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The Presence of the West in Achebe's Novel *A Man of the People* With reference to Arab Spring

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Chinua Achebe, www.jamati.com

Introduction

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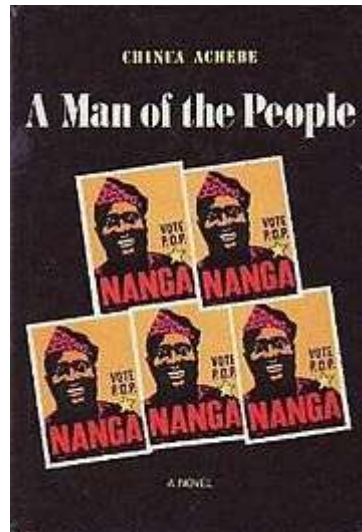
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Chinua Achebe is a famous writer not only in Africa, but also in the Whole world. He has been the recipient of numerous honours from different parts of the whole world, including over twenty honorary doctorates from different universities in Britain, United States, Canada and Nigeria. Achebe's themes are universal. He has been writing not only for Africa, but also for the whole world, especially Third World. Achebe has used the English language in his writing to send a message to the western people to tell them that African become aware of their deplorable situation and of the western racism against Africa. At the same time, he wants to send a message to the Third World to stand up for their rights because they are a victim of the West.

This paper makes an attempt to discuss the meaning of the West, from the post-colonial point of view as it is depicted in Achebe's novel *A Man of The People*. The paper also will be from an Arab point of view.



According to Neil Lazarus, Eurocentrism is not only an ideology but also a basis of domination in the colonial and modern imperial contexts. Eurocentricism has been the fetish of "Europe" or "The West".

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exploited the world's resources, hitherto mostly dormant, for their own gain; they enlisted the prowess and resilience of people around the world to make themselves masters. The will to power and the capacity for taking advantage of all opportunities for their own aggrandizement . . . sprang from Europe, from the hothouse competition among the Europeans themselves. In expanding around the world and enlarging their base from Europe into "the West," they foisted their singular qualities on the unwilling and unprepared majority of humanity, dynamically transforming the entire world in their own image and establishing a hierarchy of prestige defined by the success of imitation. (Bartolovich47)

Marxists have an important point of view about the meaning of the term *West*. A general Marxist view is that "The West" is another name for Europeans by which they would enlarge their domination of the other world. The Marxists say 'the West' is a wide way of exploitation for colonizing others. This would mean that the colonizing countries gathered under this name for exploiting other countries.

I reject the view or assumption that there is a coherent geographical location of the West, not only today, but also before. And I also use the phrase the West as a constructed political identity that has enormous resonance and power. So there is a built-intension to my writing: I disclaim the authoritative voice of the West, as simply Western, and I also write as though there is a West. *ibid.* (Zillah24)

An American feminist thinker Zillah's opinion about the West is that she doesn't agree with geographical definition of *West*. She associated the term *West* with imperialist countries regardless the time or place. She said that although Africa is a big continent which includes many countries, the West always defines Africa as one mass or one country.

Achebe and the Concept of *West*

Achebe, from his part, depicts the West in his novels through white characters who are not flexible or have big heart to love Africans. Achebe, through his novels, shows that the Western people always look for their own interest . The West imposes its culture, ideas, beliefs and ideology on others.

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Achebe and Zillah agree that the West always tries to instil its values, ideas and ideology among others. The West not only imposes its ideas, beliefs and values on others, but also universalizes them as a universal standard.

The Focus of *A Man of the People*

A Man of the People dramatizes political struggles between Africans, illustrates the continuing influence of Britain and other western countries on African economics and culture, and ends with a government being overthrown by a coup.

The novel is set in a post-independence environment, after a period of colonial-style social and economic development has resulted in a conflicted situation between the emergent elitist middle class and the general population.

Elite class is one influence of the West. It is as a result of Western education in *A Man of the People*. In the novel, the argument Nanga uses against Odili is that Odili is an intellectual who has a European style and education and thus is farther away from the common man. It is a good argument, but coming from the mouth of Nanga who knows how to exploit these things for his sake, to support his position among his people. Nanga attacks on Odili accusing him as person who has Western education and thus his loyalty will be for the West.

Nanga knows how to mislead his people well so people trust him. Nanga consider himself closer to the common man and he considers himself as a man of the people, and far away from the intellectual, who represents more European style of living and thinking. By presenting his country after colonialism, he has the incentive to stay as far away from the European style of life and politics as possible.

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The Presence of the West in the Novel

The presence of the West in this novel comes through the character of Chief Nanga. He is a picture of the colonizer but this time is from inside the natives and not from the whites. It is a political effect of the West. Achebe reflects his distaste for post-independence Nigeria as a place where leaders who had fought for independence become traitors after attaining power and sacrifice their country for their own interest. Despite the fact that Nigeria is now free from colonial rule, the exploitation of the colonizer is continued by new rulers created by the West. It is an aspect of a political influence of the West on Africa, depicted by Achebe's novel *A Man of the People*. Achebe embodies this influence through Nanga character.

Achebe presents Nanga as a political opportunist. He has no concept of political morality; he has become rich through exploiting his people by taking bribe, corruption and intimidation. Nanga, in the novel, and many others pursue self-interest with false promises of sharing with anyone. Odili, in the novel, is presented by Achebe as the opposite to Nanga. He is totally disillusioned at seeing such a debased form of politics in his country.

Let us now and for all time extract from our body- politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people... (A4)

Nanga seems to be as a colonizer after colonizer who is playing the same role as the British colonizer that embodied in plundering the wealth of the people. Nanga uses his privilege to attack the educated class in Africa, obviously vital to any country's development, but the villagers are far from understanding him. Nanga recognizes Odili among the people, as an ex-student, he invites him to visit his house in Bori, promising him that he will help him to get a scholarship to England .

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Chief Nanga as a new face of the colonizer knows how to play and mislead others. He always misleads his people telling his people the things they like to hear from him and doing another thing .He tries to attract Odili to his side by promising him to help him getting a scholarship to London. Chief Nanga uses all tricks in order to be at the top of the country.

Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of Western educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage... (A6)

New Rulers and the Impact of the West

The effects of the West have come this time through African new rulers. Nanga misled his people by attractive speech and false promises. He attacks western educated class, as they do not have any loyalty to their country. He accuses those people who have western education as disloyal people. Achebe reflects by using irony and satire on how new rulers, replaced by European, mislead their people. They say one thing and do another. Nanga is used here as an example of a political impact of the West on Africa. On the other hand, Achebe wants to show that many leaders today, especially in the Third World rule their countries by using the same way as Nanga: with false promises . Today one can find many Nangas, in this world, who mislead their people and exploit their position and power to enrich themselves and their families, clans and friends at the expense of people .

Reasons for the Western Support

The West supports such rulers for many reasons. First of all, there is a gap between those rulers and their people because those rulers don't have a base that can be relied on among their people. As result of this, those rulers always are needy for outside powers to support their regimes. The Arab Spring is a typical example of the gap between the rulers and their people. As one can see a wide revolutionary in the Arabic countries against their rulers, the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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loyalty of those people are not for their people but for the West. Secondly, the West can direct and control those countries through their disloyal ruler's. And at the same time the West can dictate western policy to be applied in those countries. In this case, the West can get their interests under the shadow of law.

The Influence of the West on Africa

The influence of the West on Africa took its position in different life aspects such as political, as it represented in Nanga character, and cultural aspects.

Many of us vowed then never to be corrupted by bourgeois privileges of which the car was the most visible symbol in our country. And now here was I in this marvellous little affair eating the hills like yam---as Edna would have said. I hoped I was safe; for a man who avoids danger for years and then gets killed in the end has wasted his care. (A111)

According to Marx, the bourgeoisie is a class that owns means of the production. It generates income for the society. This class exploits its people for the sake of themselves.⁶

Fanon, inspired by a Marxist perspective, denied the role that the African bourgeoisie could not play in a liberated Africa. According to Fanon this class was created by European colonizer, so it plays the same role done by colonizer. (Mazama)

Preference for the Ways of European Living

The cook who came for a job at Nanga house can only prepare European food. The cook was seeking to preserve his self-respect by adopting superior European customs. This shows how much Europeans influence native people and have such deep values. By adopting the European style of cooking, the cook hopes to get good position in the society and a good job

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.Same as the people who have Western education get a good position. One feels that the West culture, language and religion dominate the life of African.

The Outside World and Africa

Comparing Nanga to Oknokwo and Ezeulu, Nanga is a face of colonization and looking for his interest, but the other two, Ezeulu and Okonowo are loyal to their clan . Okonkwo and Ezeulu refused the impact of the West. In case of Nanga, he was a new colonizer created by European colonizer. Oknokow and Ezeulu sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country, but Nanga at the end of the novel tried to escape out of his country. Achebe wants to show that there is no difference between the person who has no loyalty to his country and people, and the western colonizer both plunder the wealth of the people.

Just think of such a cultureless man going abroad and calling himself Minister of Culture. Ridiculous. This is why the outside world laughs at us. (Mazama)

The narrator (Odili) mocks at Nanga. Odili talk about how a cultureless person is appointed as a minister of culture. The narrator asks what a cultureless person like this can offer to the country and what he can offer for the culture.

The important thing here is what the narrator says “this is what the outside world laughs at us.” The narrator (Odili) as a person who has a Western education and at the same time influenced by the West refers to the West by ‘outside world’ and saying that the outside world laughs at Africa because of such acts of decision .Odili seems to be more associated and influenced by the West (outside world)

“...bottles of European drink...” ‘whisky’, ‘alcohol’ (Mazama)

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Language of the Colonizer

These words dominate many novels of Achebe. It is the language of the colonizer. These words reflect the influence of the culture of the West on African culture. Because of European influence on African, African people started drinking alcohol. People, such as chief Nanga and white men, like to drink whisky. They consider people who drink whisky and alcohol as civilized people. It is one aspect of Western impact on African life.

The influence of English language occurs widely in Nigerian society.

‘Nanga always spoke English or pidgin... (Mazama)

‘they would become English people. Don’t you see they hardly speak our language? (Mazama)

English language is a colonizer language. It becomes a language of educated people and a language of ruling class. Africans called those people who have western education and who speak a colonizer language as a European African. English language deeply influenced Africans and became an official language in many countries.

The impact of colonizer language (English) on natives is inevitable. Language forms a huge part of the culture of a people .through language people express their folk tales, myths, proverbs and history. For this reason, the colonizing powers attempted to stamp out native languages and replace them with their own language. Colonizers used their imposed language onto natives in order to impose their cultures and religion. Language is considered the way through which the colonizer dominated the colonized.

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The colonial process itself begins in language. The colonizer language is installed as standard comparing to natives' languages. It is a type of the colonizer racism when he considers his language as the only standard and better than other languages. Language provides the terms by which reality may be constituted. It may provide the names by which the world may be 'known'. For example, the Arabic countries are called The Arab World because they speak Arabic language.

According to Ashcroft(283-284), Chinua Achebe has chosen English language for his writings, to convey the Igbo experience of that colonization. For Achebe, English language is a powerful weapon in the fight to regain what is theirs (Africans). By using English, Achebe wants the whole world to know real Africa from the point view of African writings , not from the western point of view .Achebe uses the colonizer language (English) to present the real image of Africa..

In *A Man of The People*, one can observe the dominance of English language among elites as with Odili and also in Nanga's children who speak 'impeccable English' and they despise the 'bush culture'.

'Hi Micah, hi Margaret,' said the woman.

'Hi Jean, hi John,' replied the Minister whom I had never heard anyone call Micah until then. But he seemed quite pleased, actually. I was greatly shocked. These two people were no older than I and yet had the impudence to call Chief Nanga his now almost forgotten Christian name. But what shocked me even more was his reaction. I had turned quickly and anxiously to watch his face contort with fury. But no. He had replied sweetly, 'Hi Jean, hi John.' I couldn't understand. I was dead certain that if I or any of our people for that matter had called him Micah he would have gone rampaging mad. But perhaps I shouldn't have been so surprised. We have all accepted things from white skins that none of us would have brooked from our own people. (Mazama)

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One can notice in this quotation that the presence and the influence of the West is represented mainly in characters Jean and John, a young American couple who come to visit Chief Nanga. Although, they are younger than Nanga, they do not give a respect to him. Racism and power of the West is represented in the character of these American couple, especially Jean. She calls Nanga as Micah. Odili says that, he is surprised how Jean calls Chief Nanga as Micah and he (Odili) becomes more surprised when Chief Nanga doesn't give any reaction but willingly accepted and replied her sweetly.

Achebe wants to send a message to the whole world and especially third world that a person should give his loyalty to his people and his country not to the West. Also he wants to say that if a person is disloyal to his country and his people, he won't be respected by others (the West). On the other hand, if one is loyal to his country and his people, both his people and the others will respect him.

In our country a long American car driven by a white- uniformed chauffeur and flying a ministerial flag could pass through the eye of a needle.
(Mazama)

The narrator wants to explain the influence and the impact of the West on Nigeria. He says that the white man has a power to do anything and to go anywhere. The above quotation describes the white man with full power who could pass through the eye of a needle. The white appears to have double power and influence the first one is his white colour and second one the government support.

A Man of the People and the Arab Spring

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The Arab Spring today is one result of the presence and the influence of the West. According to Marxist theory, alienation is a very important reason for unstable situation among peoples. This term *alienation* is an important reason for Arab Revolutionaries. Arab countries offer a very clear example for this dilemma and the unstable situation such as what is happening in the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and other countries. That **Alienation** is one reason that cause instability in the third world countries is shown by Achebe's novels *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. The Arab Spring is an obvious example that is shown in Achebe's two novels. The main reasons that caused the Arab Spring is the gap or alienation between the Arab rulers and their people. The second reason is that the Arab rulers are more loyal to the West than to their people. The Arab rulers have appeared as a continuously as colonizers and this idea is shown also in Achebe's novels. So, one can say the Achebe's work is very important to understand the goings on in the present Arab world.

The **Arab Spring** is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests against the situations of corruption and injustice in the Arab countries, occurring in the Arab world that began on Saturday, 18 December 2010. To date, there have been revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria. Also there have been major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman; and minor protests in Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Western Sahara. The protests have shared techniques of civil resistance in sustained campaigns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches, and rallies, as well as the use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness in the face of governments' attempts at repression and Internet censorship.

Some Specific Comparisons

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The series of protests and demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa has become known as the "Arab Spring". It was sparked by the first protests that occurred in Tunisia on 18 December 2010 following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest against police corruption and ill-treatment. Bouazizi can be compared to Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, who sacrificed himself for all the people. Bouazizi and Okonkwo both are liberal people who can't accept injustice.

With the success of the protests in Tunisia, a wave of unrest sparked by the Tunisian "Burning Man" struck Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen, then spread to other countries. The largest, most organised demonstrations have often occurred on a "day of rage", usually Friday after noon prayers. The protests have also triggered similar unrest outside the region.

Just as Achebe depicted events in his novels, Arab rulers who are loyal to the West and disloyal to their people may be destroyed by their own people and will never be respected by both the West and their people. As of February 2012, governments have been overthrown in four countries. Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011 following the Tunisian revolution protests. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned on 11 February 2011 after 18 days of massive protests, ending his 30-year presidency. The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown on 23 August 2011, after the National Transitional Council (NTC) took control of Bab al-Azizia. He was killed on 20 October 2011, in his hometown of Sirte after the NTC took control of the city. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh signed the GCC power-transfer deal in which a presidential election was held on 21 February 2012, resulting in Abdo Rabo Mansur Hadi formally replacing him as the president of Yemen on 25 February 2012, in exchange for immunity from prosecution.

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Geopolitical Implications

The geopolitical implications of the protests have drawn global attention, including the suggestion that some protesters may be nominated for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. *Tawakel Karman* from Yemen was one of the three laureates of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize as a prominent leader in the Arab Spring. In December 2011, *Time* magazine named "The Protester" its "Person of the Year". Another award was noted when the Spanish photographer Samuel Aranda, won the 2011 World Press Photo award for his image of a Yemeni woman holding an injured family member, taken during the civil uprising in Yemen on 15 October 2011. (Wikipedia, Arab Spring)

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- A=A Man of the People
- GCC= Gulf Cooperation Council
- NTC= National Transitional Council

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