

## Independence and the Transformation of the Social Consciousness: Theories of Fanon and Said vs Achebe's Practice

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**Abstract:** Chinua Achebe's novels are very practical and provide the reader with a thorough understanding of the field of post colonialism and specifically in the phase of transformation. The researcher going to discuss *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in specific and other works in general. For Edward Said and such for Fanon, social transformation, which involves large-scale social change, can be brought about by the intellectual with a critical consciousness. It is the work of the intellectual to be manageable and lead the people and their community towards genuine social transformation and change and not only national independence. Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism* about the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, which also applies to Achebe: "In this phase liberation, and not nationalist independence, is the new alternative, liberation which by its very nature involves, in Fanon's words, a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness" (278). National independence does not necessarily mean that there has been a social transformation of the consciousness as both Achebe and Ngugi show in their novels. These intellectuals can help provide solutions and suggestions that can enable people overcome sectarianism, tribalism, all forms of orthodoxy that excludes many sectors of society, illiteracy and unemployment or the tyrannical tendencies of their leaders.

**Keywords:** Third World (1), Independence (2), Postcolonialism (3), Culture (4), anticolonial (5), transformation (6), Social Consciousness (7), armed struggle (8).

Accordingly, every nation which seeks to free its people politically and socially is obliged to adopt wisely calculated programs. The implementation of such programs differs from one colonized country to another and can serve a certain section of one country much better than the other. That is why we can see different programs in the selected novels of Achebe. These programs include ideas that lead the target nation to independence and to areal transformation of the social consciousness. In addition, through what can we observe from the novels under study, any economic successful program is shown to be important as it includes a principle regarding the partition of social relationships and wealth. Actually, a cautiously designed plan that relates to man and the future of the entire population and prevents any demagogic formula or conspiracy with the former inhabiting authority is very important in this process.

Since change cannot be rapid, people cannot transform quickly. A process needs colossal efforts and time. The mentioned program or plan, as a close examination of these novels reveal, should be gradually performed allowing for serious transformations, modifications and

reconsiderations. Some people who are initially unconscious of the merits of the program will be converted into further clear minded and, in importance, it will conduct a durable request.

Contrary to the common acceptance, African peoples and indeed all developing nations are known to construct a well-organized a social and radical consciousness very quickly. Nevertheless, what can be risky is that a society does not reach a total transformation of the social consciousness after the stage of nationalism. When this occurs in developing countries, we witness the emergence of violations against social justice, which are often allied with primitive tribalism.

Developing nations behave like starving creatures as clearly noticed in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Such behavior, that is to say that members of the community that are having such a good time in Africa are about to be abolished and eliminated means that the end is very near for those who are having a good time in Africa. The governmental authority will not be able to sustain this balance and equilibrium as a result of the rapid changes in the transformation of the social consciousness. Nationalism alone, without a program of social transformation, fails miserably. However, when nationalism is achieved step by step and is augmented by a social transformation of the consciousness that meets both social and political demands, this allows for true liberation from all forms of colonization.

National consciousness imprisoned in restrictive and discourses that would divide people is inadequate, as these novels will show. When members of the community are instructed in progressive and productive work that would benefit their society, then positive changes are integrated within the social consciousness. Then the position, which the government takes, stops to function as a representation to the nation itself. The nation abandons brightly lit and unfilled shells and defends itself in the country, which the essence of life and changing aspects.

The living countenance of the country is the transforming consciousness of the community's members; it is the consistent, rational act of both women and men in the society. The cooperative structuring manners of fate is the supposition of responsibility on the historic records of balance. Then, there is chaos, subjugation and the resurgence of familial and tribal parties. Any national government or authority, if it really wishes to be truly national for the sake of its people, then representative from all sectors of society should rule it, a government representing all classes, ethnicities and religions. No leader, valuable as he is, can totally alter himself for the will of all the citizens of a country. Moreover, any national government before dealing with external and foreign issues should be able to provide its citizens with their full rights in all respects, and to improve their lives and endow their consciousness with moral and just principles.

In *The Wretched of Earth*, Fanon describes many processes, one of which is history. History is not regarded as a new phase. Human beings are positioned within the stream of time.

Alternatively, it is important to acquire the way in which people can position themselves within the course of history. For Fanon, the importance of knowing one's position in history, of course, involves understanding that people can change the course of history if they can diagnose the problems of their society. In the case of African and many other "Third World" countries, the main problem has always been colonization. The indigenous population must understand the importance of having control over the productive forces, and being truly free means not being ruled by European rulers. This inevitably means not being economically dependent upon the European colonizer.

Fanon wrote about imperialism, naturally adopting the oppressed subjects' side or what he called the "wretched of the earth." In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon emphasizes that colonies were divided in two parts with the "clean city of the white occidental colonists' on the one side and the "native quarters, the shanty town and a disreputable place for inhabited disreputable people" on the other (1961, 3-4). He emphasizes that the colonized were considered as inferior persons, almost as animals. According to Fanon, colonized people were preys of torment, in a span of time when torment was supposedly officially eliminated at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Western world. Subsequently, natives were reduced to live in a state of anxiety and anger because "colonists said that colonized only understood the language of force" (1961, 42). Hence, Fanon believed in the rehumanizing effect of violence against the colonizer. This is Fanon's main quarrel in favor of violent decolonization:

The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity (1961, 46).

He also maintains that decolonization is a radical change of the society based on the statement "the last shall be first." He argues that a fatal confrontation cannot be evaded (1961, 1-3). Fanon thinks that violence is needed in order to defeat the oppressors and allow the oppressed to recuperate their freedom. He says that the process of decolonization can only begin when the natives realize that they are equal to the settlers who control and govern them, so they have nothing to be afraid of. Therefore, the rage the oppressed is turned toward every settler and European individual. Surprisingly, the slogan of the oppressed is not far removed from the ideas the colonists employ. They think that violence and war is the only style of treatment the natives can understand. The oppressed believe that violence is an essential way to make the settlers understand that they want to achieve their freedom and independence. It is what Nigel C. Gibson calls 'Manichean morality,' or more popularly called the mentality of 'an eye for an eye' (Gibson, 2003 1). Fanon denounces their 'aggression transformed in a wish to be assimilated to the colonizer's world and thus placed at the service of their own interests' (1961, 9-22). Although intellectual natives are in favor of independence, they, nonetheless, praise compromises and concessions instead of physical violence and armed struggle which they consider as inefficient and incompetent. Fanon disagrees and states that these 'intellectuals' are simply dreading a repression from the colonists' side and are hence acting like cowards (23-25).

Significantly, Fanon's ideas were confirmed on several occasions and in different places. In North Africa, for example, violence and armed struggle against settlers advanced the case of the oppressed. Lewis R. Gordon (1996, 297-298) thinks that the problem of decolonization is in fact a problem of mediation, which means that it is subtle to pass from a situation of colonists and colonized to a condition of absolute equivalence and equality. He states that Fanon has some effective arguments justifying a violent struggle for independence.

Fanon demonstrates he is right when he asserts that to be equal to the settler, the native has to "bring the white god down to humanity." So even though his life cannot be as good as the settler's, the life of the settler can be as bad as his own (Gordon 1996, 303). Therefore, he offers the use violence and armed struggle in the same meaning that is literally suggested by any dictionary. That is what exemplifies the colonization; certainly, it could be said that colonization exterminates the freedom and sovereignty of colonized nations through a violent process of political and economic authority and introduces the notion of governor and governed.

Gordon adds that violence in its wider sense is not only physical, but it can be in essence a form of taking away, which has been or will be rejected, because when someone has something he owns and wants to reclaim, he can only take it back by force. The context necessarily involves violence. Therefore, by adopting this definition of violence, it can be said that Fanon is right about its requisite (Gordon, 1996 304-305) since the principle of decolonization is to withdraw colonists' authority and power and recover the territory and goods they conquered in the past.

In short, Fanon's main discussion implies that decolonization has to be violent and entails the use of armed struggle because it is how colonization is itself. So, in his perspective, native has no other alternative but to use violent response and methods to recreate themselves as equals to their oppressors and as the true citizens of their own community. Natives should know and be sure that the previous process is the only that could be followed and applied in order to gain independence and to reintroduce a new consciousness via a process of transformation. In addition, it has been confirmed that the process of acknowledgement and independence can be beneficial for only one group so the other has no will to admit it accomplishing success. Therefore, it results in a clash of interests and a confrontation of two forces, and violence is the most logical consequence. Therefore, Fanon encouraged it as it has been proven that peaceful decolonization is not possible through the diplomatic processes and concessions. Besides, it can be observed that the example of decolonization he based his work on, namely Algeria, was considered to very violent in its decolonization processes in history. However, in the end, nations gain their independence and transform their consciousness. Thus, violent struggle appears to be a solution although its results are very bloody.

In times of colonialism and post-colonialism, the dominant social relations of natives become irresponsible to the needs of the majority of people and a radical social transformation becomes necessary; this is why it is of great importance to examine the changing social

consciousness of the indigenous population. Social consciousness and social action are definitely linked to a violent response to colonization, which is better called the armed struggle, since it is therein that both specific aspects and attitudes to social reality are largely developed. This is exactly what happened in Nigeria and Kenya in general and constructed and represented in the works of Achebe and Ngugi in specific.

In line with the previous thoughts, we shall try to highpoint some crucial issues regarding the relationship between the process of the transformation of the social consciousness and constructing armed struggle, and also between independence and the construction of a social consciousness, which advances such change. Decolonization and the transformation of the social consciousness are very long processes that need to proceed in a balanced way. Fanon emphasizes, on a variety of occasions, that achieving freedom through decolonization is always a violent phenomenon as is the situation whenever and wherever natives live under a structure of domination. Under any structure that confines the liberties of peoples to live their lives as they see fit, there is a struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors, the colonized and the colonizer, the natives and the settlers. According to Fanon, a structure where such a dynamic occurs, especially with regards to colonization, there is “meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature” (36).

Violent response and liberty are unescapably associated with each other, and we should know that liberty which is freedom is strongly related with violent response. Therefore, it should be clear that acting and responding violently to a suppressed situation is the only way for natives to regain their liberty and independence. The action of repudiating liberty to the people who chase it is a violent response; as a result, and in accordance with Herbert Marcuse, “violence against the oppressors and the settlers is reasonable and justifiable because it is merely ‘counter violence’” (Ethics and Revolution, 137).

The historical rule of violent response and constructing an armed struggle is scrutinized, according to Marcuse, in bringing rapid alteration and change, asserting that throughout history, and on many occasions, violence and armed struggle were the only solution for their people to cause progress. According to him, there are “situations in which violence becomes the necessary and essential element to progress” (Ethics and Revolution, 137). It could be clarified, throughout history that the liberty of members of a certain community cannot occur and come to light without a violent response and a fight between two or more groups of people. Marcuse’s position is nearly exclusively built upon the inspection of some historical revolts, by providing both his readers and himself with sufficient suggestion that freedom and liberty occur only in a violent way.

This is not to say that change can only happen with the utilization of bloodshed but that revolutionary change will be accomplished only following such a way. Essential alteration necessitates a reformation of a current scheme of systems. Therefore, destruction, certainly a violent act, will have to happen at some level to actually bring about human freedom. While both

authors are writing about different instances of oppression, they both insist that revolutionary violence is the solution to enslavement simply due to its effectiveness to change an existing political/social structure. However, to understand more clearly how the role of violence functions to generate freedom, the definition of “freedom” must be more closely examined.

The formula that “freedom” is simply the absence of oppression may look very simplistic because the question is: “What is oppression?” Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral and Edward Said would agree that freedom is more complicated than eliminating capitalism or apartheid in colonized countries. Working from an anti-colonial perspective, these revolutionary theorists focus on freedom stemming from exploitive relationships. For Fanon, and even more specifically, Cabral control over the means of production translates into domination. Freedom is one’s capability to produce freely and to satisfy his needs without hurting himself/herself by helping to perpetuate a system that is destructive to all that operate underneath it. For Fanon, oppression is obviously a crucial function of colonization, but it is the aspects of repressive systems that are concealed and/or indirect that is destructive to freedom.

This is accomplished by gradual degrees of subjugation such as, in the case of colonization, the intentional revision of history, the indoctrination of certain ideals and beliefs, and the complete permeation “by colonialism and all its ways of thinking” (Fanon 45). In short, “freedom” is opposed to direct and indirect subjugation of force as a means to oppress or exploit others in any form. In essence, freedom means not tolerating “any repression other than that required for the protection and amelioration of life.”(Fanon 45) It must be apparent from the varied criteria the definition of “freedom” that oppression takes many forms. To further examine the association between liberty and violent response a more decisive definition of “violence” as well as a closer assessment of what comprises revolutionary violence is needed.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a powerful novel about variety of communal variations that occurred the moment the white colonizer put his feet at the shores of Africa. These social changes cause a vital transformation in the social consciousness of the indigenous population. This experience portrayed in the novel *Things Fall Apart* is a worthy exemplification of Fanon and other revolutionary thinkers, who has faith in the necessity of the armed struggle as leading the path toward decolonization. The novel deals with humans as self-instinctive creatures, and it also give a description of the culture as a set of balanced instruments.

Again, the novel tells the story of its protagonist Igbo tribe member who was successful and earned respect. And if we deal with the story on a personal aspect only, it describes the protagonist falling from being respected in his tribe to a strange outsider who commits suicide and dies in a different way.



Before navigating deeper and analyzing these social changes and transformations at the level of individuals, let us look at the historical and literary background of Nigeria's independence movement. In the 1950s, the country of Nigeria faced an increasing tension in both its political system and between its diversifying ethnic groups, as the colonizer slunk its way from being close to independence. The British power confronted stress during WW2, and after the war, Nigerian people increased their desire to gain their own independence. There were tense debates between Nigerian intellectuals and British politicians on how the British should hand over Nigeria and put it under the control of Nigerians. When independence came, many ethnic Nigerian groups sought for representation in the government, although they never formed such unity. However, and because the Nigerian natural resources were not distributed in an even way in the country, many groups were very concerned about the situation especially, the Hausa, the Igbo and the Yoruba tribes.

In the mid-fifties, Achebe decided to write about the tense process of gaining independence in Nigeria. Brilliantly, Achebe decided to begin the discussion about Nigeria in the pre-colonial phase in order to allow people to recall the way their ancestors lived without any intervention from the colonizer. They lived peacefully, relying on their traditions and customs which gave them respect and a worthy life. He decided to end his novel when a British District Officer summarized or even cut the last two hundred pages into one single paragraph. The same way indicated in the book, Achebe foreshadowed that after long years of colonizing Nigeria and totally changing it, the colonizer decided to wipe out its history from books. It is also very similar to the disposition which was drawn by the colonizer forcing the biggest three ethnic groups to live in the same geographical territory.

Going back to the novel, Okonkwo's father was laughed at by the villagers, and was considered a disaster for his son. Yet, this was not true of Okonkwo, whose accomplishment was praised worthy amongst his people. Okonkwo has a big residence bounded by a very thick wall which is built from red soil. His own hut, his place, is almost opposite to the red wall. He has three wives and each one of them has her own place or hut. All of the huts together constructed a moon like shape. His barn is at the end of the red walls and near his own hut, where extended loads of yams piled prosperously in his barn.

The clash of cultures happens when the white man's missionaries come to Africa in an effort to convert the natives. This makes Okonkwo lash out at the white man, and this results in his banishment from his own tribe. Okonkwo has a bad temper, which he often shows. Okonkwo rules with a heavy hand. All of his three wives live in horror and especially the youngest wife, whom he used to beat. Maybe down in the bottom of his heart, he was not a strict man. Nevertheless, he always lived a life, which was haunted by the fear of failure of being weak.

The fractures inside Okonkwo's character are not so much exterior as interior. They display those features of his being that have been his greatest strengths: acting without thinking; never showing any sentiments besides rage; stubbornness; fear of being professed as frail and, therefore,

feminine. Gradually, these features that served Okonkwo so well in the past begin to change the direction of his life. Firstly, Okonkwo unintentionally did not follow the instructions and things that he is not allowed to do in the week of peace. Infuriated by his second wife who forgot to cook a meal for him, Okonkwo hit her with great force, overlooking the time of placation for the Goddess of Peace. The warning by the Priestess Ezeani to Okonkwo puts things in perspective: "You have committed a great evil . . . The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. . ." (30). Ezeani's comment thus delivers an anthropological clarification for Okonkwo's hasty act. If the man's anger makes him lose control of himself, all the members of the clan will need to pay the price for their own wrongdoing if the gods decided to bring a very shallow crop. Paradoxically, Okonkwo did not want to be a member of this community and decided to act individually.

Okonkwo's fate is decided when part one of the novel ends. At Ezeudu's funeral, at the very end of part one, Okonkwo who in a preceding chapter was described as "the greatest wrestler and warrior alive" (117), unintentionally kills Ezeudu's son with his gun by mistake:

It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. (124)

Okonkwo's belongings must be demolished, his households burned, his animals killed. The earth must be washed and cleansed. Until now, we should not forget that Okonkwo's actions stand for an enormous cluster of people, an entire class who chooses to resist and fight, to say no to the settler. Okonkwo chooses the armed struggle, to change his culture and to release it from the fangs of the colonizer. Change would progressively lead to the transformation of the cultural and social consciousness. Unfortunately, Okonkwo was not the intellectual that Fanon and Said wrote about. Okonkwo was so tied to the past and to his own reputation that he could not foresee how to deal with the fast and destructive changes that the colonizer introduced. Some of his hasty and foolish actions led to his own isolation and alienation from his tribe:

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman.(101)

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As a result, Okonkwo was sent into exile for seven years, because this traditional Ibo man, obsessed with his manliness, committed a "female crime" (124) since the boy's death was unintentional. During his exile, Okonkwo was indolent, almost paralyzed by his incapability to do any work providing for his family. Achebe suggests that once Okonkwo was away from his fatherland, his character was destroyed, almost obliterated. He could no longer act as a man among men. As an alternative, he was restricted to reaction, especially rage, as he heard stories about the approaching of the white colonizers. He called other men fools for not fighting back, for not retaliating against the settlers, but his ravings were mostly impotent, unheard cries of frustration that Ibo men were no longer men but women, "clucking like old hens" (153). When he learnt of Nwoye's decamping to the Christian missionaries, he asked himself, "How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate?" (153). Okonkwo correctly viewed the white missions as a threat to his way of life, and community. He refused to weaken in the face of the white missionaries.

The exile of Okonkwo launches one of the main premises of the novel: a male's character is rooted in the social fabric of his people. If he leaves that communal structure, his own character may change. If that society itself changes and he does not, the two will become impossibly at odds with one another. That was precisely what happened to Okonkwo after he comes back from his motherland and exile. These incidents were the very first signs of the transformation of Okonkwo's consciousness. The white men sent their messenger to the village. Okonkwo was still furious about Nwoye's conversion. He jumped to his feet when he discovered who was coming. He faced the white head messenger, vibrating with hatred, incapable to complete a word. The messenger was courageous and stood firmly on the ground, as a group of men stood near him: "In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. . . .Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body" (204).

At the end of this story, the reader may infer that Okonkwo was not able to understand what needed to be done to encourage his compatriots to rebel, and that is why he commits suicide. It was also the white missionaries' failure to understand that Africans did not want change imposed upon them from outside. The missionaries embodied the mercilessness of the settler in Africa. Unfortunately, for Okonkwo and for the African culture that he represents, his fellow countrymen were willing to accept the ways of the white culture under pressure, of course, and not out of their own free will. In the light of these incidents, the missionaries could be seen as ruthless, brutal, and anything but true Christians. As a matter of fact, they were religious extremists, who like Okonkwo, wished to force their worldview upon other people.

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