characterisation only in terms of a character’s position with regard to the colonised/coloniser binary. Harris (in Moore-Gilbert *et al* 1997:16), indeed, is of the opinion that the world has *always* been constructed in complex relations between cultures, and that to limit one’s study of the cultural encounter at any period to examining relationships between “European” and “indigenous” peoples is confining and unprofitable. Moore-Gilbert *et. al.*(1997:16) comment that Harris in fact suggests that the whole world has been built on cross-culturalism for centuries, and that the question of cross-culturalism should therefore not be avoided.

This rejection of a reductionist approach to cultural identity is applied to literature by Neena Ghandi. Ghandi (2012:55) contrasts early “essentialist” views of cultural identity to the postmodern view proposed by Rosaldo, where “zones of disorder, dispute and disintegration are analysed, and the erstwhile essentialising categories of cultural identity become superfluous”. A key factor in this movement away from essentialist categories of cultural identity is that culture is no longer used to affirm ideology, but rather that culture “is perceived as ‘anti-ideological’” (Ghandi 2012:55-56). Cultural identity, therefore, in Rosaldo’s view, is not something fixed or defined, which succeeding generations maintain unchanged through various means, such as ritual, myths, folklore, family order and so forth. Rather, Gandhi (2012: 56) quotes Larrain, who suggests that Rosaldo’s postmodern perception of cultural identity is “historical, encompassing and open”; furthermore, culture, in this conception, is evolving. This idea of cultural identity is similar to T. Kortenaar’s (1995: 32) suggestion that cultural identity resides not in a fixed place, but in constant dialogue among a people group. Rosaldo’s conception, it would seem, places cultural identity not in the status quo of a society or community, but rather in the active encounter between people and between cultures.



This would seem to suggest further that a simple categorisation of characters and cultures according to their positions in the colonised/coloniser opposition will fail to account for either group sufficiently. Both T. Kortenaar (1995: 32; 40) and Morrison (2018: 19 – 20) show how, especially in *Arrow of God*, Achebe himself demonstrates how nuanced and indefinable culture and the cultural encounter truly are, and how culture itself is frequently forged and re-forged by people groups in response to outside threats or to encounters with other people groups. The “zones of disorder, dispute and disintegration” which Rosaldo speaks of are demonstrated, in both *No longer at ease*, as well as *Arrow of God* to be in fact *productive ruptures*. In this respect, it seems also most appropriate to study the texts in light of Bakhtin’s (1984) theory of polyphony, as he spends much time discussing the productive possibilities of such ruptures. As the single plane of cultural identity is crossed and disrupted by other cultural identities and encounters, pockets are formed in which the original cultural identity is tested, changed, transformed, and this, according to T. Kortenaar (1995: 40) is in fact what cultural identity is—a constant re-narration by a people group of their own history and culture. Gandhi’s exploration of Rosaldo’s cultural theory provides thus a useful means of examining a more nuanced, ambivalent approach to culture, especially in the second two novels of the trilogy.

The positive aspects of an encounter across cultures were identified by Bakhtin (1981:11) when he traced the history of the European novel and decided that the key facets of the emerging European novel

are all organically interrelated and have all been powerfully affected by a very specific rupture in the history of European civilization: its emergence from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual contacts and relationships. A multitude of different languages, cultures and times became available to Europe, and this became a decisive factor in its life and thought.

Bakhtin here clearly identifies a cross-cultural encounter as one of, if not the, determining factors in the development of the novel. According to Larrain (in Gandhi 2012: 56), the “encompassing and open” facets of Rosaldo’s concept of postmodern cultural encounters are thus reflected in Bakhtin’s conception of literature, and the positive possibilities of this framework are also glimpsed in the way Bakhtin sees a cross-cultural encounter as forever altering and enlarging the perspective of early novelists.

For a novel to transcend the stereotypical tendencies of locating characters merely with relation to a binarism, therefore, it would appear that an author must grapple with the productive interaction which is possible in the ruptures both of the monologic plane of the novel itself as well as in a cultural identity. The productivity of the interaction itself suggests the importance of Bakhtin’s work on dialogism and polyphony, where a character’s idea and utterance remain autonomous from those of every other character and from the author’s own.

This discussion therefore leads to the definition of the second type of representation to be discussed in this study, namely, “dialogic” representations. From the literature above, “dialogic” representations can be identified as characterisation of characters, and specifically, for the purposes of this study, across a cultural divide

from an author, which treats them as fully individual,<sup>4</sup> taking into account not only their race or their position in the colonised/coloniser opposition, but also their unique personality traits, history, as well as the complex, personal motivations at work in propelling the character's actions and ideologies in the plot.

## 2.4 CHARACTER TYPOLOGY

In order to be able to fully analyse the presentation of characters in Achebe's novels, a basic theory of character, in terms of stereotype or individual personality, needs to be established. This distinction, known by many names and addressed in many different ways, has been a concept of particular interest to theorists and novelists for nearly a century. E.M. Forster's (1962:75) early proposition of "flat" and "round" characters has remained a concept which is generally accepted in theoretical and non-theoretical approaches alike. The distinction it highlights is certainly accepted by many theorists (including Pickrel 1988:181; Fishelov 1990:422 and Rimmon-Kenan 2000:40): namely, that some characters seem more like "real" people, and that others seem to be mere caricatures, showing only certain, frequently exaggerated, aspects of a real person.

Forster's (1962:75) original classification identified this distinction, but his elaboration of the idea, as well as his terms, "flat" and "round", became problematic in application, especially where particularly vivid characters were deemed "flat". Pickrel (1988: 181) suggested the alternative terms "existential" and "essentialist". He proposed that "existential", as a replacement for "flat", suggested a "character . . . whose 'essence precedes existence', whose nature is a given that remains largely (essentially) unchanged by the experience it passes through" (Pickrel 1988:182). On the other hand, Pickrel (1988:182) proposed the term "existential" instead of "round", denoting by this term a character whose "'existence precedes essence'; his or her nature is shaped by experience". An advantage of this change in terminology, according to Pickrel (1988:182) is that it presented a "less judgmental look at the flat/essentialist" character, since "many of the most wonderful characters in literature are essentialist".

David Fishelov (1990:422), however, proposed a further expansion of the model. To Fishelov (1990:425), a key to understanding character in fiction lies in understanding the distinction between the textual and the constructed level. Fishelov (1990:425) proposed that the "flat" and "round" distinctions could be applied to both the textual and the constructed level, and that leaving out the constructed level in analysis "may lead to confusion in any typology of characters." On the textual level Fishelov (1990:425) placed aspects of a character's name, the closeness at which the character's "consciousness" is presented to the reader, how many perspectives the character may be presented from, and the diegetic or mimetic nature of this presentation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Here, the term "individual" is used in reference to Fishelov's (1990:426) model of types and individuals, which will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>5</sup> Fishelov does not spend much time on a technical analysis of the textual or constructed level. Rimmon-Kenan (2000) presents a detailed theoretical approach to the subject in both Chapter 3 and 5 of her work *Narrative fiction*. In Chapter 3 she looks at the debate between 'purist' and 'realistic' views of character, where 'purists' suggest that characters are no more than textual signs, bearing no resemblance to real people, while the 'realistic' position takes the opposite view, suggesting that characters are in many ways independent from the events of the story and may

The constructed level is that on which the character is reconstructed in the reader's mind, and in which the reader analyses and interacts with both the character and with her own background and prior knowledge. On the constructed level, Fishelov (1990: 426) suggests that constructionally typical/flat characters will fit into "some simple category" in the reader's knowledge and background, which may be cultural (such as "the Jew"), political (the stereotype of "the bureaucrat" or "the tyrant") or aesthetic (where the character is typical of certain character functions; for example, as "the hero" or "the love interest"). Constructionally individual characters will not fit into a readily definable category in the reader's mind, as they will possess traits, or motivations for their actions which preclude them from simply embodying the traits of a particular category.

Fishelov (1990:425-426) uses the distinction between the constructed and textual level to suggest that the "flat/round" distinction may be applied to both levels. This results in a model with four, rather than two, separate kinds of character: the "pure" type, the individual-like type, the type-like individual and the "pure" individual. A "pure" type is considered to be a character who is flat on both the textual and constructed level: that is, the textual indicators are limited and one-dimensional, while at the same time these textual indicators are constructed by the reader to create a character who is easily recognised as fulfilling a "typical label". The individual-like type is one where the textual presentation may be rich, but the constructed level still results in a "ready-made typical designation". The type-like individual, on the other hand, refers to a character who may be presented one-dimensionally in the text, but on the constructed level does not fit any preconceived typical label. Finally, the "pure" individual is a character who is richly represented in the text, as well as not fitting into any labels or categories preconceived by a reader.

It is important to note, as Fishelov (1990:427) does, that "there is no point in claiming that the 'pure' individual is in any sense superior to the 'pure' type. Both of them have their places and functions in the heterogeneous literary scene, and each can be highly effective and successful in his own context." Nevertheless, it could be argued, as with Forster's original classification, that there is still a sense of hierarchy, in that a "pure" individual character is more likely to remain vividly and positively in a reader's mind. A "pure" type, on the other hand, may be "highly effective and successful", but only as a cartoon is successful: by exaggeration highlighting one key trait for the purpose of humour or instruction, but not probing the complex web of motivations, personality features or overarching goals which may lead to that trait, and therefore only ever giving a one-dimensional perspective to that trait.

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be treated "as if they were our neighbours or friends" (Rimmon-Kenan 2000:32). Rimmon-Kenan (2000:33) proposes that a middle ground may be established by recognising that the two views relate to "different aspects of narrative fiction". She goes on to suggest that "character is a construct", and refers to Chatman in suggesting that reading character is a process of identifying personality traits by textual clues and thus arriving at character (Rimmon-Kenan 2000:36;37). In Chapter 5 (p. 59-71), Rimmon-Kenan deals in detail with the various "text-indicators" by which character is constructed.

The advantages of applying a purely theoretical model of character to the study of characterisation across cultures are manifold. Firstly, it serves as a guide without introducing questions of morality to the identification of a character as “type” or “individual”. It therefore becomes possible to classify a character as “type” or “individual” with only minimal suggestion of worth adhering to those terms in and of themselves.

Furthermore, the theory of character takes into account the many complex aspects which form the foundation of human experience. If one is to agree with Forster (1967:51) that “the actors in a story are, or pretend to be, human beings”, it follows that when reading about characters, one is constantly looking out for those textual clues which one may recognise from one’s own experience of being a human being. Aspects touched upon by Fishelov (1990:425-426) and detailed by Rimmon-Kenan (2000:60-67) suggest ways in which point-of-view, narrative voice, character action and dialogue and even a character’s appearance may be used to represent textually those aspects which a reader is quick to reassemble and identify with. A text is thus able to evoke the complexities of human life, and by recognising these complexities in the text the reader is often provoked into further thought about his or her own reality.

However, the framework is not without shortfalls. While the four typologies proposed by Fishelov (1990:426) provide a useful tool to analyse character, it does not address issues of a character’s inner life, his/her relationships with other characters or, indeed, the even more controversial issue of the character’s relationship with the author.

## **2.5 BAKHTIN’S THEORIES OF DIALOGISM AND POLYPHONY**

The aspects of characters’ inner (and especially inner ideological) life, the relationships characters have with one another on the page and the question of the place the author’s discourse should occupy in a novel are addressed by Bakhtin’s (1981;1984) work on the concepts of “dialogism” and “polyphony”.

Underlying all Bakhtin’s theory, Peterson (1995:90) suggests, is Bakhtin’s unique concept of “the utterance”. Peterson (1995:90) traces Bakhtin’s concept back to the Russian word used in Bakhtin’s writings (*vyskazyvanie*), and suggests that this connotes “expression” or “the active process of speaking out and having one’s say”. According to Peterson (1995:91), this means that “the fundamental verbal sign is already an act of articulation”. He quotes Bakhtin’s statement that “within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other. The utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it”. For Bakhtin, therefore, the utterance, or word, exists in relation to the words of others, and in many senses any word depends on others’ words to give it life.

### 2.5.1 Dialogism within a novel's discourse

This is the fundamental principle involved in the idea of dialogism. Bakhtin's word *dialogism*, according to Bakhtin translators Holquist and Emerson (1981:426) denotes "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance." That is, dialogism characterises every aspect of an utterance's existence, because each utterance only exists within a system or network of other utterances. Any utterance responds to some previous other utterance, and also presupposes that some future other utterance will respond to it.

At the heart of the idea of dialogism is the notion that discourse is fundamentally social. Bakhtin (1981:259) proposes that discourse in fact "lives", and that it does so in "fundamentally social modes". He (1981:289 - 291) argues that language in the course of everyday life is "stratified", meaning that various intentions and uses of language each form a specific strata — for example, the "strata" of generational language such as teenage slang, the "strata" of professional jargon such as that of a lawyer or doctor and so forth. The fact that each of these strata must interact with any number of other strata creates "heteroglossia", or the "diversity of social speech types" (Bakhtin 1981: 262-263). This heteroglossia, according to Bakhtin, is a mark of the living, dynamic qualities of linguistic life, making it more than an abstract system but rather a means of articulation, relating back to Bakhtin's statement quoted earlier that the utterance is therefore a dynamic organism, rather than a system of conveying meanings. Furthermore, as language inevitably develops, it is suggested that the stratification and heteroglossia present in it will "widen and deepen".

The location of an utterance, therefore, is in a heteroglot environment, constantly dialogised by other utterances (Bakhtin 1981:272). In any utterance, not only are the individual speaker's concrete intentions and style present, but also anonymous, social language, such as current standards for certain speech types, current accepted grammar and so forth. In accenting the utterance with his or her own intentions and forms, the speaker must necessarily acknowledge and make use of the intentions and forms available to them. Furthermore, Bakhtin (1981: 276) points out that any word, seeking to direct itself at an object, finds that object already riddled with and surrounded by *other* words, thoughts, points-of-view and accents. Thus, in traversing the ground towards its object, the word is forced to interact with an environment which is dialogically active, filled with alien words, values and accents. In some instances, the word will merge with these alien words, while in others it will recoil; nevertheless, the traversing of this dialogised ground is unavoidable and no word can find its object without acknowledging the alien accents surrounding it. Moreover, Bakhtin (1981:277) insists that it is this dialogically active environment within and around an object, as well as any word's attempt to articulate that object, which in fact produces richness in a language, giving it a multifaceted character.

As inevitable as this dialogised environment of stratification and heteroglossia is, Bakhtin (1981:270) acknowledges that certain philosophies of language seek to establish language as a unitary entity. Nevertheless, he is careful to note that this unitary language is not language with respect to grammar, but rather “language as a worldview, ensuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life”. These “centripetal forces”, Bakhtin (1981: 271) observes, are in constant tension with heteroglossia, since the latter, as already established, is inevitable. The presence of both the unifying centripetal forces and the decentralising heteroglossia intersecting an utterance means that utterance must thus be analysed, Bakhtin (1981: 272) suggests, as a “contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language”. This adds yet another layer of interaction and dialogism to the utterance, once again characterising the utterance as a living entity, in constant interaction with other utterances.

The environment of heteroglossia provides a platform where “differing individual voices” can all flourish, and Bakhtin (1981:263) proposes that it is in fact this interaction between speech types which constitutes the novel. He posits that the novel is unique among literary genres, because its world is created by distinct kinds of utterance and speech interacting with one another within the environment of the novel. Because of the differing individual voices present in a novel, the novel itself is characterised by a “multiplicity of voices” living within it, thus creating heteroglossia within the novel itself. As Bakhtin (1981:263) argues, it is the “distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme [of a novel] through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the basic distinguishing feature of a novel”.

If language and utterance, therefore, are fundamentally social activities, and the stratification of language and the presence of dialogised heteroglossia in all aspects of its life is the main contributing factor to its power in articulating meaning, the novel, Bakhtin (1981:275) suggests, is the best artistic means by which to express the reality of social heteroglossia and the dialogism of the word. The novel gives fullest and deepest expression, he argues, to the concept of “the dialogic orientation of the word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness)”.

Bakhtin (1981:283), however, does note that in certain manifestations dialogism is not as full-bodied or productive as the previous description might seem to imply. Bakhtin (1984: 69 – 72) generally deems Tolstoy a monologic writer, although he does remark on some aspects of dialogised discourse in Tolstoy. Bakhtin (1981: 282 – 283) suggests that there are two types of internal dialogism in the discourse of a novel. The first is the word’s encounter with the alien word *within the object*. The second type of internal dialogism is the word’s encounter with the alien word in the “subjective belief system of the reader”—that is, in the system of knowledge, opinion, belief and affection of the reader. Because of the extremely subjective nature of this

second kind of dialogism, Bakhtin (1981: 282 – 283) suggests that it tends to be either “crudely accommodating” or “provocatively polemical”. Both forms of dialogism can be found very tightly interwoven—for example, in Tolstoy:

Thus, discourse in Tolstoy is characterized by a sharp internal dialogism, and this discourse is moreover dialogized in the belief system of the reader—whose peculiar semantic and expressive characteristics Tolstoy acutely senses—as well as in the object. These two lines of dialogization (having in most cases polemical overtones) are tightly interwoven in his style: even in the most “lyrical” expressions and the most “epic” descriptions, Tolstoy’s discourse harmonizes and disharmonizes (more often disharmonizes) with various aspects of the heteroglot socio-verbal consciousness ensnaring the object, while at the same time polemically invading the reader’s belief and evaluative system, striving to stun and destroy the apperceptive background of the reader’s active understanding. . . . This propagandizing impulse sometimes leads to a narrowing-down of heteroglot social consciousness (against which Tolstoy polemicizes) to the consciousness of his immediate contemporary, a contemporary of the day and not of the epoch; what follows from this is a radical concretization of dialogization (almost always undertaken in the service of a polemic). For this reason Tolstoy’s dialogization, no matter how acutely we sense it in the expressive profile of his style, sometimes requires special historical or literary commentary: we are not sure with *what* precisely a given tone is in harmony or disharmony, for this dissonance or consonance has entered into the positive project of creating a style.

Here, Bakhtin suggests that the discourse in Tolstoy interacts harmoniously and—more often—unharmoniously with different aspects of the varied social and verbal consciousnesses which surround the object (that is, in the first type of internal dialogism, that of the word encountering the alien word in the object itself). Simultaneously, in the second type of internal dialogism, the word interacting with the reader’s apperceptive background, Bakhtin (1981: 283) observes that Tolstoy’s discourse “*polemically*” intrudes into the reader’s apperceptive background, “striving to stun and destroy [it]”. It is this endeavour to *polemically* engage the reader’s apperceptive background which Bakhtin dubs a “propagandizing impulse”. The danger of this impulse, he suggests, is that what should be a broad, all-encompassing “heteroglot social consciousness” must needs be reduced to something more easily polemicised against. In Tolstoy’s case, the social heteroglossia is reduced to the narrower heteroglossia of Tolstoy’s specific day (Bakhtin 1981: 283); however, it could be argued that polemical internal dialogism can reduce the heteroglot social consciousnesses in other ways, as well. It is important to note, therefore, that while dialogisation is thus always present, it is nevertheless possible for an individual author to exercise a limiting control over the heteroglossia and the dialogised voices present in a novel.

### 2.5.2 The polyphonic novel as conceived by Bakhtin with regard to Dostoevsky’s pioneering work

The second major concept developed by Bakhtin which will be of use to the present study is the idea of “polyphony”. Bakhtin (1984:6 – 7) first proposed the concept of polyphony in the context of a study on the artistic form of Dostoevsky’s fiction. He defines polyphony as the presence of “a plurality of independent and

unmerged voices and consciousnesses”, where characters are “not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse”.

Bakhtin (1984: 17) identifies two key components of “polyphony” in a novel. The first is “the unification of highly heterogeneous and incompatible material” and the second “the plurality of consciousness-centers [*sic.*] not reduced to a single ideological common denominator”. Polyphony, therefore, creates within the novel firstly a selection of varied forms and materials, and secondly (and most importantly) multiple individual voices which are all equal, and do not become merely objects of a single, narratologically higher ideology or philosophical system. With regard to the first, Bakhtin (1984: 15) quotes Grossman’s remark that Dostoevsky is able “to create out of heterogeneous and profoundly disparate materials of varying worth a unified and integral artistic creation”:

Thus the Book of Job, the Revelation of St. John, the Gospel texts, the discourses of St. Simeon the New Theologian, everything that feeds the pages of his novels and contributes tone to one or another of his chapters, is combined here in a most original way with the newspaper, the anecdote, the parody, the street scene, with the grotesque, even with the pamphlet. He boldly casts into his crucibles ever newer elements, knowing and believing that in the blaze of his creative work these raw chunks of everyday life, the sensations of boulevard novels and the divinely inspired pages of Holy Writ, will melt down and fuse in a new compound, and take on the deep imprint of his personal style and tone (Grossman in Bakhtin 1984: 15).

This “melting-pot” of styles, Bakhtin (1984: 16) suggests, combines uniquely with the second element of polyphony (plurality of consciousness-centres) in that these so-called “incompatible elements” are in fact “distributed among several worlds and several autonomous consciousnesses; they are presented not within a single field of vision, but within several fields of vision each full and of equal worth.” Bakhtin (1984: 16) comments further that what is combined into the unity of the novel is not the heterogeneous material itself, but rather the consciousnesses represented by each of them. The unity created when these separate, autonomous consciousnesses are combined and brought into contact with each other Bakhtin (1984: 16) calls a “higher unity”, a truly *polyphonic* unity.

This unity is not created by taking diverse materials and unifying them through the single vision and intentions of the author. What Bakhtin (1984: 18) has in mind is a unity similar to that of the polyphonic music from which he derives his metaphor—a whole comprised of separate voices, each maintaining its own unique worldview, expression and ideas, mingling to create a whole in which each individual voice is clear and distinct and the unity is derived from their interaction; the voices never merge with one another to sound *one*, *single* worldview or idea.

Bakhtin (1984:6–7) therefore sees polyphony as opposing a monologic construction of a novel. While in the monologic novel, a character’s discourse is reduced to mere functionality of the plot or characterisation, or to serve “as a vehicle for the author’s own ideological position”, in a polyphonic novel characters are entirely



autonomous from the author, capable of disagreeing ideologically with the author. Polyphony has many applications, but one of the primary locations of Bakhtin's discussion on the subject is the ideological placement of both the characters and the author. This ideological positioning is discussed in terms of the concept of the hero's self-consciousness and in the treatment of the idea within the polyphonic novel.

In a polyphonic novel, absolute autonomy is necessary, not only for the characters, but also for the ideas they possess and of their discourse or utterance. Bakhtin (1984: 26–27) suggests that Dostoevsky's use of polyphony is due to his perception of "the objective social world" as being filled with coexisting contradictions and "opposing camps" between people. The interaction of ideas, therefore, is the social interaction of fully autonomous *people*, living alongside one another, sometimes agreeing, sometimes disagreeing; at all times each maintains *their own* idea and worldview, yet at all times still interacts with the ideas of other people. The novel's representation of this condition of society is one of the ways it maintains its fundamentally social genre traits (see also Bakhtin 1981: 259).

However, in order to be truly polyphonic, the ideas of a character must remain autonomous not only from those of other characters, but also from the author. Bakhtin (1984: 25) states "in no way do [the heroes' ideas] become principles of representation or construction for the entire novel as a whole, that is, principles of the author himself as the artist. If that were the case we would have an ordinary philosophical novel of ideas." In other words, the *entirety* of the novel is not organised around the idea of the hero, concerned only with its own affirmation or progression. Rather, the hero's idea forms a *part* of the novel, and the unity of the novel is found not in the ultimate resolution of the idea, but instead in the *relationships* between the idea of one character with the ideas of others. These ideas, furthermore, Bakhtin (1984: 92) conceives of as inextricably wound up with the people who hold them. The idea is not so much an abstract philosophical position as it is the worldview inherent in a person (see also Bakhtin 1984: 95). In this way, Bakhtin (1984: 92) argues, these "idea-images" interact "on fully equal terms" with other idea-images in the overall dialogue of the novel itself. The "finalising function" of monologic novels is thus utterly impossible here, as each idea-image (inseparable from the person who holds it) is autonomous and equal, and no one participant can subject another's idea to its finalising word.

The hero in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, therefore, is not "some manifestation of reality that possesses fixed and specific socially typical or individual characteristic traits, nor as a specific profile assembled out of unambiguous and objective features which, taken together, answer the question "who is he?":

No, the hero interests Dostoevsky as a *particular point of view on the world and on oneself*, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality. What is important to Dostoevsky is not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself (Bakhtin 1984: 47).

For the hero, or character, within a polyphonic novel, therefore, what is of import is not so much what the author presents to us as “reality” but what the character presents to him or herself as *his or her* reality. Thus, the author does not present the character as an aspect of reality to the reader (equating, say, the fact of a sunny day and the fact of the character’s having a happy disposition as two objective, equal truths finalised by the author’s intervention); rather, even aspects of reality—both outside of and within the character—are presented as objects of the character’s own self-consciousness (the *character* believes it is a good day, and also *believes*, through her own self-conscious discourse, that she has a happy disposition, which is by no means an objective reality given credence by the author’s finalisation). Bakhtin (1984: 49) states “What the author used to do is now done by the hero, who illuminates himself from all possible points of view; the author no longer illuminates the hero’s reality but the hero’s self-consciousness.”

Because all of reality becomes, in the polyphonic novel, “absorbed” into the hero’s self-consciousness, *reality* (in the form of objective facts) can no longer occupy the same plane as the hero (Bakhtin 1984: 49). The only thing which can lie outside of the hero’s “all-devouring consciousness”, Bakhtin (1984: 49 – 50) argues, is “a single objective world—a world of other consciousnesses with rights equal to those of the hero”. Thus, Bakhtin (1984: 50) states, “reality” is robbed “of any power to define and finalize the hero”. The only thing standing outside of the hero’s consciousness is the consciousnesses of others, with which, in consequence, his own consciousness must grapple and interact and dialogise. Bakhtin (1984: 51) stresses again that this type of self-consciousness must be “really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouthpiece for his voice.”

A key foundation for the polyphony identified in Dostoevsky’s work is what Bakhtin (1984: 122) terms the “carnivalisation” of the literary genre. Bakhtin (1984: 122 – 123), speaking about the European carnival, points to several ways in which its ambivalence and freedom influenced the development of the novel, and found special significance in the work of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin’s discussion on the origins of the carnivalesque in literature begins with the serio-comical genres of ancient literature, finding evidence for the serio-comic as a base layer in Socratic dialogue (Bakhtin 1984: 109 – 110). However, it is in the Menippean satire (which he terms “menippea”) that Bakhtin (1984: 114 – 120) finds the most direct links between ancient serio-comical genres and the carnivalesque nature of later writers such as Dostoevsky. Both in the menippea and in Socratic dialogue, Bakhtin (1984: 111; 116) notes the special role of “dialogue on the threshold”—the particular experiences and discourse of a character on the verge of death, on the verge of madness or in some other threshold state, which gives him or her a more particular insight and lends an instant dialogism to the characters’ discourse. This is an interesting feature to note with regard to Achebe’s novels; as it will be seen, there are good arguments for the existence of threshold dialogues in the trilogy, and the consequences of these, in terms of cross-cultural encounters, makes an insightful study.

Moving to the later assimilation of the serio-comic into carnival, Bakhtin (1984: 123) highlights several important features of carnival which have influenced the novel; carnival, he suggests, creates an abnormal “free and familiar contact among people”, as the usual social barriers of hierarchy are broken down, and people of various social orders have space to work out new ways of interrelating as *individuals*. Along with this abnormal familiarisation come “carnivalistic *mésalliances*”, which, due to the suspended hierarchy of the carnival, creates a free and familiar attitude toward *all* things— the sacred, profane, high, low, wise, stupid, all are now considered with the same attitude and are “drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations” (Bakhtin 1984: 123). Finally, Bakhtin (1984: 123) observes *profanation* as a trait of carnival, where the sacred is brought down to earth, expressed in carnival parodies.

Bakhtin (1984: 124) further notes that several carnivalistic acts had a profound influence on the development of Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel. Among these, he identifies specifically the “dualistic ambivalent ritual” of the crowning and decrowning of the carnival king (Bakhtin 1984: 124). Bakhtin (1984: 124; 125) stresses that this is a *dualistic* and *ambivalent* ritual, encompassing the carnival sense of shifts and changes, including death and renewal. Carnival, Bakhtin (1984: 125) states, “celebrates the shift itself”. There is no “naked, absolute” negation, affirmation or destruction in carnival. Carnival laughter, too, Bakhtin (1984: 126) maintains, is a highly ambivalent act. He relates it to ritual laughter, which “was always directed toward something higher: the sun (the highest god), other gods, the highest earthly authority were put to shame and ridiculed to force them to *renew themselves*” (Bakhtin 1984: 126 – 127). This ritual laughter Bakhtin (1984: 127) identifies as a reaction to crises—in the life of the sun, deities or man. Carnivalistic laughter is likewise directed at something higher, but this time “toward a shift of authorities and truths” (Bakhtin 1984: 127). Bakhtin (1984: 127) notes that “laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with *crisis* itself”. It is easy to identify similarities between this way of responding to shifts and changes within society, and Rosaldo’s (in Gandhi 2012: 56) notion of cultural identity being found in the pockets of disruption and disorder.

A last element of carnival which Bakhtin (1984: 127) notes is the ambivalent nature of parody within carnival. Most notably for the present discussion, he describes carnival pairs or “parodying doubles” who parody each other in diverse ways, from several points of view. Parodying doubles, he claims, have become a staple in carnivalised literature (Bakhtin 1984: 127 – 128); in Dostoevsky, Bakhtin (1984: 127 – 128) proposes, “almost every one of the leading heroes . . . has several doubles who parody him in various ways.” This, again, is an interesting feature of the polyphonic novel which has direct applicability to Achebe.

Although the idea of the carnival is perhaps more remote from Achebe than many other aspects of Bakhtin’s theory, several aspects of the carnivalesque will be seen to apply quite strikingly, especially in an analysis of *Arrow of God*, as will be demonstrated in chapter five.

Finally, a critical aspect of the polyphonic novel is that of double-voiced dialogue. Bakhtin (1984: 199) proposes that “the plane of investigation . . . of discourse from the point of view of its relationship to someone else’s discourse has, we believe, exceptionally great significance for an understanding of artistic prose”. He lays out, therefore, three varieties of discourse, the latter two of which contain further sub-categories, or types.

The three categories of discourse are 1.) “Direct, unmediated discourse directed exclusively toward its referential object, as an expression of the speaker’s semantic authority”; 2.) “Objectified discourse (discourse of a represented person)”; 3.) “Discourse with an orientation toward someone else’s discourse (double-voiced discourse)”. Under the second variety, Bakhtin (1984: 199) classifies 2a.) objectified discourse “with a predominance of socio-typical determining factors” or 2b.) “with a predominance of individually characteristic determining features.” This variety of discourse is less objectified in 2b.), where it is coloured with the (subjective) *individually characteristic* features of the person whose speech is represented. Under the third variety, discourse oriented toward someone else’s discourse, Bakhtin (1984: 199) classifies a further three types: 3a.) “uni-directional double-voiced discourse”; this includes “stylization, narrator’s narration, unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author’s intentions, and *Ich-Erzählung* [first-person narration]”. When these types of discourse tend toward subjective discourse, Bakhtin (1984: 199) notes that these types become fused in a single discourse of the first type. 3b.) “Vari-directional double-voiced discourse” including “parody, with all its nuances, parodistic narration, parodistic *Ich-Erzählung*, discourse of a character who is parodically represented; any transmission of someone else’s words with a shift in accent.” In these types of vari-directional discourse, Bakhtin (1984: 199) notes that the more the objectification is decreased, and the “other” becomes an active participating subject, the more this type of discourse will “disintegrate into two separate discourse of the first type”. 3c.) “The active type (reflected discourse of another)” including “hidden internal polemic, polemically coloured autobiography and confession, any discourse with a sideward glance at someone else’s word, a rejoinder of a dialogue, hidden dialogue.” Bakhtin (1984: 198) notes that these are not so much fixed categories, as points along a spectrum, where discourse may fall between certain points instead of precisely upon them.

Seeing discourse as “double-voiced”, always fraught with alien words and alien consciousnesses, is, Bakhtin argues, part of the inherent nature of language in the lived experience of society:

When a member of a speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not as a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others’ voices. No, he receives the word from another’s voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretations of others. His own thought finds the word already inhabited. Therefore the orientation of a word among words, the varying perception another’s word and the various means for reacting to it, are perhaps the most fundamental problems for the metalinguistic study of any kind of discourse, including the artistic (Bakhtin 1984: 202).

Within the discourse of a polyphonic novel, he suggests, dialogism may occur through “refraction” of the author’s experience through “someone else’s discourse . . . style . . . manner” (Bakhtin 1984: 202). This is because in such a novel the author possesses no “ultimate” finalising word.

The position of the author’s word is different in a monologic novel (Bakhtin 1984: 203 – 204). The question of how and where “the author’s ultimate semantic authority” is implemented is “easily answered” as far as a monologic novel is concerned:

Whatever discourse types are introduced by the author-monologist, whatever their compositional distribution, the author’s intentions and evaluations must dominate over all the others and must form a compact and unambiguous whole. Any intensification of others’ intonations in a certain discourse or a certain section of the work is only a game, which the author permits so that his own direct or refracted word might ring out all the more energetically. Every struggle between two voices within a single discourse for possession or dominance in that discourse is decided in advance, it only appears to be a struggle; all fully signifying authorial interpretations are sooner or later gathered together in a single speech center [*sic.*] and a single consciousness; all accents are gathered together in a single voice.

In the monologic novel, therefore, all uncertainty between consciousnesses or ideas or utterances is ultimately resolved in the single consciousness of the author.

On the other hand, in the polyphonic novel “the most extreme activation of vari-directional accents in double-voiced discourse” becomes of key importance (Bakhtin 1984: 204). Here, “a plurality of voices, after all, is not meant to be eliminated . . . but is meant to triumph”. In this way, words are not bonded merely semantically, but rather, within the polyphonic novel, words become *utterances* and the bonds between them are between autonomous speech acts, completely free of any monologic unifying forces (Bakhtin 1984: 204).

Of particular interest to the current study, as regards discourse in the polyphonic novel, are Bakhtin’s (1984: 195 – 196) comments about the hidden polemic. Bakhtin positions the hidden polemic in the “reflected discourse of another”—that is, in the third type of the third variety of discourse (3c above). It is, therefore, internally dialogised discourse:

In a hidden polemic the author’s discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as is any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other’s discourse on the same theme, at the other’s statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another’s word within the very object itself. The other’s discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another person’s implied words. . . . In a hidden polemic . . . the other’s words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author’s discourse. This radically changes the semantics of the discourse involved: alongside its referential meaning there appears a second meaning—an intentional orientation toward

someone else's words. Such discourse cannot be fundamentally or fully understood if one takes into consideration only its direct referential meaning. The polemical coloration of the discourse appears in other purely language features as well: in intonation and syntactic construction (Bakhtin 1984: 195 – 196).

The internal dialogism of the utterance, therefore, is created between the utterance and another hostile utterance. It could be argued that this type of hostile internal dialogism could be utilised, even within the framework of a monologic novel, in order to, in the finalising plane of the author's intentions, create certain impressions of and attitudes towards the utterance thus polemicalised. The hidden polemic, it could be argued, is the same type of (polemical) internal dialogism with the reader's apperceptive background which Bakhtin (1981: 283) observes in Tolstoy, as seen in the previous section.

Of most particular interest to a study of Achebe's novels, is the idea, overarching all of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, that in a fully polyphonic novel, the multitude of independent voices interacting dialogically create "ruptures" in the monologic plane of the novel (Bakhtin 1984: 18). These ruptures, as zones of productive uncertainty, transition and change, would seem to be a useful tool in the study of an author's representation across the cultural divide.

### **2.5.3 Usefulness of the concepts of "dialogism" and "polyphony"**

The discussion above has sought to demonstrate that Bakhtin's ideas are of value in the current study due to their inherent focus on communication and interaction (dialogism) between and among utterances and ideas. Bakhtin's concepts have the potential to present a fresh and positive perspective on cross-cultural encounters, because they are dedicated to the idea of communication as a social, interanimating dialogue. As Peterson (1995:90) has remarked, "in the current agitated climate of critical theory, Bakhtin's socially positioned, contextualised understanding of signs and communication takes on a reassuring, rather than an abysmal, open-endedness."

Where the previous concepts of character typology, and a tendency in some postcolonial theory towards a binary representation of characters present certain limits in their ability to analyse character, Bakhtin's concepts provide a means by which to analyse even the ideological positioning of a character in a highly nuanced, non-reductionist manner.

## **2.6 SYNTHESISED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of the several sections above was to provide a brief outline of the most pertinent aspects of the theories to be applied in the analysis of Achebe's novels. A framework will now be proposed whereby these theories may be used in conjunction with one another to arrive at a conclusion about a character's representation as "binary" or "dialogic".

Firstly, Fishelov's (1990:426) model will be used to classify the non-African characters. This will serve as an early indicator of stereotyping. However, this analysis is likely to yield more fruitful information than merely

the classification of a character as stereotype or not. This is due to Fishelov's (1990:426) particular model, which operates on both the textual and the constructed level. Whether a character is classified as typical on the textual or constructed level, or on both, will lead to nuanced distinctions between various representations of non-African characters through the three novels.

Analysing (mainly) postcolonial-positioned interpretations of each novel will be necessary in order to determine to what extent a binary representation of the cultural encounter is accepted within the scholarship around each novel. As Gandhi (2012:56;59) notes, the cultural environment in novels such as *Things fall apart* and *Arrow of God*, which depict pre-colonial Igbo society and the first encounters with European culture, is vastly different from that depicted in novels set in later periods, when "culture is seen as far more diffuse". Understanding the critical aspects of the discourse surrounding the cultural encounter in each novel will be an important first step in understanding the non-African characters' ideological representation.

Finally, the character's representation in the text will be analysed according to Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and polyphony. First, it will be established whether dialogism is present in the particular passages relating to the non-African characters. It will also be assessed what the nature of this dialogism is, and whether aspects of polemics or the type of internal dialogisation with a reader's presupposed background of the type Bakhtin (1981:283) identifies in Tolstoy are present in the dialogism of a given passage.

Working from the basis of the dialogistic aspects of each passage, attention will then be directed to the question of polyphony in the text. Questions of the characters' consciousness and self-consciousness will be addressed, as well as the position of ideas throughout the novels and specifically the position of the non-African characters' ideas.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion sought to present a theoretical framework by which the non-African characters in Chinua Achebe's three novels, *Things fall apart*, *No longer at ease* and *Arrow of God* will be examined. The ultimate aim of this examination is to decide if there is a shift in the representation of non-African characters across the trilogy. The two positions, from a more stereotypical representation towards a more nuanced one, have been defined above in terms of "binary representations" and "dialogic representations". The former term implies a reductionist approach to characterisation across a cultural divide, one which bases all evaluation of a character by his or her position in the colonised/coloniser opposition, while the latter implies an individualising approach to character, where a multifaceted representation is based on a keen appreciation for the complex human and social elements at work in a novel. The concepts of stereotyped characters compared to individual characters will be drawn from Fishelov's (1990:426) model, as the inclusion of four classifications in this model suggests more flexibility and room for nuance. This nuanced approach to character representation will be furthered through the course of the study by paying attention to elements of dialogism

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and polyphony present within texts or parts of texts. Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism and polyphony are of particular relevance to this study, as they present a new way of dealing with the cultural encounter, one which suggests the inevitability of encountering alien words and ideas, but which also seeks to demonstrate the positive potential such encounters have, and indeed, the absolute necessity of the encounter occurring in order to animate any particular utterance or idea.



## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSIS OF THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *THINGS FALL APART*

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

*Things fall apart* (first published 1958) is the story of Okonkwo, an elder in the Igbo village of Umuofia, who, haunted by the failures and debts of his “unmanly” father Unoka, works hard to achieve success and fame. He accomplishes this by becoming a mighty warrior and by labouring hard on his land. It is his successes which lead to him being asked by Umuofia to take care of Ikemefuna, a hostage from another village, and it is his fear of being weak like his father which drives him to take part in killing Ikemefuna three years later, after the boy’s fate is decreed by the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. After Okonkwo accidentally kills a clansman during a funeral, he takes refuge in his mother’s town, Mbanto. It is while he is living there that the Europeans arrive, first only in tentative rumours, and then in full force with a new religion and a new government. Okonkwo is enraged when his son, Nwoye, joins the missionaries in Mbanto, and even more so when he returns to Umuofia to find that the people there have compromised their traditions to allow the lucrative trading posts set up with the Europeans to continue. After the missionaries sacrilegiously unmask one of the spirits of the ancestors (*egwugwu*) the confrontation between the Europeans and the Umuofians comes to a head; however, Okonkwo is disappointed to find, even after he and several of the other elders of the town have been arrested and humiliated by the District Commissioner for the incident, that the town does not want to provoke outright conflict with the Europeans. Okonkwo, enraged that the village has given up on its heritage, hangs himself.

It is important, when studying *Things fall apart*, to acknowledge its special place in the history of literature. As Achebe’s first novel, it sets out to achieve a task of pioneering importance; *Things fall apart* aims in many ways to reclaim Africa and the African in literature from the stereotypes to which they had been condemned by colonial (western) writers for centuries. Abdullahi (2014: 169) suggests that Achebe aspired to prove that it was not the west which brought culture, philosophy or humanity to Africa, but rather that African societies had their own unique and rich philosophy and culture, and that, contrary to the message frequently portrayed in western colonial literature, African people had dignity.

It is widely agreed that Achebe did achieve this aim in *Things fall apart*. Bandele (2001: xi) notes that “Achebe’s characters do not seek our permission to be human, they do not apologise for being complex (or for being African, or for being human, or for being so extraordinarily alive)”. Murty (2013:90-91) agrees with this assessment, commenting on the authentically human, yet authentically Igbo portrayal of Okonkwo’s character. Nnolim (2011: 48) furthermore adds that “Achebe established the total rehabilitation of the image and dignity of the African personality bruised and damaged by the colonial master”. *Things fall apart* consequently ranks among the first and foremost novels which achieve a real and dignified image of Africa. As

such, it provides an important starting point for a study aiming to investigate fiction's role in an increasingly globalised world.

In order to understand Achebe's approach to the characterisation of characters across a cultural divide from himself, it is thus important to begin by analysing the role he assigns to his non-African characters. In this chapter, a detailed analysis will be presented of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart*. As outlined in Chapter two, this analysis will study each of the sections which deal in-depth with the non-African characters; these sections will first be discussed with reference to Fishelov's (1990:422) character typology, to determine where the non-African characters fall on Fishelov's scale—"pure" individual, individual-like type, type-like individual or "pure" type. The non-Africans' role in the story will then be discussed in light of *Things fall apart*'s place in postcolonial literature, and Achebe's aims in addressing certain inadequacies in the cross-cultural representation in colonial literature, and several reasons presented for why the stereotyping present in these characters' portrayal may be useful. Finally, each of the sections will also be discussed in terms of Bakhtin's (1981; 1984) work on polyphony and dialogism in the novel, in order to understand to what extent the non-African characters are autonomous from the author's own discourse. Conclusions will then be drawn as to the non-African characters' role in *Things fall apart*, and what Achebe's approach to them seems to have been.

### **3.2 PLACING THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS OF *THINGS FALL APART* WITHIN FISHELOV'S CATEGORIES OF CHARACTER**

#### **3.2.1 Analysis of Mr Brown according to Fishelov's character typology**

Mr Brown, the first white man encountered directly in the novel, is twice described in terms of being "the white missionary" (Achebe 2001: 130) or "the white man" (Achebe 2001: 105). When the first missionaries come to Mbanta, the narrator states "There were six of them and one was a white man" (Achebe 2001: 105). (Furthermore, "every man and woman came out to see the white man" (Achebe 2001: 106)—as they might come out to see some interesting or odd natural phenomenon, which increases the stereotypical aspect of "the white man" label.) Later, when the narrative returns to Umuofia with Okonkwo, Brown is again introduced as "Mr Brown, the white missionary" (Achebe 2001: 130). It is easy to deduce from these persistent introductions that Mr Brown will fit into "some simple category" (Fishelov 1990: 426)—that of "the white missionary".

In spite of the evidence pointing to a type on the constructed level, the text presents an almost uniformly positive portrayal of Mr Brown's character. Nevertheless, this positive portrayal remains textually flat. There is frequent reference to his benevolence and his attempts to understand the people in Umuofia. In the initial encounter in Mbanta, Brown "smile[s] benevolently" (Achebe 2001: 106) when asked about the bicycles. In Umuofia, Brown's efforts to keep his converts from offending the clansmen and to understand how the religion of the clan works is described as earning him the praise of the village:

Mr Brown preached against such excess of zeal. Everything was possible, he told his energetic flock, but everything was not expedient. And so Mr Brown came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith. He made friends with some of the great men of the clan and on one of his frequent visits to the neighbouring villages he had been presented with a carved elephant tusk, which was a sign of dignity and rank. One of the great men in that village was called Akunna and he had given one of his sons to be taught the white man's knowledge in Mr Brown's school (Achebe 2001: 130).

Positive attributes in this account include the fact that Brown "trod softly" on the clan's religion, and his use of Scripture to restrain unnecessary and offensive zeal among his converts when he is reported telling them "everything was possible . . . but everything was not expedient."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the clan responds positively to Brown—the gift of the elephant tusk and Akunna's sending his son to be educated at Brown's school constituting the ultimate gestures of respect and acceptance.

Mr Brown's discussions with Akunna are also presented in a positive light. The reader is told that "whenever Mr Brown went to that village he spent long hours with Akunna . . . talking about religion. Neither of them succeeded in converting the other but they learned more about their different beliefs" (Achebe 2001: 130). Mr Brown's willingness to *understand* the religion of the people of Umuofia is suggested as a strong point in his favour (as opposed, for example, to Mr Smith's radical policies in the next chapter).

Although Brown is presented positively, there is nevertheless no evidence within the novel for "textual roundness". A "textually flat" character, according to Fishelov (1990:426), "is depicted from only one perspective, always says the same things, attention is called to only one of the character's traits, etc." Brown's positive portrayal, therefore, although it may have significance in its contrast to Smith's negative portrayal, does not prevent Mr Brown from being textually flat; in a truly individual character, positive traits must be realistically balanced with negative ones in order to create the impression of a "real" person—and thus a rich, rounded textual image of a character.

The textual depictions of Mr Brown are confined to the activities, thoughts and speech expected of "a white missionary". There is a strong suggestion that this could be extended to "benevolent white missionary", but this is no less a type than the first.

Aside from the initial introduction in chapter sixteen, chapter twenty-one provides the only detailed description of Mr Brown, and this, while the narrator remains neutral, provides a one-sided perspective. A reader

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<sup>6</sup> It is of interest, although it does not seem to be significant within the text, that Brown is in fact misquoting in this instance. 1 Corinthians 10:23 states "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." The changing of "lawful" to "possible" could be a result of combining the verse in Corinthians with Mark 9:23: "all things are possible to him that believeth". Nevertheless, there does not seem to be any suggestion that Brown is a poor theologian (and thus misquotes Scripture), nor does the text use the misquote in such a way as to deliberately draw any other point about Brown, his congregation or the clan in Umuofia.

does not, for instance, hear Akunna's opinion of Brown from Akunna himself, nor is there any instance where different characters hold even slightly differing opinions about Brown's personality.

Mr Brown's speech, also, is restricted to one subject. He only ever talks about religion, with occasional examples of speech about his missionary project. Furthermore, his speech about religion is inclined to constantly pointing out where the clan is "wrong"—even his informative discussions with Akunna do not show him asking questions or probing the depths of Akunna's belief, but rather presenting his own beliefs as a contradiction to Akunna's:

"There are no other gods," said Mr Brown. "Chukwu is the only God and all others are false. You carve a piece of wood—like that one (he pointed at the rafters from which Akunna's carved *Ikenga* hung), "and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood."

"Yes," said Akunna. "It is indeed a piece of wood. The tree from which it came was made by Chukwu, as indeed all minor gods were. But He made them for His messengers so that we could approach Him through them. It is like yourself. You are the head of your church."

"No," protested Mr Brown. "The head of my church is God Himself."

"I know," said Akunna, "but there must be a head in this world among men. Somebody like yourself must be the head here."

"The head of my church in that sense is in England."

"That is exactly what I am saying. The head of your church is in your country. . . . Your queen sends her messenger, The District Commissioner. He finds that he cannot do the work alone and so he appoints *kotma* to help him. It is the same with God, or Chukwu. He appoints smaller gods to help Him because His work is too great for one person."

"You should not think of Him as a person," said Mr Brown. "It is because you do so that you imagine He must need helpers. And the worst thing about it is that you give all the worship to the false gods you have created" (Achebe 2001: 131).

Brown here frequently contradicts Akunna, and demonstrates no real appreciation for the culture he has come to "understand". His speech here, as in the rest of the novel, is preoccupied with getting across the message to the people he meets that they worship false gods and that they should turn away from them to worship the Christian God.

Even more telling is the description of Mr Brown's thoughts on these discussions with Akunna. The text states "In this way Mr Brown learned a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia" (Achebe 2001: 132). The text thus maintains Brown's position as type—if the discussion with Akunna seemed open-minded, the text maintains the thoughts of "the white missionary" by demonstrating that the conversations with Akunna merely served to show Mr Brown the best way to infiltrate the clan with his new religion. He

chooses not to mount a “frontal attack” (as Smith does later), but the idea remains that, as a missionary, he is there to mount an “attack” on the religion of the community. The connective “and so” between the phrase “a frontal attack would not succeed” and “he built a school and a little hospital” transforms even these actions into part of Mr Brown’s “white missionary” character—everything he does is in some way to convert members of the clan to Christianity.

The only instance of Mr Brown’s interaction with Okonkwo himself is at the end of chapter twenty-one, where he comes to tell Okonkwo that Nwoye has been sent to college in Umuuru (Achebe 2001: 133). Here again, Mr Brown’s action (going to tell Okonkwo that his son has been sent to the training college) remains the same as all his other actions—bringing his culture to the people of Umuofia. His thoughts, likewise, do not create a new textual facet to his character: “he had hoped that Okonkwo would be happy to hear of it” (Achebe 2001: 133). Mr Brown remains bound in the type of the “white missionary”, not understanding Okonkwo’s desires for his son’s future and certain in the belief that Nwoye’s success in the European culture Mr Brown has succeeded in bringing to Umuofia must please anyone in his family.

Thus, it can be seen that Mr Brown fits the status of “pure” type. The data within the text easily leads to a category in the constructed level in the reader’s minds—the “white missionary” type. The textual description, furthermore, is also flat: Mr Brown always speaks in terms of his religion, he always acts in favour of his religion and he always thinks in terms of helping the people of Umuofia to accept his religion. His character traits—understanding and benevolent, by and large—suggest that he should be seen as a “benevolent white missionary”, but this is likewise a simple category, and does not change Mr Brown’s positioning as “pure” type on Fishelov’s scale. There is, nonetheless, evidence that Mr Brown’s character is seen in a positive light, perhaps by the narrator as well as the people of Umuofia, and this aspect will be returned to within the Bakhtinian analysis of the text.

### **3.2.2 Analysis of Mr Smith according to Fishelov’s character typology**

Mr Brown, it was shown above, fits the stereotype of “the white missionary”, although perhaps with the mitigating label “the benevolent white missionary”. When Mr Brown returns to England in chapter twenty-one, he is replaced with Mr Smith (Achebe 2001: 133 – 134). Mr Smith is “a different kind of man” (Achebe 2001: 134). The textual data, which will be seen to be flat, can be constructed to the category of “militant white missionary”. Mr Smith is presented as a character who is single-minded in his aim to establish the church in the correct doctrine, and is willing to do whatever he must to the people attending the church in order to achieve this aim (Achebe 2001: 134 – 140). As was seen with Mr Brown, the text presents a one-dimensional view of Mr Smith, depicting him only from one perspective, and presenting all his speech, thoughts and actions as being focussed on one subject and in one manner. Mr Smith stands for the purity of the church, and he stands for it militantly.

The text presents very little direct information about Mr Smith. He is always represented from the perspective of the narrator, and even his speech—unlike Mr Brown’s—is largely reported speech, rather than direct dialogue. The report of Mr Smith begins with a description of his attitude towards religion, both Christian and Igbo:

Mr Brown’s successor was the Reverend James Smith, and he was a different kind of man. He condemned openly Mr Brown’s policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal (Achebe 2001: 134).

The language here relies heavily on imagery drawn from combat; Mr Smith sees the world as a “battlefield”, Christians are “locked in mortal conflict” with non-Christians, Mr Smith thinks in terms of “slaying” false prophets or idolaters. This immediately establishes the textual image of Mr Smith which is retained throughout the rest of the novel: the image of the “militant white missionary”.

The phrase “and black was evil” suggests early on the attitude Mr Smith will take on the matter of understanding or appreciating the culture of the people he is living among. The switch in the meaning of the word “black” in the two sentences “He saw things as black and white. And black was evil”, further emphasises the fact that Mr Smith is a “militant *white* missionary”. Although Mr Smith’s race is never emphasised, unlike in the descriptions of Mr Brown, the subtle wordplay here suggests that the text defines him by it no less than it does Mr Brown.

The reported speech of Mr Smith is composed largely of Biblical allusions. Nevertheless, it is notable that Mr Smith chooses to rely on those portions of the Bible which agree with his harsh, militant ideas. Smith alludes to “Narrow is the way and few the number” and “fill[ing] the Lord’s holy temple with an idolatrous crowd clamouring for signs”. Perhaps the most telling of these is Mr Smith’s interpretation of the Biblical account of Jesus clearing the temple; although the Biblical text speaks of Jesus casting out “all them that sold and bought in the temple”—that is, those who had made the temple a place of commerce (Matthew 21:12; see similar wording in Mark 11:15, Luke 19:45 and John 2:13 – 16)—Mr Smith seems to deliberately interpret the verse with an emphasis on the *crowd* with whom Mr Brown has populated the church; ignoring the reference in the text to the improper use of the temple, Mr Smith rather interprets the text as suggesting that large numbers alone are a sign of false or flawed religion: “Our Lord used the whip only once in His Life—to drive the crowd away from His church” (Achebe 2001: 134).

Mr Smith’s response (once again in reported speech) to those who tell him about the *ogbanje* children also has overtones of wrath and conflict: “He replied that such stories were spread in the world by the Devil to lead men astray. Those who believed such stories were unworthy of the Lord’s table” (Achebe 2001: 135). The relegation of the belief about *ogbanje* children to “tales of the Devil” is in the same line with the earlier

assessment that, to Mr Smith, “black was evil”. The word “unworthy”, applied to people who hold the belief, furthers the description of Mr Smith’s views in the paragraph above—he has come to Umuofia, it appears, to cleanse the church of impurities. Mr Smith’s speech, therefore, remains all in the same vein. The reader is not given any information about his conversations except that which involves him speaking about religion, and speaking about it in stringent terms.

The actions which Mr Smith performs within the course of the narrative are also all directed towards this purpose, and in this manner. The third paragraph of chapter twenty-two reports that Smith “suspended” the young woman who let her husband mutilate the body of their dead child when he suspected it was an *ogbanje* (Achebe 2001: 134). His reaction to being told more about *ogbanje* children is that he is “filled with wrath” (Achebe 2001: 134). His action in suspending the woman continues the characterisation already created by the reported speech in the first two paragraphs; Mr Smith having been presented as a militant missionary come to cleanse the church, he proceeds to cleanse the church. His “wrath” when told about the *ogbanje* children reinforces the militant manner in which he approaches the task of evangelism in Umuofia. Where Mr Brown learned about customs, at least in a gentle manner, if not with an open mind, Mr Smith is dismissive of the culture of the clan, and even angry when it creeps into his church. When the church comes into conflict with the people of Umuofia over Enoch’s abomination in unmasking an *egwugwu*, Mr Smith’s first instinct is immediately to send for military help: “Mr Smith would have sent for the District Commissioner and his court messengers, but they had gone on tour on the previous day” (Achebe 2001: 136). Mr Smith’s desire to remain distant from the clan, to remain an outsider bringing good things in without contracting any of the ills which he perceives there, is perhaps most evident in this line. Faced with conflict, Mr Smith’s first thought is to rely on his fellow Englishman and the physical power the District Commissioner possesses.

Mr Smith’s actions when he is forced to face the conflict himself become almost a caricature. Although the reader is told that the Mother of Spirits’s wailing “affected Mr Smith, and for the first time he seemed to be afraid” (Achebe 2001: 136), and that when the band of *egwugwu* rush on the church, “he nearly bolted” (Achebe 2001: 137), Mr Smith himself seems to be aware of his need to act like a missionary. Instead of running away, it seems as though he adopts the outward demeanour of a Christian martyr: “He overcame this impulse and instead of running away he went down the two steps that led up to the church and walked towards the approaching spirits”; the *egwugwu* are surprised by Smith’s “unexpected composure” (Achebe 2001: 137). In these sections, it could be argued that Mr Smith has himself adopted a stereotypical role, because he believes this is how missionaries faced with hostile heathens ought to behave. The category of “defending missionary” into which he fits is adopted by himself in exaggerated manner, creating a caricature that is quite humorous.

However, once Smith confronts the *egwugwu*, he seems to abandon his assumed attitude of martyrdom, and to return to the speech and attitude that characterise him throughout:

Mr Smith said to his interpreter: "Tell them to go away from here. This is the house of God and I will not live to see it desecrated."

Okeke interpreted wisely to the spirits and leaders of Umuofia: "The white man says he is happy you have come to him with your grievances, like friends. He will be happy if you leave the matter in his hands" (Achebe 2001: 138 – 139).

The marked distinction between what Mr Smith says and Okeke's "wise" interpretation serves to further highlight Mr Smith in the type of "militant white missionary". Firstly, he speaks angrily and abruptly, which, as Okeke's interpretation shows, is not the custom in Umuofia, and especially not when addressing the spirits; nevertheless, because he is "white", Mr Smith does not adhere to or care about the customs of Umuofia. Smith also speaks authoritatively, as though he has the ultimate word on what will happen in the case. Okeke interprets his words instead humbly, in the form of a request. Mr Smith's belief that he is the authority in the scenario is in keeping with the "militant white missionary" type—if "black is evil", the white missionary is always right and the uneducated heathen are naturally subordinate to him, and it is his responsibility to stand strongly against such attacks as the one presented here.

Mr Smith, therefore, also fulfils the requirements for a "pure" type according to Fishelov's definition. His presentation in the text is one-dimensional, always portraying him as speaking, acting and thinking on only one topic and in only one manner. These textual indicators can be interpreted on the constructed level to yield the category "militant white missionary", leaving Mr Smith a "pure" type.

### 3.2.3 Analysis of the District Commissioner according to Fishelov's character typology

Of the three non-African characters represented in *Things fall apart*, the District Commissioner is without doubt the most despicable, and the text is sure to leave readers in no doubt of this fact. For example, chapter twenty-three opens with Okonkwo's growing happiness as he feels that finally the people of Umuofia are going to act to defend their culture; this passage ends when the fourth paragraph begins "*Then* the District Commissioner returned from his tour" (Achebe 2001: 140). The use of the word *then* immediately signals to the reader that the District Commissioner is going to be the end of Okonkwo's happiness.

The character of the District Commissioner does, nevertheless, pose some significant questions when one analyses him according to Fishelov's typology. Firstly, he is never named; he remains "the District Commissioner" throughout. In this way the text, in a sense, hands the reader the category into which to place the character—the category of "District Commissioner". However, unlike Brown or Smith, there are several lines of the text which are focalised through the District Commissioner's own point-of-view (including the closing lines of the novel itself). On a theoretical level, this would seem to qualify him as "textually round", since he is presented from more than one perspective. However, a close analysis of the sections which are in the District Commissioner's point-of-view yields no new aspect to his character; the narration in his point-of-view is, if anything, more one-dimensional than the rest of the narration concerning him, as will be seen shortly.



Consequently, in spite of the inclusion of his point-of-view, there are neither textual indicators nor constructional conclusions which can categorise the District Commissioner as anything other than “pure” type.

The “simple category” (Fishelov 1990: 426) into which the District Commissioner falls is that of an administrator—specifically a hectoring, patronising administrator. The title “District Commissioner” does in many ways summarise his character from beginning to end. The character throughout the novel, from his introduction in chapter twenty-three to the end of the book, speaks, thinks and acts *as* a “District Commissioner”. The text does not give any indication of what he thinks or how he behaves outside of his office.

The District Commissioner’s approach to interaction with the people of Umuofia is very different from that of Smith or Brown. He employs flattery and speaks always as though he is a great blessing to the people, while persistently acting in ways which suggest that he does not really regard the Umuofians as people at all, and has no qualms about affronting their dignity, ignoring their own system of government or interfering in their affairs (see Achebe 2001: 140; 141; 142; 144). The text seems to suggest that the difference between the District Commissioner’s approach and Smith’s and Brown’s methods (which, although they are voiced differently, nevertheless hold the same basic premise) is the District Commissioner’s role as a member of the government, as opposed to Brown’s and Smith’s as missionaries. On the one hand, it would appear, the District Commissioner wants to give the appearance of one government working with another, while on the other he has come to impose British rule on the people in Umuofia. Smith and Brown, on the other hand, are under no obligation to seek any formal relationship with the leaders of Umuofia, but nevertheless are there to preach a religion which upholds peace, as witnessed in Smith’s decision not to use physical force in the confrontation with the *egwugwu* (Achebe 2001: 136).

In both his speech and his actions, the District Commissioner is continually presented in terms of this duplicity. This is immediately signalled when, after Smith comes to tell him about the incident when the *egwugwu* burnt down the church, the District Commissioner “sent his sweet-tongued messenger to the leaders of Umuofia asking them to meet him in his headquarters” (Achebe 2001: 140). The adjective “sweet-tongued” applied to the messenger serves to characterise the message he gives as well; although the District Commissioner “asks” and there is a sense of equality in the word “meet” (as well as in “palaver” in the next line), the message is rendered suspicious by its “sweet-tongued” messenger.

Once the meeting takes place, the District Commissioner continues to present language which suggests equality and friendliness:

“I have asked you to come,” began the Commissioner, “because of what happened during my absence. I have been told a few things, but I cannot believe them until I have heard your own side. Let us talk about it like friends and find a way of ensuring that it does not happen again.”

Ogbuefi Ekwueme rose to his feet and began to tell the story.

“Wait a minute,” said the Commissioner. “I want to bring in my men so that they too can hear your grievances and take warning. Many of them come from distant places and although they speak your tongue they are ignorant of your customs. James! Go and bring in the men” (Achebe 2001: 141).

The manner in which the District Commissioner opens the meeting—“I cannot believe them until I have heard your own side”—is fair and just, and the reasons he provides for bringing in his “men” also seem eminently reasonable. The fact that the District Commissioner is willing to use the language of trust, honour and justice to mask his intention of arresting the men out of hand shows the narrow-minded outlook he has on African culture, and the double standards which he applies to the Umuofians as opposed to the treatment one presumes he would accord a fellow European. Here, the textual indicators in the discrepancy between what he says and what he does serve to characterise the District Commissioner in terms of a repressive, authoritarian colonial administrator.

The speech which the District Commissioner gives to the men once they are arrested furthers this character trait:

“We shall not do you any harm,” said the District Commissioner to them later, “if only you agree to cooperate with us. We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen. I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people’s houses and their place of worship. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world. I have decided that you will pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries” (Achebe 2001: 141).

Both the condescending tone of this speech (“we shall come to your rescue”; “we will not allow you to ill-treat others”; “just as it is done in my own country under a great queen”; “That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world”), as well as its clear assumption of authority, add to the perspective of the District Commissioner as a man who does not really consider those he has come to rule as “people”, and furthermore as someone committed to imposing British rule—traits which also seem inherent in his title “District Commissioner”.

Once the six leaders of Umuofia have been arrested, there follows a striking juxtaposition between the District Commissioner’s orders and the actions of his men. The District Commissioner, leaving the guardroom, “told the court messengers . . . to treat the men with respect because they were the leaders of Umuofia. They said ‘Yes, sir’, and saluted” (Achebe 2001: 142). Nevertheless, once the District Commissioner is gone, the messengers humiliate and abuse the prisoners (Achebe 2001: 142). Two interpretations of this discrepancy seem possible: the first being that the District Commissioner is so careful not to interact too intimately with any African, including his messengers, that he remains oblivious to their misuse of authority. This interpretation may be corroborated by the fact that he does not seem aware that his messengers add fifty bags

of cowries for themselves to the fine he imposes on the prisoners (Achebe 2001: 143). The second interpretation is that the District Commissioner is continuing his habit of saying what is acceptable while all the time acting (or condoning actions) which are the opposite. In this way, he may tell the messengers to treat the men well so that he himself is not culpable, while all the time knowing the messengers will ill-treat the prisoners, which will teach them a lesson—which, ultimately is his goal. Whichever interpretation is taken, however, neither one provides a new perspective on the District Commissioner; in both instances he would be a condescending and cruel administrator.

Even when the District Commissioner seems to lose his administrative purpose and adopt some interest in the people of Umuofia, he is not in fact demonstrating any qualities at variance with the type into which he fits. Coming upon the body of Okonkwo, and being asked to take it down, as the men of Umuofia cannot due to their customs, “the District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs” (Achebe 2001: 151). Although the idea of the District Commissioner allowing himself to become a “student” of the customs in Umuofia, and the questions he asks relating to these customs may seem positive—as Brown’s discussions with Akunna were, for instance—the word used to describe the object of the District Commissioner’s studies is “primitive customs”. This does not suggest that the District Commissioner in fact wants to know or understand the culture, but rather that he is subjecting the “primitive” people he has come to govern to an anthropological curiosity. The reason for his studies is revealed later in the chapter—he is writing a book, and it is called *The pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger* (Achebe 2001: 151 – 152). The fact that he becomes a student only to study how to “pacify” those he considers “primitive” alters the originally positive light in which one might read of the District Commissioner becoming a “student of primitive customs” back to the District Commissioner’s type as authoritarian, condescending colonist.

The sections in the District Commissioner’s own point-of-view are particularly interesting in the way that, although they supposedly represent his own internal monologue, the textual representation they create only furthers the type already created in the previous pages. The first instance is when the District Commissioner, arriving at Okonkwo’s compound to arrest him following his murder of one of the court messengers, is faced with Obierika’s evasive answer:

The Commissioner did not understand what Obierika meant when he said, ‘perhaps your men will help us’. One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words, he thought (Achebe 2001: 150).

Here, the Commissioner is presented with a situation he does not comprehend. His reflection on the situation shows him casting all the blame on the people he does not understand—whom he characterises to himself as “these people”, thus continuing his strain of condescension and othering towards the people of Umuofia. Furthermore, the Commissioner becomes frustrated with the “infuriating habit” the Umuofians have of a

“love of superfluous words”. This is in direct contrast with the remark made earlier in the novel, “Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe 2001: 6). The District Commissioner here, although his own internal monologue is being presented to the reader, remains oblivious to the richness of the culture around him, and only finds it infuriating.

The second section in the District Commissioner’s own point-of-view is the final paragraph of the novel, which bears some more thorough analysis:

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 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* (Achebe 2001: 151 – 152).

There are several aspects in this passage which reinforce, more strongly than anything before, the character of the District Commissioner within the type of bullying and condescending colonial administrator. Although this passage is in his point-of-view, instead of humanising him in any way, it has rather the opposite effect. The first aspect is the pompous tone of “in the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilisation to different parts of Africa”, which is based on the same premise as his speech to Okonkwo and the other leaders when he arrested them and told them “We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy” (Achebe 2001: 141). The District Commissioner thinks the people of Africa are in need of civilisation, government and culture, and he is “toiling” (which implies self-sacrifice and dedication on his part) to give these things to them.

The second aspect of the passage which is notable in its reinforcement of the District Commissioner’s character is his attitude to the labour of cutting down a body from a tree. The Commissioner considers it “undignified”, but more importantly thinks a District Commissioner should not be involved in the activity because it “would give the natives a poor opinion of him”. Here again, the District Commissioner’s view of the people among whom he is living as “primitive” and barely human returns. He is careful to act in such a way as to maintain control of the people over whom he rules, but is satisfied that the idea of “native” or “primitive” is sufficient to account for them as individuals, as a culture and as a society.

Finally, the District Commissioner’s response to Okonkwo’s suicide is a prime example of how he fits into the type of a narrow-minded colonist. The most outstanding example is perhaps the Commissioner’s reflection “the story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading”. In

this short, dismissive sentence, the Commissioner assesses and dismisses Okonkwo's life and death. This is a particularly striking piece of dramatic irony for the reader, who has watched Okonkwo's rise and fall, witnessing the multitude of differing motivations, fears, strengths and weaknesses which culminate in the final tragic suicide. The District Commissioner, who does not know or understand why or how Okonkwo came to kill the messenger or hang himself, is nevertheless confident that he can write about the incident in his book. Once again, he assumes authority; just as he assumed he had the right to rule the people of Umuofia, he now assumes he has the right to tell their stories in his own manner. The District Commissioner furthermore thinks that Okonkwo's story could make up "perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph", thus belittling the tragedy even further, and reinforcing his own complacent view of an Africa populated with helpless, primitive natives who need him to bring civilisation to them—in short, the his dismissal of Okonkwo's story as only meriting "a reasonable paragraph" cements the textually flat portrayal of the District Commissioner. Although the District Commissioner is given his own point-of-view for a few lines, he nevertheless remains a "pure" type on Fishelov's scale. In spite of the sections which are written from his perspective, this perspective does not add any new layers to the already created type of "bullying and condescending colonist" which has already been attached to him. In fact, it could be argued that the District Commissioner's own perspective is only used to enhance this type, rather than with the purpose of giving the reader the Commissioner's side of the story, as it were. Thus, as all the textual details are one-dimensional, presenting the District Commissioner speaking and acting always as a patronising or authoritarian colonist, and as these textual indicators easily yield the category of "authoritarian and condescending colonist" on the constructed level, the District Commissioner is also a "pure" type.

#### **3.2.4 The non-African characters in *Things fall apart* according to Fishelov's typology**

The analysis above demonstrates that all three of the key non-African characters in *Things fall apart* fall into the "pure" type category on Fishelov's (1990:426) scale. "Pure" types, according to Fishelov (1990: 426) are both textually and constructionally flat. This means that there is "a one-dimensional appearance of a character in the text; the character is depicted from only one perspective, always says the same things, attention is called to only one of the character's traits, etc.". Furthermore, "constructionally flat characters stand for some simple category (moral, social, aesthetic, etc.) into which we can fit the character question after constructing data from various levels of the text (dialogue, description, action, environment, and so forth)".

As was seen above, Mr Brown fits the category "benevolent white missionary". Although he is portrayed positively seeking to understand the culture of the clan in Umuofia and the other villages, this is merely a benevolent method to draw people to Christianity and his church (Achebe 2001: 132).

Mr Smith, it was demonstrated, fits the category "militant white missionary". All his speech and action shows him agitating aggressively for a stricter rule within the church and a more militant approach to dealing with the non-believing clan (Achebe 2001: 134 – 140).

Although the District Commissioner has a short section within his own point-of-view, it was demonstrated that this did not, in fact, provide another perspective on his character, but rather serves to reinforce his typical adherence to the category of “colonial administrator” (Achebe 2001: 140 – 143; 149; 150 – 152).

Pickrel (1988: 189), in his work on the subject of flat and round characters, makes an interesting suggestion that flat characters—or characters who would fit into the categories of “pure” type or individual-like type, in Fishelov’s terms—seem to be frequently endowed with self-conscious names which indicate “something about their bearers”. Pickrel (1988: 189) speaks mainly about the absurd names which some English novelists chose to give their flat characters; however, it could be argued that Achebe’s use of extremely generic names for the missionaries is a technique in the same vein. Neither Mr Brown nor Mr Smith is in any substantial way an individual character. They each stand for a different kind of missionary, and as such represent all white missionaries throughout the colonised world. Their status as representatives of a category would seem to be emphasised by how generic their names are. This argument seems to be supported by the fact that the District Commissioner, who represents to an even greater degree a whole body instead of a single individual, does not even receive a name throughout the novel, thus making it impossible for the reader to really respond to him as a person—as one might with Okonkwo or Nwoye, for instance.

The use of flat or stereotypical characters, as noted specifically by Pickrel (1988: 182), has long been employed by writers to fulfil various important tasks within a novel. Therefore, it is important to assess what might be a writer’s reason for using stereotyped characters and what may possibly be gained from their use. Fishelov (1990:427) states that “all four categories [“pure” individual, type-like individual, individual-like type and “pure” type] are purely descriptive; there is no point in claiming that the “pure” individual is in any sense superior to the “pure” type. Both of them have their places and functions in the heterogeneous literary scene, and each can be highly effective and successful in his own context”. As will be explored in the next section, the stereotyping of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* seems particularly appropriate within the context of the book’s place as one of the first novels by a West-African to be written in English (Bandeled 2001: xi). Seen in the context of fulfilling a function, as suggested by Fishelov (1990: 427) above, the fact that all three non-European characters are “pure” types seems to indicate that their role within the novel is either to show in sharp relief the individual nature of characters like Okonkwo or Obierika, or as some form of “writing back” against the dark image of Africa which was first propagated by western writers such as Conrad, and which Achebe found so disturbing (see Abdullahi 2014: 169; T. Kortenaar 1995: 35; Osei-Nyame 1999: 149). The function of this stereotyped portrayal of the non-African characters is most appropriately explored within the context in which Achebe wrote *Things fall apart*, and the political and artistic reasons behind it are worth exploring in a little detail.

### 3.3 WRITING BACK TO THE CULTURAL ENCOUNTER: POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE INCLUSION OF STEREOTYPICAL NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *THINGS FALL APART*

Any reading of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* would have to take into account the evidence which suggests that Achebe's aim in his first novel was, at least to some extent, related to a need to correct African as well as western ideas about both the complexity of African societies, and the possibility of fully individualised African characters in novels. In light of Achebe's own aims in *Things fall apart*, and the context in which he was writing, several reasons can be proposed for the use of types for the non-African characters.

There appears to be consensus that Achebe, in writing *Things fall apart*, was addressing a very specific problem in western literature—one which had a profound effect on his own culture. In speaking of Achebe's role in teaching his African readers about their past, Quayson (1997: 142) posits that "Achebe himself saw his writing as a pedagogical tool in the effort to give his African readers a sense of the coherence of their traditional past". This is corroborated by Gandhi (2012: 56) and Osei-Nyame (1999:148), who both quote Achebe's desire to teach his (African) readers that their history was not one of backward savagery; Abdullahi (2014: 169) adds that "the basis of Achebe's argument is that African people 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, and that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity." There is also evidence which suggests that Achebe was writing not merely to invoke a sense of dignity in his African readers, but to give the western world a new, true "image of Africa" (Nnolim 2011: 39). This is especially evident in the literature which suggests links between *Things fall apart* and Conrad's *Heart of darkness*. Gandhi (2012: 56) suggests that Achebe's writing had immense significance in world literature, stating that "Achebe's desire to impress cultural patterns in the novels set before colonisation stems from the necessity to counter stereotypes of Africa, the so-called 'heart of darkness'". Osei-Nyame (1999: 149) further states that part of Achebe's purpose in writing was "challenging and displacing the narratives of colonialist writers like Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad". *Things fall apart* consequently has a major role to play in the early stages of writing back to the insultingly stereotypical portrayal of Africa, African cultures and African peoples in western colonial writings (see also Achebe 2016: 23).

Having identified the role *Things fall apart* plays in the establishing of an authentic representation of Africa, and in reclaiming African culture from stereotypes imposed upon it by the west, several explanations for Achebe's own use of typical non-African characters can be proposed. The first of these is the idea of the reversal of the trend in western literature which prevailed from the earliest cultural encounters between the west and Africa. T. Kortenaar (1995:35) suggests that Achebe's non-African characters are "mildly satirized" and "relegated to a somewhat static background", in what he calls "a reversal of the strategy of imperialist texts". A "reversal of the strategy" of colonial texts and authors could be useful to make a political point;

nevertheless, it seems insufficient, as an end in itself, to account for the use of stereotypical European characters in *Things fall apart*. Rather, several ways in which the reversal of the strategy creates interest in the text itself, and enhances the portrayal of the African characters, can be identified.

One of the ways in which this “reversal of strategy” is used in *Things fall apart* is the way that the typical characterisation of the non-African characters is used as a juxtaposition against which the individuality of the African characters and their culture is thrown into sharp relief. Achebe (2016: 15) himself identified this as a strategy in western literature about Africa which had to be countered. He identified “the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will manifest” (Achebe 2016: 15). He goes on to say:

Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. . . . Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate (Achebe 2016: 25).

Apart from the psychological implications highlighted here, Achebe draws attention to the literary benefits of setting up a foil in order that, by comparison with another, one character or group of characters may be seen with sharper clarity. The use of a stereotyped set of European characters is peculiarly useful in this regard in *Things fall apart*. It is firstly important to note that the European characters do not make an appearance until the end of Part two of the novel; this provides the reader with sufficient time to become fully acquainted with Okonkwo and with the setting of Umuofia, with its unique and vivid cultural practices, as well as with the levels of assent which are already present within the society (such as Obierika’s questioning or Nwoye’s deep disturbance at the death of Ikemefuna). When the non-African characters appear, there is nothing in their presentation, in the worldview they demonstrate or in their interaction with the main characters of the novel which does not fit a typical category. They come, as it were, with the western image of Africa, as exemplified in Conrad, already defining every aspect of their character. Alongside the narrow-minded, essentialist non-African characters, the individuality of the African characters, the rich complexity of their culture and philosophy and the three-dimensional aspect of their society provided by varying levels of assent within it are seen with more clarity and appreciation.

A second purpose for the use of typical non-African characters is the way Achebe is thus able to demonstrate some key points about the representation of cultures in novels. Quayson (1997: 137) quotes Slemon saying that postcolonial theory, since Said’s *Orientalism*, is not so much interested in *what happened*, but rather, “it is with the concept of colonialism ‘as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation’ that the field is mostly concerned.” In line with this argument, it could be suggested that, in *Things fall apart*, the non-African characters are stereotyped in order to make a critical point about the how



character representation works in fiction. Achebe demonstrates that characters who might, in Conrad or Cary, have been deeply individual characters, can be represented as the face of a mass idea just as easily as the Congolese whom Conrad reduced to a nameless group of savages with little language or no human expression (see Achebe 2016: 18 – 19). This draws attention to the idea that the representation of Africans in western literature was not recorded fact, but rather, a representation through a predetermined lens, and a remarkably uninformed lens, as Achebe (2016: 24) points out. Achebe (2016: 23) notes that “I will not accept just any traveler’s [*sic.*] tales solely on the grounds that I have not made the journey myself. I will not trust the evidence even of a man’s very eyes when I suspect them to be as jaundiced as Conrad’s”. Thus, in portraying a stereotypical view of the non-African characters, Achebe likewise is showing these characters and their culture through a lens, frequently a lens which the central characters might adopt towards them. In this way, he is able to hint that representation of another is always done through a set of presuppositions, framed by cultural experiences and expectations, a fact which Conrad and other western writers did not seem to take into account at the time.

Achebe goes further, however, directly demonstrating this point about representation when he satirises the District Commissioner’s own point of view, describing the Commissioner’s thought that “the story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself” would make a “reasonable paragraph” in his book on the “Pacification of the Primitive Tribes” (Achebe 2001: 151 – 152). As noted in the previous section, by the time the reader comes to the District Commissioner’s summary of Okonkwo’s life, he or she has been immersed in the trajectory of Okonkwo’s story, understanding the multiple factors and pressures which have played a part each step along the way. The reader is therefore struck by the simplistic summary which the Commissioner is happy to give to the rest of the world, never doubting his authority to interpret and tell Okonkwo’s story. By demonstrating representation at work within the characters’ minds, Achebe provides the reader with two lenses on Okonkwo’s story—that of the narrator and that of the District Commissioner—drawing attention to the fact that representation of any one person or culture is as much dependent on who is telling the story as it is on facts. The use of stereotypical characters in this instance can be said to serve the function of demonstrating how representation depends on the person telling the story as much as it depends on how much he or she knows about the people they seek to represent.

Both of these reasons are closely related to a third possible purpose for the use of typical non-African characters, which is that, by representing the dominant western image of Africa on the page, in the form of the missionaries Brown and Smith, and the District Commissioner, Achebe is able to enter into a direct dialogue with it. In stereotyping the non-African characters, Achebe does not merely “settle score with Conrad”, as Abdullahi (2014: 169) suggests, but also demonstrates how narrow-minded the views espoused by Conrad and other writers of the colonial era truly were. The juxtaposition referred to above shows the contrast between the complex nuances of the situation, and the smug narrow-mindedness of the European explanation for the situation. Because the non-African characters are presented as stereotypes, they could be said to

stand, not as individual characters, but as examples of a particular view; by contrasting this view to the story as it plays out for Okonkwo and his family and for the rest of the clan, Achebe is able to prove it false. The fact that the characters could be said to be representative of a view, and that Achebe's portrayal of Okonkwo and the people of Umuofia and Mbanta directly engages this view and refutes it, there is evidence that Achebe is setting up a certain amount of dialogism between these views, as will be further examined in the following section.

Looking at the use of typical non-African characters in *Things fall apart*, it can be concluded that the use of a stereotype is certainly a reversal of the attitude western colonial writers adopted towards African characters. It is clear, however, that the use of this reversal serves a specific function, firstly as a foil against which the vibrancy of characters like Okonkwo is better displayed; beside the narrow-mindedness of this stereotypical view, the Igbo culture's complexity is shown in richer detail. Furthermore, the use of types for non-African characters presents an interesting example of how representation works in the cultural encounter. In the final instance, the usefulness of typical non-African characters is in the way they are able to represent a common view of Africa, which Achebe is then able to dialogise with through characters like Okonkwo and Obierika.

### 3.4 A BAKHTINIAN ANALYSIS OF THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *THINGS FALL APART*

Across the trilogy, starting with *Things fall apart*, moving through *No longer at ease* and culminating in *Arrow of God*, it can be argued that there is a movement from what Bakhtin considers a monologic novel to, in *Arrow of God*, something which appears to be polyphonic almost to the same extent as Bakhtin argues Dostoevsky's novels are. Along with this trend, it will be seen that the cross-cultural interaction changes significantly, as does the attitude both to the cultural "other" and toward the possibility and productivity of a transitional period. It was seen in the previous chapter, and will further be explored in the subsequent two chapters, that Gandhi (2012: 55), after Rosaldo, expressed the postcolonial cultural identity as being full of "borderlands" and "zones of dispute and disorder". It can be argued that the polyphonic novel, envisioning the coexistence of multiple, independent and fully valid consciousnesses, creates "ruptures" in the fabric of the novel's discourse very similar to the "borderlands" proposed within cultural identity by Rosaldo (in Gandhi 2012:55). Rosaldo points out that these borderlands are the site of *productive* tension, and it will be seen how, in the conception of "ruptures" created by the coincidence of several unfinalised voices in the plane of the novel's discourse, a dialogue is created which is indeed productive.

It is necessary to establish first why *Things fall apart* is not a polyphonic novel as Bakhtin conceives it. It will be seen that the plurality of multiple consciousnesses, autonomous of a finalising word from the author, is not present in *Things fall apart*, and that the position of the characters is largely subject to the author's

finalising intentions<sup>7</sup>. This is, if considered against the context of the writing of *Things fall apart*, an understandable outcome; in accordance, perhaps, with the corrective and pedagogical intentions referred to above (Quayson 1997: 142), the novel seems intended to present a fully-formed idea, rather than to explore the possibilities of an open-ended dialogue, which seems to become the preoccupation in *Arrow of God*. This does not mean, however, that Bakhtin's theory of polyphony or dialogism has nothing to contribute to a reading of *Things fall apart*. On the contrary, the concept of dialogic discourse produces some very useful ways of considering *Things fall apart's* place, specifically in how Achebe seems to achieve both his "pedagogical" intentions (Quayson 1997: 142; Gandhi 2012: 56; Abdullahi 2014: 178), as well as reversal of colonial strategies and addressing some of his concerns with regard to colonial writings about Africa (T. Kortenaar 1995: 35; Achebe 2016: 23).

If Bakhtin's theory of polyphony is applied to the sections of *Things fall apart* which deal with the non-African characters, it becomes immediately clear that the plurality of multiple consciousnesses, unmediated by a finalising word from the author (Bakhtin 1984: 5; 6) is not present in this novel. The conditions for a fully valid, autonomous voice Bakhtin (1984: 5) stipulates as follows:

The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of [the writer's] finalizing artistic vision . . . the direct and fully weighted signifying power of the characters' words destroys the monologic plane of the novel and calls forth an unmediated response—as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word. (Bakhtin 1984: 5)

Bakhtin here proposes that, if a novel is truly polyphonic, the characters' ideas and thoughts are not merely tools to help the author achieve his or her final ideological proposition, but rather that the characters' ideas are allowed full freedom, even to contradict the author's ideological position, without being finalised in the end by the author's ideological judgement. This is related to Bakhtin's (1984: 47) proposal, referred to in the discussion in Chapter two above, that Dostoevsky, in writing the polyphonic novel, is not so much concerned with "how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself." Bakhtin (1984: 6) also quotes Meier-Gräfe as saying, similarly, that in Dostoevsky, "we . . . enter into discussions with Raskolnikov, and not only with him, but with every bit-player as well." Against this proposition, one can examine the District Commissioner's final contemplations at the close of *Things fall apart*:

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 learnt number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a dead man from the tree.

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<sup>7</sup> The question of a novel's being more or less polyphonic is not one of merit; rather, the model is used in this study to assess the value of polyphony in addressing characterisation across a cultural divide.

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* (Achebe 2001: 151 – 152).

As has been noted above, this passage is written as though from the perspective of the District Commissioner, and yet it is by no means his own, autonomous voice which is presented here. The previous section discussed the fact that the juxtaposition of the District Commissioner's quick judgement of Okonkwo's situation with the outworking of Okonkwo's story in the rest of the novel is used to demonstrate not a fully autonomous voice on the matter, but rather as a way of showing the narrowmindedness of the District Commissioner and his inability to perceive or appreciate the culture of the people he presumes to judge. Furthermore, it was suggested that the District Commissioner, as a type, rather than an individual, stands for a certain class or category of people, and his views therefore are generally applicable to people of that category. The views presented here, therefore, are not Achebe presenting the world to the District Commissioner, and allowing the reader to converse and argue with the District Commissioner directly; here, Achebe presents the District Commissioner to the world, his views already formed and presented moreover with ironic overtones which suggest to the reader what the expected response should be.

The passage is riddled with irony; although it is supposedly in the point of view of the District Commissioner, there are ironic constructions which mock him and his views even as they are presented. For example, "in the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learnt number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a dead man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him." Here, the District Commissioner's presumed sacrifice, connoted by the phrase "the many years in which he had *toiled*" is made somewhat ridiculous by his refusal to undertake "undignified" tasks. This care for dignity is further mocked by the notion that performing "undignified" tasks is bad for the administration, as it "would give the natives a poor opinion of him"—both ridiculing the District Commissioner's concern for his personal dignity and the apparently noble excuse which he suggests for this ("would give the natives a poor opinion of him"); the latter also reveals his need to maintain the hierarchy he is imposing on the colonised peoples. Furthermore, these ironies suggest that what is being presented here is not the character's own autonomous consciousness. Rather, the ideas are presented as ideas characteristic of a particular type of character, and the author uses the presentation of these ideas to suggest a stereotypical understanding of the character to the reader.

In consequence, the reader's response is not unmediated. The careful juxtaposition, which places the District Commissioner's summary of Okonkwo's life at the end of the novel, after the reader has formed a clear understanding of Okonkwo's character and motivations, suggests that Achebe is calling forth a specific response from the reader. The District Commissioner dismisses Okonkwo as being worth no more than "a reasonable paragraph". The reader, who has been given reason to feel that Okonkwo's story is more complex than the District Commissioner's summary, is therefore prompted to dismiss the District Commissioner.

Bakhtin comments that in a polyphonic novel

A hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself and his word is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters (Bakhtin 1984: 7).

This passage further corroborates the suggestion that the characterisation of the District Commissioner presented at the end of *Things fall apart* is not the presentation of an independent voice. The District Commissioner's "voice" in the extract above is one of his characteristics—indeed, it is his only characteristic. It furthers the characterisation of him as fitting the type of a "colonial administrator", and that stereotyping, it could be argued, is the main function of presenting this section of internal monologue. This finalised voice, mediated entirely by the author, can be contrasted with a few sections of the novel in which the voices of Okonkwo, Obierika and Unoka become fully valid and autonomous.

The early description of Unoka is preceded by the declaration that Okonkwo "had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father" (Achebe 2001: 3):

Unoka, for that was his father's name, had died ten years ago. In his day he was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. If any money came his way and it seldom did, he immediately bought gourds of palm-wine, called round his neighbours and made merry. He always said that whenever he saw a dead man's mouth he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime. Unoka was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbour some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts.

He was tall but very thin and had a slight stoop. He wore a haggard and mournful look except when he was drinking or playing on his flute. He was very good on his flute, and his happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest when the village musicians brought down their instruments, hung above the fireplace. Unoka would play with them, his face beaming with blessedness and peace. Sometimes another village would ask Unoka's band and their dancing *egwugwu* to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes. They would go to such hosts for as long as three or four markets, making music and feasting. Unoka loved the good fare and the good fellowship, and he loved this season of the year, when the rains had stopped and the sun rose every morning with dazzling beauty. And it was not too hot either, because the cold and dry harmattan was very severe and a dense haze hung on the atmosphere. Old men and children would then sit round log fires, warming their

bodies. Unoka loved it all, and he loved the first kites that returned with the dry season, and the children who sang songs of welcome to them. He would remember his own childhood, how he had often wandered around looking for a kite sailing leisurely against the blue sky. As soon as he found one he would sing with his whole being, welcoming it back from its long, long journey, and asking it if it had brought home any lengths of cloth (Achebe 2001: 3 – 4).

This passage presents Okonkwo's father, Unoka, not directly from Unoka's point of view, but in such a way that his own voice seems to be presented, in opposition to Okonkwo's judgement of him. The early lines seem to be in what Bakhtin (1981: 303 – 304) terms the concealed voice of another—that is, the undisclosed presentation of another's thoughts or words, in a style which is alien to the author. In this instance, the concealed voice is that of general opinion. Unoka is "of course" a debtor, and his speech about eating what one has in one's lifetime is reported with a tone of tolerant amusement. The second paragraph, however, seems to dispense with the concealed voice of another, and to present a more direct portrait of Unoka. Here, the idea of his "failure" is called into question by his love for music, for the dry season, for feasting and communal dancing. His memories of childhood are also presented, in opposition to Okonkwo's word about him—"failure". The reader, therefore, is forced to deal with Unoka himself, not with Okonkwo's opinion of him, or with his social status as a debtor; in dealing with Unoka himself, the reader must make their own conclusions about not only his word, but also about Okonkwo's and the general opinion, thus interacting and debating with the characters in an autonomous fashion. In this passage, therefore, Achebe presents something of the polyphony identified by Bakhtin, creating a sense of the possibilities of ruptures in the monologic plane of the novel, which are only fully explored in *Arrow of God*.

However, not even in the character of Okonkwo is the monologic plane of *Things fall apart* ever fully abandoned. Although multiple passages allow the reader to interact directly with Okonkwo or, to a lesser extent, Obierika or Nwoye, the ending of the novel reinstates the finalising authority of the author's word. In this respect, it is of great significance to compare the endings of the three novels. Although, as will be shown in the next chapter, *No longer at ease* has perhaps the most directly finalising ending, the tragedy of Okonkwo's life represents a peculiar aspect of finalisation, and one which is directly contrasted with that of Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*. Bakhtin (1984: 116) identifies, within the menippea, the first use of unusual psychological states, such as insanity, to explore "moral-psychological" problems. The peculiar experimental advantage of exploring insanity, Bakhtin (1984: 116) suggests, is that insanity "destroy[s] the tragic wholeness of a person and his fate: the possibilities of another life are revealed in him, he loses his finalized quality and ceases to mean only one thing". Okonkwo's fate, although he commits suicide, it could be argued, is not a result of a passion bordering on madness. Okonkwo, as Quayson (2011 36) suggests, is "defeated by certainty"; his suicide is not brought on by passionate raging, but seems instead to be his last, calculated act of preserving within himself the cultural norms which he has pursued all his life. Furthermore, there is no speculation or re-narration of the end of his life, as there is of Ezeulu's madness in *Arrow of God*. The District Commissioner's

smug summary is not a contrary opinion, as the varying explanations of Ezeulu's madness are; rather, it is merely a characterisation of the District Commissioner, and does not alter a reader's (or another character's) view of Okonkwo or Okonkwo's death. Ultimately, therefore, Achebe, finalises the words of the characters in *Things fall apart*.

This finalising act on Achebe's part, and his overall monologic control throughout the rest of the novel, could be seen as fulfilling a necessary function, given the context of the novel, and Achebe's aims, referred to above. In pursuance of these aims, it could be argued that Achebe adopts a polemical approach to dialogue within *Things fall apart*, in much the same way as Bakhtin (1981: 283) suggests Tolstoy does. As discussed in chapter two, Bakhtin proposed that Tolstoy's discourse "polemically invad[ed] the reader's belief and evaluative system, striving to stun and destroy the apperceptive background of the reader's active understanding. . . . This propagandizing impulse sometimes leads to a narrowing-down of heteroglot social consciousness (against which Tolstoy polemicizes) to the consciousness of his immediate contemporary, a contemporary of the day and not of the epoch; what follows from this is a radical concretization of dialogization (almost always undertaken in the service of a polemic)". Furthermore, in his discussion on polyphony, Bakhtin (1984: 196) describes the "hidden polemic", in which the word is constructed with a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word. In the hidden polemic, he suggests, "discourse is directed toward an ordinary referential object, naming it, portraying, expressing, and only indirectly striking a blow at the other's discourse, clashing, as it were, within the object itself" (Bakhtin 1984: 196).

There is reason to suggest that *Things fall apart*, more than the other two novels in the trilogy, is written as a directly polemical discourse. This is due to several aspects. Firstly, the "propagandising impulse" mentioned by Bakhtin with relation to Tolstoy, can be traced through Achebe's intentions in *Things fall apart*, as described by Quayson (1997: 142), as well as by Gandhi (2012: 56) and Osei-Nyame (1999: 149). Furthermore, Achebe's own comments on Conrad suggest that he had definite aims and intentions of correcting the stereotype engendered by colonial writers. Quayson (2011: 32), after Foucault and Bakhtin, describes the possibility of writing to a (hidden) sceptical interlocutor. He furthermore, tracing the sceptical interlocutor through Fanon, remarks on the racialised—white—addressee of Fanon (Quayson 2011: 33 – 34). It could be argued that Achebe, in *Things fall apart*, is likewise addressing a specific hidden addressee—either a type of Conrad or of African readers who had begun to believe colonial lies about their history and heritage, and is writing to directly "stun and destroy" these aspects of his readers' apperceptive backgrounds. The reversal of the strategy of stereotyping noted by T. Kortenaar (1995: 35), for instance, could be an example of his direct strategies to invade his readers' consciousnesses. However, it could also be argued that Achebe, like Tolstoy, had to narrow down some of the heteroglot social consciousness which Bakhtin (1981: 263) claims is vital for full dialogicality. While Achebe does not narrow down the heteroglot social consciousness to that of his immediate contemporary, as Bakhtin (1981: 282) claims Tolstoy does, it does seem that, in *Things fall apart*, Achebe narrows down the heteroglot social consciousness of his readers to the restrictive binary mindset of

colonised/coloniser, in order to demonstrate the rich historical and cultural heritage of the former to both groups (see Abdullahi 2014: 178; Gandhi 2012: 56; Osei-Nyame 1999: 149). This type of reduction of the heteroglot social consciousness, it will be seen, is already far less pronounced, and even disappears, in *Arrow of God*.

The monologic tendency of Achebe's description of non-African characters in *Things fall apart* suggests, as the Fishelov typology has already shown, that in this novel, there is still a tendency toward a "post-colonial" approach—that is, the cross-cultural encounter takes place entirely in the sphere of the colonised/coloniser opposition. The lack of autonomy given the non-African characters' utterances further enhances the typical nature of their characters, giving their words no freedom to stand independently within the novel, and preventing the reader from interacting directly with their words. The ruptures and the borderlands within which identity is discovered and rediscovered in the face of the cultural encounter are here finalised, suggesting a uniform explanation for the outworking of the cultural encounter in the life of Umuofia. This, it will be seen, is very different from the ambivalence created by the unfinalised ending of *Arrow of God*.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter analysed the non-African characters in *Things fall apart*, seeking to establish what Achebe's approach to these characters is at the start of the trilogy. The analysis examined the characters on Fishelov's (1990: 426) typology, before discussing several reasons why stereotyping within the novel was useful in the context of the postcolonial project which *Things fall apart* was engaged in and finally explored aspects of polyphony and dialogism within the text.

The analysis of the non-African characters according to Fishelov's (1990: 426) typology shows that all of them fall into the category of "pure" type. On the textual level, the representation of these characters is one-dimensional and focusses on a limited number of characteristics of each character, while on the constructed level in the reader's mind the characters all fit into easily defined, simple categories.

Taking into consideration Achebe's aims in writing back to colonial fiction such as Conrad's, several reasons were posited for the usefulness of stereotypical non-African characters within this particular novel. Firstly, reversing the trend of the stereotype (from the African to the non-African characters) makes an important political point about the stereotypes favoured by the colonial writers. Furthermore, using stereotypical non-African characters presents a useful juxtaposition to the complex, individual African characters, serving to highlight their individual characteristics. Finally, it could be argued that in stereotyping the non-African characters, Achebe is creating a personification of the ideas about Africans espoused by colonial writers, and is able thus to engage directly with these ideas, contradicting them through the juxtaposition with the reality of the African characters' experiences.



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A Bakhtinian analysis of *Things fall apart* reveals that, although at times there is evidence of polyphony, such as in the introduction of Unoka, the non-African characters' utterances are not autonomous, but are in fact merely characteristics of the characters themselves, and help to further their stereotypical nature. Furthermore, the novel finalises all the words of all the characters, creating an ending in which the reader does not participate in discussion with any of the characters, but rather is presented with a series of events, and provided with a mediated response, dictated from the higher authorial plane.

The characters in *Things fall apart* who fall across the cultural barrier from Achebe, therefore, can be defined as "binary" representations. These characters are stereotypical, and their stereotype is defined by their function within the colonised/coloniser binary. Although there are pertinent reasons (such as the writing back to colonial writing) for this stereotyping, the novel remains monologic in its treatment of the cultural encounter, polemicising against a particular view rather than dialogising with it. Most importantly for the study here, the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* do not possess their own autonomous voice with which the reader must grapple aside from the author's intervention, but are all finalized on a higher monologic plane by the author.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *NO LONGER AT EASE*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

*No longer at ease* (first published 1960), the second novel in Achebe's trilogy, is set in the postcolonial period of Nigeria in the 1950s and relates the story of Okonkwo's grandson, Obi Okonkwo. The novel is told in analepsis, starting at the point where Obi is on trial for having taken a bribe. The narrative then goes back to Obi's days studying English literature in England, on a scholarship from the Umuofia Progressive Union. On his return to Nigeria, Obi takes a job in Lagos, working for Mr Green, and begins a relationship with Clara, a nurse whom he met at Nigerian students' socials in England, and who returned to Nigeria on the same boat as him. In Lagos, in his relationship with Clara and in his dealings with the Umuofia Progressive Union, Obi soon finds himself torn between western and traditional ideals. In the last part of the novel, Obi is frustrated by his parents' refusal to sanction his marriage to Clara, due to her family being *osu*, or outcast, and thus ineligible to anyone outside of their own caste. Obi is particularly hurt because his father is a Christian and has apparently thrown off most of the traditions of his Igbo culture, yet still refuses to allow the marriage. His mother's death, along with Clara's pregnancy and abortion, the couple's subsequent break-up and other financial and social pressures eventually wear Obi down, and he succumbs to taking bribes. He is caught and tried, leading to speculation on the part of several people, including the judge and Obi's boss, about what led to him doing something which seemed so out of character.

This setting of *No longer at ease*, as Gandhi (2012: 56 – 57) notes, makes it an ideal novel to study in terms of a less traditional, more postmodern approach to cultural identity. The novel provides many examples of the struggles Obi faces in marrying his western education and experience with his desire for his own Igbo culture and traditions, and in these struggles a reader may begin to perceive the "zones of disorder and dispute" which Rosaldo (in Gandhi 2012: 56) identifies as shaping the postmodern experience of cultural identity. In *No longer at ease* there is furthermore a move towards a more ambivalent, unfinished representation of characters across a cultural divide from the author. This is not fully achieved within this novel, but the polyphony and unmediated dialogism across cultures which is present in *Arrow of God* can be traced to seeds planted within *No longer at ease*.

In the present chapter, a similar approach to the analysis of *Things fall apart* will be applied to *No longer at ease*. The non-African characters' position within Fishelov's (1999: 426) typology will be identified, and the ramifications of their positions on the typology briefly discussed. Some comments on the novel's presentation of the cultural encounter will then be offered, before a Bakhtinian reading of the most pertinent sections which deal with the non-African characters will be presented. Through this analysis, the beginning of the shift

towards a more “dialogic” representation of characters who do not share the author’s culture will be identified.

## 4.2 PLACING THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS OF *NO LONGER AT EASE* WITHIN FISHELOV’S CATEGORIES OF CHARACTER

### 4.2.1 Analysis of Mr Green according to Fishelov’s character typology

Mr Green is the only non-African character who has any substantial role within *No longer at ease*. In keeping with the uneasy atmosphere which pervades the whole book, Mr Green seems as uncomfortable in the socio-political landscape of 1950’s Nigeria as Obi does. Although, as with the non-African characters in *Things fall apart*, Mr Green fits a type on the constructed level, the textual level in his case is in fact rich and somewhat varied, yielding an individual-like type on Fishelov’s scale.

The setting of *No longer at ease*, compared to *Things fall apart*, places the Europeans in a very different position. They are still nominally in power, but independence is looming, Africans are admitted to the club and there is the suggestion that a very different attitude towards Africans is expected of them (Achebe 2010: 2 – 3; 51; 84). Mr Green, consequently, as a character, is fulfilling a very different role to the European characters in *Things fall apart*, and the fact that he is “working for a country he doesn’t believe in” (Achebe 2010: 84), instead of imposing British rule on an unwilling people creates very different demands on him within the framework of the narrative. This difference in the functions of the European characters in the novels will be discussed within the next section on the cultural encounter within this novel.

It is still clear that the character of Mr Green yields a type on the constructed level. His dialogue and the descriptions of and about him ring true to the category of “colonial administrator”. He seems to despise Africans, still has the attitude that Britain is doing Nigeria a favour and always assumes an attitude of superiority towards any of the African characters with whom he interacts (Achebe 2010: 2; 76; 122). However, on the textual level the presentation of Green is rather richer than that of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart*. Mr Green does not always adopt the same message; although he frequently says things which are contemptuous of Africans, he also says things which seem to reveal a genuine compassion (Achebe 2010: 122). He treats most Africans with contempt, but is capable of generosity towards them (Achebe 2010: 83 – 84). Furthermore, along with the narrator’s perspective on Green, the reader is given a further two perspectives from Miss Tomlinson and Obi (Achebe 2010: 83 – 85). The inclusion of these perspectives, which differ in varying degrees both from one another and from the narrator’s perspective, adds to the textual richness of the character. This textual richness, which yields an individual on the textual layer, nevertheless does not do anything to make Mr Green unfit for the category of “colonial administrator”, into which he fits on the constructed level.

This flatness on the constructed level is derived from textual indicators which set up Mr Green's attitudes, opinions and actions as all being those of a "colonial administrator". His opening certainty that he understands why Obi took the bribe, and his subsequent explanation of his reasoning, immediately suggest the simple category to a reader:

"I cannot understand why he did it," said the British Council man thoughtfully. . . .

"I can," said Mr Green simply. "What I can't understand is why people like you refuse to face facts." Mr Green was famous for speaking his mind. He wiped his red face with the white towel on his neck. "The African is corrupt through and through." . . .

"They are all corrupt," repeated Mr Green. "I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won't alter facts."

"What facts?" asked the British Council man, who was relatively new to the country. There was a lull in the general conversation, as many people were now listening to Mr Green without appearing to do so.

"The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?" (Achebe 2010: 2 – 3).

This initial assessment by Mr Green, and his inclination to accept a rather crude explanation for Obi's actions (which, as the rest of the novel demonstrates, are the result of a complex web of factors, almost any of which, although in different guise, could be experienced by Mr Green himself), set him up in the category of "colonial administrator". He is contemptuous and dismissive of Africans, and believes them inherently immoral, according to his standards. In this way, he could be seen to be a colonist in much the same mould as Mr Smith of *Things fall apart*.

Throughout the rest of the text, Mr Green's attitude does not change significantly. Obi's first encounter with him in chapter seven demonstrates him interacting in the same contemptuous way with both Obi and Mr Omo. Obi is told that he "would enjoy his work; one, if he wasn't bone-lazy, and two, if he was prepared to use his loaf. 'I'm assuming you have one to use,' [Green] concluded" (Achebe 2010: 52). Later, Green reprimands Obi sharply, "You say sir to your superior officers, Mr Okonkwo" (Achebe 2010: 52). Green tells Mr Omo "You are not paid to think . . . but to do what you are told" (Achebe 2010: 52). Green's attitude in impressing his "superiority" (and their "inferiority") on all Africans whom he meets is one of the strongest textual indicators which leads to the category of type on the constructed level, being as it is associated with the stereotype of a "colonial administrator".

These views of Mr Green remain steadfastly in place throughout the narrative, maintaining the constructionally flat characterisation. In chapter twelve, he delivers the following unsolicited comment to Obi:

"You know, Okonkwo, I have lived in your country for fifteen years and yet I cannot begin to understand the mentality of the so-called educated Nigerian. Like this young man at the University College, for instance, who

expects the Government not only to pay his fees and fantastic allowances and find him an easy, comfortable job at the end of his course, but also to pay his intended. It's absolutely incredible. I think Government is making a terrible mistake making it so easy for people like that to have so-called university education. Education for what? To get as much as they can for themselves and their family" (Achebe 2010: 93).

Later, in chapter seventeen, Green's unexpected, apparently interested enquiry about Obi's leave is followed with a tirade against the practice in general, and especially against the Africans who (he thinks) exploit it:

"It often amazes me how you people can have the effrontery to ask for local leave. The idea of local leave was to give Europeans a break to go to a cool place like Jos or Buea. But today it is completely obsolete. But for an African like you, who has too many privileges as it is, to ask for two weeks to go on a swan, it makes me want to cry" (Achebe 2010: 122).

The attitude evinced in the opening pages of the novel remains as strong here as it was in the beginning. In both passages quoted above, Mr Green seems to find the idea of Africans having "privileges" appalling. He does not, for example, seem to see any problem in the original conception of Europeans needing leave to "go to a cool place", but feels that the Africans in the service have "too many privileges". He feels, furthermore, that the young man at the University College is not deserving of education, and that "people like that" shouldn't be given such easy access to the privileges education affords. This attitude, represented by these and other comments throughout the novel, serves to cement in place a reader's categorising of Green in the type of "colonial administrator".

The typical label is not as applicable to the textual level, however. Within the text, some richness is provided by the different perspectives Miss Tomlinson and Obi provide on Green's character, and the positive qualities they are each able to find in him.

Miss Tomlinson, although she agrees with Obi that Green is strange, seems to posit the idea to Obi that Green is not as bad as he appears to be. "He is quite different at home," she tells Obi. "Do you know he pays school fees for his steward's sons? But he says the most outrageous things about educated Africans" (Achebe 2010: 83). She follows this with the information that Mr Green is "a very devout Christian, a sidesman at the Colonial Church" (Achebe 2010: 82). Miss Tomlinson's perspective, although it is rather naïve (after all, would Mr Green be "quite different at home" if Obi visited him?), nevertheless provides the reader with a richer textual account. Instead of only having the narrator's perspectives on Mr Green, the reader is given Miss Tomlinson's perspective, and is thus given a more rounded account, even if none of the details provided by Miss Tomlinson can persuade the reader that Mr Green is not wholly defined by his status as "colonial administrator", since there is no evidence for his "generosity" in his direct interaction with anyone in the course of the narrative.

Obi's account of Mr Green is even more textually rich than Miss Tomlinson's; Obi is not naïve, yet he is open-minded enough to give Mr Green credit for having admirable qualities. Furthermore, his assessment draws

direct parallels between Green and Mr Kurtz of Conrad's *Heart of darkness*, which provides an intertextual angle on Green's character as well. Obi's assessment, nevertheless, also provides direct reasons why Green still remains constructionally flat:

Obi had long come to admit to himself that, no matter how much he disliked Mr Green, he nevertheless had some admirable qualities. Take, for instance, his devotion to duty. Rain or shine, he was in the office half an hour before the official time, and quite often worked long after two, or returned again in the evening. Obi could not understand it. Here was a man who did not believe in a country, and yet worked so hard for it. Did he simply believe in duty as a logical necessity? . . . He was like a man who had some great and supreme task that must be completed before a final catastrophe intervened. It reminded Obi of what he had once read about Mohammed Ali of Egypt, who in his old age worked in frenzy to modernize his country before his death.

In the case of Green it was difficult to see what his deadline was, unless it was Nigeria's independence. They said he had put in his resignation when it was thought that Nigeria might become independent in 1956. In the event it did not happen and Mr Green was persuaded to withdraw his resignation.

A most intriguing character, Obi thought . . . It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy. He must have come originally with an ideal—to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal headhunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St. George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear.

With a flash of insight Obi remembered his Conrad which he had read for his degree. "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded." That was Mr Kurtz before the heart of darkness got him. Afterwards he had written: "Exterminate all the brutes." It was not a close analogy, of course. Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn. But their beginning and their end were alike. "I must write a novel on the tragedy of the Greens of this century," he thought, pleased with his analysis (Achebe 2010: 84 – 85).

In this passage, the reader is allowed to understand Green's genuinely good qualities—qualities which even Obi, who admittedly dislikes Green, cannot ignore. Textual details such as "devotion to duty" and working hard, even against his own ideological preferences are raised. Obi's assessment suggests something of Green's positive reasons for coming to Africa, as well. He reflects that it "was clear he loved Africa", and that he had come there with positive ideas for good.

Obi's assessment, however, although it textually provides another perspective on Green's character, provides a perspective on Green's *type* as much as it does on Green as an individual. Obi even reflects that Green's main problem is that he came to Africa too late; his type, as it were, is more like that of the "great missionaries", or that of the school inspector who showed his superiority by slapping a headmaster. Obi's analogy

between Green and Kurtz furthers this impression, as it places Green within the type Kurtz has come to represent. Obi thinks about how Kurtz's attitude of benevolence towards the Africans had been obliterated by his experiences in Africa, causing him to write "Exterminate the brutes"—an attitude, it is suggested, Green would have liked to share. Mr Green is further described as a crusading spirit, enthusiastic to bring the gifts of Britain to Africa; Obi suggests that Green is prepared for a battle, but that there is no battle to be fought, because his expectations of Africa were naïve and unfounded. Green's negative views of Africa are further reinforced by the suggestion that the "catastrophe" against which Green works so hard is Nigeria's independence; the idea presented here, through Obi's thoughts, is that Green is so fixed in his views on Africa that independence is a prospect he cannot tolerate.

Consequently, although Obi's perspective adds a substantial amount of richness to the textual level of Green's character, it does not, in fact, alter the reader's constructed type.

The good qualities suggested here, as well as later, when Green complains to Obi that "educated" Nigerians take all they can without thinking about "the millions of their countrymen who die every day from hunger and disease" (Achebe 2010: 93), suggest that Green has a keen insight and some form of compassion. Nevertheless, the fact that his compassion is of a self-glorifying nature—Mr Green wants to help downwards; he is compassionate towards the messengers, the gardeners, the stewards, but contemptuous of those who dare to aspire to his own level—and that his compassionate views about the millions dying of hunger and disease are delivered with a tone of contempt towards Obi, means that the constructed level for the reader remains flat.

Mr Green is consequently seen as an individual-like type. On the textual level there is some varied detail and at least three different perspectives. However, although these details are provided, they all still combine to create a simple category, which is why, although he bears the appearance of an individual through some textual details, Green remains a type. This is stated quite directly in the last line of the novel, which states that, "in spite of his certitude, Mr Green did not know either" (Achebe 2010: 136).

#### **4.2.2 Analysis of several secondary characters according to Fishelov's character typology**

As mentioned in the section above, Mr Green is the only non-African character in *No longer at ease* to have any significant part to play in the plot. The other non-African characters are secondary characters within the plot, and therefore are only characterised to the extent that they interact with Obi in any particular scene. This necessarily means that they are all "pure" types, just as Sam Okoli or the President of the Umuofia Progressive Union are. There is no character detail provided about the characters except Obi's impressions of them, which means they are presented from one perspective. However, it is interesting that, although each character, in a manner characteristic of a type, always speaks on only one subject, the views expressed by these secondary characters vary one from another, thus introducing layers of assent within the non-African culture represented by these characters. This introduction of varying opinions among characters within the

same culture renders the typical nature of each of the characters more dialogic, as will be seen in the Bakhtinian analysis below.

Miss Tomlinson, Mr Green's secretary, is the non-African character with whom Obi has the most interaction, apart from Mr Green; this interaction is almost entirely positive. Miss Tomlinson would fit the description of "pure" type, as she does not have a varied representation on the textual level, and does fit a category on the constructed level. However, this category is not so much a social or political category (as is the case for the missionaries and the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart* and even for Mr Green); in the case of Miss Tomlinson, it would seem that the character falls into a category of an aesthetic nature (see Fishelov 1990:426). Miss Tomlinson's category is one which seems much nearer a character archetype than merely a social status; she performs the function of Obi's confidante in the narrative. It could be suggested that Miss Tomlinson acts as a foil for Mr Green. Although she may agree with his views about policy (Achebe 2010: 122), Miss Tomlinson nevertheless has a very different attitude towards the African people she meets, as can be seen in her relationship with Obi, and her response to Clara, which "seemed to have come straight from her heart" (Achebe 2010: 67). Miss Tomlinson is thus a "pure" type, whose dialogue, action and the perspective on her presented by the narrator are all on the same subject and suggest the same attitude, and who, on the constructed level, fulfils the type of "confidante", which, contrary to the types presented in characters such as Mr Green or the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* is an aesthetic category, one integral to the framework of fiction-writing in general, and not merely postcolonial fiction.

Another character who can be found to be a "pure" type, but whose category on the constructed level is one of aesthetic necessity rather than political or social, is Macmillan, the Englishman with whom Obi strikes up a friendship on the return voyage from England to Nigeria in Chapter three. As Macmillan's role in the story begins and ends in Chapter three, once again there is neither time nor any need to characterise him very deeply; he is "the friendly stranger". His dialogue is characterised by friendly questions, some of which are naïve, such as his questions about African names (Achebe 2010: 21), and friendly chatter, such as he has with Obi and Clara in Madeira (Achebe 2010: 22). Once again, however, Macmillan's attitude, however much of a type he is, is not political, and it could be argued that his place in the novel is not to stand for a type of European, but just to stand as a friendly stranger.

Achebe furthers the ambiguity of the cosmopolitan society represented in *No longer at ease* with the brief scene with the Irish Roman Catholic teachers whom Christopher introduces Obi to (Achebe 2010: 93 – 95). Once again, three pages is not sufficient to give Nora and Pat any three-dimensional characteristics; they are interested in Nigeria, happy to have fun with Obi and Christopher and careful to adhere to the rules of Roman Catholicism (Achebe 2010: 93 – 95), which renders them flat characters on the textual level. On the constructed level they also achieve a simple category; in their case, the simple category is both aesthetic and socio-political. They are associated with the Roman Catholic missionaries, yet they do not yield the category



“missionary” on the constructed level, as the textual indicators do not present them in this capacity. Rather, they could be categorised as “foreign girls”. In some ways, their role in the story is not very different from that of Bisi, one of Christopher’s girlfriends; they are there as brief female attraction and distraction for Obi and Christopher. However, their association with the Roman Catholic missionaries means that at times the “foreign” aspect of their category becomes more prominent than their role as girls with whom Obi and Christopher dally for amusement. This is most apparent when they inform Obi and Christopher that Mother Superior has threatened to write to the Bishop about their behaviour if they continue “going about with African men” (Achebe 2010: 95). Here, although their actions seem different from their extreme friendliness in the first meeting, they are not acting outside of the character necessitated by their category.

The character of the judge, William Galloway, while his role within the story is very slight, is worth a brief examination. Galloway is the first non-African character presented within the novel, and his first words are a sharp reprimand for tardiness to a Nigerian lawyer, followed with the remark “But I must say I’m getting sick and tired of these constant excuses about the problem of locomotion” (Achebe 2010: 1). The most significant statement made by the judge is when he addresses Obi with the remark, “I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this” (Achebe 2010: 2). Although the judge does not appear again until the final paragraph of the whole book, the rest of the novel, told in analepsis, seems to be directed to explaining the thing the judge cannot comprehend—as evidenced by the final paragraph of the novel:

Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr Green did not know either (Achebe 2010: 136).

This paragraph indicates that the reader has been permitted access to the answer to a question which puzzled everybody. The judge’s remark, therefore, is of key importance in the novel’s structure.

As far as it pertains to the judge’s character, the suggestion, both in the original remark and in the rather off-hand tone in which it is quoted in the final paragraph, is that the judge, like Mr Green, fits into the category of a “colonial administrator”, who has come into Nigeria but does not appreciate the culture or the people. His remark to Obi is condescending and narrow-minded in its suggestion that “education” and “promise” outweigh the personal aspects of Obi’s character and circumstances, as the dramatic irony of the last paragraph shows. The judge thus is also a “pure” type, his speech restricted to condescending remarks or reprimands towards African characters, which suggests the category of “colonial administrator” on the constructed level. However, as the judge’s remark provides the structural backbone of the rest of the analeptic narrative, it could also be suggested that he also fulfils an aesthetic category within the novel.

### 4.2.3 The non-African characters in *No longer at ease* according to Fishelov's character typology

The non-African characters in *No longer at ease*, as demonstrated by the discussion above, when analysed according to Fishelov's character typology, already present some marked differences to those presented in *Things fall apart*.

It was seen above that Mr Green, although he did in fact fall into a category very easily, was presented more richly and from several different perspectives in the text. This textual depth renders Mr Green an individual-like type on Fishlov's scale.

The other non-African characters in the novel are largely quite secondary to the plot itself, which means that their rendering on the textual level is necessarily flat. The secondary characters, moreover, do fit into specific categories on the constructed level. As was demonstrated, however, many of these categories are not political or social, such as Mr Green's category of "colonial administrator", but rather begin to be more functional and aesthetic, such as Miss Tomlinson's category of "confidante" or Macmillan's as "friendly stranger".

Both the use of an individual-like type in the character of Mr Green, and the fact that the secondary characters fulfil aesthetic categories more than socio-political ones, begin to suggest a trend towards a more nuanced, dialogic perspective in this novel, compared to *Things fall apart*. As will be seen in the following section, *No longer at ease* is set at a very uncertain cross-roads in cultural history within Nigeria and the rest of the world, and this is reflected in the way Achebe places Obi in close contact not only with characters like Green and the judge, who represent a very similar view to that of earlier colonists, but also with people like Miss Tomlinson and the Irish teachers, thus making both Obi and the reader interact with a varied and complex set of characters who, while all non-African and in many senses prejudiced in one way or another, are not all hostile and even, such as in Miss Tomlinson's case, have a genuine friendship with Obi.

## 4.3 THE SHIFTING CULTURAL ENCOUNTER IN *NO LONGER AT EASE*: FROM EXTERNAL TO INTERNAL

In *No longer at ease*, it seems that the interaction between Africa and the west takes place more in the interactions of western versus African *ideas* within Obi Okonkwo's own experience and mind, than it does between African characters and European characters, as is the case in *Things fall apart*. This is due to *No longer at ease*'s placement in a postcolonial setting, where knowledge and information about Europe in Africa and vice versa has become common, and the drive among African peoples for western amenities has begun to change the shape of the culture. As Gandhi (2012: 61) points out, the conflict in *No longer at ease* (as in other texts set in a postcolonial era) is internal, between the western values Obi learned at school and in England, and the traditional Igbo values espoused by his family and often cherished by Obi himself. There is a strong suggestion that in London, Obi came to greatly appreciate his own culture, and in turn to hate England and the English colonial project (Achebe 2010: 10). However, when Obi returns to Nigeria and begins working in Lagos, it is interesting that he continually acts according to western values. Most notable is his

desire to marry Clara—who is, by the tradition in Umuofia, *osu*, and as such ineligible for marriage outside her own caste. In arguing with his father over the matter, Obi cunningly presents the argument for marrying Clara in Biblical language of equality, which he knows will give his father—a devout Christian and catechist—pause. In the end, it seems the impasse he reaches in trying to reconcile two incompatible worldviews in his person and actions is responsible for his downfall.

Gandhi (2012: 55) suggests that it is these “pockets” of cultural discord which characterise a postcolonial society such as that depicted in *No longer at ease*. Basing her analysis on Rosaldo’s definition of fluid cultural identity in the postmodern age, she explains that a culture, instead of being coherent and cohesive is rather riddled with what Rosaldo terms “cultural borderlands”, in which can be found “zones of disorder, dispute and disintegration” (Gandhi 2012: 55). In this model of cultural identity, culture no longer endorses a single ideology, but becomes instead “anti-ideological”. Gandhi (2012: 58) traces the earliest signs of this fluid cultural identity even in Achebe’s pre-colonial novels, stating “poised as Igbo society is for a transition, cultural patterns disintegrate to usher in a period of flux and instability where characters struggle to define themselves in a complex world hitherto unknown to them”. Gandhi (2012: 60) suggests that the disintegration of traditional values and customs can be identified in the breakdown of traditional family structures and in the marginalisation of women in the newly colonised society. Nevertheless, she points out, quoting Rosaldo, that these “borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones, but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation” (Rosaldo in Gandhi 2012: 60). Going further, she suggests that the characters struggling between western values learned at school and traditional Igbo values upheld at home “serve as the source for a transformative energy that ultimately allows them to come to terms with complex and multiple identities and assist in the dynamics of change” (Gandhi 2012: 61).

Losambe’s (1986: 148) analysis of the stages of expatriation experienced by African characters in confronting alien cultures, and becoming, to differing degrees, associated with them, is in a very similar vein. Losambe traces three stages of this “expatriation”: the first that of the European world coming to Africa in the form of the Christian church, to which some Africans migrate, the second the passage from the village to the city and the third the passage from Africa to the west (Losambe 1986: 148). *No longer at ease* he situates in the second and third stages, the second stage being of most importance to the discussion here. In this second stage, Losambe (1986: 156) suggests, Lagos stands as a cultural vacuum which has been “unable to harmoniously blend tradition with modernity”. Similarly to Gandhi (2012: 60), Losambe (1986:156) argues that “the imported new socioeconomic structure” has caused a decay in traditional modes of living, replacing them with the pursuit of money, which results in declining morals. Losambe (1986: 156) notes that the “unifying” social activities of the past—festivals, feasts and dances—are replaced with individualistic ones—cinemas and discos with entry fees, and R.S.V.P.-essential invitations to parties. Religion is ignored most of the time, and any expedient is seized upon (bribery of money, bribery of body, etc.) for gaining western education, which is seen as a means of gaining money (Losambe 1986: 156). Although Obi’s sojourn in England makes

him reject and despise England and her colonial project, Losambe (1986: 157) suggests that he runs into conflict on his return because “he judges Lagos and his tradition by European standards”. This again hints at the conflict suggested by Gandhi (2012: 61) between Obi’s desire to be one with his culture and the western values he (sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously) operates by. Losambe (1986: 158) concludes by suggesting that these “expatriate” African characters, who have in some measure adopted western thinking, can be classified into four types: “(a) a perverse, fanatic disposition towards outside [traditional African] values . . . (b) a cautious approach to alien values . . . (c) a total indifference to or a rejection of the values of the outside world . . . and (d) a withdrawal into internal solitude followed by a psychological reunion with home people”. It is into this last category that he places Obi.

This, then, is the context in which *No longer at ease* is placed. Since the west-versus-Africa conflict has moved from an external one (such as Okonkwo versus the District Commissioner) to an internal one (Obi’s western education and values versus his desire to maintain (some) traditional Igbo cultural identity and practices), it becomes necessary to ask what the position of the non-African characters in the novel is. Mr Green’s position is especially interesting in this light, as, at first glance at the main conflict, he could almost be seen as superfluous. Two possibilities, however, present themselves with regard to Green’s role in Obi’s struggle for identity in the shifting borderlands of the postcolonial world of *No longer at ease*.

The first possibility is that Green, just like Obi, is struggling to find his own identity in the postcolonial world. There are many statements in the novel which suggest that Green is no more at ease in the moral and social vacuum of Lagos than Obi is. For example, there is the fact that he would have resigned his position in the event of Nigeria’s independence (Achebe 2010: 84). Obi’s likening him to Mr Kurtz of *Heart of darkness* suggests an ambivalent and shifting cultural identity on Green’s part—like Kurtz, he is hovering on the brink between two worlds, unable to sanely balance them (Achebe 2010: 84). Obi’s acknowledgement that Green is working hard for a country he does not believe in further suggests that Green, like Obi himself, has certain steadfast cultural beliefs and practices which are called into question in the uncertain borderlands of postcolonial Nigeria. Furthermore, Green’s apparent duplicity—helping the messenger, paying his steward’s sons’ school fees, yet touting racist views and treating Obi with contempt—could also be seen in light of this internal conflict between traditional norms (Briton as benefactor) and the incompatibility of those norms with the realities of the postcolonial situation (equality at the club, the fact that many Africans are equally well-educated and advanced in the world). In this way, Green forms a parallel to Obi—two men, from different cultures, struggling to find their self-identity in an increasingly hybridised society where neither one can be entirely at ease unless they find out how to reconcile the two cultures within themselves.

There is a second possibility, however, and, given Green’s status as a type (even if an individual-like type), it is this second possibility which seems to be a more likely interpretation. This is the suggestion that Green stands, not as a parallel to Obi, but as a foil—an example of a person who did *not* manage (or want) to adapt

to the postcolonial situation and “assist in the dynamics of change” (Gandhi 2012: 61). This is most strongly suggested in Obi’s analysis of him in chapter eleven:

Obi had long come to admit to himself that, no matter how much he disliked Mr Green, he nevertheless had some admirable qualities. Take, for instance, his devotion to duty. Rain or shine, he was in the office half an hour before the official time, and quite often worked long after two, or returned again in the evening. Obi could not understand it. Here was a man who did not believe in a country, and yet worked so hard for it. Did he simply believe in duty as a logical necessity? . . . He was like a man who had some great and supreme task that must be completed before a final catastrophe intervened. It reminded Obi of what he had once read about Mohammed Ali of Egypt, who in his old age worked in frenzy to modernize his country before his death.

In the case of Green it was difficult to see what his deadline was, unless it was Nigeria’s independence. They said he had put in his resignation when it was thought that Nigeria might become independent in 1956. In the event it did not happen and Mr Green was persuaded to withdraw his resignation.

A most intriguing character, Obi thought . . . It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy. He must have come originally with an ideal—to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal headhunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St. George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear.

With a flash of insight Obi remembered his Conrad which he had read for his degree. “By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.” That was Mr Kurtz before the heart of darkness got him. Afterwards he had written: “Exterminate all the brutes.” It was not a close analogy, of course. Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn. But their beginning and their end were alike. “I must write a novel on the tragedy of the Greens of this century,” he thought, pleased with his analysis (Achebe 2010: 84 – 85).

Here, Obi draws attention to the fact that Green is not only ill at ease in the postcolonial setting, but also that he feels his purpose is frustrated by it. “Africa played him false,” Obi thinks ironically, but the real problem for Green seems to be his own inability to alter his worldview. Gandhi (2012: 55) states that, in the state of fluid cultural identity, society no longer endorses one, single ideology, but becomes instead “anti-ideological”. Green, however, holds onto his ideology—Obi’s assessment, “in 1900 Mr Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear”, points to the idea that Green clings obstinately to a worldview which ceased to exist *per se* decades ago. Green wants to believe in the benevolent bestowal of a good government on uncivilised savages, but the world he lives in has ceased to operate by this (or any) single, dominating ideology, and so he can “only curse and swear”.

Green's inability to adapt or change, and the dangerous consequences of this inability are highlighted when Obi compares Green to Conrad's Kurtz, who moves from the mindset "we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" to "exterminate all the brutes". The suggestion here is that Green, in clinging to his dream of Africa, far from being able to "assist in the dynamics of change" turns instead to a position of irreconcilable conflict.

Understanding the way the novel presents the cultural encounter, Green's character can be seen as a foil of implacable, insistent cultural identity, against the fluid, ever-changing cultural reality in which characters like Obi must come to terms with themselves in order to survive and benefit the culture.

It could be suggested that the other non-African characters, such as the judge and Miss Tomlinson, serve a functional purpose very similar to Green's. Each of them seems to represent a different attitude, belief or value, against which Obi must define himself. The judge speaks of Obi's "promise", reducing him to tears for the first time during the trial, but also claims he cannot understand how Obi came to take bribes (Achebe 2010: 2). In this way, the judge could be said to represent both the idea of the values and morals which are fast declining in the morally ambivalent world of Lagos, as well as the inadequacy of the western value system Obi in part adheres to, to fully comprehend the pressures his hybrid existence places upon him. Miss Tomlinson and Obi's friendship could perhaps be said to demonstrate the shifting, ambivalent nature of cross-cultural interactions in this transitional cultural sphere; Obi is suspicious of her, yet her praise of Clara "seems" genuine, they establish an easy friendship and often agree in their opinion on Mr Green, yet Miss Tomlinson generally seems to lean more towards Green's views than Obi's (Achebe 2010: 67; 83; 122 – 123). In this way, their relationship represents mimetically both the challenges, but also the possibility, of relationships across a cultural divide which are not solely based on the power relations of colonised/coloniser.

Understanding the cultural encounter depicted in *No longer at ease*, thus, is best done in terms of Gandhi's (2012: 55) exploration of fluid cultural identity. Using this analysis, it can be seen that Mr Green's role in the novel is as a foil, an example of a character who refuses to come to terms with the multicultural landscape around him, or himself within that landscape. This is in contrast to Obi, who struggles consciously to find his identity among different worldviews, traditions and values. Furthermore, the judge and Miss Tomlinson can also be said to represent different aspects of the "zones of dispute" and "borderlands" in the postcolonial society—the judge the external conflict between values and the moral laxity creeping into the culturally ambivalent society, and Miss Tomlinson's friendship with Obi as a positive example of the productive power of these borderlands.

#### **4.4 A BAKHTINIAN ANALYSIS OF THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *NO LONGER AT EASE***

A Bakhtinian analysis of *No longer at ease* begins to suggest a shift within the trilogy towards a more polyphonic novel. As will be seen in the following discussion, *No longer at ease* is much closer to a monologically constructed novel than to a polyphonic one; however, certain elements, particularly the position of the idea

within Obi's character, begins to shift the monologism more than is the case in *Things fall apart*. The presentation of Obi's ideas is more dialogic than that of Okonkwo's ideas in *Things fall apart*, as contradictory ideological opinions are in constant dialogue *within* Obi's own consciousness. This, as well as the reduced use of self-revealing irony to confirm a finalised position on Green's utterance, contributes to a greater sense of ambivalence, which accords well with Gandhi's (2012: 57) analysis of the novel's postmodern approach to cultural identity. This ambivalence, and the move towards a polyphonic approach, are furthered by the fact that Obi's character is left largely unfinalised by the author's word, unlike Okonkwo, and more like the autonomy granted Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*. Nevertheless, there is still an ultimate finalisation of at least the non-African characters, both by other characters as well as by the author. This suggests that although the approach to cultural identity in *No longer at ease* has become more ambivalent, the characterisation across the cultural divide tends still towards a narrowing-down and finalisation of "the other's" consciousness.

It was noted in the previous chapter that the non-African characters' words were finalised in the author's consciousness through the use of self-revealing irony, which allows them to speak their word unhindered, but also makes it possible for the author to ultimately affirm or deny (in the case of *Things fall apart*, deny) this word. This finalisation on a higher plane than the character's utterance, denying the utterance even as it records it, is a typical trait of a monologic novel, as Bakhtin (1984: 79 – 80) notes. It was also established in the previous chapter that all of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* fell into the category of "pure" type on Fishelov's typology. Earlier in the present chapter, however, it was noted that Mr Green in *No longer at ease* is an individual-like type in Fishelov's typology. Due to this circumstance, the elements of caricature in his character are much less pronounced than is the case with the non-African characters in *Things fall apart*, although they are still present. This reduction of the caricature element corresponds to a less hyperbolic style adopted in the text when describing Green and Green's utterance—as opposed, for instance to the first introduction of Smith in *Things fall apart*, which employs an exaggerated tone in concordance with the extremity of Smith's views, and consequently undermines those views. Lacking the caricature element, which makes self-revealing irony an appropriate way of providing authorial finalisation, Green's word is not as immediately finalised on the authorial plane. Throughout most of the sections which introduce Green and his utterances, Green's word is autonomous from the author, dialogising only with the autonomous words of other characters, or (less so) with the reader's apperceptive background in a hidden polemic. For example, Green's first introduction in chapter one:

"I cannot understand why he did it," said the British Council man thoughtfully. He was drawing lines of water with his finger on the back of his mist-covered glass of ice-cold beer.

"I can," said Mr Green simply. "What I can't understand is why people like you refuse to face facts." Mr Green was famous for speaking his mind. He wiped his red face with the white towel on his neck. "The African is corrupt through and through." The British Council man looked about him furtively, more from instinct than from necessity, for although the club was now open to them technically, few Africans went to it. On this particular occasion

there was none, except of course the stewards who served unobtrusively. It was quite possible to go in, drink, sign a cheque, talk to friends and leave again without noticing these stewards in their white uniforms. If everything went right you did not see them.

“They are all corrupt,” repeated Mr Green. “I’m all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won’t alter facts.”

“What facts?” asked the British Council man, who was relatively new to the country. There was a lull in the general conversation, as many people were now listening to Mr. Green without appearing to do so.

“The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?” (Achebe 2010: 2 – 3)

In this opening passage, Green’s words are not as quickly dismissed in the authorial plane as those of the District Commissioner in the final chapter of *Things fall apart*. The comments which are inserted to explain or characterise Green and his speech (“Mr Green was famous for speaking his mind”) seem to be the concealed voice of another—that of general opinion (see Bakhtin 1981: 304); there does not immediately appear to be any authorial “surplus” (Bakhtin 1984: 70) of understanding which dictates to a reader in what manner to receive, understand or judge Green’s words.

It could be argued that Green’s words are polemical in the extremity which they express. This does seem to be the case, as there appears to be a hidden polemic in the entire exchange (see Bakhtin 1984: 195 – 196); it is not immediately clear against *what* these words stand in opposition, however. Green is contradicting the British Council man’s statement, but their overall ideas are not in conflict here. It seems most plausible to explain the confrontation here as dialogising with the reader’s apperceptive background (Bakhtin 1981: 281; 283). Green’s words are a believable depiction of a colonial administrator of the time, yet, as with the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart*, they ring sharply in contrast to what (in *Things fall apart*) the reader already knows or what (in *No longer at ease*) they will discover about the people objectified by Green’s discourse.

However, over the course of the novel the hidden polemic within the non-African characters’ utterances is less pronounced than in *Things fall apart*. This is due largely to the shift in the presentation of cultural identity (see Gandhi 2012: 56 – 57). Because of the “zones of disorder” and the crossroads of culture, Green’s utterances are frequently in accord with Obi’s ideas, and presented less as passages to stun the reader with the crudity of Green’s narrow-minded views, and more as opportunities to introduce ideas to Obi’s self-consciousness; it is within his own self-consciousness that he must wrestle with these ideas, rather than in direct conflict or engagement with Green. The dialogism, therefore, is between two ideas *within Obi’s consciousness*, not between Obi’s consciousness and Green’s. The result is a reduction in the hidden polemic, but there is a further consequence in that there is also no interaction of “equally valid consciousnesses” across the



cultural divide in *No longer at ease* (see Bakhtin 1984: 7). There is however, an increase in the ambivalence of cultural identity, propagated by the dialogue within Obi's consciousness of "western" and "Igbo" ideas, which are neither of them as clearly defined and separate from one another as they are, for instance, in *Things fall apart*. A good example of this coexistence of ideas is the passage in chapter fourteen where Obi presents a Biblically substantiated argument for marrying Clara to his father (Achebe 2010: 106 – 107), while elsewhere he longs to know and be a part of the traditional ritual and folklore which his father's (western) Christianity forbids (Achebe 2010: 46 – 47; 102 – 103). These various ideas exist and dialogue within Obi's consciousness, creating a sense that culture is neither as steadfast nor as definable as Okonkwo's approach in *Things fall apart* purports.

However, it is worth noting the tendency across the whole of *No longer at ease* for ideas to eventually be affirmed or repudiated in a plane higher than the characters' consciousnesses. Bakhtin (1984: 79 – 80) notes that in a monologic world, the author presents either one of two kinds of ideas: those s/he agrees with, or those s/he disagrees with. In presenting ideas which are the author's own, Bakhtin claims that the monologic author will affirm them as they are uttered. The idea, he states, is not integrally connected to the character who utters it; rather, the idea is independent of him, and could be placed in any character's mouth with the same effect. Bakhtin notes that it is always possible to identify an affirmed thought within the context of the work. On the other hand, in presenting ideas which are "untrue" according to the author's worldview, the monologic author will repudiate these. This act of repudiation by the author is done either by an act of polemic repudiation, where the author will in some way insist on the idea's falseness, or, if the author does not engage with the idea, it becomes merely an aspect of characterisation. It holds no validity anymore, but becomes merely a feature of the character, an aspect of his/her mental characterisation as his/her eye colour might be a feature of his/her physical appearance. Bakhtin (1984: 80) argues that these repudiated ideas cannot be genuine representations of ideas, because "denial, whatever form it takes, excludes the possibility of any genuine representation". This is because if the idea is already repudiated, it cannot form an autonomous consciousness alongside another consciousness.

Bakhtin therefore highlights the course of ideas when they are subjected to a monologic plane. In this case, an idea will either concur with the author's overall purpose and worldview, and will therefore be presented *as an idea*, valid and signifying both within the events of the novel and outside of the novel in lived experience. It will, however, by its mere affirmation, become separate from the character who utters it, not the deeply rooted, idea-image of that character's worldview, but merely a truth uttered by a character but not inherent to him or her. If, on the other hand, the idea does not agree with the author's worldview, or is indifferent within the author's own consciousness and intentions, it will ultimately lose its power of both representation and signification, as the author will either repudiate it, thus robbing it of its validity as opposed to other (affirmed) ideas within the text, or it will simply become a characteristic feature of a character, but will not resonate as a signifying truth to the reader.

It could be argued that through the course of *No longer at ease* there is a tendency toward this affirmation and repudiation of ideas. While Obi's thoughts maintain some independence from the affirming power of the authorial consciousness, Green's utterances, where they are dismissed by Obi or repudiated by the author through self-revealing irony or some other means, lose their signifying power, and do not "create alongside" Obi's consciousness "another autonomous consciousness". They are either revealed as false ideas, or become merely characteristics of Green. Some examples will be useful in establishing this point.

The first is Green's tirade against educated Nigerians:

"You know, Okonkwo, I have lived in your country for fifteen years and yet I cannot begin to understand the mentality of the so-called educated Nigerian. Like this young man at the University College, for instance, who expects the Government not only to pay his fees and fantastic allowances and find him an easy, comfortable job at the end of his course, but also to pay his intended. It's absolutely incredible. I think Government is making a terrible mistake in making it so easy for people like that to have so-called university education. Education for what? To get as much as they can for themselves and their family. Not the least bit interested in the millions of their countrymen to die every day from hunger and disease."

Obi made some vague noises.

"I don't expect you to agree with me, of course," said Mr Green, and disappeared (Achebe 2010: 93).

In this passage, Green's utterance is not directly engaged with by Obi, although there is a sense in "some vague noises" that Obi is not in complete agreement. Elsewhere, however, Obi himself theorises on the state of the government, and lays the blame on *uneducated* "older men" (Achebe 2010: 31), which would seem to suggest that he would not agree wholly with Green's statements here. There is not any immediate authorial finalisation or repudiation present in the passage here, although Green's conclusion ("I don't expect you to agree with me, of course," said Mr Green, and disappeared) relapses to typical characterisation, which suggests that the utterance is merely characteristic, and not a fully signifying idea. Furthermore, earlier in the novel, as shall be shown later, Obi's analysis of Green ("It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy" (Achebe 2010: 84)) subsumes Green's discourse under Obi's consciousness. The fact that there are echoes of this analysis here—Green is concerned for the sick and dying, the helpless African who needs help and makes no demands—suggests that this passage is also given through Obi's consciousness, being defined and finalised by Obi's word on Green, and not a fully valid idea which dialogises with Obi's own.

The second example is Green's discussion on local leave after Obi returns from the difficult stay in Umuofia, where his mother forbade him to marry Clara:

"Did you have a good leave?" Mr Green asked when he saw Obi. It was so unexpected that for a little while Obi was too confused to answer. But he managed in the end to say that he did, thank you very much.

"It often amazes me how you people can have the effrontery to ask for local leave. The idea of local leave was to give Europeans a break to go to a cool place like Jos or Buea. But today it is completely obsolete. But for an African like you, who has too many privileges as it is, to ask for two weeks to go on a swan, it makes me want to cry."

Obi said he wouldn't be worried if local leave was abolished. But that was for Government to decide.

"It's people like you who ought to make the Government decide. That is what I have always said. There is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of his country. From your ministers down to your most junior clerk. And you tell me you want to govern yourselves."

The talk was cut short by a telephone call for Mr. Green. He returned to his room to take it.

"There's a lot of truth in what he says," Marie ventured after a suitable interval.

"I'm sure there is."

"I don't mean about you, or anything of the sort. But quite frankly, there are too many holidays here. Mark you, I don't really mind. But in England I never got more than two weeks' leave in the year. But here, what is it? Four months." At this point Mr Green returned.

"It is not the fault of the Nigerians," said Obi. "You devised these soft conditions for yourselves when every European was automatically in the senior service and every African automatically in the junior service. Now that a few of us have been admitted into the senior service, you turn round and blame us." Mr Green passed on to Mr. Omo's office next door (Achebe 2010: 122 – 123).

Here, Obi's response to Green's utterance tends towards repudiation; although he isn't directly opposed to Green's idea ("Obi said he wouldn't mind if local leave were abolished"), he nevertheless repudiates Green's suggestion that Nigerians ought to take responsibility in the issue ("You devised these soft conditions for yourselves"). Obi's response, and furthermore, the irony of Mr Green assuming Obi was "on a swan" during Obi's very painful time with his parents, once more seems to reduce Green's utterance to a characteristic—one which fits his character of typical racist colonial administrator.

In addition to the tendency to a monologic repudiation or affirmation of the ideas of the characters, *No longer at ease* also adopts a finalising approach to its non-African characters. With regard to finalisation, in fact, *No longer at ease* is positioned between *Things fall apart* and *Arrow of God*; while *Things fall apart* retains authorial control of all its characters, finalising in the monologic plane of the author's word even Okonkwo himself, and *Arrow of God*, as shall be shown in the following chapter, retains almost no finalisation over any characters, *No longer at ease* leaves Obi largely unfinalised, in the plane of the authorial consciousness, while finalising the utterances of most of the other characters, and most sweepingly those of the non-African characters.

The first finalisation of the non-African characters is the finalisation of their word by the word of another character. Bakhtin (1984: 59) suggests a character's word may be finalised not only by the author, in a higher

plane than all the characters, but also other characters. This happens if the utterance of one character about another is not challenged or dialogised by that character's own utterance. This may also happen if a character's consciousness and ideas become solely the object of another character's consciousness. This is seen most strikingly in *No longer at ease* when Obi analyses Green's character:

Obi had long come to admit to himself that, no matter how much he disliked Mr Green, he nevertheless had some admirable qualities. Take, for instance, his devotion to duty. Rain or shine, he was in the office half an hour before the official time, and quite often worked long after two, or returned again in the evening. Obi could not understand it. Here was a man who did not believe in a country, and yet worked so hard for it. Did he simply believe in duty as a logical necessity? . . . He was like a man who had some great and supreme task that must be completed before a final catastrophe intervened. It reminded Obi of what he had once read about Mohammed Ali of Egypt, who in his old age worked in frenzy to modernize his country before his death.

In the case of Green it was difficult to see what his deadline was, unless it was Nigeria's independence. They said he had put in his resignation when it was thought that Nigeria might become independent in 1956. In the event it did not happen and Mr Green was persuaded to withdraw his resignation.

A most intriguing character, Obi thought . . . It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy. He must have come originally with an ideal—to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal headhunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St. George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear.

With a flash of insight Obi remembered his Conrad which he had read for his degree. "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded." That was Mr Kurtz before the heart of darkness got him. Afterwards he had written: "Exterminate all the brutes." It was not a close analogy, of course. Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn. But their beginning and their end were alike. "I must write a novel on the tragedy of the Greens of this century," he thought, pleased with his analysis (Achebe 2010: 84 – 85).

Green's consciousness in this passage becomes ultimately an object of Obi's consciousness. Obi explains Green to himself (and to the reader) here, and the novel does not present Green's consciousness in opposition to Obi's analysis, with the result that Green's utterances later on are all already predetermined to simply substantiate Obi's analysis (as seen above). This is in contrast, for example, to discussions in *Arrow of God* where, although a character may be discussed and analysed by another, the character's consciousness remains separate from, more than, this analysis. For example, Ezidemili and Nwaka discuss Ezeulu's pride and hunger for power, but Ezeulu's consciousness presented in the rest of the novel, and his actions, present a fuller picture, maintaining the autonomy of his consciousness from theirs (Achebe 2010: 328 – 330). The same is true in reverse—Ezeulu's opinion about Nwaka and Ezidemili is full of spite and coloured by a sense

of their ill-usage of him, but their discourse and their characters maintain autonomy from his judgement of them. Likewise, Clarke and Wright analyse Winterbottom, but his consciousness contains more—and sometimes contradictory—elements than their analysis allows, and their analysis therefore loses the power to finalise his character (Achebe 2010: 390 – 393).

Miss Tomlinson and the Irish teachers are also presented as objects of Obi's consciousness. None of them, of course, has as much plot significance as Mr Green, and it may therefore be merely narratologically convenient to present them through Obi's point-of-view. The Irish teachers seem to be presented as curiosities which interest Obi for a while, but who ultimately do not interact or present a fully valid consciousness to his (Achebe 2010: 94 – 95). Miss Tomlinson's utterances are, indeed, interesting, as she seems to be a confirming voice for Obi's opinions on Green (Achebe 2010: 83). However, in later passages, as in the leave discussion analysed above, she seems instead to present a contradiction to Obi's views. Nevertheless, whether agreeing or disagreeing, Miss Tomlinson is never free, in the reader's mind, from *Obi's* thoughts about her; she is fully subsumed by his consciousness.

Apart from the finalisation of several characters in Obi's consciousness, *No longer at ease* presents a very firmly finalised view of the non-African characters from the position of the author's ultimate authority in the last paragraph:

Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either (Achebe 2010: 136).

Bakhtin (1984: 26; 70; 203 – 204) points out some interesting features of authorial finalisation of the kind demonstrated in this paragraph. Speaking of "Three deaths", a short story by Tolstoy, he notes:

But all three personages [in the story], with their self-enclosed worlds, are united, juxtaposed and made meaningful to one another in the *author's* unified field of vision and consciousness that encompasses them. He, the author, knows everything about them, he juxtaposes, contrasts, and evaluates all three lives and all three deaths. All three lives and deaths illuminate one another, but only for the author, who is located *outside* them and takes advantage of his *external position* to give them definitive meaning, to finalize them. The all-encompassing field of vision of the author enjoys an enormous and fundamental "surplus" in comparison with the fields of vision of the characters. . . .

Thus the total finalizing meaning of the life and death of each character is revealed only in the author's field of vision, and thanks solely to the advantageous "surplus" which that field enjoys over every character, that is, thanks to that which the character cannot himself see or understand. This is the finalizing, monologic function of the author's "surplus" field of vision (Bakhtin 1984: 70).

Here, therefore, Bakhtin notes that in a monologic novel, the sense, unity and interrelationships of various elements are only present on the level of the author's understanding, and that the author enjoys a more

advantageous position than any of the individual characters, being able to see each and all, and relate them to one another in ways which they themselves cannot.

Bakhtin (1984: 26) also stresses that in a monologic novel, various ideas and philosophies are subject to the author's overall philosophical intentions: "The ultimate link in the dialectical sequence would inevitably turn out to be the author's synthesis—which would then cancel out all preceding links as abstract and totally suspended". He reinforces this point later in his argument:

How and in what aspects of the verbal whole is the author's ultimate semantic authority implemented? For the monologic novel, this question is very easily answered. Whatever discourse types are introduced by the author-monologist, whatever their compositional distribution, the author's intentions and evaluations must dominate over all the others and must form a compact and unambiguous whole. Any intensification of others' intonations in a certain discourse or a certain section of the work is only a game, which the author permits so that his own direct or refracted word might ring out all the more energetically. Every struggle between two voices within a single discourse for possession or dominance in that discourse is decided in advance, it only appears to be a struggle; all fully signifying authorial interpretations are sooner or later gathered together in a single speech center and single consciousness; all accents are gathered together in a single voice (Bakhtin 1984: 203 – 204).

It can be seen from these passages that, when authorial finalisation is present, all dialogic qualities or apparent autonomy of a character's consciousness in fact merely *seems* to exist, since a final conclusion—the author's synthesis—will outweigh all other voices once it is presented.

The final paragraph of *No longer at ease* would appear to act in just such a finalising manner. The opinions of the non-African characters and even the collective of the people of Umuofia are synthesised into their lack of understanding of Obi's motivations. Green is perhaps the most finalised here, as there is a direct authorial repudiation of his utterance. In the last statement, therefore, Green's discourse is ultimately weighed and subordinated to a higher (authorial) discourse, rendering all his utterances merely characteristic.

A Bakhtinian analysis of the non-African characters in *No longer at ease* therefore shows that the discourse of these characters is, as in *Things fall apart*, ultimately finalised and pre-determined in the monologic plane of the author's intentions. The plurality of equally-valid, unmerged consciousnesses necessary for a polyphonic work are not present here, as there remains an authorial "surplus" whereby the author affirms or repudiates finally the consciousnesses of his characters. Nevertheless, within Obi's character there are the seeds of an unfinalised consciousness in which ideas dialogise and wrestle with one another. This is a move towards polyphony from the wholly monologic approach in *Things fall apart*, which places *No longer at ease*, in terms of structure and approach, between the more monologic *Things fall apart* and the polyphony which characterises *Arrow of God*.

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

As the discussion above has shown, although *No longer at ease* still adopts a stereotypical approach to those characters who do not share the same culture as the author, and is still almost entirely a monologic novel, where it is easy to define characters by their position within the colonised/coloniser binary, nevertheless a few significant movements away from the thorough monologism of *Things fall apart* are present within this second novel.

The first significant aspect to note is the movement within Mr Green's character from "pure" type to individual-like type. As was noted in the previous chapter, all *Things fall apart's* non-African characters are "pure" types, and this allows their views, utterances and actions to become merely caricatures for the category into which they fall. In using an individual-like type for the character of Mr Green, Achebe makes a significant move towards a more dialogic approach to characters of a different culture, as there is now a sense of Green's own personality and motivations. Although he is still a type, and does fit into a simple category, the caricature elements are greatly reduced, and the reader is, to some extent, forced to consider Green's personal motivations and goals for his actions and views. This ambivalence is not given the fullest expression, as it is with the use of a "pure" individual in *Arrow of God*, but it makes the first steps towards the productive possibilities of individuality in characters across a cultural divide.

This use of an individual-like type, and the ambiguity and productivity of this kind of approach to cultural encounters, is furthered by the exploration of a more postmodern approach to cultural identity (see Gandhi 2012: 56). Due to the setting in the postcolonial world of 1950s Lagos, *No longer at ease* is able to explore, to a much greater degree than *Things fall apart*, what the consequences, positive and negative, are of different people groups encountering one another on a daily basis. In *No longer at ease*, these cultural border zones and pockets, it was suggested, occur more in Obi's own consciousness than in direct conflict between two cultures. Furthermore, the position of the non-African characters in this state of fluid identity was analysed, and it was suggested that Green provides a foil to Obi, as an example of a character unwilling to enter into the productive state of flux and tradition in the encounter between cultures.

Finally, a Bakhtinian analysis was applied, and it was discovered that, although Green's utterances are not immediately finalised within the text, there is a general tendency toward their finalisation, made complete in the last paragraph of the novel. The idea of finalisation and its monologising effect on the narrative was explored in relation to *No longer at ease*, and it was discovered that, while the non-African characters' utterances were always finalised on the plane of the author's consciousness, or even within the consciousness of another character, Obi's utterances were less finalised. This begins the move, completed in *Arrow of God*, towards unfinalised discourse of unmerged consciousnesses; what *No longer at ease* does not do—extending this unfinalised autonomy across a cultural divide as well as within it—it will be seen *Arrow of God* finally

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does, and achieves thereby an even greater sense of productive ambiguity than that demonstrated in *No longer at ease*.



## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *ARROW OF GOD*

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In *Arrow of God* (first published 1964; second edition 1974), the final installment of the African Trilogy, Ezeulu, the priest of the god Ulu, struggles with feelings of resentment towards his people, whom he feels do not sufficiently appreciate him or his god. In the nearby village of Okperi, against whom the people of Umuaro recently waged a war, the British District Officer, Captain Winterbottom, struggles with the decision by his superiors to appoint paramount chiefs among the Igbo. Winterbottom decides to appoint Ezeulu chief over Umuaro, prompting a conflict both between Ezeulu and the British, but ultimately precipitating the war Ezeulu determines to wage over Umuaro on behalf of his god. Because Ezeulu refuses the appointment, Winterbottom's subordinate, Tony Clarke, acting on Winterbottom's behalf while the latter is ill, detains him in Okperi for three months. When Ezeulu is released and returns to Umuaro, he refuses to call the New Yam feast at harvest time, claiming that he must eat all the sacred yams before he can call the festival, and that he can only eat one yam a month. Due to his imprisonment in Okperi, Ezeulu missed eating the sacred yams for three months, so he proposes to put off the harvest until he has caught up those three months. As the crisis rises, and the villages face starvation, the church offers to call a harvest festival of their own, granting the villagers immunity from Ulu's wrath if they instead bring their yams to the Christian church. The multiple layers of conflict come to a close when Ezeulu's second son, Obika, running in an ancestral mask for a funeral while weak with fever, dies of the exertion. Ezeulu, feeling betrayed by his people and by Ulu, loses his sanity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2010: xii) has commented that *Arrow of God* remains her favourite novel. She remarks that "unlike Okonkwo, a character who was clearly in Achebe's control, Ezeulu is wondrously unwieldy and his deep complexity lends *Arrow of God* much of its enduring power" (Adichie 2010: xii). Many critics, indeed, cite *Arrow of God* as Achebe's "best" novel, or their personal favourite (see T. Kortenaar 1995: 31; Brown 2011: 87). Adichie hints at the possibilities for this favour in her description of Ezeulu's "unwieldiness".

However, it would seem that not only Ezeulu, but nearly all of the characters of *Arrow of God* maintain a stubborn independence from the author's finalising control. It will be seen in the following chapter that this independence and "unwieldiness" creates within *Arrow of God* a productive space of interdependent dialogue between individuals within and across cultures.

As has been the case in the preceding chapters, this chapter will seek to analyse the non-African characters of *Arrow of God* according to Fishelov's typology, in order to determine whether they are subject to any measure of stereotyping. The presentation of the cultural encounter in *Arrow of God* will then be examined, with reference to several discussions on the fluid nature of cultural identity in this novel.. Finally, a Bakhtinian

reading of the novel, specifically of the discourse of its non-African characters, will be presented, and conclusions drawn as to the presence of dialogue and polyphony within the novel, and the ramifications of this on the representation of characters with whom an author does not share a culture. It will be concluded whether there is, by *Arrow of God*, a shift towards a dialogic representation of these characters, one where they are not defined by the narrow confines of a stereotype or by their position within the colonised/coloniser opposition.

## 5.2 PLACING THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS OF *ARROW OF GOD* WITHIN FISHELOV'S CATEGORIES OF CHARACTER

### 5.2.1 Analysis of Captain Winterbottom according to Fishelov's character typology

Captain Thomas Winterbottom's point-of-view is used in conjunction with Ezeulu's to focalise the bulk of the story of *Arrow of God*. Winterbottom's views and many of his actions and dialogue fit the constructed-level category of "colonial administrator". However, the textual level presents him in a very round manner, and the layers added by this textual richness call into question the constructed level's category. A reading may suggest that Winterbottom, like Green in *No longer at ease*, is rendered an individual-like type. However, on closer reading it seems probable that he is in fact a "pure" individual, as textual details enrich, subvert, motivate and complicate the views, attitudes and actions which would render him flat on the constructed level. Due to the layers of complexity and doubt added by the textual level to the constructed level, the "pure" individual seems the more appropriate description.

The first aspect of Winterbottom's representation which suggests individuality is the fact that not only is his own point-of-view used quite extensively, but it is also used to present his thoughts and feelings on several different subjects. Unlike the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart*, Captain Winterbottom's stream of consciousness is not limited to his patronising thoughts about Africa and Africans—even though Winterbottom's views are in fact very similar to the District Commissioner's (see Achebe 2010: 324; 394 – 396). Winterbottom's first scene, in Chapter three, opens with his feelings about the weather. His thoughts include reflections such as "But this treacherous, beguiling wind was the great danger of Africa", "He would wonder what unspeakable rites went on in the forest at night, or was it the heart-beat of the African darkness?", "This dear old land of waking nightmares!" (Achebe 2010: 318 – 319), all of which tend to a textual indication of Winterbottom as a colonial administrator, properly dreading the fascinating darkness of Africa. However, other textual details are placed alongside these remarks which do not simply contribute to the type. The details about his lack of sleep, his declining health, his happiness when the rain begins to fall and his envy of both the children and his steward for begetting them (Achebe 2010: 318 – 319), are not thoughts which simply advance Winterbottom's views on one single subject, but are rather details which create a rich background against which his views on the subject of Africa can be understood more fully.

Winterbottom's dialogue within the novel consists largely of speeches made to Clarke and sometimes one or two other characters; most of these take colonial administration as their subject, which at first suggests that Winterbottom always "says the same things" (Fishelov 1990: 426). Winterbottom's speeches on the subject of colonial administration, however, are by no means one-dimensional. Within one speech it is not uncommon for him to be negative about the Igbo people, while also criticising the British administration sharply for its lack of understanding and commitment in handling the people. For example, later in Chapter 3, when Tony Clark, his new Assistant District Officer, comes to dinner, they discuss the views in a book by Allen<sup>8</sup>, and Winterbottom presents the following view:

"I see you are one of the progressive ones. When you've been here as long as Allen was and understood the native a little more you might begin to see things in a slightly different light. If you saw, as I did, a man buried alive up to his neck with a piece of roast yam on his head to attract vultures you know . . . Well, never mind. We British are a curious bunch, doing everything half-heartedly. Look at the French. They are not ashamed to teach their culture to backward races under their charge. Their attitude to the native ruler is clear. They say to him: 'This land has belonged to you because you have been strong enough to hold it. By the same token it now belongs to us. If you are not satisfied come out and fight us.' What do we British do? We flounder from one expedient to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure old savage tyrants on their thrones—or more likely filthy animal skins—we not only do that, but we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before. They make me sick. . . . I wouldn't really mind if this dithering was left to old fossils in Lagos, but when young Political Officers get infected I just give up. If someone is positive we call him smug" (Achebe 2010: 324 – 325).

Within this speech, the patronising, colonial view of Africa and the African people is present. Winterbottom disregards Clarke's suggestion that there might be "anything of value in the native institutions" (Achebe 2010: 324) with the retort that he does not understand "the native" well enough; this hints at the idea that if Clarke did understand "the native", he would see very clearly that the institutions of the African people were really valueless. This view of Africa is also reinforced by Winterbottom's comparison between the British and French colonial styles; Winterbottom's admiration for the harsh French view is a singularly striking textual indicator for Winterbottom's "colonial administrator" mindset, which does not countenance the idea that anything about the African people or their culture might be of value.

Winterbottom's criticism of the British system might at first seem to simply reinforce him in the "colonial administrator" type, if interpreted as merely a suggestion that the British aren't harsh enough. However, the reader is given more textual detail which makes such a simplistic explanation difficult to accept. Having suggested that Clarke is only advocating the value of "native institutions" because he hasn't experienced "the native" enough, Winterbottom shares briefly his experience of finding a man "buried alive up to his neck with a piece of roast yam to attract vultures". The trailing off of the idea into the ellipsis, and the fact that this

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<sup>8</sup> The title of George Allen's book (*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*) is the same title as the book the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart* was planning to write. This seems to suggest that George Allen is the same District Commissioner.

account is repeated within Winterbottom's internal monologue in Chapter five both suggest that Winterbottom was deeply affected emotionally by this experience, and that his idea about "native institutions" is not born merely of an inherent idea of his own and Britain's "superiority" over African people and African traditions, but as much by his own experiences of a system of rule which he personally found traumatic to witness. As much as his views are still those of the smug "colonial administrator", the reader begins here to feel that these smug views do not define the character. Instead, the character has created these views out of careful study and painful experience. This distinction makes it difficult to feel that the character is easily located within a simple category.

Furthermore, Winterbottom's speech frequently reveals a rather extensive understanding of the customs of the people of Umuaro and Okperi. In his description of the Okperi-Umuaro war (which presents a very simplistic understanding of the various factors truly involved in the issue, as described by the narrator in Chapter two), Winterbottom adds comments such as "I may explain that *ikenga* is the most important fetish in the Igbo man's arsenal, so to speak. It represents his ancestors to whom he must make daily sacrifice. When he dies it is split in two; one half is buried with him and the other half is thrown away. So you can see the implication of what our friend from Umuaro did in splitting his host's fetish" (Achebe 2010: 326); Winterbottom's explanation is dismissive and less than appreciative, but it does show that he has taken some time to understand at least superficially what the customs are and how society operates among the Igbo people<sup>9</sup>. Winterbottom also seems rather proud of the name bestowed on him by the people of Umuaro (Achebe 2010: 325). This understanding of the customs pertaining among the people in Umuaro is also evident in Winterbottom's views on the issue of Paramount Chiefs. He tells Clarke that the Igbos did not develop "any kind of central authority" (Achebe 2010: 325), explaining why the headquarters orders to appoint Paramount Chiefs is "stupid and futile". Although later, when confronted with the Lieutenant Governor's memorandum, Winterbottom expresses himself in extremely patronising and othering language, the subsequent account of his experience with appointing Chief Ikedi suggests that this patronisation is tempered with some concern and compassion. One has, on the one hand, Winterbottom's reflection that "the man on the spot who knew his African and knew what he was talking about found himself being constantly overruled by starry-eyes fellows at headquarters" (Achebe 2010: 344); on the other, one reads of Winterbottom's concern for the extortion practised by the first Paramount Chief whom he had appointed, with his conclusion "This was what British administration was doing among the Igbos, making a dozen mushroom kings grow where there was

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<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that slight misunderstanding and/or misrepresentation of cultural customs across a cultural divide is not necessarily indicative of malice or stupidity on either part, but is rather a realistic presentation of something which happens at every level of the cultural encounter. This same misunderstanding across cultures is used by Achebe to somewhat humorous effect when Ezeulu returns to Umuaro after his custody, and tells his third son, Oduche, "When I was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. . . I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn it until you can write it with your left hand" (Achebe 2010: 475).

none before" (Achebe 2010: 345). Once again, although Winterbottom's views are typical of a particular category, the presentation within the text is careful to provide the reader with the complex web of circumstances and personality traits which led to these views, thus rendering the character not a type, but an individual.

The personality traits of Winterbottom's character are presented at various intervals, and seem at times in harmony with a stereotypical character and at other times at odds with it. For example, his lecture to Wright about sleeping with native women is motivated by the idea that "It was absolutely imperative . . . that every European in Nigeria, particularly those in such a lonely outpost as Okperi should not lower themselves in the eyes of the natives" (Achebe 2010: 321). In this instance, Winterbottom's strict standard of living, which is consistent throughout the novel, is motivated by the need to present an example to the people of Nigeria, as though they were small children. Later, however, Winterbottom refers to "ugly stories of whippings and that kind of business. Without prejudging the issue I may say that I wouldn't put anything past Wright, from sleeping with native women to birching their men" (Achebe 2010: 344). Here, Winterbottom does not seem to give any reason to avoid whipping men; it appears that on the basis of his own personal morals he objects to it, the same way he objected to the idea of the man being left to be eaten alive by vultures. Winterbottom's solid character is also suggested by his response to junior officers being promoted above him. The text states "'Any fool can be promoted,' Winterbottom always told himself and his assistants, 'provided he does nothing but try. Those of us who have a job to do have no time to try'" (Achebe 2010: 342). Later in the same scene, Winterbottom reflects that nobody would tell the Lieutenant-Governor the truth about the issue of chiefs because "they were all afraid of losing their promotion or the O.B.E." (Achebe 2010: 343). This statement seems to indicate as much contempt for the obsequies of British administrators as for the extortion of Chief Ikedi, which suggests at the least that Winterbottom is not hypocritical; incidents such as this one, furthered by the reflections on Winterbottom's character by others, suggest that he is to some extent a sincere person, who holds views typical of his time and station, but is not merely characterised by these views. The smugness or hypocrisy which might otherwise attach itself to the views he holds on government in Africa cannot be fully believed in by a reader, because the text provides other details which, while not making Winterbottom particularly likable, nevertheless render him fully individual, his actions and views the product of his personality, and his personality remaining steadfast across many differing circumstances and towards both British and Nigerian people.

Perhaps the most significant aspect which renders Winterbottom individual instead of type is that he is presented from many different perspectives. The first mention of Winterbottom is Ezeulu's assessment that Winterbottom, like himself, "understood" Ezeulu's need to speak truthfully, "even though he came from a land no one knew" (Achebe 2010: 296). Many aspects of Winterbottom's character are later presented through Clarke's focalisation. The discussion Clarke and Wright have about Winterbottom in Chapter ten

forms a significant part of the textual indicators given a reader whereby to interpret Winterbottom's character. The fact that even Clarke moves, in the course of the conversation, from despising to both sympathising with and pitying Winterbottom, strongly suggests the textual richness of the presentation. The opening of the conversation shows Clarke allowing himself to be influenced by Wright:

"Are we having a celebration to open [the road]?"

"The captain says no. He says we have already overspent the Vote for it."

"What does it matter?"

"That's what I want to know. And yet we spend hundreds of pounds building Native Courts all over the division that nobody wants, as far as I can see."

"I must say though that that is not the Captain's fault." Clarke was already adopting Wright's half-contemptuous manner of referring to Winterbottom. "It is the policy of Headquarters which I happen to know the Captain is not altogether in agreement with."

"Damn the Headquarters."

"The Captain would approve of that sentiment."

"Actually, you know, the Captain is not a bad fellow at all. I think that deep down he is quite a decent fellow. One must make allowances for the rough time he's had" (Achebe 2010: 390).

From the mocking use of Winterbottom's title, Wright and Clarke move to a discussion of Winterbottom's domestic life, and Wright tells Clarke about Winterbottom's wife running away with someone while Winterbottom was fighting in the Cameroons (Achebe 2010: 390). As a result of this discussion, "without any conscious design the two men dropped their contemptuous reference to *the Captain* and called Winterbottom by his name" (Achebe 2010: 390). This sudden spark of human sympathy from Clarke and Wright adds to the textual richness with which Winterbottom is characterised, and this is furthered by the various theories and opinions on Winterbottom's character which they proceed to consider. For example, this exchange, following Wright's revelation about Winterbottom's wife:

"Really? I hadn't heard about that."

"Yes. I'm told he was very badly shaken by it. I sometimes think it was this personal loss during the war that's made him cling to this ridiculous Captain business."

"Quite possibly. He's the kind of person, isn't he, who would take the desertion of his wife very badly," said Clarke.

"Exactly. A man as inflexible as him can't take a thing like that" (Achebe 2010: 390)

Later, Clarke suggests that Winterbottom is "a man of very high principles". Fishelov (1990: 426) posits that a textually round description of a character includes the reader seeing the character from different perspectives, and that a "rich and elaborate appearance" is gained during the course of the text—"we know the

character's name; we learn of the character's thoughts, see him in different situations, many traits of him are told to us, etc.". The conversation between Clarke and Wright not only presents a different (or two different) perspectives on Winterbottom, but also serves to show Winterbottom in the light of different situations; the story about his wife leaving him especially adds another dimension to the stiff, dutiful appearance he has borne up until this point. Because of the information a reader becomes privy to in this scene, their view of Winterbottom is altered slightly, and the typical label is no longer sufficient to account for his character.

It could be argued, furthermore, that intratextual and structural details can also help to create a sense of textual roundness. In many ways, it would appear that Winterbottom and Ezeulu form an interesting parallel—one which serves to give each of them a richer appearance within the text. Both Ezeulu and Winterbottom have some, but not ultimate, power within their cultural communities<sup>10</sup> (Achebe 2010: 293; 318; 346). However, they each experience opposition and conflict within their cultural community (Achebe 2010: 305 – 308; 327 – 330; 342 – 346), and seem to sense an affinity towards one another (Achebe 2010: 296; 346). At various moments in the text, they each feel the other could be an ally in his private war within his own community (Achebe 2010: 346; 460; 445 – 446; 476), while at other times they are openly opposed to one another (Achebe 2010: 458 – 459; 460). This complex, shifting parallel between Ezeulu and Winterbottom seems to be a particularly powerful method whereby the textual presentation of both characters is deeply enhanced.

As demonstrated in the discussion above, Winterbottom's views are just as much those of a colonial administrator as the District Commissioner's in *Things fall apart*; nevertheless, the text provides many more details than simply his views on colonial administration. His feelings about brutality, his sense of duty, the different perspectives on his character presented by various characters and the parallel between him and Ezeulu all create a rich textual background which contradicts and subverts any definitive labels, thus making it difficult to place Winterbottom in any simple category on the constructed level.

### 5.2.2 Analysis of Tony Clarke according to Fishelov's character typology

Tony Clarke is Winterbottom's junior Political Officer, and, like all the European characters across the trilogy, has some idea of being in Africa to rescue the people from savagery (see Achebe 2010: 321). Clarke receives almost as much attention in the text of *Arrow of God* as does Winterbottom, and is also presented from various perspectives and in different situations which show a broad spectrum of his thoughts and ideas. He thus yields a roundness on the textual level. However, on the constructed level, Clarke fits the category of

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<sup>10</sup> As witnessed by the final denouement, when he refuses to announce the New Yam Feast, Ezeulu can exercise ultimate power within his community, but the catastrophic and destructive nature of this power is hinted at in the opening chapter, and again at the end when it is suggested that Ulu "had taken sides with [the people] against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors—that no man however great was greater than his people" (Achebe 2010: 293; 512).

“colonial administrator”. His views, his behaviour, his thoughts and his feelings, although presented in a reasonably diverse way, do not suggest any contradiction or nuance to the category of “colonial administrator”, thus yielding a flat constructed level. Clarke, therefore, would appear to fit the description of individual-like type. Although the textual presentation is rich and suggests a three-dimensional character, the reader is still able, without any difficulty, to perceive Clarke within a simple category.

This flat constructed level is the result of there being no contradiction or nuance within the text to refute the application of a simple category. Clarke’s character is built around his attitudes and responses to Africa and African people, and, although at times his views seem more “progressive” than Winterbottom’s, there is no explanation or experience which is given to suggest why he holds the views. These views thus become defining features of his character, instead of being, as in Winterbottom’s case, the result of experiences which have affected the character and caused him to adopt certain views. The type-defying strength of motivating factors behind a character’s views can be seen quite effectively in a comparison between Clarke and Winterbottom.

Clarke argues, at the first dinner with Winterbottom in Chapter 3, that Allen’s book, which Winterbottom lent him, is “a trifle too dogmatic. One could even say a little smug,” and later thinks Allen is wrong in not allowing “for there being anything of value in native institutions” (Achebe 2010: 323 – 324). These statements seem to suggest that Clarke’s views on Africa and African culture are not as dismissive as Winterbottom’s. However, as the novel progresses, Clarke is shown demonstrating the same callous attitude towards the Igbo people as Winterbottom or Wright, in spite of his philosophical musings—for example, when talking with Wright, Clarke really wants to find out about “native women” (Achebe 2010: 391), and, most notably, when confronting Ezeulu about the chieftdom, Clarke delivers an angry speech about the great benefits of the British government (Achebe 2010: 458 – 459). These views, however, and even Clarke’s discomfort with some of them (such as the statement, in the interview with Ezeulu, that “he calmed down and spoke about the benefits of the British Administration. Clarke had not wanted to deliver this lecture which he would have called complacent if someone else had spoken it” (Achebe 2010: 458 – 459)), have no basis in experience, temperament or goals. In contrast, when Clarke suggests that Allen is wrong in dismissing “native institutions”, Winterbottom’s response is to recount his experience of finding the man buried to be eaten alive by vultures (Achebe 2010: 324). This suggestion that Winterbottom’s views are the result of hard experience which has had an emotional impact on him is not present in Clarke’s character, which makes the flat constructed level applicable in his case.

The appropriateness of the category “colonial administrator” on the constructed level is further demonstrated in the way Clarke takes up Winterbottom’s responsibilities while the latter is ill. The explanation for why Clarke releases Ezeulu is presented in this rather humorous paragraph:



Ezeulu's sudden release was the first major decision Clarke had taken on his own. It was exactly one week since his visit to Nkisa to obtain a satisfactory definition of the man's offence and in that time he had already developed considerable self-confidence. In letters he had written home to his father and his fiancée after the incident he had made fun of his earlier amateurishness—a certain sign of present self-assurance. No doubt this new confidence had been helped by the letter from the Resident authorizing him to take day to day decisions and to open confidential correspondence not addressed personally to Winterbottom.

The mail runner brought in two letters. One looked formidable with red wax and seal—the type junior Political Officers referred to lightly as *Top Secret: Burn Before You Open*. He examined it carefully and saw it was not personal to Winterbottom. He felt like a man who had just been initiated into an important secret society (Achebe 2010: 464).

Here, Clarke evinces delight and a sense of achievement in the confidence with which he takes up the administration of the Okperi station. The irony in the narrator's comment "he made fun of his earlier amateurishness—a certain sign of present self-assurance" suggests that Clarke's self-assurance is no less ridiculous than his earlier "amateurishness". This ridiculousness reinforces the idea of Clarke as fitting the type "administrator", as he fulfils the role, but even his newfound confidence is the result of greater authority, not greater understanding.

Clarke's conclusion about the incident where he and Wade come across the sacrifice left by the two policemen on the roadside reinforces Clarke's typical position within the novel. After Wade takes the coins out of the sacrifice, Clarke, thinking about his responsibilities should Winterbottom die, thinks "It would fall on him to defend his natives if need be from the thoughtless acts of white people like Wade" (Achebe 2010: 446 – 447). The idea of "helpless natives"—and especially of "*his* natives"—is one which furthers Clarke's position within his type of "colonial administrator". Furthermore, the text does not really demonstrate why or how Clarke came to the conclusion that desecrating a sacrifice was a "thoughtless act", or why he feels so burdened to "protect" the Igbo people from these acts; instead, Clarke, in keeping with his position within the novel, acts in accordance with the type which he exemplifies, and not out of convictions born of experience.

On the textual level, however, Clarke is given a much rounder treatment. His thoughts and feelings are presented through his own point-of-view quite regularly, he is seen within the novel in various diverse situations which allow a reader to see him acting and speaking in different ways and on different subjects. Furthermore, Clarke, like Winterbottom, is presented from several different perspectives.

While Clarke waits for dinner with Winterbottom in Chapter three, the narrative flashes back to several months earlier, to an anecdote about Clarke attending a dinner party while in training at Headquarters. Clarke's *faux pas* in arriving at the Lieutenant-Governor's dinner fifteen minutes early, and his further embarrassment when his name is not at the table present a comic situation in which a reader can both be amused by Clarke and sympathise with him (Achebe 2010: 322 – 323). This account, as well as Clarke's self-

consciousness about his behaviour when with Winterbottom (see Achebe 2010: 320; 388; 392) characterise Clarke as punctilious and very aware of social conventions, with a desire to impress his superiors.

Clarke's internal monologue is also presented quite regularly. For example, his guilt over gossiping with Wright about Winterbottom's marital crisis is textually rich in that it presents Clarke's thought processes, both in working out why he feels guilty and in the way in which he vindicates himself internally:

All this was working on Clarke's mind as he awaited Winterbottom's coming. He felt guilty, like one who had been caught back-biting one of his own group with an outsider. But then, he told himself in defence, they had said nothing that could be called uncharitable about Winterbottom. All that had happened was that he got to know a few details about the man's life, and felt sorry for him. And that feeling justified the knowledge (Achebe 2010: 391 – 392).

Once again, this passage is riddled with irony as Clarke tries to convince himself of his innocence. "They had said nothing which could be called uncharitable" seems, in light of the discussion Clarke and Wright did have, somewhat of a stretch, and "a few details about the man's life" is a significant understatement for the salacious gossip about Winterbottom's wife having an affair. These ironies, and Clarke's frantic desire to convince himself that he is not guilty of offending Winterbottom before having to endure dinner with him adds textual richness to his character, giving the textual appearance of a three-dimensional character.

The conversation Clarke has with Wright is perhaps one of the foremost examples of textual richness added to Clarke's character by presenting him in different situations. Where he has been stiff and formal with Winterbottom, Clarke relaxes with Wright, and seems to be showing off in rather an adolescent manner by adopting Wright's callous contempt for Winterbottom, imbibing rather too much gin and trying to compliment Wright (Achebe 2010: 389 – 392). This section gives the reader a glimpse into just how naïve and raw Clarke is, adding another textual dimension to his character.

Clarke's character, therefore, falls into the description of individual-like type. Although the textual representation of his character is quite varied and detailed, Clarke is still easily identified as a type on the constructed level. This distinction can be seen quite clearly in the contrast between Clarke and Winterbottom, who, although he holds similar views to Clarke, seems to have developed these from personal experience and convictions.

### 5.2.3 Analysis of John Wright according to Fishelov's character typology

The final non-African character who has any significant part to play in *Arrow of God* is John Wright, the Public Works man in charge of building the road between Okperi and Umuaro (Achebe 2010: 320). Wright, largely, it would seem, due to his relatively small role within the story, is a "pure" type. On the textual level, Wright is shown from one perspective, always speaks and acts in the same manner, and largely only speaks on a certain limited number of topics. On the constructed level, this textual data can be decoded to yield the category of "English industrialist abroad". There is a level of aesthetic category in Wright's character, as, not

being part of the administration, he provides a foil for Winterbottom, an alternative way of dealing with the cultural encounter—one which, as shall be shown, Clarke finds at first more appealing than Winterbottom's. The first time Wright appears within the action of the plot is in Chapter eight, in the incident where he beats Ezeulu's son, Obika, for being late for work (Achebe 2010: 363 – 370). In this chapter, Wright acts on the assumption of his own superiority to the Igbo people who are working for him. This belief in his own superiority is shown in various comments throughout the narrative, which would appear to be in Wright's own point-of-view, for example in the explanation of the workers on the road:

The new road which Mr Wright was building to connect Okperi with its enemy, Umuaro, had now reached its final stages. Even so it would not be finished before the onset of the rainy season if it was left to the paid gang he was using. He had thought of increasing the size of this gang but Captain Winterbottom had told him that far from authorizing any increase he was at that very moment considering a retrenchment as the Vote for Capital Works for the financial year was already largely overspent. Mr Wright had then toyed with the idea of reducing the labourer's pay from threepence a day to something like twopence. But this would not have increased the labour force substantially; not even halving their pay would have achieved the desired result, even if Mr Wright could have found it in his heart to treat the men so meanly. In fact he had got very much attached to this gang and knew their leaders by name now. Many of them were, of course, bone lazy and could only respond to severe handling. But once you got used to them they could be quite amusing. They were as loyal as pet dogs and their ability to improvise songs was incredible. As soon as they were signed on the first day and told how much they would be paid they devised a work song. Their leader sang: "*Lebula toro toro*" and all the others replied: "A day", at the same time swinging their machetes or wielding their hoes. It was a most effective work song and they sang it for many days:

*"Lebula toro toro*  
A day  
*Lebula toro toro*  
A day"

And they sang it in English too! (Achebe 2010: 363)

Although this passage appears to be in Wright's point-of-view, there is subtle self-revealing irony which undermines the appearance of Wright's interest and pleasure in the Igbo workers in the gang, and contributes to the flat presentation of Wright's character. The statement "even if Mr Wright could have found it in his heart to treat the men so meanly" seems to indicate that Wright is a generous man who understands the needs of his workers and wants to deal justly with them. However, interpreted in the light of later statements this is shown to be an exaggeration, almost a humorous mocking of the men. The passage goes on to say "He had got very much attached to this gang . . . Many of them were *of course* bone lazy and could only respond to severe handling. But once you got used to them they could be *quite amusing*. There were as loyal as *pet dogs* and their ability to improvise songs was incredible" (emphases added). These statements demonstrate the sort of admiration a person might indeed show "pet dogs", and the attitude exemplified in them, as well as the assumption "many of them were *of course* bone lazy" and later the astonishment "And they sang it in

English too!" all combine to give the reader the impression that Wright is biased towards the African people who work for him, and does not even bother, as Clarke and Winterbottom sometimes attempt to do, to try to understand or appreciate the culture of the people. Even his astonishment at their work song is facetious and amused, rather than appreciative, which reinforces the flat characterisation on the textual level.

Wright's response to Obika and Ofoedu arriving late to work furthers this impression. Wright's assumption that he has ultimate authority is thrown into sharp relief against Obika's reaction when Wright lashes him; Obika, feeling insulted, "dropped his machete and hoe and charged" (Achebe 2010: 369). Wright does not stop to inquire reasons or deliver warnings regarding the two men's tardiness; instead, he immediately lashes out with his whip, again demonstrating his belief, stated above, that the people of Umuaro and Okperi are like animals. The narrative presents an ironic backdrop, as Obika, albeit drunk, feels himself insulted, and justified in trying to tackle Wright. For Obika, the inherent superiority assumed by Wright and even by Moses Unachukwu doesn't exist, and he responds by attempting to fight Wright as two men might fight to settle a quarrel. Wright's attitude towards the African workers is shown again when he stops the quarrel which breaks out among the workers over the old Umuachala-Umunneora feud right after Obika is beaten:

"Shut up, you black monkeys, and get down to work!" Mr Wright had a grating voice but one that carried far. Truce was immediately established. He turned to Unachukwu and said: "Tell them I shall not tolerate any more slackness."

Unachukwu translated.

"Tell them this bloody work must be finished by June."

"The white man says that unless you finish this work in time you will know what kind of man he is."

"No more lateness."

"Pardin?"

"Pardon what? Can't you understand plain, simple English? I said there will be no more late-coming."

"Oho. He says everybody must work hard and stop all this shit-eating."

"I have one question I want the white man to answer." This was Nweke Ukpaka.

"What's that?"

Unachukwu hesitated and scratched his head. "Dat man want axe master qeshon."

"No questions" (Achebe 2010: 369 – 370).

Here again, Wright's speech is characterised by an overwhelming indifference to the human dignity of the people he is speaking to, and his action in refusing to answer Nweke Ukpaka's question also shows him acting in the same prejudiced way as in the beating of Obika.

Although in the conversation with Clarke in Chapter ten Wright is shown from Clarke's perspective, and the conversation is mainly about Winterbottom rather than the people of Umuaro and Okperi, Wright's speech does not add any extra dimension to his character. His willingness to gossip about Winterbottom's personal life contributes to the sense of callousness gained in the previous scene (Achebe 2010: 389 – 390). Furthermore, in discussing Winterbottom's beleaguered attitude, Wright suggests "The real trouble with Winterbottom . . . is that he is too serious to sleep with native women" (Achebe 2010: 390). In this instance, Wright's attitude towards the Igbo people, that they are commodities free for the use of Europeans, is again demonstrated in his speech. Furthermore, the flatness of the textual representation can be seen in that Wright's conversation, even here, is largely centred around his patronising and abusive attitude towards the Igbo people.

Other perspectives on Wright are presented through Winterbottom and Clarke's thoughts on him. Winterbottom's perspective does not add anything new on the textual level, however. The first comment made in Winterbottom's point of view about Wright is that he "had already had cause to talk to him seriously about his behaviour, especially with native women" (Achebe 2010: 320). Later, he instructs Clarke, "'When you are in Umuaro find out as much as you can—very discreetly of course—about Wright and his new road. I've heard all kinds of ugly stories of whippings and that kind of business. Without prejudging the issue I may say that I wouldn't put anything past Wright, from sleeping with native women to birching their men'" (Achebe 2010: 344). Although Winterbottom reflects on and speaks about Wright—a criteria which can add textual richness to a character, according to Fishelov (1990: 426)—his comments and thoughts are restricted to Wright's habit of sleeping with Igbo women and his tendency to beat the men working for him. These are not new ideas when Winterbottom brings them up, nor does his commentary add anything new, such as motivation, to Wright's behaviour.

Clarke has a more positive view on Wright, and this has the potential to add textual three-dimensionality to Wright's character. However, what Clarke seems to find refreshing about Wright's personality is that he isn't in the habit of "taking himself too seriously" (Achebe 2010: 389). Clarke's internal reflections on their conversation are mainly centred around his changing opinions about Winterbottom; he thinks of Wright as a "good and honest Englishman", but this in spite of his "rough and squat exterior" (Achebe 2010: 389). Since Clarke is comparing Wright to Winterbottom, and especially to Winterbottom's "smugness" and "missionary" ideas, it would appear that what Clarke finds appealing about Wright is the very attitude seen previously in Wright's interaction with Obika and the other men from Umuaro. Furthermore, a great portion of Clarke's thoughts on Wright's conversation is taken up with his desire (and regret that he cannot find the courage) to ask about the habit of sleeping with native women (Achebe 2010: 309 – 391)—thus repeating again a single aspect of Wright's character. Although Wright is presented briefly from Clarke and Winterbottom's perspectives, their reflections on his character nevertheless do not add any extra dimensions or present Wright in

any different light to that of any of the rest of the narrative. This added perspective thus does not disrupt the flatness of the textual presentation.

Wright, thus, is seen to be a “pure” type. On the constructed level, he fits the category of “British industrialist abroad”, and the textual details given the reader all show Wright doing and saying the same sorts of things in the same manner.

#### 5.2.4 The non-African characters in *Arrow of God* according to Fishelov’s character typology

From the discussion above, it can be seen that *Arrow of God* makes a shift from *Things fall apart* and *No longer at ease* by including a non-African character who is a “pure” individual on Fishelov’s scale. The fact that Winterbottom is a “pure” individual presents many interesting possibilities for exploring the issue of cross-cultural characterisation; as will be seen below in the section on a Bakhtinian analysis of *Arrow of God*, the use of a “pure” individual seems to give an author more scope to allow his or her material to play out polyphonically on the page.

It is of interest to note that, while Winterbottom can be described as a “pure” individual, the other non-African characters in the novel are not. As demonstrated above, Clarke yields an individual-like type on Fishelov’s scale, since, although the textual description of him is very rich, he nevertheless fits the category of “colonial administrator” on the constructed level. Wright, on the other hand, is a “pure” type; he fits a simple category on the constructed level, and the textual level presents him in very uniform ways. The fact that, although all three characters are on different positions in Fishelov’s typology, they all hold more or less the same views about the Igbo people and culture they are experiencing, suggests once more that Fishelov’s typology presents an interesting tool to represent a culture in a nuanced, non-reductive manner, even if a single ideology and set of views and values may dominate that culture.

### 5.3 THE “MESSY WORKSHOP”: A FLUID VIEW OF THE CULTURAL ENCOUNTER IN *ARROW OF GOD*

*Arrow of God* seems to posit for the reader an even more open view of both culture and the cultural encounter than *No longer at ease*, depicting many various “borderlands” both within the Igbo and British cultures, as well as between them, and apparently encouraging the reader to think of culture more as a thing created and recreated constantly by society than as a static set of behaviours (see T. Kortenaar 1995: 31).

It is possible to trace this change in the representation of cultural identity from *Things fall apart* to *Arrow of God*, by observing the attitude of the main characters to tradition and change. Quayson (2011: 36) notes of Okonkwo:

Throughout the novel he [Okonkwo] is represented as someone for whom the changes in his society do not register in his consciousness either explicitly or subliminally as transitions that need to be negotiated, but only as signs of the reprehensible departure from the masculine and heroic norms that must be upheld at all cost.

Okonkwo has no ambivalence in relation to his capacity to restore his cultural standing in the society he has had to leave. His suicide may be described as a peculiar form of cultural self-assertion, even if its immediate effect is to place him outside the potential cohort of venerable ancestors. Okonkwo is one ultimately defeated by certainty.

In contrast to this adherence to tradition and flat rejection of change, *Arrow of God's* Ezeulu is described by Losambe (1986: 151), as behaving “as a man who, while wanting to remain rooted in his tradition, nevertheless understands the imperatives of history.” It is in the presentation of the (arguably productive) tension between necessary connection to culture and inevitable movement with history, that *Arrow of God* seems to offer a distinct move away from the tendency towards a reductive binarism seen in the first two novels of the trilogy.

One of the primary ways this productive tension is depicted in *Arrow of God* is the way in which culture is demonstrated to be a fluid aspect, constantly re-narrated to suit the needs of the people adhering to it. T. Kortenaar (1995: 31) claims that, in *Arrow of God*, “Achebe represents culture in Africa as Paulin Hountondji argues that it should be represented: as something invented and in constant need of reinvention.” In this way, he suggests the multi-faceted, fluid nature of culture, and posits that it is in this very fluidity that a culture in fact finds resilience against outside pressures. As he notes, “the British intrusion forces Umuaro to redefine itself, but its culture has always been subject to redefinition” (T. Kortenaar 1995:32). The establishing of the communal god, Ulu, is an example of a time when the people of Umuaro redefined themselves in order to preserve themselves—this time from the Abam slave traders, before the crisis of colonisation confronting them in the novel’s storyline (Achebe 2010: 304; T. Kortenaar 1995: 32). T. Kortenaar (1995: 39) further notes that the villagers in Umuaro are always keenly aware of the fact that Ulu is their own creation, and of the purpose of his creation to their cultural identity. He argues, therefore, that “Umuaro is best understood through the will of its members to narrate a collective identity” (T. Kortenaar 1995: 32), further drawing attention to an important point by Amselle:

For there to be an identity, society, culture or ethnicity, it is not necessary for the members to agree on what defines culture: it is enough that they agree to debate or negotiate the terms of that identity. In other words, identity is an agreement about the object of disagreement” (Amselle in T. Kortenaar 1995: 32).

Culture, therefore, to the people of Umuaro, is something which they themselves create, defining it by their historical needs and using it to create a more solid sense of community and loyalty.

The war between Umuaro and Okperi is a further example of an act which seeks to establish identity; in this instance, however, the British intervention to stop the war “changes the significance of the war for all concerned” (T. Kortenaar 1995: 33). T. Kortenaar (1995: 33) argues that the British intervention draws the attention of the people of Umuaro and Okperi to an external boundary which they share, suggesting that when

external boundaries are threatened, a people will become more concerned with establishing and understanding internal boundaries—as noted in Ezeulu’s obsession with his rivalry with Nwaka and Ezedimili, which he sees as more important than his disagreement with Winterbottom, and in Winterbottom’s own struggles with headquarters, which provides his real conflict, rather than the conflict with Ezeulu (T. Kortenaar 1995: 34).

T. Kortenaar (1995: 40) further stresses the idea of the power with which this self-invention invests a community, claiming that “Achebe’s narrative is not a tragedy but a realist novel about the telling of a tragedy, a novel in which Africans are not the victims but the makers of their own history.” He suggests that the people of Umuaro could have created out of the bare facts of Ezeulu’s story a narrative of resistance or one of assimilation, but that tragedy “is accepted as the most appropriate narrative configuration because it is that part of the reservoir of available cultural elements that proves most useful for Umuaran self-definition” (T. Kortenaar 1995: 39). By this means, he posits, the people of Umuaro are able to avoid cultural imperialism, because they retain their own “collective will-formation” (T. Kortenaar 1995: 39).

Along with T. Kortenaar’s suggestion of self-fashioned history and identity, this tendency in *Arrow of God* toward a more nuanced position with regard to culture, cultural encounters and cultural identity can be seen in light of Morrison’s (2018: 16 – 17) proposal that Achebe’s novels demonstrate his peculiarly Igbo understanding of and desire for dialogue. Morrison (2018: 16) quotes Achebe as claiming “‘middle ground’ as his working space”:

The preference of the Igbo is not . . . singularity but duality. Wherever Something Stands Something Else Will Stand Beside It. The middle ground is neither the origin of things nor the last things; it is aware of a future to head into and a past to fall back on; it is the home of doubt and indecision, of suspension of disbelief, of make-believe, of playfulness, of the unpredictable, of irony. Let me give you a thumbnail sketch of the Igbo.

When the Igbo encounter human conflict, their first impulse is not to determine who is right but quickly to restore harmony. In my hometown, Igidi, we have a saying, *Ikpe Ogidi adi-ama ofu onye*: The judgement of Ogidi does not go against one side. We are social managers rather than legal draftsmen. Our workplace is not a neat tabletop but a messy workshop. In a great compound, there are wise people as well as foolish ones, and nobody is scandalized by that (Achebe in Morrison 2018: 16 – 17).

Using this statement as a point of departure, Morrison (2018: 16) suggests that Achebe does not present the relationship between coloniser/colonised as “an impassable gulf between incommensurable systems”, but rather that, amid the “noise” of the struggle between these two, Achebe seeks out “signs of negotiation and accommodation” which take place among people of both systems. Furthermore, Morrison quotes T. Kortenaar’s (in Morrison 2018: 18) suggestion that Achebe’s portrayal of characters across the cultural divide does not reinforce the binary of colonised/coloniser, but seeks rather to disrupt it. One example of this type of “border-crossing” noted by Morrison (2018: 19) is in Achebe’s depiction of the Igbo Christian converts as not merely abandoning one set of values for another, but as adapting and manipulating the Christian narrative



to fit their own traditional values—seen most notably in Moses Unachukwu’s deft use of Biblical narrative and Igbo proverbs to urge the church in Umuaro against alienating their non-Christian neighbours (Achebe 2010: 336; Morrison 2018: 19). Relying on constantly seeking out points of accommodation, adaptation and border-crossings, Achebe is able, rather than writing “a grand anti-colonial narrative” to instead create a narrative based on what he himself saw as “a distinctively Igbo dialogism” (Morrison 2018: 20).

One of the ways in which Morrison (2018: 21 – 24) suggests Achebe accomplishes this dialogism is in creating a parallel between Ezeulu and Winterbottom. Ezeulu, he claims, “struggles in his responsibility to lead Umuaro according to the requirements of his god”, while Winterbottom experiences “difficulties [in] implementing the directives he receives from his own, remote higher authorities” (Morrison 2018: 21). Moreover, both Ezeulu and Winterbottom fail, Ezeulu because of his pride and vain competition with Nwaka and Ezedimili, Winterbottom because of “ignorance and ambivalence” (Morrison 2018: 21). In what Morrison (2018: 21) calls “an obvious narrative symmetry”, both Ezeulu and Winterbottom suffer an eventual breakdown—Ezeulu’s mental, Winterbottom’s physical.

However, Morrison (2018: 21) claims that although *Arrow of God* is therefore centred around failures of leadership, it is, for this very reason, also about the opposite. For, he claims, both Winterbottom and Ezeulu have the seed of “selfless service” buried somewhere inside them—“even if neither man is able to rise to it” (Morrison 2018: 21). In this concept of selfless service, Achebe shows great willingness to dialogise between Igbo and colonial ideas; as Morrison (2018: 23) proposes, although “Achebe offers plentiful evidence of the violence, ignorance, and perversity endemic to British colonialism . . . he also tries to tease out the idea of public service hiding within it.” In this regard, Morrison (2018: 25) suggests that Achebe portrays “a potential commonality between the elder of ‘tradition’ and the bureaucrat of ‘modernity’ in the ethos of disinterested public service they are supposed to share”.

Nevertheless, even in relation to this ideal, Morrison (2018: 24) suggests that Ezeulu and Winterbottom alike fall short of the ideal, choosing rather to create self-determined identities for themselves. Although their “failure to banish pride and wilfulness from [their] calling” is ultimately a fatal weakness, yet their position of “quiet insubordination”, Winterbottom to the higher ranks of the British colonial administration, Ezeulu to the elders of Umuaro, could be seen as a positive sign—an example of what Jefiyo (in Morrison 2018: 16) calls “the kernel of resistance to both local and foreign domination”. The sense of self-determination evinced by both characters, in opposition to all the pressures of domination bearing down on them, could also be said to introduce several new planes in which dialogue can take place; because these characters are endowed with a will and a consciousness of their own, a desire to create their own identities as individuals, in opposition to the wills of those around them, they intrude themselves obstinately into the conflict, rupturing the simple coloniser/colonised divide and creating new dimensions on which dialogue is forced to take place—

between “disobedient” coloniser/coloniser (Winterbottom/the British headquarters), “disobedient” coloniser/colonised (Winterbottom/the people of Umuaro), “disobedient” coloniser/“disobedient” colonised (Winterbottom/Ezeulu), and “disobedient” colonised/colonised (Ezeulu/the people of Umuaro) as well. The multiple new planes of dialogue opened up by the recalcitrant self-determination evinced within both cultures represented in the novel immediately demonstrates the nature of the fluid, self-narrating cultural identity depicted by *Arrow of God*.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the role of the non-African characters is very different in *Arrow of God* from the previous two novels. In *Arrow of God*, the non-African characters do not present a static foil, a stationary type against which the dynamic emotional journeys of the main characters are thrown into sharper relief. Rather, in *Arrow of God*, the non-African characters become points in a dialogue, both across the Igbo-British divide as well as within their own culture. Differing levels of assent within British culture are here given some space in the novel, shown by Winterbottom’s uneasy relationship with headquarters as well as in the conversation Clarke and Wright have when they discuss Winterbottom’s character and personal life. By demonstrating the British culture as equally riddled with these border zones created by levels of assent as the Igbo culture, Achebe renders it a fully realistic culture, and its adherents become less faces for a particular view, and more individuals in an ever-flowing dialogue.

Another aspect of cross-cultural representation which is different in *Arrow of God* from the previous two novels is the that in *Arrow of God*, both the non-African and African characters sometimes share views or opinions, demonstrating some sense of commonality between them. Most notably, Winterbottom and Ezeulu feel the same way both toward their own higher authorities, but also in certain situations in the novel, such as the Okperi-Umuaro land dispute. Furthermore, T. Kortenaar (1995: 37) points out that “both Clarke and Nwaka believe that Ezeulu was already mad when he refused the position of warrant chief”. Although the characters remain true to their own culturally-shaped worldviews, the occasional overlapping of these demonstrates the productive possibilities of dialogue, instead of only sharply delineated conflict.

Consequently, it can be argued that *Arrow of God* is the most dialogised of the three novels in the trilogy, and that this dialogism is presented both in the less-stereotypical representation of the non-African characters, and in the levels of assent portrayed in both Igbo and British culture. The most striking example of this dialogism could perhaps be said to be the parallel drawn between Ezeulu and Winterbottom. Thus, while not abating his critique of the perfidy of colonialism, Achebe nevertheless presents in *Arrow of God* a profound, and profoundly productive, study of cross-cultural dialogue.

#### **5.4 A BAKHTINIAN ANALYSIS OF THE NON-AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN *ARROW OF GOD***

*Arrow of God* provides a good example of the productive possibilities of the rupture-prone world of the polyphonic novel (Bakhtin 1984: 18). As the discussion below shall seek to demonstrate, nearly all of the elements of polyphony defined by Bakhtin (1984) can be identified within *Arrow of God*. The early beginnings of nuance

and ambivalence across cultures seen in *No longer at ease* are thus fully fledged in *Arrow of God*, thanks to the fact that, through a polyphonic style, Achebe releases monologic hold of his characters' discourse, and allows their utterances to sound equally on the same plane as each other's and his own.

#### 5.4.1 The plurality of multiple independent consciousnesses present in *Arrow of God*

For a novel to be polyphonic, Bakhtin (1984: 6; 7) suggests that it must contain "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses", where these multiple consciousnesses are all of them equally valid and autonomous of a finalising word by either the author or another character. Bakhtin comments further:

[Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel] is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively)—and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant. Not only does the novel give no support outside the rupture-prone world of dialogue for a monologically all-encompassing consciousness—but on the contrary everything in the novel is structured to make dialogic opposition inescapable. Not a single element of the work is structured from the point of view of a nonparticipating "third person". In the novel itself nonparticipating "third persons" are not represented in any way. There is no place for them, compositionally or in the larger meaning of the work. And this is not a weakness of the author but his greatest strength. By this means a new authorial position is won and conquered, one located above the monologic position (Bakhtin 1984: 18).

In a polyphonic novel, therefore, Bakhtin suggests that the monologic, unified discourse of the author is ruptured by voices and consciousnesses which operate outside of this discourse, dialogising with it, avoiding its finalising word. The whole novel cannot be defined, decided or explained by a single idea of the hero, representing the author (Bakhtin 1984: 25). This multi-levelled discourse, Bakhtin (1984: 27) suggests, is part of the lived reality of society, where ideas, fully autonomous from one another, jostle one another, dialogise with one another constantly, but never absorb one another. "The important thing in . . . polyphony", states Bakhtin (1984: 36) "is precisely what happens *between various consciousnesses*, that is, their interaction and interdependence". Therefore, in a polyphonic novel an author does not seek words with which to define or explain (and therefore finalise) the character, but rather words *for the characters* which will express his or her unique view on the world.

It is possible to identify these characteristics throughout *Arrow of God*, within Achebe's own cultural affiliations among the Igbo characters as well as without, among the British characters. From the first introduction of Winterbottom's point of view in Chapter three, his discourse sets itself up in opposition to all attempts to define or explain it, in much the same way that Ezeulu's does. Throughout the novel, Winterbottom's own personal world, beyond the confines of the plot's time and space, is set up. He had a wife who left him unexpectedly, apparently causing him considerable pain (Achebe 2010: 390; 396); he fought the Germans in the

Cameroon during World War I (Achebe 2010: 319); he believes in the “British mission in Africa” (Achebe 2010: 319); he disagrees with the British administration’s policy due to his bad experiences of Chief James Ikedi’s corruption (Achebe 2010: 344 – 345); he has a romantic relationship with the missionary doctor Mary Savage (Achebe 2010: 391; 436; 512); he has had (apparently traumatic) encounters with the Igbo justice system which has defined his approach to his position (Achebe 2010: 324; 343). This brief summary demonstrates how much broader Winterbottom’s personal world (and therefore worldview) is than those of the missionaries or the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart*, or Green in *No longer at ease*, none of whom possessed a fully developed world of idea-shaping experiences outside of their brief appearances within the novel’s plot.

Furthermore, Winterbottom’s consciousness defies all attempts to finalise it. Through the novel, he is regularly discussed, in his absence, by other characters. Ezeulu thinks in chapter one, “Even the white man, Wintabota, understood, though he came from a land no one knew” (Achebe 2010: 296). At the end of Chapter two, the narrative provides the following:

The next day, Afo, saw the war brought to a sudden close. The white man, Wintabota, brought soldiers to Umuaro and stopped it. The story of what these soldiers did to Abame was still told with fear, and so Umuaro made no effort to resist but laid down their arms. Although they were not yet satisfied they could say without shame that Akukalia’s death had been avenged, that they had provided him with three men on whom to rest his head. It was also a good thing perhaps that the war was stopped. The death of Akukalia and his brother in one and the same dispute showed that Ekwensu’s hand was in it.

The white man, not satisfied that he had stopped the war, had gathered all the guns in Umuaro and asked the soldiers to break them in the face of all, except three or four which he carried away. Afterwards he sat in judgement over Umuaro and Okperi and gave the disputed land to Okperi (Achebe 2010: 317).

Later, Clarke and Wright have a lengthy discussion in which they freely exchange opinions and ideas about Winterbottom’s character and personal history:

“Are we having a celebration to open [the road]?”

“The captain says no. He says we have already overspent the Vote for it.”

“What does it matter?”

“That’s what I want to know. And yet we spend hundreds of pounds building Native Courts all over the division that nobody wants, as far as I can see.”

“I must say though that that is not the Captain’s fault.” Clarke was already adopting Wright’s half-contemptuous manner of referring to Winterbottom. “It is the policy of Headquarters which I happen to know the Captain is not altogether in agreement with.”

“Damn the Headquarters.”

“The Captain would approve of that sentiment.”

“Actually, you know, the Captain is not a bad fellow at all. I think that deep down he is quite a decent fellow. One must make allowances for the rough time he’s had.”

“In the matter of promotions, you mean?”

“He’s been badly treated there too, I’m told,” said Wright. “Actually I wasn’t thinking of that at all. I was thinking of his domestic life. Oh yes. You see during the war while the poor man was fighting the Germans in the Cameroons some smart fellow walked away with his wife at home.”

“Really? I hadn’t heard about that.”

“Yes. I’m told he was very badly shaken by it. I sometimes think it was this personal loss during the war that’s made him cling to this ridiculous Captain business.”

“Quite possibly. He’s the kind of person, isn’t he, who would take the desertion of his wife very badly,” said Clarke.

“Exactly. A man as inflexible as him can’t take a thing like that.”

In the course of the evening Clarke was given every detail of Winterbottom’s marital crisis and he felt really sorry for the man. Wright also seemed to have been touched with sympathy by the very act of telling the story. Without any conscious design the two men dropped their contemptuous reference to *the Captain* and called Winterbottom by his name.

“The real trouble with Winterbottom,” said Wright after deep thought, “is that he is too serious to sleep with native women. . . . He doesn’t seem to realize that even Governors have been known to keep dusky mistresses.” He licked his lips.

“I don’t think it’s a question of knowing or not knowing,” said Clarke. “He is a man of very high principles, something of a missionary. I believe his father was a Church of England clergyman . . .”

“I think you are right about the missionary business. He should have come out with the C.M.S. or some such people. By the way, he has been going around lately with the woman missionary doctor at Nkisa. Of course we all have our different tastes, but I would not have thought a woman missionary doctor could provide much fun for a man in this God-forsaken place.” . . .

“From what I heard of Winterbottom at headquarters,” [Clarke] said, “I expected to see some sort of buffoon.”

“I know. He is a stock joke at Enugu, isn’t he?”

“Whenever I said I was going to Okperi they said: What! With Old Tom? and looked pityingly at me. I wondered what was wrong with Old Tom, but no one would say any more. Then one day a very senior officer said to another in my hearing: *Old Tom is always reminding you that he came out to Nigeria in 1910 but he never mentions that in all that time he has not put in a day’s work.* It’s simply amazing how much back-biting goes on at Enugu.”

“Well,” said Wright, yawning, “I cannot say myself that Old Tom is the most hard-working man I’ve ever met; but then who is? Certainly not that lot at Enugu” (Achebe 2010: 389 – 391).

In none of these statements, however, is Winterbottom's consciousness entirely objectified, as Green's is into Obi's discourse in *No longer at ease*. Winterbottom's own utterance is consistently presented in dialogue with the utterance of others about him. Thus, to the narrative's explanation of the Umuaro/Okperi war and his part in stopping it, Winterbottom presents his own utterance:

"Those guns have a long and interesting history. The people of Okperi and their neighbours, Umuaro, are great enemies. Or they were before I came into the story. A big savage war had broken out between them over a piece of land. This feud was made worse by the fact that Okperi welcomed missionaries and government while Umuaro, on the other hand, has remained backward. It was only in the last four or five years that any kind of impression has been made there. I think I can say with all modesty that this change came about after I had gathered and publicly destroyed all firearms in the place except, of course, this collection here. You will be going there frequently on tour. If you hear anyone talking about Otiki-Egbe, you know they are talking about me. Otiji-Egbe means Breaker of Guns. I am even told that all children born in that year belong to a new age-grade of the Breaking of Guns" (Achebe 2010: 325).

Neither the explanation of the narrative in Chapter two, nor Winterbottom's here seems to be an entirely accurate representation of the facts; neither of them is, however, affirmed or repudiated from a realm of an authorial "surplus" field of vision (Bakhtin 1984: 70). The narrative in Chapter two would appear to be the concealed voice of another, that of the people of Umuaro collectively (see Bakhtin 1981: 302). Winterbottom's explanation stands in opposition to and in dialogue with this general opinion of the war. The two utterances interact and colour each other with different levels of meaning, but neither one is given the status of "true" from a higher, monologic plane, which would finalise both explanations and reduce the false one to merely characteristic of the person or group whose utterance it is. Rather, the two opinions coexist, and it is in the interaction between them that a reader is chiefly made interested.

The same is true of Clarke and Wright's gossip about Winterbottom. They each make utterances regarding Winterbottom, and seek to explain him by these utterances. Yet there is no affirmation or repudiation of their word, from either the author or from Winterbottom. Their utterances remain unfinalised among the many fully valid statements which enter into the great dialogue of the narrative; they may colour or influence Winterbottom's utterances, but do not succeed, as Obi's statements on Green do, in fully absorbing Winterbottom's consciousness and creating a predetermined judgement for all his following utterances.

A similar situation is true of Ezeulu's discourse, which nearly all the other characters attempt to define, explain and finalise. Nwaka and Ezidemili are convinced that Ezeulu is hungry for power (Achebe 2010: 327; 330), yet Ezeulu is insulted by Winterbottom's offer to make him Paramount Chief of Umuaro (Achebe 2010: 459). Ezeulu is so independent from any other's discourse, in fact, that he even refuses to be bound by the discourse of cultural tradition and heritage:

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the

New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! The Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival—no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare.

Ezeulu was stung to anger by this as though his enemy had spoken it.

“Take away that word *dare*,” he replied to his enemy. “Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not been born yet” (Achebe 2010: 293).

Ezeulu’s statement “Take away that word *dare*”, made as if to his enemy, is a prime example of double-voiced discourse of a person addressed to himself (Bakhtin 1984:184). Here, a thought in Ezeulu’s mind becomes separate from his consciousness, sounds as the utterance of his “enemy”, and his own word instantly engages it, wrestling with it and dialogising it. The monologic plane of unassailable tradition—“No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done.”—is instantly ruptured by the independent will of Ezeulu’s opposing utterance.

In a similar way, Winterbottom’s relationship to the words of his own superiors possesses the same autonomous will. In Chapter five, he receives a memorandum regarding the appointment of Paramount Chiefs:

Captain T. K. Winterbottom stared at the memorandum before him with irritation and a certain amount of contempt. It came from the Lieutenant-Governor through the Resident through the Senior District Officer to him, the last two adding each his own comment before passing the buck down the line. Captain Winterbottom was particularly angry at the tone of the Senior District Officer’s minute. It was virtually a reprimand for what he was pleased to describe as Winterbottom’s stonewalling on the issue of the appointment of Paramount Chiefs. Perhaps if this minute had been written by any other person Captain Winterbottom would not have minded so much; but Watkinson had been his junior by three years and had been promoted over him.

“Any fool can be promoted,” Winterbottom always told himself and his assistants, “provided he does nothing but try. Those of us who have a job to do have no time to try.” . . .

Back at his desk Captain Winterbottom read the Lieutenant-Governor’s memorandum again:

My purpose in these paragraphs is limited to impressing on all Political Officers working among the tribes who lack Natural Rulers the vital necessity of developing without any further delay an effective system of ‘indirect rule’ based on native institutions.

To many colonial nations native administration means government by white men. You are all aware that H.M.G. considers this policy as mistaken. In place of the alternative of governing directly through Administrative Officers there is the other method of trying while we endeavour to purge the native system of its abuses to build a higher civilization upon the soundly rooted native stock that had its foundation in the

hearts and minds and thoughts of the people and therefore on which we can more easily build, moulding it and establishing it into lines consonant with modern ideas and higher standards, and yet all the time enlisting the real force of the spirit of the people, instead of killing all that out and trying to start afresh. We must not destroy the African atmosphere, the African mind, the whole foundation of his race . . .

Words, words, words. Civilization, African mind, African atmosphere. Has His Honour ever rescued a man buried alive up to his neck, with a piece of yam on his head to attract vultures? He began to pace up and down again. But why couldn't someone tell the bloody man that the whole damn thing was stupid and futile. He knew why. They were all afraid of losing their promotion or the O.B.E. (Achebe 2010: 342 – 343).

Winterbottom's response to the Lieutenant-Governor's memorandum shows two distinct utterances in unfinished dialogue with one another. The pompous tone of the Lieutenant-Governor's letter seeks to influence and determine Winterbottom's consciousness. Winterbottom's utterance takes the Lieutenant-Governor's words and repeats them, now re-accented in *Winterbottom's* style, and through his consciousness, sounding a different accent to in their original conception by the Lieutenant-Governor ("Words, words, words. Civilization, African mind, African atmosphere."). The two utterances stand now in dialogic opposition; the Lieutenant-Governors' voice, which at first seeks to sound in a single-voiced manner over Winterbottom's utterance, is now forced to sound in double-voiced dialogue with Winterbottom's equal utterance. The next few lines present again a double-voiced dialogue of Winterbottom with himself; the phrase "he knew why" acts as a rejoinder to his own word in the question "why couldn't someone tell the bloody man that the whole damn thing was stupid and futile". When Winterbottom answers himself that his colleagues "were all afraid of losing their promotion or the O.B.E.," once again the voices and accents of these colleagues are forced to sound in dialogue with Winterbottom, their "promotion or the O.B.E." against "rescued a man buried alive up to his neck, with a piece of roast yam on his head to attract the vultures". There is, furthermore, no authorial surplus which affirms Winterbottom's position over his colleagues or vice-versa. As noted by Bakhtin (1984: 18) above, this unmediated interaction does not guide the reader in how to direct his or her judgements as a monologic construction would; rather, the polyphonic interaction of equal, unmediated consciousnesses forces the viewer to become a participant, to dialogue with the utterances rather than to accept an authorial judgement over them. Once again, the result of these independent, unmerged consciousnesses in dialogue on the page is a rupture of the monologic plane, a shift of authority where no single consciousness is given the power to define another—Winterbottom is not finalised in the Lieutenant-Governor's discourse, but neither is the Lieutenant-Governor finalised in Winterbottom's; furthermore, there is here no authorial surplus or non-participating third person to affirm either Winterbottom's position or the Lieutenant-Governor's.



Within the points-of-view of Wright, Clarke and, to a lesser degree, Wade, a similar approach is adopted. Clarke's consciousness does not merge with or submit itself to Winterbottom's, or even to an external, authorial finalisation. Very frequently, within Clarke's own consciousness, he dialogises the point-of-view of his superiors, forming his utterance in response to their (unuttered) word:

Tony Clarke was suitably impressed. "You should go and see a doctor," he said, knowing that this was the kind of stuff expected of new boys (Achebe 2010: 434).

There is perhaps less opportunity for Clarke's discourse to dialogue as independently on the page as Winterbottom's does, and some tendency toward finalisation in the discourse of other characters—Ezeulu characterises him as having "very little sense", for instance (Achebe 2010: 474). However, there is no ultimate finalisation of his consciousness from a position of authorial surplus. Indeed, even Ezeulu's utterance, which might be thought to be on a higher plane and to absorb Clarke's consciousness into itself, in fact cannot fully define or finalise Clarke. Because of the nature of the discourse within this narrative, Ezeulu's analysis of Clarke can only signify *Ezeulu's* worldview; for example, Ezeulu attributes Clarke's power to his ability to write with his left hand, which contrasts with Clarke's own beliefs about his administrative power (Achebe 2010: 464; 475). Both ideas are allowed to exist within the narrative, unfinalised by the author, as the fully valid words of Ezeulu and Clarke respectively.

Wright's character is perhaps the only one in the novel which could be suggested to have some element of external finalisation exercised over it. There is no non-participating third person in *Arrow of God*, and Wright's character is rarely discussed in a finalising manner by another character (as Green is by Obi, for example). Although Winterbottom holds a poor opinion of him (Achebe 2010: 320 – 321; 344), the same characteristics, seen through Clarke's point of view, are given a positive accent. The two utterances, therefore, stand independent of each other and of Wright's consciousness and worldview. The finalisation exercised over Wright is, as in *Things fall apart*, largely due to the presence of self-revealing irony, dialogising polemically with the reader's apperceptive background to finalise Wright in his typical role, forcing the reader to a certain judgement instead of to a participating dialogue:

But this would not have increased the labour force substantially; not even halving their pay would have achieved the desired result, even if Mr Wright could have found it in his heart to treat the men so meanly. In fact he had got very much attached to this gang and knew their leaders by name now. Many of them were, of course, bone lazy and could only respond to severe handling. But once you got used to them they could be quite amusing. They were as loyal as pet dogs and their ability to improvise songs was incredible. As soon as they were signed on the first day and told how much they would be paid they devised a work song. Their leader sang: "*Lebula toro toro*" and all the others replied: "A day", at the same time swinging their machetes or wielding their hoes. It was a most effective work song and they sang it for many days:

*"Lebula toro toro*  
A day

*Lebula toro toro*

A day”

And they sang it in English too! (Achebe 2010: 363)

Here, as in *Things fall apart*, the patronising tone of Wright’s utterance is deliberate and polemical—in it, one senses another voice, another consciousness which Wright’s utterance, in its exaggerated condescension, is set against, to reveal the weakness and narrow-mindedness of Wright’s position. In this revelation his character is finalised. Although no other utterance directly finalises him, his consciousness here is not autonomous or equal, say, to Ezeulu’s or Winterbottom’s; in the presence of a finalising authority, Wright’s utterances lose their signifying power. This seems to be, however, the only instance of finalising authority within the novel.

The presence of these multitude of independent, equally valid consciousness-centres (Bakhtin 1984: 17) appears to suggest that *Arrow of God* can be described as a polyphonic novel. The lack of an authorial surplus of understanding permits the characters to sound independently, unfinalised, dialogising with each other and destroying the unified synthesis of authorial intent. Instead, a myriad of ruptures, full of potential and productive ambiguity, are opened.

#### 5.4.2 The person of the idea in *Arrow of God*

A key element of the polyphonic novel, according to Bakhtin (1984: 85) is the representation of “someone else’s idea, preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea, while at the same time also preserving a distance, neither confirming the idea nor merging it with [the author’s] own expressed ideology.” This has been seen, in the above section, to be profoundly applicable in an analysis of *Arrow of God*, which is capable of presenting the multiple, autonomous ideas of Ezeulu, Nwaka, Winterbottom, Clarke (and, indeed, the members of Ezeulu’s household, his friend Akuebue and to some extent nearly every character who enters the novel), neither affirming nor denying any of these ideas, but leaving them to interact with one another, to confront and oppose one another with no authorial intervention or ideological framing.

Furthermore, Bakhtin (1984: 85) notes that “the image of an idea is inseparable from the image of a person, the carrier of that idea”, what is important is “the *person born of [the] idea*”. This notion of a “person born of the idea” has an interesting parallel to the discussion of Fishelov’s typology applied to Winterbottom. It was noted above that, as opposed to the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart*, Winterbottom’s views and opinions on colonial administration are given motivation within his personal experience. This would appear to be similarly born up by the suggestion of a “person born of an idea”. Winterbottom’s self-consciousness, his actions and his utterances, are largely informed by his idea on the policy of indirect rule. His experience, notably his experience of rescuing a man who had been condemned to be eaten alive by vultures (Achebe 2010: 324; 343), and his experience of Chief James Ikedi’s corruption once given the position of paramount chief, shapes his discourse, and his discourse shapes his interactions with other utterances—

notably the Lieutenant-Governor's, and Ezeulu's, insofar as he judges Ezeulu to be less likely to abuse the position of paramount chief than James Ikedi (Achebe 2010: 346).

Even more than Winterbottom, Ezeulu is a person born of an idea. Through the novel, he burns with a grievance against his people, which intensifies after Nwaka snubs him in the matter of going to Okperi to see Winterbottom (Achebe 2010: 429 – 431). The course the idea takes within his mind, his constant planning for revenge and his final act in refusing to call the New Yam festival create the image of him as a person.

This fully valid idea, which creates the image of Ezeulu's full and unfinalised personality, but is not shaped by his position or his social circumstances (Bakhtin 1984: 86), is, according to Bakhtin (1984: 87), what creates the idea of the character as "absolutely unselfish, insofar as the idea has really taken control of the deepest core of their personality". Bakhtin (1984: 87) notes that what is unselfish in the devotion to an idea is not the idea itself, as a moral or noble idea, or the acts carried out in consequence of the idea, but rather the character's accepting and holding an idea "in the deepest recesses of his personality." In other words, this is not a moral unselfishness—on a moral judgement the acts perpetrated in the service of the idea could be called selfish—but rather, an ideological unselfishness, a willingness to wholly surrender to the full outworking of an idea. This is an interesting perspective to bear on both Ezeulu's act in not calling the New Yam feast, as well as Winterbottom's colonial project. For Ezeulu, his devotion to the idea of Ulu's quarrel with the people of Umuaro, with the idea that he himself is merely Ulu's "arrow", would, in this construction, render him "unselfish", a person wholly devoted to an idea and willing to work through all the practical consequences of a devotion to this idea. This is perhaps similar to Winterbottom's "British mission in Africa" (Achebe 2010: 319). Winterbottom, like Ezeulu, is fully committed to an idea and to its working out; although his acts, like Ezeulu's willingness to let Umuaro face famine, may seem morally questionable, both characters are given full autonomy in the dialogic plane of the novel to work their ideas out without finalising judgement from the author, or from the reader through the author.

Thus, the position of the idea, and its unfinalised state within *Arrow of God*, free from constraining judgement or affirmation from the author, renders the novel in yet another way reflective of a polyphonic work.

#### **5.4.3 Elements of the carnivalesque in *Arrow of God***

A final element of polyphony which has application in *Arrow of God* is the aspect of the carnivalesque. It was noted in Chapter two that several elements of the carnivalesque are of particular relevance to a discussion of Achebe's work. In the case of *Arrow of God*, it is appropriate firstly to consider the application of the genre *serio-comic* to the novel. There is a distinctly light-hearted tone in *Arrow of God*, rather different to *Things fall apart* or *No longer at ease*. Frequently, even in the progression of the weightiest events, a detour is taken to relate a humorous anecdote, such as the account of Wright beating Obika being punctuated with the tale of the bet Obika and Ofoedu made at the Pumpkin Leaf festival and their failure to drink a horn of the special

palm-wine and remain sober. Furthermore, the novel seems to leave the responsibilities of narration to either Ezeulu or to some (concealed) general opinion, or general consensus (see Bakhtin 1981: 302). There is rarely any intervention from a narratological point of view not participating in the events of the novel. This lends the narrative itself a humorous tone, which sounds in the language even in the recounting of the most serious events.

As an example of a serio-comic, *Arrow of God* would seem to fit some aspects of carnivalesque literature, as related by Bakhtin (1984: 101 – 178). An aspect of carnivalesque literature which seems to find peculiar applicability within *Arrow of God* is the idea of “threshold dialogues”. Bakhtin (1984: 111) speaks of the “threshold dialogue” as forcing “a person to reveal the deepest layers of his personality and thought”. These threshold dialogues, he suggests, are usually created on the threshold of crossing from one state to another—life to death, reason to madness, etc. He mentions, among the menippea particularly, the tendency to invoke madness as a platform for these threshold dialogues (Bakhtin 1984: 116). Within the menippea, he notes, states of insanity, mania, passions bordering on madness, are of generic significance, rather than merely thematic, as “dreams, daydreams, insanity destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of a person and his fate: the possibilities of another person and another life are revealed in him, he loses his finalised quality and ceases to mean only one thing” (Bakhtin 1984: 116 – 117). The delicate state of Ezeulu’s sanity towards the end of *Arrow of God* immediately comes to mind:

But whatever it was, Ezeulu was not to be allowed to remain in two minds much longer.

“*Ta! Nwanu!*” barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. “Who told you that this was your own fight?”

Ezeulu trembled and said nothing, his gaze lowered to the floor.

“I say who told you that this was your own fight to arrange the way it suits you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm-wine he-he-he-he-he!” Only the insane could sometimes approach the menace and mockery in the laughter of deities—a dry, skeletal laugh (Achebe 2010: 475 – 476).

Later, Ezeulu dreams he hears a python singing, but “the voice of the python had ended as the voice of Ezeulu’s mother when she was seized with madness” (Achebe 2010: 504 – 505). Finally, after Obika’s death, Ezeulu enters a state of mental disturbance himself:

Perhaps it was the constant, futile throbbing of these thoughts that finally left a crack in Ezeulu’s mind. Or perhaps his implacable assailant having stood over him for a little while stepped on him as on an insect and crushed him under the heel in the dust. But this act of malevolence proved merciful. It allowed Ezeulu, in his last days, to live in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest and spared him knowledge of the final outcome (Achebe 2010: 512).

Ezeulu, therefore, it could be argued, is on the threshold of madness throughout the novel, and his discourse, devoted to the idea of revenge, could be seen as a revelation of his “deepest layers of personality and

thought” (Bakhtin 1984: 116). More importantly, however, is the idea that in madness, finalisation is ultimately made impossible, and ambiguity opened up within a single person (Bakhtin 1984: 116 – 117). This would create further ruptures within the discourse of the novel, and allow even more productive ambiguity, where even Ezeulu’s own discourse, and his ultimate fate, has the ability to sound multiple accents which colour the ending of the novel, without permitting it to finalise him. As noted in Chapter three, this is a very different fate to that of Okonkwo, whose suicide can be seen as an act in accordance with his adherence to his cultural values and beliefs. Okonkwo, it might be said, means one thing at the end of *Things fall apart*; Ezeulu, on the other hand, evades this final word on himself, retreating into the multi-levelled state of insanity. The ability to mean more than one thing is hinted at in the narrative, which presents two possible reasons for Ezeulu’s madness (“Perhaps it was the constant, futile throbbing of these thoughts . . . Or perhaps his implacable assailant. . .”). Thus, the use of a threshold dialogue creates another rupture, permitting multiple ideas and explanations to flourish unfinalised in the closing paragraphs of the novel.

Another major aspect of the carnivalesque which can be identified in *Arrow of God* is carnival’s unique relationship to shifts and transitions. At the root of a carnival sense of the world is the “inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal” (Bakhtin 1984: 124). Bakhtin (1984: 125) notes that “carnival celebrates the shift itself”. Closely linked to this is carnivalistic laughter which “could grasp and comprehend a phenomenon in the process of change and transition, it could fix in a phenomenon both poles of its evolution in their uninterrupted and creative renewing changeability” (Bakhtin 1984: 164). This particular phenomenon is of special significance to *Arrow of God*, more than to the other two novels in the trilogy; while *Things fall apart* documents an initial encounter between cultures, and *No longer at ease* describes a society after its transition to a cosmopolitan way of life (however unsettled and unsettling that cosmopolitanism still is), *Arrow of God* is preoccupied with the mechanics of the transition itself. This is most clear in the events described in the last part of the novel, where the Christians offer immunity to anyone who wishes to harvest their yams in the name of the Christian God and thus escape the devastation of the famine precipitated by Ezeulu’s refusal to call the New Yam festival (Achebe 2010: 499). In the voice of general opinion, weighing up the events in the last few pages, the narrative suggests:

So in the end only Umuaro 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 one ever won judgement against his clan.

If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold that truth for 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 moment such as this to chastise his priest or abandon him before 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 Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many a man

sent his son with a yam or two to offer the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son (Achebe 2010: 512 – 513).

This passage, again, reflects an element of double-voiced discourse, the second paragraph a rejoinder to the first, in a voice distinct from those of “Umuaro and its leaders” in the first paragraph. This dialogised summing up of events presents a tragic-comic description of the ultimate transition of Umuaro from following Ulu to following the Christian religion. There is the tragedy of Ezeulu’s fate, told with some sense of triumph from the perspective of the leaders of Umuaro, while there are humorous jabs at Ulu in the second paragraph, even while the weight and consequence of a transition is described.

Reference has been made above to Morrison’s (2018: 21 – 24) claim that Achebe creates a parallel between the characters of Winterbottom and Ezeulu. This, too, would accord well with the base of carnivalesque elements in the novel. Bakhtin (1984: 127) notes that “parodying doubles have become a rather common phenomenon in carnivalized literature”. These parodying doubles, he suggests, are “like an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions and to various degrees” (Bakhtin 1984: 127). Placing *Arrow of God* as a serio-comic novel following in the progression of carnivalised literature, it would seem to make sense to place Winterbottom and Ezeulu as parodying doubles of one another. As Morrison (2018: 21) suggests, both Ezeulu and Winterbottom struggle and contend with their respective higher authorities, each therefore reflecting and illuminating the other’s turmoil. Furthermore, they are doubled in their eventual collapse and in their ultimate failure in leadership (Morrison 2018: 21). This use of parodying doubles creates a further sense of ambivalence, as each reflects and also distorts the other, once more disrupting the finalising impulse and creating a sense of a ruptured world, bursting with the productive energy of both ambivalence and the sense of death/renewal (Bakhtin 1984: 128).

#### 5.4.4 Reading *Arrow of God* as a polyphonic novel

It has been demonstrated above that in *Arrow of God*, Achebe achieves a polyphonic novel very much along the lines described by Bakhtin (1984) in his presentation of Dostoevsky’s polyphonic approach. There exists in *Arrow of God*, unlike the previous two novels, a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses, unfinalised in the monologic plane of authorial knowledge or in the discourse of another character. The existence of this multitude of consciousnesses, each independent of one another, interacting with one another as equally valid, creates, it was seen, ruptures in the novel’s discourse, through which the productive possibilities of ambiguity burst. These ruptures, it could be argued, have similar properties to the “border zones” of “dispute and disorder” identified by Rosaldo (in Gandhi 2012: 56). Rosaldo suggested that cultural identity is located in fact in the interaction of cultures within these border zones. It could be argued, in a broader sense, as Bakhtin (1984: 110) in fact suggests in his reference to Socratic dialogue, that the truth or significance of a character

within a novel is not in fact located in monologic dictates or characterisation from the author through a unified discourse. The truth of a character and the character's ideas is perhaps better located in the dialogue of her or his independent consciousness, in dialogue with other independent consciousnesses.

This is a particularly interesting angle of approach to characterisation of characters with whom an author does not share a culture. In this unfinalised dialogue is found a means to fully escape a stereotypical portrayal (positive or negative) and to instead allow a character's consciousness to live, to interact freely in dialogue with other's consciousnesses, drawing the reader into an active participation in this dialogue instead of simply being presented with a monologically created judgement. As has been noted, Winterbottom's ideas themselves, in *Arrow of God*, do not differ vastly from the views and ideas held by the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart*. Nevertheless, the representation of the two characters is vastly different; Winterbottom's ideas cannot be dismissed as the District Commissioner's can, because they are not pre-refuted ideas placed upon him to further a typical characterisation. Rather, Winterbottom's word sounds in the whole of the novel as a full, independent voice, as valid as Ezeulu's, and must therefore be engaged with more actively, allowing the nuances and complexities of the real human condition to be brought to bear on any analysis of his discourse. It is in presenting the productive possibilities of representing these nuances and complexities which seems to be the real value of a Bakhtinian analysis, and a polyphonic approach to dialogic representations of cultural "others" in fiction. Within this approach, without justifying or condemning any character's position or idea, an author is able to truly, and generously, represent a character's self-consciousness, and to allow the reader to participate in the dialogue of the narrative.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an analysis of the non-African characters in *Arrow of God*, with the aim of investigating if a shift is made final in this novel from a more monologic, "binary" approach to these characters, to a more polyphonic, "dialogic" approach.

Firstly, it was demonstrated that Winterbottom can be classified as a "pure" individual according to Fishelov's typology. This is a significant move away from the tendency to stereotyping in the previous two novels, even though Clarke and Wright still yield individual-like type and "pure" type according to the typology. It was seen that it is significant that Winterbottom's individuality is portrayed through the motivations given for his views, which do not differ themselves too significantly from the District Commissioner's in *Things fall apart*. The reader's relationship to them, however, is altered by the fact that motivations of a personal nature are provided for how these ideas came to exist in Winterbottom's consciousness.

Looking at the way this novel portrays culture, cultural identity and the cultural encounter, it was seen that *Arrow of God* presents a very nuanced, ambiguous look at culture and the formation of cultural identity. It was seen that levels of assent are portrayed here in both cultures—the Igbo, who share a culture with the author, and the British, who do not. This accordance of varying levels of assent within the "other" culture,

instead of a homogenous culture adhered to by all its proponents with no reservation, begins to provide a dialogism in the representation of these “other” characters.

A Bakhtinian reading was presented of the non-African characters in *Arrow of God*. This demonstrated that *Arrow of God* can be classified as a polyphonic novel, possessing as it does the requisite plurality of unmerged consciousnesses, unfinalised by the author or each other. The lack of authorial finality further allows the novel to explore the possibilities of the “rupture-prone world of dialogue” instead of the unified plane of monologism (Bakhtin 1984: 18). It was seen that the novel furthermore contains some interesting aspects of carnivalesque, and that these also contribute to a sense of these ruptures, through which spaces of productive ambiguity are created. This reading presented a very interesting perspective on the non-African characters, with whom the author does not share a culture; it was seen that, through the use of polyphony, these characters’ voices were allowed to sound with equal weight as those of the characters who share the author’s culture. This granting of equally valid voices to characters of a culture different from the author provides a much more nuanced representation of their ideas and the history of their ideas, yielding a representation ultimately that takes into account the complexities of all human experience and ideas. The use of unfinalising polyphony allows the author to explore the ideas of all the characters as equal, without unifying them into judgements, affirming or repudiating the ideas according the author’s own ideological position.

It is therefore evident that there is a very definite shift across the trilogy, and that in *Arrow of God* a move towards a more polyphonic approach creates a representation of characters not from the same culture as the author which is more dialogic in its acknowledgement and treatment of the humanity, the complexity and the ambiguity in these characters, than the representations in either *Things fall apart* or *Arrow of God*.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine Chinua Achebe's representations of non-African characters across his African Trilogy, in order to determine if there is a shift in the way these characters are represented from the first through to the third novel in the trilogy. The research was specifically focussed on the non-African characters, in order to draw some conclusions about author's representation of characters across a cultural boundary from him/herself. Thus, the study has examined the shift in Achebe's trilogy from what has been defined here as a "binary" approach towards a "dialogic" approach, with a broader aim of exploring in what ways this dialogic approach seems to provide a more useful model for characterisation across a cultural divide.

The two terms "binary" and "dialogic" representations were delineated within the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, where it was suggested that a "binary" representation is one in which a character is wholly defined according to her/his position within the coloniser/colonised binary, and where stereotypical elements may accrue to the character as a result. The term "dialogic" representation refers, in contrast, to a character who is presented as fully individual, and whose own utterances and ideas remain autonomous from any finalising word of either another character or of the author.

In discussing a binary approach, Chapter 2 traced the ways in which Achebe's writing is closely concerned with issues of stereotype and with a reductionist approach to culture in fiction. His examination of Conrad's characterisation of African characters in *Heart of darkness* suggests that Achebe understood the power a fictional characterisation of people groups can have (Achebe 2016: 23). Abdullahi (2014: 169), Osei-Nyame (1999: 149) and Quayson (1997: 142), therefore, suggest that Achebe's fiction was pedagogical in intent, attempting to demonstrate the possibility of individual characters and complex societies in African contexts.

This concern with addressing issues of stereotype leads, as T. Kortenaar (1995: 35) suggests, to a "reversal", in which it is the European characters who become stereotyped in Achebe's fiction. A concern with this type of reversal would appear to lead an author to reduce the non-African characters to their position within the colonised/coloniser binary, and it is this characterisation, wholly preoccupied with a character's position on the binary, which leads to the definition of the "binary" representation.

Wilson Harris's (in Moore-Gilbert *et. al.* 1997: 16) suggestion that the world has always been constructed in the complex interaction among different cultures leads to the suggestion that there are other, perhaps more productive possibilities for characterising across a cultural boundary, and this idea is . examined by Gandhi

(2012: 55), who explores Rosaldo's claim that cultural identity is located in "border zones", in ruptured pockets where an open-ended interaction is what defines the cultural identity. This fits in with T. Kortenaar's (1995: 32) claim that cultural identity is not fixed, but is something which is negotiated in dialogue among people. Even more pertinently, Morrison (2018: 16) suggests that this fluid nature of cultural identity, and the possibility of dialogue even within the colonial context, is important to Achebe. Morrison (2018: 16-17) claims that Achebe is constantly looking for accommodation and adaptation within cultures in interaction with each other. These claims seem to suggest that a "dialogic" approach is interested not only in a character's position along the colonised/coloniser binary, but rather in all the complex interactions of culture and personality which make up an individual—including, importantly, the dialogue within one person of his or her own culture and other cultures with which he or she may come in contact.

Two theories were therefore suggested as useful tools to analyse the characters within a novel, as a key to understanding how this "dialogic" characterisation may be achieved. The first of these is Fishelov's (1990: 425) typology, which provides a good point of departure for assessing whether a character is stereotypical or not. Fishelov (1990: 425) proposed four categories of character, utilising both the textual level of the author's representation, and the constructed level of the reader's imagination and background. These four categories are: (1) the "pure" type—a character whose representation in the text is one-dimensional, and who easily fits into a simple, identifiable category in the reader's constructed level; (2) the individual-like type—a character who, although the text presents from multiple perspectives and in rich detail, nevertheless still fits into a simple category in the reader's mind; (3) the type-like individual—a character who is represented simply and one-dimensionally within the text, and yet who does not fit into a simple category on the constructed level; and (4) the "pure" individual—a character who is represented in rich detail, from multiple perspectives on the textual level, and who does not fit into a simple category on the constructed level. The usefulness of Fishelov's typology is to provide an early (and objective) indicator of stereotyping.

Building on Fishelov's typology, an analysis using Bakhtin's (1981; 1984) theories of dialogism and polyphony can be used to assess the level of interaction among and across cultures within a novel. Bakhtin (1981: 259), in his discussion on dialogism, suggests that language, being predominantly social, is fundamentally a dialogue, in which no single utterance can exist apart from other utterances. An utterance is made, he suggests, in response to another utterance, and in the expectation of being responded to by a future utterance (Bakhtin 1981: 272; 276; 277). This dialogism of language is especially applicable to the novel in the concept of polyphony. Bakhtin (1984: 6 – 7) defines polyphony as the existence of multiple, independent consciousness, which remain unmerged either with each other or with the author's consciousness. The characters in a polyphonic novel, therefore, are not merely mouthpieces for the author and the author's own ideology, either propagating it, and therefore being affirmed by the author, or opposing it, and therefore being repudiated by the author; rather, each character is an independent consciousness-centre, whose own worldview exists on the same plane as the author's, and may interact with the author's (as with another character's), but is

never finalised by the author's ultimate affirmation or repudiation. Thus, the idea of a "dialogic" representation of character may be drawn, in which the character is independent of the author's finalising word. This is especially useful in characterisation across a cultural boundary, as it provides the characters on the other side of the cultural boundary with autonomy from the author's own worldview or ideology, allowing a fully independent dialogue to take place on the page, forcing the reader to engage with each character individually, rather than simply with the author.

The polyphonic novel, as Bakhtin describes it, presents multiple ways and opportunities for this independent dialogue to flourish in a novel. The issue of foremost importance is the plurality of independent consciousnesses, where each individual character and his/her ideas are given autonomy from each other character and from the writer. Bakhtin (1984: 122) further identifies the influence of the carnivalesque on the polyphonic novel, and this was seen to be of especial importance in the study above. The carnivalesque elements in a polyphonic novel serve to focus on shifts and transitional states, especially on the productive elements of these shifts and transitions. The move from fixating on "before" or "after" states allows the text to reveal, as it were, in the shift itself. Bakhtin (1984: 111; 116) notes how this preoccupation with transitional states can be seen effectively in what he calls "threshold dialogues". These threshold dialogues, discourse made by a character who is on the threshold between two states (reason and madness, life and death), allow for a further rupture in the monologic plane of the novel, thus leading to a furtherance of dialogism.

Having established a theoretical framework, the study sought to apply it to each of the three novels in Achebe's trilogy. The application of the framework to each novel sought to establish whether there is a shift in the presentation of the non-African characters from *Things fall apart* to *Arrow of God*. It was established through the three chapters that the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* can be defined as "binary" representations because they are stereotyped according to their function within the coloniser/colonised opposition. Similarly, most of the non-African characters in *No longer at ease* were defined as "binary" representations, although several discrepancies between the representations in *No longer at ease* and *Things fall apart* suggested the first seeds of dialogic representations. These were seen to be fulfilled in the representation of the non-African characters in *Arrow of God*; in this last novel, it was seen that the non-African characters, as well as the African characters, broke free from the finalising discourse of the author, allowing their independent and unmerged consciousnesses to dialogue with each other and the reader free from a conclusion drawn on the higher, authorial plane.

In the examination of the three key non-African characters in *Things fall apart* in Chapter 3—the missionaries, Mr Brown and Mr Smith, and the District Commissioner—an analysis according to Fishelov's (1990: 425) typology concluded that all three are "pure" types: that is, all three characters are presented one-dimensionally in the text, while in the reader's constructed level they easily fit into a simple category. This suggests that these three characters are portrayed stereotypically.

The context of the novel itself was examined in order to propose several reasons for the stereotypical portrayal of the non-African characters.. These suggested that it was both artistically and politically useful to present non-African characters as stereotypical; firstly, as T. Kortenaar (1995: 35) notes, it is a reversal of the strategy of western colonial writers, thus making a useful political point by demonstrating that stereotypical presentations can be applied to any culture.. On an artistic level, the chapter examined the idea of the non-African characters' typicality being used as a foil for the African characters' individuality. In juxtaposing the stereotypical non-African characters with the richly individual and complex African characters, Achebe (2016: 15,18) is able to enhance the latter, in much the same way as he suggests Conrad uses the stereotype of African characters in *Heart of darkness*. Finally, another political advantage of this method was suggested, as this stereotypical presentation allows Achebe to personify the narrowminded views of many colonial writers, thus engaging directly with the damaging views of many western writers.

The stereotypical portrayal of the non-African characters is plausible within the context in which *Things fall apart* was written. However, analysing *Things fall apart* according to Bakhtin's (1984) theory of polyphony, it was shown that the novel remains a monologic one, since the plurality of independent consciousnesses is inevitably not present where stereotyping takes place. However, it was found that not only the non-African characters, but all the characters are ultimately finalised by the author on the monologic plane, as can be seen in Okonkwo's eventual suicide,. Once again, there appear to be good reasons for this monologic approach, since the aim of the novel, bearing in mind Achebe's intention in writing back to colonial literature (see Abdullahi 2014: 169; Osei-Nyame 1999: 149; and Quayson 1997: 142), is to present the reader with a fully formed idea, and not to involve the reader in an open-ended dialogue. It was shown how, using a Bakhtinian analysis, an argument can be made that in *Things fall apart* Achebe has a particular "propagandising impulse", in which he is seeking to polemically interact with colonial impressions of Africa; in order to achieve this internal dialogism and engage with the reader's apperceptive background with regard to the characterisation of African cultures, it was suggested that Achebe had to narrow the heteroglot social consciousness of the reader to that of the reductive binary of colonised/coloniser. The narrative in the end finalises all the utterances which tend towards creating a dialogue across cultures, presenting a uniform explanation of the encounter to the reader.

In Chapter 4, the examination of the non-African characters in *No longer at ease* focussed on the character of Mr Green, the principal non-African character within this novel. Using the same theoretical framework as applied in Chapter 3, an analysis of Mr Green according to Fishelov's typology yielded the result that, although he fits into a simple category on the constructed level, in the textual level the presentation is in fact more varied and multi-dimensional. This leads to classifying Mr Green as an individual-like type, a character who appears to be an individual from the detail given in the text, yet still conforms to a simple type in the reader's constructed level. The inclusion of this category introduces some nuance into the representation of

Mr Green's character. In analysing several of the secondary non-African characters, it was found that, although they could all be classified as "pure" types, their typical function tended to be less political (as in the case of the non-African characters in *Things fall apart* and Mr Green), but rather aesthetic—for example, Miss Tomlinson as "the confidante", MacMillan as "friendly stranger" etc. It could thus be argued that in using non-African characters who are purely aesthetic types, rather than political ones, *No longer at ease* begins to shift away from the binary of colonised/coloniser which determines the characterisation in *Things fall apart*.

Of major importance to understanding the cultural encounter in *No longer at ease* is Gandhi's (2012: 55) discussion of Rosaldo's definition of postmodern cultural identity. In this context, Rosaldo (in Gandhi 2012: 55) claims that society is no longer uniform and cohesive, but is instead characterised by "cultural borderlands", or sites of rupture and dispute. It was suggested that, in this context, the conflict between Africa and the west in *No longer at ease* does not take place so much between African and non-African characters as it does between African and western ideas within Obi's own consciousness. In determining what role the non-African characters play in the cultural encounter as it is presented in *No longer at ease*, and specifically in determining the role which the stereotyping of these characters might play, several possibilities were discovered. The first is that Green parallels Obi as someone who is uneasy in the incoherent, disrupted postcolonial world. The second is that Green is instead a foil to Obi, exemplifying the characteristics of a person who is unable to adapt to or accept the shifting nature of the postcolonial society, thus resisting the new reality of "cultural borderlands".

*No longer at ease*, like *Things fall apart*, can be said to remain largely monologic, according to a Bakhtinian analysis. However, there is a greater tendency towards aspects of the polyphonic novel than can be identified in *Things fall apart*. Chiefly, the position of the idea in this novel (at least as far as Obi's idea is concerned) resembles the treatment of the idea in a polyphonic novel (Bakhtin 1984: 85). In *No longer at ease*, western ideas and traditional Igbo ideas are in constant dialogue within Obi's consciousness, and it is also important that Obi's character, unlike Okonkwo's, is left unfinalised by the author's word at the end of the novel. It was also suggested that there is a reduced use of self-revealing irony to finalise the words of the non-African characters, moving closer to the independence of multiple consciousnesses which is true of the polyphonic novel. On the whole, however, the novel tends towards the same hidden polemic in its treatment of the non-African characters as *Things fall apart*.

Several indicators that *Arrow of God* is likely to be less monologic in its treatment of non-African characters include the fact that there are several more of these in this novel, and that their perspective is given more time to develop. Furthermore, the focalisation of large sections of the book through Winterbottom's perspective also suggests that these characters are likely to be less stereotypically portrayed than in the previous

two novels. Chapter 5 applied the theoretical framework used in the previous two chapters to the three principal non-African characters of *Arrow of God*, Captain Thomas Winterbottom, Tony Clarke and John Wright. Looking at the characters from the perspective of Fishelov's typology found that Winterbottom fit into the category of "pure" individual, thus being the first non-African character in the trilogy who is represented without stereotype. A significant way in which this individuality is created is through the use of motivations and personal history. It was noted that, although Winterbottom's views and approach to the colonial situation are in many ways the same as the District Commissioner in *Things fall apart*, in Winterbottom's case these views were not merely aspects of his character as a colonial administrator, but were rather the products of experiences which led him to forming certain opinions. This makes it impossible to fit him into one simple category or to define him by his views alone. Clarke yielded the category of individual-like type, since he does fit a simple category on the constructed level, but is given a richer presentation on the textual level, while Wright was identified as a "pure" type, being presented one-dimensionally and fitting easily into a simple category on the constructed level.

Looking at the novel's position with regard to the cultural encounter, it was found that the approach to culture and to the cultural encounter in *Arrow of God* is much more fluid and open-ended than in the first two novels. This is seen through the positions of all the characters, as can be seen in Losambe (1986: 151), who identifies Ezeulu as a character who is willing to adapt to the needs of ever-changing history. T. Kortenaar (1995: 31) suggests the power of the culture presented in *Arrow of God* is its willingness to preserve itself by constantly re-inventing and re-narrating its traditions, thus dynamically remaining true to tradition while at the same time being able to adjust to new cross-cultural encounters and changes in the immediate environment. Morrison (2018: 16) claims that this fluidity and accommodation with regard to cultural encounters and cultural identity is something Achebe himself placed emphasis on, referring to Achebe's description of the Igbo ideal of dialogue and middle ground, suggesting that, in *Arrow of God*, Achebe achieves a certain amount of negotiation, compromise and dialogism between the coloniser and colonised, thus disrupting the binary and allowing a more flexible interaction to flourish.

This led to the Bakhtinian analysis's demonstration of the multiple aspects of a polyphonic novel present in *Arrow of God*. As noted above, the most important aspect of a polyphonic novel could be said to be the existence of a plurality of multiple independent consciousnesses, unfinalised by the author's word or by the words of other characters. In *Arrow of God*, the characters' words remain independent of attempts to finalise them; although characters make statements about other characters (such as Clarke and Wright's discussion of Winterbottom, or Ezedimili and Nwaka's discussion of Ezeulu), the latter are never fully objectified by these statements, since their own utterance stands in opposition to and in dialogue with these statements. It is most significant that this unfinalised presentation does not apply only among the Igbo characters, with whom Achebe shares a cultural affiliation, but is also present with respect to the non-African characters. In particular, it was noted that the independence of both Ezeulu's and Winterbottom's consciousness from that

of their culture, their higher authorities, their peers or, indeed, the author himself, creates “ruptures” in the monologic plane, and, as noted by Bakhtin (1984: 18), it is precisely these ruptures which allow for the productive possibilities of dialogue.

A second element of a polyphonic novel which was identified in *Arrow of God* is that of the position of the idea. Bakhtin (1984: 85) notes that in a polyphonic novel the idea is inseparable from the person who carries the idea—that is, ideas should be represented as the fundamental worldview which creates a person, not as an objective “truth” which the author merely places in a character’s mouth, but which has no relationship to that character as a person. The examination of the way Ezeulu and Winterbottom’s ideas are formed within *Arrow of God* suggested that this independence of the idea within each of them could be identified. As was discussed in placing Winterbottom within Fishelov’s typology, none of Winterbottom’s ideas is independent of his experiences and thought processes. His ideas, however repugnant they may be, form a unified worldview that makes sense within Winterbottom’s experiences. Likewise, Ezeulu’s ideas are not merely typical, nor do they merely enhance Achebe’s own stance, but rather they are organically grown out of Ezeulu’s experiences and the ways in which he shapes his worldview from these experiences.

Another key aspect of a polyphonic novel of relevance to a reading of *Arrow of God* is that of the carnivalesque. Because the novel can be identified within the serio-comic genre, many traits which it displays are inherited from the carnivalesque. Of key importance to a discussion of Ezeulu’s character is the carnivalesque element of threshold dialogues. Because Ezeulu goes mad in the climax of the novel, it could be argued that he exists on the threshold between reason and madness through the whole novel; this creates the dialogic possibility of multiple meanings within his character, thus resisting at last any possibility of authorial finalisation (as opposed to Okonkwo’s deliberate act of suicide, as noted in Chapter 3). A second element of carnivalesque which was highlighted is the unique relationship which exists between carnival and transitional states. Carnival, celebrating as it does shifts and transitional states in and of themselves, focussing on the moment of shift, rather than on what was before or what will come after, thus provides a uniquely useful tool to examine the transitional state of cultures described in *Arrow of God*. The society in Umuaro and Okperi in this novel is in the process of redefining itself once again, in the light of a the encounter with the Europeans. The idea of the carnivalesque celebration of shifts allows one to study the productive and profound moment of change presented in the novel, avoiding temptations to focus on what was before or what will come after. In this way this novel is also different from at least the first part of *Things fall apart* (which focusses on the “before) state) and *No longer at ease* (which focusses more on the “after” state, once the shift from colonial encounter to postcolonial society has taken place).

The final aspect of carnivalesque which is of relevance to *Arrow of God* is that of parodying doubles. Parodying doubles allow a character to be directly dialogised with by other characters, who sometimes parallel,

sometimes juxtapose the first character's being and ideas. The distinct parallels between Ezeulu and Winterbottom suggests that they are, in many ways, parodying doubles of one another (this idea is also explored by Morrison (2018: 21 – 24), although not specifically with reference to Bakhtin or the notion of carnival parodying doubles).

The Bakhtinian analysis of *Arrow of God*, and the identification of this novel as polyphonic, demonstrates many productive possibilities which a rupturing of the monologic plane is able to produce. This is particularly the case in presenting both sides of the cultural encounter (and, indeed, the encounter itself). By constructing a polyphonic novel, Achebe traces with nuance and complexity the human condition, whatever the cultural background of the individual human might be. The structure of a polyphonic novel also allows Achebe to demonstrate the productive tension of the human condition within the context of cultural shifts and encounters—presenting these not as final and devastating, but rather as productive and subversive, creating a rupture within which redefinition and renewal are possible.

## 6.2 SYNTHESIS

An analysis of the three novels according to the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter two suggests a definite shift across Achebe's trilogy, moving from what has been termed here a "binary" representation of non-African characters in *Things fall apart* to a fully "dialogic" representation by *Arrow of God*. The use of the theoretical framework in analysing the portrayal of characters across the cultural divide from the writer suggests specifically the value of both Fishelov's (1990: 426) and Bakhtin's (1981; 1984) theories in addressing this type of portrayal. Most importantly, Bakhtin's (1981; 1984) insights regarding polyphony and dialogism demonstrate the positive and productive possibilities of addressing a cultural encounter.

Using Fishelov (1990: 426) as a point of departure enabled a quick establishment of a character's level of stereotyping. As Fishelov (1990: 427) and Pickrel (1988: 182) before him both note, writing a stereotypical character is not artistically or thematically inferior to creating a fully individual one, and as was discussed in both Chapter three and Chapter four, several significant reasons for this type of stereotyping across the cultural divide could be given in the cases of both *Things fall apart* and *No longer at ease*. Having established that a character is stereotypical in some way, it remained important to analyse in what way (political or aesthetic, for example), and then to analyse the novel within its context in order to determine the reasons behind the stereotyping. Although these reasons were different in *Things fall apart* compared to *No longer at ease*, in both cases they were plausible both politically and artistically. The analysis of *Arrow of God's* Captain Winterbottom in Chapter five showed how a categorisation of "pure" individual allows one to trace the significant elements which make up a character, coming thus to an appreciation of the types of elements and incidents which create a "pure" individual. It was of significance to compare the character of Winterbottom to the District Commissioner in this regard, since the views and opinions of the two characters are almost identical; however, where the District Commissioner's views are a consequence of his type (he is a colonial



administrator, therefore he think like this), Winterbottom's (nearly identical) views were seen to spring from deeply personal experiences and thought processes (the two incidents of his finding the man punished by being buried to be eaten by vultures and the disastrous appointment of Chief James Ikedi being the most significant in forming Winterbottom's views). This comparison suggests the value of Fishelov's four types, and how the "pure" individual is distinguished from the stereotype not on the character's internal merit, but rather in the author's fundamental treatment of the character him/herself.

The Bakhtinian analysis provided at the end of each chapter suggests that this theory has great potential in addressing the issue of characterisation across the cultural divide, not least because of the positive light it lends to the situation. The notion of the polyphonic novel, created from a plurality of multiple independent consciousnesses, was seen to be created in *Arrow of God*, and the application of the theory in that novel yielded many important suggestions with regard to the study's specific problem of characterising characters across a cultural divide from an author. The most significant remains the treatment of *all* the characters—and their individual utterances and ideas—as autonomous from a higher authorial plane, thus rendering them unable to be finalised by the author from what Bakhtin (1984: 72) calls "authorial surplus" of information and intention. This was seen in the way *Arrow of God* permitted all the characters' words and ideas to exist independent of a finalising will. Although Winterbottom's views may be objectionable, yet the reader must interact with Winterbottom himself about them; likewise, Achebe provides no final, authorial word on Ezeulu's decision not to call the New Yam Feast. The characters are also independent of each other; although many characters freely exchange opinions on other characters, these opinions do not subsume the ideas or thoughts of the first character himself (as was seen with Nwaka and Ezedimili's constant gossiping about Ezeulu, which does not define Ezeulu, but must rather wrestle with Ezeulu's own explanations of his actions; likewise, Clarke and Wright gossip about Winterbottom, but their word on him must be seen in dialogue with his own word on himself). This is in contrast to a monologic approach where it is possible for one character's discourse to be higher than (and thus finalise) the discourse of another (as is the case with Obi's analysis of Mr Green in *No longer at ease*), as well as for the author to finalise the word of the character (which happens to all of the non-African characters in the final paragraph of *No longer at ease*, and which happens to the entire cast of *Things fall apart* in the climax and conclusion of the novel).

Bakhtin (1984: 85) notes also the importance of the placement of the idea within a polyphonic novel. In a novel of this type, ideas are fundamentally part of the *character*, they are not the author's ideas expressed through the character. The placement of the idea as an organic and integral part of a character's worldview can be seen in the contrast between the District Commissioner and Winterbottom. Although the idea each of them holds with regard to Africa and African people is fundamentally the same idea, yet in the case of Winterbottom it can be said to be an integral part of his experiences and worldview—*his* fully valid, autonomous idea, created in his self-consciousness by his personal history. In contrast, the same idea in the District Commissioner is merely part of his type; the idea is repudiated as it is uttered by the self-revealing irony

which pervades those passages in the novel, and thus before the idea exists as an idea in the reader's mind it is already rejected. The autonomy of Winterbottom's ideas links also with the discussion of his character on Fishelov's typology, where his personal experiences prevented his (stereotypical) ideas from defining him according to a type.

Finally, the idea of elements of carnivalesque pervading polyphonic novels suggests the ultimately productive nature of transition states, thus making it a valuable tool to discuss the many ruptures and shifts within a cultural encounter. The first transitional state identified within carnivalesque is that of the "threshold dialogues"—the discourse of a character who is between two states, frequently life/death or reason/madness. Bakhtin (1984: 111;116) notes that a character who becomes mad ultimately defies all attempts to define him, because in his madness he "ceases to mean only one thing", thus breaking open dialogue within his own character. Ezeulu, in the conclusion of *Arrow of God*, becomes mad, while Okonkwo, in the conclusion of *Things fall apart*, commits suicide; it could be argued that Okonkwo makes a final, decisive step in the direction he has been heading all through the novel—towards rigid adherence to his traditional ideals—while Ezeulu's end suggests many more possibilities for his character, none of which can be ultimately decided upon by the author or the reader. *Arrow of God's* tendency towards the open-ended carnivalesque is in line with its polyphonic texture, and thus it seems significant that Ezeulu should have responded to the pressures of his situation not by a decisive action like Okonkwo's, but rather by breaking open the internal dialogic possibilities of the mad state.

Bakhtin (1984: 125; 126 – 127) also remarks on the value of carnivalesque in that it is not concerned with rigid states, but rather is fully preoccupied with the productive possibilities of a shift itself. This preoccupation, therefore, furthers the ruptures in the monologic plane created by the independent consciousnesses of the characters (Bakhtin 1984: 18). Examining *Arrow of God's* historical setting (a little after *Things fall apart*, several decades before *No longer at ease*) again allows one to conclude that the novel lends itself to an analysis by these transitional states. *Arrow of God* contains a society delicately poised in the midst of transition; this can be seen not only in Winterbottom's struggles over the issues of appointing paramount chiefs (thus radically restructuring the society as it is, as Winterbottom realises), but also in Moses Unachukwu's articulation of his Christianity, nicely blended with elements of Igbo proverbs and myths. Most significantly, the climax of the novel, in which many families send yams to the Christian feast so that they can harvest their crop and survive, suggests that the society of Umuaro is rapidly moving away from what was in the past. The presentation of Ezeulu shows him aware of these changes—as Losambe (1986: 151) states, he is aware of the need to change with history; thus he sends Oduche to learn western ways in the Europeans' school, while still remaining faithful to the essence of his cultural heritage. In all of these instances, there is a sense of productivity and usefulness in the tension between the past and the future, even in moments where the tension is uncomfortable. This contrasts sharply with *Things fall apart*, in which the cultural encounter does

not produce productive ruptures; rather, the introduction of a new idea is set up in opposition to the traditional ideas of Okonkwo, and when he finds the village unable to maintain his commitment to its own views, he hangs himself almost in defiance of change, as it were. In *No longer at ease*, likewise, although the society is in many ways in a greater state of flux than in *Arrow of God*, the novel does not seem to present the same attitude to the productive state of transition; the chaotic world of Lagos seems more doomed than a zone of productive shift. Although *Arrow of God* remains fully aware of the dangers and desecrations that the cultural encounter can bring, yet it seems to suggest more the important opportunity which a shift provides for a society to renew itself (this is seen in microcosm in the flashback to the period where the six villages, in dealing with the threat of the Abam slave traders, came together and forged a new identity for themselves by creating the new god, Ulu).

The third element of the carnivalesque, that of parodying doubles, is of especial significance in this study's focus on representation of characters across a cultural boundary. Bakhtin's (1984: 127) comment that parodying doubles create "an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions and to various degrees" suggests that by creating a pair or set of parallel characters, an author will once again create ruptures in the monologic plane of the novel, forcing the reader out of a finalised world and into the chaotic, but productive realm of polyphony. It is significant that the pair of parodying doubles in *Arrow of God* is Winterbottom and Ezeulu; in none of the other two novels is any such clear parallel created between characters from either side of the cultural divide (although Green in many ways faces the same issues as Obi, his word is not autonomous enough from Obi's own for him to live in true dialogue with Obi, thus negating any possibility of him being a parodying double for Obi). As Winterbottom and Ezeulu confront many similar issues, have the same potential to rise to greatness and fail in similar ways (see Morrison 2018: 21- 24), they each reflect the other, providing different angles on each other's characters. The fact that characters across the cultural divide can be parodying doubles to one another, thus suggesting that each character can, in some way, reflect the other, creates a further dialogue across the cultural divide—the silent dialogue that is only found in tracing the ways in which the two characters mirror each other.

The positive, productive possibilities of the ruptures—both in the monologic plane and across cultures—can thus be identified. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe demonstrates how using a "dialogic" representation of characters across the cultural divide from himself allows for a fully polyphonic treatment of characters from both sides of the cultural divide, as the independent consciousnesses of the characters meet and dialogue on the page without any intermediary guidance or finalisation from the author. This allows the reader to engage directly with the autonomous characters themselves, experiencing thus firsthand the excitement of the melting-pot of ideas.

### 6.3 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main question which this research aimed to address was whether there is a shift, across the African Trilogy, in the representation of non-African characters from a more “binary” to a more “dialogic” presentation. In an analysis of the non-African characters, both an analysis using Fishelov’s (1990: 425) typology and a Bakhtinian analysis showed a distinction in the way the non-African characters were represented in *Arrow of God* as opposed to *Things fall apart* and *No longer at ease*.

Fishelov’s (1990: 425) model provides a useful tool, since its use of both the textual level and the constructed level allows for four categories of character, rather than two. This leads to the creation of the individual-like type and the type-like individual. As was seen in the case of Mr Green in *No longer at ease*, an individual-like type character can begin to create the nuances and complexities of a more fully developed character, even if he ultimately remains bound to a simple category in the constructed level in the reader’s mind. Furthermore, the fact that typical labels can be both aesthetic as well as socio-political leads to a further creation of complexity; as was seen in the cases of Miss Tomlinson and MacMillan in *No longer at ease*, a “pure” type character whose type is nonetheless not socio-political, but rather merely aesthetic, shifts the focus in these characters from their role within the colonised/coloniser binary, to the more neutral elements of narrative function.

Of most value to the current study was the identification of Captain Winterbottom, in *Arrow of God*, as a “pure” individual character. Winterbottom is the only non-African character in the trilogy to fall into the category of a “pure” individual; it could be argued that the possibilities for productive dialogue and ruptures, examined in the Bakhtinian analysis, would not exist unless at least one of the non-African characters was a “pure” individual, since it is as an individual that a character gains the most control of his or her consciousness. Creating individual characters across the cultural divide thus sets up the possibility for polyphony to exist within a novel.

The literature which evaluates Achebe from a mainly postcolonial perspective highlighted several elements which are of relevance to the representation of the non-African characters. The first of these is the aspect of writing back, or reversing the strategy (T. Kortenaar 1995: 35). As noted by Abdullahi (2014: 169), Nnolim (2011: 38), Osei-Nyame (1999: 149) and Quayson (1997: 142), Achebe’s early fiction faced the enormous task of rewriting the “image of Africa” which predominated throughout the world after damagingly stereotypical portrayals of African peoples had been propagated by colonial writers. This suggests several solid reasons for employing a stereotypical portrayal of non-African characters, as discussed in Chapter 2.

However, Gandhi (2012: 55) points out the shifting, essentially interactive nature of cultural identity in the postmodern age. Gandhi does not directly address the issue of the non-African characters in her article, but the ideas of “cultural borderlands” which she discusses do present the possibilities of a non-binary exploration of the cultural encounter.

In the literature on *Arrow of God*, there is some consensus as to the “unwieldiness” which exists within this novel (Adichie 2010: xii). Most importantly, Morrison’s (2018: 14) work suggests that the more dialogic, less binary understanding of the cultural encounter is in fact in line with Achebe’s own views of his role in “writing culture”, and with what Achebe saw as a distinctly Igbo perspective on the world. The element of dialogue, negotiation and accommodation which Morrison (2018: 17) suggests is inherent to Achebe’s treatment of the encounter provides a more productive way of examining the role of the non-African characters, specifically in *Arrow of God*, one which seems to lend itself quite naturally to a Bakhtinian analysis.

The Bakhtinian analysis of the three novels shows clearly a difference in the representation of the non-African characters across the trilogy. *Things fall apart*, as a fully monologic novel, finalises the characters on the higher, authorial plane, presenting the reader with a fully unified idea, all the statements made by all the characters definitely affirmed or repudiated by the end of the novel. In *No longer at ease*, there is a hint of the possibilities of unfinalised discourse, seen in the character of Obi, who remains unfinalised by the end of the novel. Nevertheless, the non-African characters are fully finalised, Mr Green both in Obi’s discourse as well as that of the author. In *Arrow of God*, it can be seen that finalisation disappears altogether. Each attempt to finalise a character’s word, either by another character or by the author, is resisted by the character’s own word, which asserts itself in dialogue with these alien words; this forces the reader to interact directly with the characters’ words, participating thus in the dialogue.

It could be argued that the strength of the Bakhtinian analysis lies largely in the *productive* nature of these ruptures which are created by polyphony. In allowing polyphony, and allowing each character’s word complete autonomy within the text, a writer necessarily creates pockets of ambiguity and open-endedness. However, for Bakhtin (1984: 18), these should be perceived as productive, rather than as disruptive. Bakhtin is concerned to show that a character’s truth is not imparted directly to a reader by an author, but exists in that character’s own, independent interaction with other, equally valid voices—including those of the author and the reader.

#### 6.4 DIALOGIC REPRESENTATIONS

It is significant that there is a move from the earlier novels in the trilogy to the later *Arrow of God*, from a monologic approach to a polyphonic one. It could be argued, without wishing in any way to diminish the literary value of *Things fall apart*, that Achebe himself came to find the monologic approach inadequate to fully express everything he wished to about culture and about the cultural encounter. Morrison’s (2018: 16-17) suggestion that dialogism is in fact at the heart of Achebe’s view of the world and of his writing about it would seem to bear out this idea.

Thus, it seems plausible to conclude that there is great value in the notion of a “dialogic” representation of characters who do not share an author’s cultural background. Moving away from the reductiveness of the “binary” representation, a “dialogic” representation would appear to give an author a chance to explore, in

what Achebe (in Morrison 2018: 17) terms the “messy workshop”, the true complexities of every character’s human condition, not disregarding that character’s culture, but also not fully defining the character by a few reductive traits of his culture.

Based on the analysis on *Arrow of God*, a few key traits of a dialogic representation can be deduced.

1. A “dialogic” representation is most easily achieved by the use of “pure” individual characters, or characters which have some element of individuality (such as individual-like types or type-like individuals).
2. In a “dialogic” representation the words of all the characters, whether they share the author’s culture or not, should remain unfinalised.
3. A “dialogic” representation demonstrates the characters as *persons born of the idea*—that is, people who are formed in their characters by their ideas, and whose experiences continue to form and change these ideas. They are not fully defined by pre-determined ideas which are, as it were, merely pasted onto them with no inherent connection between the person and the idea.
4. A “dialogic” representation, in presenting unfinalised, independent consciousnesses, creates a productive dialogue within the text, into which the reader is drawn and forced to participate on an equal plane; it is this dialogue which creates the true heart of each character, rather than the author’s imputations on a higher plane, and it is in this dialogue that the nature of culture and each character’s cultural identity is worked out.

To represent a character in this way is by no means an easy task; to fully achieve a dialogic representation requires a great humility and generosity on the part of a writer. Nevertheless, as Achebe’s achievement in *Arrow of God* shows, a text which accomplishes this is profound and rich in its apprehension—and forgiveness—of the complex, intricate and sometimes inexplicable aspects of emotion and motivation which lie at the heart of all people.

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