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## **Imagined nations and imaginary Nigeria: Chinua Achebe's quest for a country**

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## **Biodata**

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## **Abstract**

The article argues that Chinua Achebe's memoir, *There was a country: a personal history of Biafra* (2012) articulates a hankering after a home, a habitable country in the context of colonially-derived contradictions embedded in the institutional formation of Nigeria, the failure of the nationalist and postcolonial leadership to resolve such contradictions as well as the legacy of ethnicity. It demonstrates how the memoir expresses the writer's despair at unfulfilled hopes, whilst also celebrating utopic moments, such as his colonial childhood, the independence of Nigeria and the founding of Biafra. It is the dramatic contrast between promise and actuality that engenders a deep sense of loss, just as it inspires the belief in the possibility of a transformed and habitable Nigeria. Using trauma theory, the article also argues that the memoir is committed to 'working through' the historical trauma, as demonstrated by its breaking the national silence over the Nigerian civil war (1966-1970), its assertion that a genocide had been perpetrated against the Biafrans and the need for accountability and justice.

## Introduction

The distinguished African writer Chinua Achebe passed away on 21 March 2013. He will be remembered for his strongly-held view that writers should be committed to cultural and socio-political causes, which he himself exemplified. This stance is evident in his last book, *There was a country* (2012), a memoir that, according to V.Y Mudimbe, ‘retraces the responsibility of Achebe’s faith vis-à-vis a historical challenge ... [and offers] the definition of the *écrivain engagé*’.<sup>1</sup> Achebe began shouldering the ‘historical challenge’ with the publication of his seminal and widely-acclaimed novel, *Things fall apart* in 1958. As Simon Gikandi observes: ‘[f]or many students and scholars of African literature, the inaugural moment of modern African literature was the publication of Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart* ...; since then the Nigerian novelist’s reputation has never been hard to sustain’.<sup>2</sup> For M. Keith Booker, it is ‘the African novel that is most often read by Westerners and taught in British and American classrooms [in] courses in world literature’.<sup>3</sup> It is also on most school and university syllabi in Africa.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, it has been translated into at least 53 languages.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, the novel is now part of the international English literary canon. Achebe’s success was also instrumental in the emergence of the first generation of African writers, especially in his role as the founding editor of the influential Heinemann African Writers Series from 1962 to 1972.

What is more, Achebe’s writing has also contributed to the formation of the critical practice on African literature. Indeed, *Things fall apart* was one of the key texts in response to which the professional study of African literature emerged.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the novel was central to the formation of postcolonial theory, especially for the notion that post-colonial texts ‘write back’ to the metropolitan centre.<sup>7</sup> It has also featured in key debates in critical theory, for instance in Stephen Knapp’s *Literary interest* as an example of texts that resist what he regards as the tendency of critical theory to reduce canonical texts to political statements rather than attending to their open-ended form.<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of the novel in an important

debate on the state of theory underlines Achebe's significance as a reference point in contemporary cultural theory and practice.

Achebe's fame rests not only on his first novel, but also on his subsequent work, primarily his four novels: *No longer at ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A man of the people* (1966) and *Anthills of the savannah* (1987), which consolidated his position as the leading African novelist. All his fictional work seeks to explore the history and formation of contemporary Nigeria. For the Nigerian critic Abiola Irele, Achebe's role in African letters 'has consisted in bringing fully to our consciousness the processes and forces that have determined our peculiar experience in the modern age. No one was better placed therefore to understand and to point out the directive purpose of literature in the crisis of consciousness that has attended our experience of colonialism and its agonizing aftermath'.<sup>9</sup>

This article argues that in *There was a country*, Achebe extends the probing of the historical and postcolonial 'crisis of consciousness' in his creative writing to the domain of the memoir, this time, situating it as a narrative of lived experience rather than of the literary imagination. Irele has noted that Achebe's creative writing is 'a function of the comprehensive testimony it offers of the turns and patterns of an unfolding drama of existence in which [Nigerians] have been and continue to be involved'.<sup>10</sup> The article proposes that, in the memoir, Achebe extends that literary testimonial function to autobiographical testimony, using his life as a site for exploring national history. Nevertheless, in the shift from literature to autobiography, Achebe does not repress his literary craftsmanship. Thus, the memoir is a hybrid text that testifies to history, but with the obvious writer's freedom to experiment with form. In this regard, it echoes Paul de Man's view that autobiographies are forms of masking and fictionalising the self.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the autobiographical subject that emerges cannot be easily reduced to the fictional status of novelistic characters, especially because the memoir also presents itself as well-researched historical account, with footnotes and all. It is the tension

between the memoir's aspiration to historical authenticity and its literary form that is one of the most intriguing aspects about *There was a country*. Most critics have neglected this innovative aspect of the book. We will explore it further in the article.

It is noteworthy that Achebe locates the 'crisis of consciousness' in both the process of the historical formation of Nigeria and in the absence of postcolonial forms of agency required to probe adequately what was lost and how it might be retrieved. Thus, whilst he accepts the principle of historical determination in the formation of postcolonial Nigeria, he also insists on the need for an active exercise of restorative agency. In my view, *There was a country*, in its deep reflection on the history of Nigeria, its crises and its contemporary formation, is an attempt at such a restoration. It is that project that defines the autobiographical self that emerges from the memoir. In this respect, this article disagrees with the negative reception of the memoir. In this article, the memoir is regarded as an innovative narrative that combines literary and other forms to plot the nation's progress and that of the autobiographical self. It contributes to our understanding of contemporary Nigeria as well as to the development of the memoir as a genre.

*There was a country* has been criticized for its 'ethnic chauvinism' by, among others, Femi Fani-Kayode.<sup>12</sup> For Biodun Jeyifo, the memoir reveals Achebe as an ethnic ideologue for the fact that he assumes uncritically the notion of Igbo intellectual and professional dominance and disregards the class dimension of postcolonial Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> These are important criticisms that echo some of the key debates on the relationship between class, ethnicity and state formation in Nigeria. However, they cannot be fully addressed on this occasion without digressing from the main concerns of the article.<sup>14</sup> We will return to them briefly towards the end of the article. For the time being, suffice to say that Achebe does not offer a classic class reading of Nigeria in *There was a country* precisely because, from his personal experience, as elaborated in the memoir, it was his ethnicity rather than his class that defined his primary

relationship to the Nigerian national formation, particularly just prior to, during and after the civil war. Nevertheless, whilst the memoir is a loyalist's account of the Biafran cause, a careful reading suggests that Achebe's commitment to the idea of Biafra transcends ethnic identity. It is about the notion that Biafra constituted a liberation of what Jeyifo has, in a different context, described as 'arrested decolonization'.<sup>15</sup> To use Alain Badiou's phrase, the memoir is the work of a 'faithful subject' loyal to the truth of the nationalist revolution.<sup>16</sup>

*There was a country* is concerned with much more than the fate of the Igbo people of Nigeria. It is engaged in the production of a viable imagined community in Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> That labour of transformation, Achebe seems to suggest, entails the proper and uninhibited mourning of what has been lost. It is a lament for the loss of, not just a single country, but of several, as it seeks to grasp the essential character of what was lost. It is interspersed with moments of utopic possibility, even as it fundamentally dwells on the idea of post-colonial Nigeria as a dystopia. In summary, it operates with a 'utopia-dystopia dialectic' as its main rhetorical principle of narrative organization and representation of history. At the same time, it firmly sets its sights on achieving a postcolonial utopia.

The memoir locates Nigeria's problems in the colonially-derived contradictions embedded in the institutional formation of the country, and in the failure of the postcolonial leadership to resolve the founding intrinsic contradictions as well as in the legacy of ethnicity. It also dramatizes the tension between, on the one hand, the idea of the nation as 'an 'imagined community', and, on the other, as an 'imaginary' construct, in Jacques Lacan's sense, as merely an illusory promise of such a community.<sup>18</sup> However, the memoir demonstrates the subject's desire to stop this process of serial repetition of hope and its erasure. The search is for an effective and affective as well as a rationally ordered national formation, a country he could call 'home'. The dialectic between the nation as imagined and as imaginary is never completely resolved, but there are moments of utopic possibility such as



Achebe's colonial childhood, the independence of Nigeria and the founding of the Republic of Biafra. Thus, the memoir is an articulation of nostalgia for past glimpses of plenitude as well as a veritable manifestation of trauma, the deep wound left on Achebe's nationalist mind by the disappointing trajectory of postcolonial Nigeria.

### **Theorizing trauma**

The subject's alienation from the state and the nation in Achebe's work can usefully be conceptualized through trauma theory. Ato Quayson offers a helpful observation, that 'the African postcolony is a place of violence and death such that to attempt to transcend this space of death requires a careful understanding of the trauma that ... produced the nation in the first place and that ... is still persistent to its understanding across the continent'.<sup>19</sup> It is indeed such a retracing of the origins of the trauma of post-colonial identity that Achebe undertakes in *There was a country*, bemoaning the loss of countries, homes—places of dwelling.

Following the typology proposed by Dominick LaCapra, the representation of trauma in the memoir serves as Achebe's way of both 'acting out' and 'working through' trauma.<sup>20</sup> For LaCapra, traumas can also be differentiated in terms of 'historical' and 'foundational' ones.<sup>21</sup> In Achebe's case, I would suggest that we are dealing with a clear sense of an engagement with a historical trauma whose origins and trajectory his work has sought to unravel. That cannot only be detected in *There was a country*, but also in his creative work. He describes *Things fall apart* as 'an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son'.<sup>22</sup> There is here a recognition that, whatever the writer is suffering from, it has a specific moment of origin in recoverable history and the process of reclaiming that history is itself therapeutic. That original moment was the advent of colonialism and the consequent loss of a particular social structure and its ethical orientation. Nevertheless, the

use of biblical language in Achebe's statement suggests that it would be simplistic to adhere strictly to the distinction between historical and foundational traumas when looking at his work. It can be argued that, for Achebe, the form of alienation that colonialism produces in the colonised functions both as historical and foundational.

For Achebe, the lost metaphysical space of traditional Africa can be recovered, perhaps, not as a utopia, but as a reachable horizon that can constitute a founding postcolonial knowledge that effects a radical break with the constraints and contradictions of the colonial legacy. The religious rhetoric in his statement needs to be understood as a simile that endows postcolonial cultural nationalism with the solemnity of a religious transformation. It also conveys the depth of loss and its impact on the subject—one that is presented as having the affective proportions of religious belief. In this context, Achebe's work as a whole can be read as a series of interventions to 'work through' the traumatic stresses of the founding moments of postcolonial society. This process will entail the 'acting out' of and bearing witness to a historical trauma in *There was a country*, not only as history, but as part of the determining contemporary present.

### **The loss of Nigeria**

The immediate objective of *There was a country* is to mourn the loss of the Republic of Biafra, as a viable home and national space, for the Igbo and other ethnic groups in Eastern Nigeria. It also serves as a site for grieving over the demise of a Nigeria that had been promised by the nationalist movement. Beyond that, it revisits the ground covered by his creative work, such as *Things fall apart*, by tracing where things began to go wrong, bemoaning the loss of a traditional African social and political order in the encounter with colonial modernity. Indeed, Achebe directly refers to the notion of trauma in relation to the author's violent loss of Nigeria as a home and marker of national identity:

The problems of the Nigerian Federation were well-known, but I somehow had felt that perhaps this was part of a nation's maturation, and that given time we would solve our problems. Then suddenly this incredible, horrific experience happened—not just to a few people but to millions, together. *I could not escape from the impact of this trauma happening to millions at the same time.*<sup>23</sup>

It is significant that in, this instance, the traumatic events are presented as symptomatic of the flawed structure of the national formation and its history rather than as inherent in the ethnicity of a particular group. As Achebe further explains:

It was not human nature, a case of somebody hating his neighbour and chopping off his head. It was something more devastating, because it was a premeditated plan that involved careful coordination, awaiting only the right spark.<sup>24</sup>

In light of the allegations of ethnic chauvinism against Achebe, it is important to highlight the fact that the memoir in fact historicizes—rather than essentializes—the violence as well as the emergence of ethnic rivalry.<sup>25</sup> That traces the traumatic events beyond the particularity of occurrence to their historical origins, thereby explaining the fracture of the national formation not simply in terms of the negative affect of ethnocentric hatred directed towards the Igbo, but equally as a dissemination and reproduction of a problem of national formation.

The historical sections of the memoir recount how Nigeria was put together in 1914 by Lord Lugard out of three distinct and autonomous British areas of influence in West Africa. As Adiele Afigbo argues:

The origins of Nigeria's federalism lie not in the pluralities of economic and geographic regions or of ethnic nationalities, but in the plurality of colonial administrative traditions imposed by the British. These traditions produced regional rivalry and conflict that were entrenched in the Nigerian polity by the processes of consolidation and nation-building. After independence, this regional rivalry became the basis for triggering the conflicts between economic and ethnic areas.<sup>26</sup>

It is such structural stresses that Achebe sees as accounting for the tensions that eventually led to the secession of Biafra. The memoir's historicization of the development of ethnic consciousness among all the groups in Nigeria prior to independence demonstrates a commitment to unravelling both the colonial roots of the problems besetting Nigeria in its early years of independence, and also those evident within the nationalist movements and ideologies of the 1940s and 1950s.

Nationalism which had offered a certain utopian future, seemed to contain the seeds of the destruction of that promise as well, as the leadership preached unity whilst simultaneously fashioning strong countervailing ethno-nationalist bases. The magnitude of betrayal is rhetorically intensified by Achebe's description of nationalism's initial liberatory promise. For the youthful Achebe, the nationalist leadership and its ideology held such a mesmerising aura that made him believe an independent Nigeria would most likely be successful. He records the intensity of expectation as follows:

The general feeling in the air as independence approached was extraordinary, like the building of anticipation of the relief of torrential rains after a season of scorching hot Harmattan winds and bush fires. ... We had no doubt where we were going. We were

going to inherit freedom—that was what mattered. ... Nigeria was enveloped by a certain assurance of an unbridled destiny.<sup>27</sup>

The memoir depicts how that enthusiasm for the post-colonial project was displaced into self-aggrandizement and power games by the various sections of the leadership, turning the country into an intolerable place. In this context, the intervention of what was seemingly a modernising military elite, perhaps, modelling itself on others, for example, Gamal Abdel Nasser and his 1952 anti-royalist coup in Egypt, was not totally unexpected. It was populist, as implied by Nzeogwu's address to the nation:

My dear countrymen, no citizen should have anything to fear... Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10 percent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers ... We promise that you will no more be ashamed to say that you are a Nigerian.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, they saw themselves as defending the nationalist ideals that had been betrayed by the ruling elite; and there is some evidence that they had a national outlook. Although predominantly Igbo, the group included Major Adewale Ademoyega, a Yoruba from the Western region, whose memoir *Why we struck* explains the nationalist and populist intentions of the coup.<sup>29</sup>

Achebe foregrounds the cross-ethnic character of the coup leaders, pointing out, for instance, that, though of Igbo extraction, Nzeogwu was born and bred in the north and was not known in the east prior to the coup. It can be surmised that Nzeogwu, like many other Nigerians, had laboured under the illusion of being a subject of the national rather than his

patrimonial ethnic formation when in fact the situation was more complicated. The imagined national identity was indeed imaginary as the response to the coup would take on a particularly ethnic character. It is the disappearance of nationalist ideals professed during decolonization as well as that of the possibility of building a genuinely cosmopolitan and liveable country that Achebe mourns and bears witness to in his memoir.<sup>30</sup> In the end, the ‘interpellative’ labour of the colonial regime as well as that of the postcolonial leadership towards producing subjects who identified with the national formation, had been overwhelmed by the countervailing forces working against the idea of a unified national formation.<sup>31</sup>

### **Biafra as a haven for the dispossessed**

The memoir argues that the founding of the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967 formally acknowledged what had been *de facto* since the counter-coup, that, for the Igbo and other easterners, Nigeria was no longer their country. They were part of a new imagined community. The new national formation was constructed out of a sense of collective persecution, the experience of the pogroms—that had by then claimed at least 30,000 lives—and by the easterner’s conviction that their suffering had been perpetrated with the full knowledge and, in some cases, participation of the federal government. As he observes:

Looking back the naively idealistic coup of January 15, 1966 proved a terrible disaster. It was interpreted with plausibility as a plot by the ambitious Igbo of the East to take control of Nigeria from the Hausa/Fulani North. ... What terrified me about the massacres in Nigeria was this: if it was only a question of rioting in the streets, ... that could be explained. ... But in this particular case a detailed plan for mass killing was implemented by the government—the army, the police—the very people who were

there to protect life and property. Not a single person has been punished for these crimes.<sup>32</sup>

Thus *There was a country* is a narrative about not only the traumatic demise of one country and the rise of another, but also about the need for justice and public accountability for the events surrounding the war. It is dedicated to the memory of Biafra. Opposing the federal government's view that Biafra was simply the invention of its leader General Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the memoir argues that the country was founded on the need for survival by a people who had been let down by their government.

*There was a country* bears witness to the suffering of those who were not able to tell their story: it is about the death of well over two million people who lost their lives during the war on the Biafran side and it seeks justice for the one million or so who died of starvation as a consequence of the food blockade implemented by the federal government.<sup>33</sup> In order to convey to the reader why Biafra was ethically a necessary invention, Achebe describes vividly the suffering he and others went through. In this respect, the memoirist acts out the historical trauma.<sup>34</sup> He conveys his deep sense of shock and disbelief at the dissolution of his national identity in the face of ethnic violence:

I found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that Nigeria was disintegrating, that I had to leave my house, leave Lagos, leave my job. ... People were disappearing right and left. ... There was a media report of someone from the senior service whose body was found the night before. At this point the killings had reached the peak figure of hundreds a week. ... I was one of the last to flee Lagos. I simply could not bring myself to believe that I could no longer live in my nation's capital, although the facts clearly said so.<sup>35</sup>

Achebe, the Nigerian nationalist who was in effect, as director of the external service of the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, part of the national elite, found it difficult to accept that his privileged location in the postcolonial national formation was neither a guarantee nor sufficient evidence of his Nigerianness. In other words, he was being interpellated, not in terms of his class position, but rather of his ethnicity. That might account for the absence of a class perspective in the memoir that Jeyifo mentions.<sup>36</sup>

That traumatic separation from the motherland, as it were, invites a psychoanalytic reading, as evidently, it restages what Freud describes as the primal fear of the loss of the mother.<sup>37</sup> The depth of loss is most intensely dramatic in the context of the affective and cognitive investment the author and all Nigerians had put into the idea of an independent country. It is here that rhetorically Achebe deploys the sharp contrast between what was promised and what was achieved in order to make the reader empathise with the intensity of his sense of loss, disappointment and anger at what had happened to him, fellow-Easterners and Nigeria as a whole. In this way, the narrative is the testimony of a betrayed Nigerian nationalist, but one who presents that betrayal as the ethical legitimisation of the founding of a new national formation—Biafra.

It is also noticeable that Achebe is quite circumspect about disclosing information on some occasions in the memoir. With regard to the excerpt above, Achebe later discovered that his would-be travelling companion, with whom he had lost touch, had not, in fact, reached his destination. The incident is told without any emotion and with a verbal terseness that confirms Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's observation that Achebe leaves a lot unarticulated in the memoir. She observes that 'the reader is left with a nagging dissatisfaction, as though things are being left unsaid'.<sup>38</sup> For Giorgio Agamben, the problem of inarticulacy has to do with the tension between 'knowing' and 'saying', since, '[f]or the one who knows, it is felt as an



impossibility of speaking; for the one who speaks it is experienced as an equally bitter impossibility to know'.<sup>39</sup> It is a problem of how much of what one knows about a harrowing experience can be told or should be fully disclosed, on the one hand, and, on the other, it is about the acknowledgement of the limits of one's knowledge of the traumatizing event.

What Achebe shows is that what may be recounted is always a part of a larger story and so he leaves a space within his own account for different narratives from the absent others—the silent or silenced that cannot bear witness to their own experiences. As he puts it, in relation to his-would-be travelling companion: '[u]nfortunately, [he] is no longer alive. If he were, it would have been interesting to know what happened'.<sup>40</sup> Achebe is thus foregrounding the 'lacuna' that according to Agamben is at the heart of every testimony.<sup>41</sup> Agamben borrows the concept from Primo Levi's testimony about his experience and survival in Auschwitz. Levi notes: 'Witnesses are by definition survivors and so all, to some degree, enjoyed a privilege. ... We who were favoured by fate tried, with more or less wisdom, to recount not only our fate but also that of others, indeed, the drowned'.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, the absent narratives of the others compel Achebe to circumscribe his own as a personal history, but that does not limit its authority, as it still bears witness to the untold stories and the 'unrepresentable'.<sup>43</sup> For Achebe, and indeed Agamben, this kind of verbal limitation does not suggest, as in the poststructuralist readings of trauma such as Cathy Caruth's and Shoshana Felman's, that language is inherently inadequate to represent the real, but rather that in the practice of testimony, language offers the survivor the human possibility of articulating the particular experience of the real.<sup>44</sup> The particularity that is conveyed is selective, but it can still deliver an essential aspect of the general character of an event and in that way bear witness to the experience of an individual as well as of others caught up in the same tragic event. As such, a personal trauma testimony is intrinsically and invariably the story of a community.

The ‘unrepresented’ or ‘unrepresentable’ can also be a product of the narrator’s agency, of ideological preference rather than an immanent aspect of testimony. That seems true of Achebe’s memoir, especially on occasions when he is writing about his role as an official of the Biafran regime. He mentions being an emissary to Léopold Sédar Senghor, the then president of Senegal, but says very little about the main topic of their discussion. Furthermore, Achebe is openly cryptic about a fellow Biafran diplomat, describing him as having “‘vanished” at some point during our travel’.<sup>45</sup> We learn later that the man had been executed by the Biafrans allegedly for spying. Whilst euphemism signals that the narrator’s knowledge is limited by his location in relation to some events he is recounting, it also indicates that he is, in this instance, donning his diplomatic mask.<sup>46</sup> Thus, memoirs do not bare all, so to speak, as certain truths cannot be told either because their narrative time has not yet arrived or because of ethical considerations or those of narrative representation.

What is interesting is that Achebe does not conceal the fact that he is hiding something from the reader and, through euphemism, he allows the reader to fill in the gaps. In a sense, memoirs cannot tell us the whole truth, but they can achieve authenticity by laying bare the gaps and by empathetically drawing in the reader’s interpretive agency. In this regard, memoirs entail an active ‘interpretive collaboration’ between the memoirist and the reader.<sup>47</sup>

### **Biafra as Achebe’s lost country**

That reticence also surrounds the very production of the memoir. It is noticeable that it took Achebe forty-two years or so after the end of the war to write something substantial about his experiences in Biafra. We may never fully know the reasons for the belatedness of the memoir, but what is clear is that he was not the only one who remained silent about the war. There has in fact been what, for Achebe, amounts to an official repression of the memory of

the war. It is that silence that prompted him to write the memoir and publically address some of the outstanding issues:

Almost thirty years before Rwanda, before Darfur, over two million people—mothers, children, babies, civilians—lost their lives as a result of the blatantly callous and unnecessary policies enacted by the leaders of the federal government of Nigeria. ... As a writer I believe that it is fundamentally important, indeed, essential to our humanity, to ask the hard questions, in order to better understand ourselves and our neighbours. Where there is justification for further investigation, then I believe justice should be served.<sup>48</sup>

The belatedness of the memoir may also be attributable to the desire not to undermine the post-civil war resettlement, making the repression of the memory of the trauma a function of the need to subordinate remembering to the reality principle of making post-war Nigeria habitable and palatable. That view is supported by Achebe's attempts to foster cross-ethnic political alliances during his brief period in national party politics in the early 1980s. It may well be that the memoir is itself a product of the failure of post-war integration. That is discernible from the way it links that failure to the pogroms, the civil war and what had gone on before.

Nevertheless, it is important to underline the fact that Achebe tells the story of Biafra not only as a site of trauma, but also as a space of an unfulfilled utopic possibility. The formation of the new country was a utopian moment for Achebe, as it gave him not only a sense of belonging, but also an opportunity and a responsibility to contribute towards the creation of the kind of country he and his generation had hoped Nigeria would become after independence, but had not:

For most of us within Biafra our new nation was a dream that had become reality—a republic, in the strict definition of the word. . . . We could forge a new nation that respected the freedoms that all of mankind cherished and were willing to fight hard to hold on to. Within Biafra the Biafran people would be free of persecution of all kinds.<sup>49</sup>

In a sense, Biafra resurrected the process of decolonization that had been derailed by a corrupt and ‘unnationalistic’ leadership. He reports that some of his Biafran compatriots saw Nigeria as a neo-colonial state, especially in its reliance on Britain for military support during the war.<sup>50</sup>

He believes that Biafra exemplified a number of positive values lacking in federal Nigeria. In Biafra, he witnessed the spirit of selflessness and self-reliance in greater abundance, suggesting the emergence of a new national formation and subjectivity. He recalls one particular incident when young people, without waiting for instructions, directed traffic on congested roads and concludes: ‘[t]hat this kind of spirit existed made us feel tremendously hopeful. Clearly, something had happened to the psyche of an entire people to bring this about’.<sup>51</sup> In *No longer at ease* Achebe uses a colonial administrator to tell the protagonist bluntly that: ‘[t]here is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interest of the country’.<sup>52</sup> It was also the people’s resilience amidst untold suffering that exhibited an admirable sense of responsibility and stoicism for Achebe. In addition to those who died defending their new country, a huge number of civilians perished from indiscriminate strafing by the Nigerian air-force. Achebe’s home and publishing house too were bombed.<sup>53</sup> It is that quality that, for him, made Biafra more of a community than Nigeria.

It was most supremely embodied by his best friend and fellow-writer Christopher Okigbo who died at the war front. For Achebe, he demonstrated exceptional commitment to the cause by paying the ultimate price for his beliefs. He recalls the process of Okigbo's transformation from a Nigerian poet to a Biafran combatant as follows:

The experience of the Igbo community from the pogroms onward had different effects on different people. ... He had no doubt at all in his mind about Biafra and the need for the country to be a free and separate nation. That strong stance was something new in Okigbo.<sup>54</sup>

Okigbo's commitment was exceptional, but not new—it was a re-enactment of the idealism of decolonization that had led to Nigeria's independence. Moreover, his act demonstrates the subordination of artistic subjectivity to the defence of a political truth. With Badiou, we could say, Okigbo's body bore the truth of Biafra's separation from the Nigerian body politic.<sup>55</sup>

This strong sense of patriotism was also exemplified by the citizens' willingness to engage in scientific and technological innovation in order to defend the country and make it habitable, which led to the invention of weapons and refining of crude oil with homemade equipment, among others. That is much cherished by the writer as mark of a society in which citizens are actively involved in the production of a liveable present and hopeful future. However, it was also linked to a clearly articulated national ideology grounded in the ideas of self-affirmation. That is evident in Ojukwu's involvement of intellectuals in decision making processes. For instance, Achebe and other writers became roving ambassadors for Biafra. Even more significant was the leadership's attempt to define a political philosophy of the new country, a task that Ojukwu entrusted to Achebe and his group, the national guidance committee.

Comprising a cross section of the intellectual elite and others, the committee was mandated with the formulation of the intellectual basis of Biafra, culminating in the manifesto known as the *Ahiara declaration* (1969). The document reflected a number of influences: Igbo philosophy, Julius Nyerere's *Arusha declaration* (1967), pan-Africanism as well as Maoism.<sup>56</sup> Achebe saw his role as fulfilling the traditional Igbo definition of artistic responsibility in moments of crisis, that is, to be 'a warrior for peace, with a proclivity for action'.<sup>57</sup> For Mudimbe, 'Achebe's moral normativity is exemplary [and] reflects our times and accords itself to the ethics of responsibility ... and principles of human rights'.<sup>58</sup> It is also based on discourses of political commitment of the 1940s and 50s espoused by, among others, Jean-Paul Sartre and Senghor, confirming Biafra's ideological link to the pre-independence nationalist and internationalist anti-colonial struggles.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Biafra was not only a hospitable country that offered security for the displaced Achebe, but it also renewed the intellectual's role in society. Achebe suggests that postcolonial Nigeria had sidelined the intellectual, thereby impoverishing its ruling ideology.

Biafra also offered an opportunity for developing a postcolonial political philosophy that drew on African traditions. Achebe says, when considering membership of the committee, he sought 'people who embodied a wholesome African wisdom—African common sense ... who were ... within the group that would be called "the uneducated"'. He saw them as 'arbiters of the traditional values that had sustained our societies from the beginning of time'.<sup>60</sup> The blending of tradition and modernity echoes the aesthetic hybridity of his fiction. He demonstrates that African literature can be a paradigm for radical forms of political knowledge, questioning the conventional relationship between history and literature in a manner reminiscent of constructivist historians.<sup>61</sup> According to Achebe, it is such epistemic forms that can replace the superficial modernity of postcolonial Nigeria with the

original nationalist idealism, transforming the country into a viable modern national formation in which, unlike the one described in *No longer at ease*, the citizen can truly feel at ease.

In light of this, one of the countries Achebe reminds his readers about is that which his protagonist in *Things fall apart* lost. It is appealed to, not as a place for nostalgic projection, but as a recoverable community of values that can enrich the impoverished postcolonial ideologies that had led to the civil war. On this occasion, he identifies with the *Négritude* project of cultural reclamation.<sup>62</sup> So, with the defeat of Biafra, the memoirist had lost not just a physical country, but also all the other cultural spaces and forms of agency that had made it a habitable home. It is the loss of Biafra as the embodiment of the values of an ideal imagined postcolonial community that accentuates the trauma of its loss for Achebe.

The kind of epistemological and ideological hybridity attributed to Biafra is also evident in the mixing of genres in the memoir. It exemplifies the search for a representational form that might adequately capture or accommodate the nuances and complexities of what the writer and his fellow Biafrans went through and what they lost with Biafra. It is as if its truth cannot be accommodated within the boundaries of a particular genre. As he declares, 'I have made a conscious choice to juxtapose poetry and prose ... to tell complimentary stories, in two art forms'.<sup>63</sup> In fact, there are other narrative genres in the text: history, personal memoir and anthropology, among others, which together offer the author's multiple, but overlapping perspectives on the historical events depicted. Principally, the narrative breaches the distinction between fiction and history, echoing what Linda Hutcheon has described as 'historiographic metafiction', a postmodernist fiction that appropriates and interrogates the relationship between fiction and history.<sup>64</sup> Although, *There was a country* does not take liberties with the notion of historical truth to the same extent as 'historiographic metafiction', its style allows the writer a similar degree of transgression to enable multiple representations of a given event.

The style redefines the nature of the historical event, since an event occupies two or more discursive or disciplinary spaces. Whilst the historical realist frame draws out the factual contours of an event and its cognitive import, the poetic one conveys its affective dimension. That is illustrated in the juxtaposition of the account of Okigbo's death and the poem, 'Mango seedling'. The lines: 'Today I see it still—/Dry, wire-thin in sun and dust of the dry months— / Headstone on tiny debris of passionate courage' offer a wide range of feelings towards the agency of 'passionate courage', which portrays the memoirist's ambivalence towards Okigbo's death.<sup>65</sup> As a Biafran patriot, Achebe admires his sacrifice, but, as a personal friend, he is uncertain that it was a prudent undertaking. Achebe seems to be suggesting that given the complexity of historical trauma, no genre is singularly equipped to represent it. Evidently the memoir gains from the inclusion of poetry, as it explores the affective dimensions of the real more powerfully than the historical realist narrative.

The use of strategies of fiction is additionally evident in the adoption of the *Künstlerroman* genre, that is, a story of an artist's development. Achebe thus provides an account of the cultivation of his subjectivity as an artist. He locates his interest in literature in the traditional lore of his people and in the westernized upbringing in his family, at school and university. The development of artistic consciousness is also shown to be linked to his acquisition of political knowledge. The family home is not only the source of a creative personality, but also of a transformative agency, as shown by his mother's deliberate violation of the practice of forbidding women from plucking kola nuts. She serves as a model for the writer's later counter-hegemonic agency. That is another quality that Achebe wishes were distributed more widely in contemporary Nigeria, as it would make the country more habitable, more of a home.

There is also an emphasis on the general development of Achebe as a man, in which respect, the memoir is quintessentially a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of development, as we are



given an overview of his life from childhood to adulthood. However, unlike a traditional *Bildungsroman*, here there is no final plenitudinous stage of development for the autobiographical self, though there are in the intervening periods, moments of utopic fulfilment. The development into adulthood involves recognition of the writer's transformation into a political subject, which through nationalism is experienced as utopic, but the promise of an independent and progressive Nigeria is shattered by a lack of an ethic of national community. Thus, moments of utopic achievement or promise are often undermined by negative events in the narrative, including seriously diastopic ones, such as the 1966 pogroms and the subsequent civil war.

Significantly, the *Bildungsroman* format facilitates the articulation of the unsayable, as a way of 'working through' a historical trauma, which results in the rehabilitation of aspects of life under colonialism. From the perspective of the postcolonial moment, Achebe views the colonial national formation as a more efficient and ordered society. He says, '[h]ere is a piece of heresy: The British governed their colony of Nigeria with considerable care. There was a very highly competent cadre of government officials imbued with a high level of knowledge of how to run a country. ... There was a distinct order during this time'.<sup>66</sup> This revalorization of the colonial period by an ardent nationalist may seem a contradiction in terms. However, it may be understood as a rhetorical device for highlighting the extent to which postcolonial Nigeria has fallen below the expectations of decolonization. So his quest for a return to the colonial moment is not to colonial rule as such, but to the forms of governmentality that ensured a measure of an ordered community. It is the colonial national formation as a habitable community that is one of the countries the memoir seeks to recover. In articulating this 'heresy' Achebe counter-identifies with the dominant nationalist critique of colonialism, indicating that, like the typical *Bildungsroman* hero, his development has led to a particular understanding of life whose validity is predicated on his progressive learning from

experience. Thus, in this context, the memoir abides with the traditional linear structure of the genre, though in its overall deferment of plenitude, it departs from it.

### **Post-war Nigeria as unhomely**

The memoir also presents the Biafrans re-joining Nigeria as returning to another country, not the Nigeria that was before the war. The war had reconstituted the national space and redefined their relationship to Nigeria:

My generation had great expectations for our young nation. After the war everything we had known before about Nigeria, all the optimism, had to be rethought. The worst had happened, and we were now forced into reorganising our thinking, expectations, and hopes.<sup>67</sup>

The new Nigeria was ‘unhomely’, to borrow Homi Bhabha’s term.<sup>68</sup> The ‘unhomely’ refers to the subject’s state of being ‘unaccommodated’ in a place. That sense of unbelonging is clear from Achebe’s observations:

We ... had to carry on in spite of the great disaster that was the military defeat and learn very quickly to live with such loss. We would have to adjust to the realities and consequences of a Nigeria that did not appeal to us any longer. Nigeria had not succeeded in crushing the spirit of the Igbo people, but it had left us indigent, stripped bare, and stranded in the wilderness.<sup>69</sup>

There is here a repetition of the state of being ‘no longer at ease’ of Achebe’s 1960s novel.<sup>70</sup>

As in the case of the novel’s protagonist, the name ‘Nigeria’ has lost its meaning for the

former Biafrans. It is no longer the promise of a nationalist fulfilment. The returnees come to realize that Nigeria is not an imagined community, but an imaginary one.

For Achebe, post-war Nigeria is ‘unhomely’ primarily because of the failure to integrate the returnees effectively. He attributes this to a general national incompetence, as well as the resurgence of ethnic competitiveness over the resources of the nation. He argues that the post-war resettlement policies clearly diminished the political and economic influence of the Biafrans. It would be such policies that would confirm the sense of unmitigated alienation for the Biafrans:

The federal government’s actions soon after the war could not be seen as conciliatory but as outright hostile. After the conflict ended, “the same hardliners ... got the regime to adopt a banking policy which nullified any bank account which had been operated during the war by the Biafrans. A flat sum of twenty pounds was approved for each Igbo depositor of the Nigerian currency”. If there was ever a measure put in place to stunt, or even obliterate the economy of a people, this was it.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, he sees the attempt to diminish the influence of his group in Nigeria as having underwritten the genocide of two million people or so in Biafra, largely through starvation. Achebe quotes Awolowo’s statement made during the war that: ‘all is fair in war, and starvation is one of the weapons of war. I don’t see why we should feed our enemies fat in order for them to fight us harder’.<sup>72</sup> He concludes that:

Chief Obafemi Awolowo was driven by an overriding ambition for power, for himself in particular and for the advancement of his Yoruba people in general. ... However, Awolowo saw the dominant Igbos at the time as the obstacles to that goal and when the

opportunity arose ... his ambition [made him hatch up] a diabolical policy to reduce the numbers of his enemies significantly through starvation—eliminating over two million people, mainly of the future generations.<sup>73</sup>

This passage has riled a number of Nigerians. Fani-Kayode has attacked the memoir, saying: [t]he worst thing that anyone can do is ... to indulge in historical revisionism. ... Sadly it is in [that] light ... that I view Professor Chinua Achebe's assertion ... that Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the late and much loved Leader of the Yoruba, was responsible for the genocide that the Igbos suffered during the civil war. This claim is not only false but it is also, frankly speaking, utterly absurd.<sup>74</sup>

It is noteworthy that he does not deny that Awolowo made the statement, but decries Achebe's ascription of his motive to ethnicity. He accuses Achebe of being partisan by not blaming Ojukwu for refusing the federal government's offer to open up a land corridor through which food supplies could be delivered.

Unlike Fani-Kayode's sweeping condemnation of the book, Jeyifo sees vices as well as virtues in the memoir, arguing that it reveals two personas of the writer: '[o]n the one hand, there is the superb realist writer and progressive intellectual; on the other hand there is the war-time propaganda and media warrior and ethno-national ideological zealot'.<sup>75</sup> He sees the ethnic ideologue in Achebe as not questioning the myth of Igbo dominance which had been constructed by conservative forces to ethnicize post-colonial politics in Nigeria. Jeyifo may well be right, and if he is, then, it proves the overall point Achebe is making, that Nigerians have historically been interpellated doubly—as subjects of the national formation, on the one hand, and of the ethno-nation, on the other. His alleged blindness to the fact that he is speaking from an ethno-national subject-position proves the success of the interpellative work of the ethno-centred national ideological apparatus. In this regard, the civil war must have

enhanced the sense of ethnicity among the easterners. Furthermore, the perceived iniquity of the post-war resettlement arrangements must have done little to counter that feeling. Indeed, Adichie has noted how responses to Achebe's memoir among Nigerians have taken on an ethno-national tinge.<sup>76</sup>

Adichie does not agree with Achebe's characterization of Awolowo's motives, but adds that: 'The blockade was, in my opinion, inhumane and immoral'.<sup>77</sup> Besides, she highlights what underpins the divergent responses to Achebe's memoir—the problem of differential memory. She remarks: '[f]or some non-Igbo, confronting facts of the war is uncomfortable, even inconvenient. But we must hear one another's stories. It is even more imperative for a subject like Biafra which, because of our *different experiences, we remember differently*'.<sup>78</sup> What is indeed at stake in the responses to the memoir is the question of a differential national memory. Is it possible for Nigeria to have a shared memory of the civil war or the overall history of its formation?

## **Conclusion**

The fact that the responses to the book among Nigerians have largely run along ethnic lines would suggest that it is impossible to achieve a national consensus on some of the key events in the country's recent history. However, the memoir itself may show a possible way towards these aims. It can be argued that in *There was a country* Achebe has initiated the work of producing a shared, if heterogeneous, collective memory as a prerequisite for making Nigeria a home for all its inhabitants. He calls for a process of 'working through' the traumas of the past through a candid, but empathetic understanding of how the national malformation has damaged its subjects and the national space. The differential memory of the war is, just as the war itself was, a symptom of the founding flaws in the structure of the country, in which the national-state formation has always existed in tension with the tendency towards regional and ethnic autonomy. Achebe's intention in

the book is to offer a communal national story, as he says, ‘Nigeria’s story, Biafra’s story, our story, my story’.<sup>79</sup> It is an attempt to clear a space for a serious debate about how to make Nigeria an inclusive and habitable country. Thus, *There was a country*, is a nationalist text *par excellence* whose ‘aim is not to provide answers but raise a few questions, and perhaps cause a few headaches in the process’ as a part of national healing.<sup>80</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> V.Y Mudimbe, ‘Reading *There was a country*: a personal history of Biafra’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 6, 2013, p. 671.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe* (London: James Currey, 1991), p.1

<sup>3</sup> M. Keith Booker, *The African novel in English* (London: Heinemann, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See David Whittaker and Mpalive Msiska, *Chinua Achebe’s Things fall apart* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> See Emmanuel Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates (eds.), *Dictionary of African biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Moore, *Seven African writers* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al., *The empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989). See also Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, ‘*Things fall apart*: a resource for cultural theory’, *Interventions*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2009, pp. 171-179.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Knapp, *Literary interest: the limits of anti-formalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Abiola Irele, *The African experience in literature and ideology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 1.

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<sup>10</sup> Irele, *African*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Paul de Man, in his essay, 'Biography as de-facement', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 94, 1979, pp. 919-930, argues that the author and the autobiographical self are not always one and the same person, as autobiography uses the techniques of fiction in order to narrate and represent a certain image of the self.

<sup>12</sup> Femi Fani-Kayode, 'Obafemi Awolowo and Chinua Achebe's tale of fantasy', available at: <http://thenet.ng/2012/10/opinion-obafemi-awolowo-and-chinua-achebes-tale-of-fantasy>. Retrieved 17 February 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Biodun Jeyifo, 'First, there was a country; then there wasn't: reflections on Achebe's new book', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 6, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> There is a good summary of such debates in Larry Diamond, 'Class, ethnicity, and the democratic state: Nigeria, 1950-1966', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1983, pp. 457-489.

<sup>15</sup> Biodun Jeyifo, 'The nature of things: arrested decolonization and critical theory', *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1990, pp. 33-48.

<sup>16</sup> Alain Badiou, *The logics of worlds: being and event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 50-54. Badiou argues that by rebelling against the tyranny of slavery, Spartacus, the Roman gladiator, elaborates the category of the faithful subject, one who transforms existing relations of power.

<sup>17</sup> All references to the term 'imagined community' are to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: a selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge (1989).

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<sup>19</sup> Ato Quayson, *Calibrations: reading for the social* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.77.

<sup>20</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing history, writing trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 53-60.

<sup>21</sup> LaCapra, *Writing history*, pp. 53-60.

<sup>22</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Morning yet on creation day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Achebe, *There was a country: a personal history of Biafra* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), p. 71. Emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> Fani-Kayode, 'Awolowo and Achebe.'

<sup>26</sup> Adiele E. Afigbo, 'Background to Nigerian federalism: federal features in the colonial state', *Publius*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Major Patrick Chukwuma Nzeogwu, 'Declaration of martial law', 15 January 1966, available at <http://www.dawodu.com/nzeogwu2.htm>. Retrieved 3 September 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Adewale Ademoyega, *Why we struck* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> The term nationalist is used here to refer to the ideas of the nationalist movements of the 1940s and 1950s which sought self-determination within a unified Nigeria.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses', in Louis Althusser, *Lenin, philosophy and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 85-126.

<sup>32</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 228.



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<sup>34</sup> LaCapra, *Writing history*, pp. 53-60.

<sup>35</sup> Achebe, *Country*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>36</sup> Jeyifo, 'Reflections', p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 14-17.

<sup>38</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, 'Things left unsaid: *There was a country: a personal history of Biafra*', available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n19/chimamanda-adichie/things-left-unsaid>. Retrieved 24 February 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: the witness and the archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>40</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Agamben, *Remnants*, p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> Agamben, *Remnants*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> We might also read the excerpt, following Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed*, p. 68, as involving the subject's experience of the traumatising events as unpredictable, unregistered and not capable of being framed within the parameters of existing knowledge. However, her concept of traumatic excess has been criticised by LaCapra in *Writing*, and Roger Luckhurst in *The trauma question* (London: Routledge, 2008, for its failure to provide for closure to trauma.

<sup>44</sup> For an example of the poststructuralist reading of trauma, see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (eds.), *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history* (London: Routledge, 1992) and Caruth's *Unclaimed*. For the term 'real', see Lacan's *Ecrits*.

<sup>45</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 171.

<sup>46</sup> de Man, 'Biography', pp. 919-930.

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- <sup>47</sup> For the notion that textual gaps are immanent in texts and allow greater interpretive participation by the reader, see Roman Ingarden, *The literary work of art*, trans. George Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1973), pp. 29-33.
- <sup>48</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 228.
- <sup>49</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 143.
- <sup>50</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 124
- <sup>51</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 171.
- <sup>52</sup> Chinua Achebe, *No longer at ease* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 139
- <sup>53</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 182-183.
- <sup>54</sup> Achebe *Country*, p. 116.
- <sup>55</sup> Alain Badiou, pp. 50-54.
- <sup>56</sup> Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, *Ahiara declaration: the principles of the Biafran revolution* (Enugu: Biafra Information Service Corporation, 1969).
- <sup>57</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 109.
- <sup>58</sup> V.Y Mudimbe, 'Reading', p. 671.
- <sup>59</sup> The idea that writers should be committed in both their writing and their lives was first espoused by Jean-Paul Sartre in the introduction to the 1945 issue of *Les temps modernes* and was extremely influential in discussions of African literature in the 1950s and 1960s.
- <sup>60</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Country*, p. 147.
- <sup>61</sup> See Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
- <sup>62</sup> The *Négritude* movement was started in France by students from French colonies, such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor. It sought to contest the negative colonial

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representation of Black culture by asserting its positive values. See Abiola Irele, *The Negritude moment: explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean literature and thought* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 122-123.

<sup>65</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 186.

<sup>66</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 227.

<sup>68</sup> This term 'unhomely' was first used by Sigmund Freud's his 1917 essay, 'The uncanny.' See *The uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003). It has been popularised in postcolonial theory by Homi Bhabha's essay, 'Home and the world', *Social Text*, Nos. 31/32, 1992, pp. 141-153.

<sup>69</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 227-228.

<sup>70</sup> Achebe, *Ease*, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 234. He quotes from his essay, *The trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 45-46.

<sup>72</sup> Awolowo's statement as quoted in Achebe, *Country*, p. 233.

<sup>73</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 233.

<sup>74</sup> Fani-Kayode, 'Awolowo and Chinua Achebe'.

<sup>75</sup> Jeyifo, 'Reflections', p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, 'Chimamanda Adichie pays tribute to Chinua Achebe at 82', available at:

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<http://thenet.ng/2012/11/chimamanda-adichie-pays-tribute-to-chinua-achebe-at-82/>.

Retrieved 17 October 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Adichie, 'Tribute'.

<sup>78</sup> Adichie, 'Tribute'. Emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Achebe, *Country*, p. 228.