

I. Lessing's Resistance against Western Domination

The present research probes the postcolonial ethos in the works of Lessing especially discerning in her work *The Wind Blows Away our Words* and it tries to capture the voice of the voiceless, which is post colonial resistance in nature. Similarly, the novel expresses the voice of the colonized people and suppressed people of the Afaganstan as well. Along with the exploration of the interrelations of language and culture, the development of authorial identity of Lessing is unearthed in this research. The native language, culture, and myth in the novel challenge the so-called superiority complex of the Westerners. Lessing mainly raises the issue of the language. The research presents how the novel is an appeal to the people on the part of the novelist to intervene in their own history in one way or the other. Lessing's *The Wind Blows Away our Words* attempting the postcolonial scenario of Afaganstan happens to present the issue of non-Westerns country being influenced by the westerns influence where fictional Non-western setting in the country of Afaganstan and frequent use of Afagan dialect. The inclusion of Afagan setting ,Afagan dialect belief in fate, use of myth, issue of independence, unification, indigenous test, the non-Western country facing the problem of cultural chaos due to the colonial influences represent Lessing's desire to represent non-Western thematic balancing the mimicry and rejection of the Western domination. Achebe on the one hand raises the voice against the Western mainstream culture and on the other hand he raises the issues about the marginalized Afagan culture.

Doris Lessing, in her book *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* tried to attract the attention of the Western World to the horrors that the people of Afghanistan were subjected to under the Soviet Regime. The book is a result of her trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1986 and her interviews with the Mujahedeen fighters,

the officials and the countless refugees living in the camps in Pakistan. The title, a direct quotation by a Mujahedeen Commander aptly captures the feeling of the Afghan people then. It was a war that was justified, an unequal war, a war between ragged men, women and children against the well armed and equipped Soviet army. Ill armed, ill equipped and hungry, the people of Afghanistan expected help and support for their rightful cause but all they received was assurances or maybe worse, indifference.

This is a record of Doris Lessing's visit to Afghanistan during its war with Soviet Russia in the eighties. At this time the Afghans felt they were getting little help from the West and they couldn't understand why, as even without modern arms they were still confounding and containing the Russians. They felt they could easily beat them with moderate help. The book also records the toughness, equability and resourcefulness of the men and the suffering of their families. It registers with sadness the damage the war was doing to their country and the apprehension of many Afghans that the end of the war would bring dissension between tribes and sectors of the community. Already religious differences were causing conflict, although it was noted the fundamentalists were the fiercest fighters. To read all this provides a very interesting context to current events where the physical destruction and internal dissension have developed so much more, and with Afghanistan having been abandoned by the Americans after their eventual aid helped the Afghans to force a Russian withdrawal, how its people eventually have become targets of American retribution for harbouring Al Qaeda. Doris Lessing, maiden: Doris May Tayler, rarely used pseudonym : Jane Somers (Kermanshah (Iran), 22 October 1919) is a British writer , in 2007 awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature . She is a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) and

the Order of the British Empire (OBE). Her work reflects deep involvement in political and human problems, but also many autobiographical and then describes her African childhood experiences.

Times have changed: the great Soviet Republic is no more and the Afghans have had their share of self-rule, this book however, retains its relevance to this day. Taking the current events in view and the so little that we know of that country, this book gives a good insight on the life and thinking of the Afghans, the mujahedeen in particular. Though, the author is said to have made some factual errors yet the book is an earnest effort at putting right the view that people have of the Afghan people. One interesting thing about the book is her search for the elusive female mujahedeen fighter. One question that I had in mind after reading the book was the role of the women in the Afghan society, where do they stand and have they been accorded proper credit for their contribution to the freedom struggle. The war against terror has brought Afghanistan into focus and it is hogging precious airtime on networks around the world. Every move of the Taleban, the Northern Alliance Forces and the American troops are being followed using hi-tech surveillance equipment. The life of the average Afghani; a chance to wear shorts, to play football, a shave or even an ogle at a Hindi movie heroine is being reported in the media.

This is not the first time that Afghanistan has faced war: it has seen through countless invaders and marauding armies since time immemorial. As a nation however, it faced some of its worst moments prior to the Taleban taking control. It happened after the communist coup of 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979. The fight then was for freedom and independence and not for control or power and yet the voice of the Afghans, rarely made it to the media. Even when it did, it was

very rarely presented in its proper light. The enormity of the Afghan nightmare, now in its ninth year, is almost beyond comprehension: five million refugees, a million dead, perhaps another two million uprooted from their homes - literally half of the country's prewar population is either dead or displaced. Ms. Lessing suggests various reasons for the indifference she perceives in the West: a reluctance by liberals to criticize the Russians; a distaste for what some see as the "uncivilized" Afghans. She might also have mentioned the difficulties in trying to report on the Afghan conflict properly: the Russians have closed the borders to most journalists and have threatened to kill those who enter illegally. It is only now, when a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan at last seems possible, that Western attention has been drawn to the subject.

Despite winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, Doris Lessing has received relatively little critical attention. One of the reasons for this is that Lessing has spent much of her lifetime and her long published writing career crossing both national and ideological borders. This essay collection reflects and explores the incredible variety of Lessing's border crossings and positions her writing in its various social and cultural contexts. Lessing crosses literal national borders in her life and work, but more controversial have been her crossings of genre borders into sci-fi and "space fiction", and her crossing of ideological borders such as moving into and out of the Communist Party and from a colonial into a post-colonial world. This timely collection also considers a number of the most interesting recent critical and theoretical approaches to Lessing's writing, including work on maternity and abjection in relation to *The Fifth Child* and *The Grass is Singing*, eco-criticism in Lessing's Afghan novels, and postcolonial re-writings of landscape in her *Afagan Stories*.

Doris Lessing (born 1919) was a South African expatriate writer known for her strong sense of feminism. A short story writer and novelist, as well as essayist and critic, Lessing was deeply concerned with the cultural inequities of her native land. The heroines who populate the work of Doris Lessing belong to the avant garde of their day. Leftist, fiercely independent, feminist, her characters, like Lessing herself, are social critics rebelling against the cultural restrictions of their societies. And like their creator, Lessing's heroines populate two geographies: Southern Africa and England. Lessing's fiction closely parallels her own life. Her characters have experienced her experiences; they know what she knows.

The daughter of an English banker, Doris May Taylor was born in Kermanshah, Persia (now Iran), on October 22, 1919. In 1925 the Taylor family moved to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to a farm 100 miles west of Mozambique. Lessing's childhood was spent in the hills near the farm. She attended convent school until an eye problem forced her to drop out at age 14. At that point her self-education began, mostly with the reading of the major nineteenth-century Russian, French, and English novelists. In 1938 she moved to Salisbury, took an office job, and began writing. A year later, she married Frank Wisdom. The marriage, which produced a son and a daughter, ended in divorce in 1943. In 1945 she married Gottfried Lessing. That marriage also ended in divorce, in 1949, after producing one son.

Doris Lessing's work is the work of an exile. As a white South African, she was an outsider to European society; as a socialist, she prohibited herself from re-entering Africa; as a woman, she was left out of a male-dominated culture; and as an artist, she was relegated to the outside of the collective of which she and her characters strived so hard to be a part. And her characters were exiles as well. But

the Lessing heroines are not simply vehicles for social criticism; they are not just trumpets for certain causes. They are fully realized works of fiction. Lessing's contribution was not to any cause, but to literature.

Doris Lessing was born in Persia (present-day Iran) to British parents in 1919. Her family moved to Southern Africa where she spent her childhood on her father's farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). When her second marriage ended in 1949, she moved to London, where her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, was published in 1950. The book explores the complacency and shallowness of white colonial society in Southern Africa and established Lessing as a talented young novelist.

Lessing's *The Wind Blows away our Words* has received many critical appraisals since the time of its publication. Many critics have analyzed the novel using multiple perspectives. A critic Lescaze, interprets the novel using political criticism. In this connection he puts:

Mrs. Lessing 's felling has been the post-independent floundering of Afaganstan and other west African nations and he tells a dark, story of a corrupt and incompetent government whose abuses, from petty tyranny to state-orderd mufer, are unhappily familiar in modern west Africa.(1)

Lescaze has tried to analyze how the novel explores the political scenario of the contemporary time. Lessing 's novel, *The Wind Blows away our Words*, is about history and its many models; and especially about national histories and their realization.' It asks how history is to be understood and consummated especially for people without a canonical narrative. The experience of colonialism dissolves all identities, erases nationalities, makes destiny irrelevant and even problematical. It is

not simply that we cannot understand that all identities, speaking exactly as an intellectual proposition, are always in the process of constitution. Similarly, Byd Tokin comes with the interpretation of how *The Wind Blows away our Words* is full of story of crime. He comments:

In the state of justice, a martyred writer weighs no more or less than martyred farmer or truck driver. But despote who can kill a proster know abroad will inflict any atrocity an observer victims. It's fair to treat the writer's plight as litmus-test of tyranny, without pretending that intellectuals matter than anyone else. (1)

Here, the novel also explores the issues of violence, which is unveiled by Tokin. Post-colonial history thus becomes the story of the end of old history, of old identities, of nativism. It marks the period of rabid hybridity of cultures and identities, or else of nothing but unmediated self-representation and self-narration. In such a regime, national identity is a mere fabrication, defined by passports and legal instruments of domination, violence, and barbarism. In such a situation, history is the account of the post-colonial encounter because there are no longer nations and peoples, and there is nothing to remember or recall.

In addition, it, David Carroll provides us with the interpretation of how power networks operate in the society. The power location controls and tames the individuals in the society hagemonically. In this respect, he puts:

In asserting the primacy of what is called the earth and earth's people, the privileged triumvirate of the characters is destroyed, but their death is interpreted as rite a of passage to be a better world in which the true dialectical of life of rulers and peoples of male and female, of modernity and tradition will be re-established, with the

key role to be played by the women. After the darkness of the civil war, there is in this novel a new kind of confidence in both the storyteller and storyteller's audience. (190)

The operation of the power networks in the society is analyzed by David Carroll. The 'Almighty', however, is not the term Lessing uses of God in his other novels; and there may well be reason to suppose that this use of the term in *The Wind Blows away ourWords* is intended to raise the discussion of the idea of a supreme godhead to a higher plane than hitherto. Likewise, another critic, Marcus, has talked about the consciousness in the novel. Marcus further explains" Lessing 's treatment of the other target of raised consciousness of the people. She gives them voices by turning again and again to the sprung rhythms of the local Platois" (54). Here, Marcus describes how the forcing of local language and cultural help to raise consciousness. In his *Fiction of Lessing* (2007), Jago Morrison sees this commitment in Lessing to use his art as a consistent continuation of his vision, craft, and ideal a part of his writing:

Lessing is also known to recast the notion of commitment So often associated with his writing a writer's willingness to Hold firm to the personal and the aesthetic – a writer's willingness To hold firm to the truth of his vision, the authenticity of his Language and to his own artistic integrity. (137)

It is evident that Lessing Achebe is perfect in the handling of the lucid expression with the coherent language which ultimately presents the truth associated to the condition of the Afagan people. In the context of writers' willingness, Onyemaechi Udumukwu's statement here corroborates the intertextual preview of Lessing's fiction. For him" Lessing's reflection in *Home and Exile* paves the way for us to understand his novel *The Wind Blows away ourWords* as opening Up the authentic

grounds for social and political re-storying And reinvention in the postcolonial context. " (195)

The act of re-storying above resonates with Umelo Ojinmah's contention regarding Lessing's fiction as mosaic of quotation, to borrow Julia Kristeva's phrase. Thus, Lessing's latest novel, *The Wind Blows away our Words* extends his structural time sequence to the present. It encapsulates both Achebe's original views and concepts on the role of the artist in African societies, as contained in his earlier fictions and essays, Her disillusionment and despair at what we have made of Independence.

Thus the novel is analysed from multiple perspectives but the issue of postcolonialism is yet untouched the gap is filled up by the research

Language is power, the power to name and therefore to construct the lens through which understanding takes place. As the most potent instrument of culture control, the language of the colonial power therefore played an essential role in the process of colonization. Because the literature of former imperial colonies decentralizes language control, to a certain extent it decolonizes by its very nature. The bilingual intelligentsia of postcolonial writers must negotiate the power dynamics regarding such tensions as colonized-colonizer and indigenous-alien. Postcolonial literature itself is a battle ground in which the active pursuit of decolonization continues to be played out. Armed with their pens, the Said authors address; "the dominance of imperial language as it relates to educational systems, to economic structures, and perhaps more importantly to the medium through which anti-imperial ideas are cast" (283). The postcolonial voice can decide to resist imperial linguistic domination in two ways -- by rejecting the language of the colonizer or by subverting the empire by writing back in a European language. Frantz Fanon describes the

dialectic of language between the colonized and the colonizer bleakly. According to him, "the colonized is raised above jungle status [in the eyes of the colonizer] in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards"(78). Fanon, who rejects the codified colonizer-colonized relationship, advocates total rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language. Fanon believes that "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (83). Fanon reasons that he who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted the world of the colonizer and therefore the standards of the colonizer.

Following Fanon, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o also proposes a program of radical decolonization in his collection of essays *Decolonizing the Mind* which points out specific ways that the language of African literature manifests the dominance of the empire. He builds an powerful argument for African writers to write in traditional languages of Africa rather than in the European languages. Writing in the language of the colonizer, he claims, means that many of one's own people - meaning those people with whom a postcolonial writer identifies by nativity - are not able to read one's original work. About African literature written in European language Ngũgĩ writes, "its greatest weakness still lay where it has always been, in the audience - the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language" (22). According to him, literature written in a European language cannot claim to be African literature, and therefore he classifies the works by Soyinka, Achebe, and Okara as Afro-European literature. They have strongly suggested:

We use the term 'post-colonial'... to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout

the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism, which has emerged in recent years, and for the discourse through which this is constituted. In this sense, this book is concerned with the world, as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures. (65)

A post-colonial view of history is an entirely relevant undertaking. It enables us to understand what a people have become in the process of a particular form of political and cultural contact. It tells of an important, even crucial, moment in a process of becoming. It acknowledges that colonialism was, indeed, a fact of history, and an unerasable one at that. It reminds us that the ex-colonial, in his/ her post-colonial condition, can never be the true native again. Postcolonialism, in this sense, is an age after innocence. The literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its post-colonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for Post-colonial literatures everywhere. What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their

differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this, which makes them distinctively post-colonial.

Post-colonial literatures can be seen developed through several stages that correspond to stages both of national or regional consciousness and of the project of asserting difference from the imperial centre. During the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial centre is inevitably, of course, produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power. Thus the first texts produced in the colonies in the new language are frequently produced by representatives of the imperial power; for example, gentrified settlers, travelers and sightseers, Froude's *Oceana*, and his *The English in the West Indies*, or the travel diaries of Mary Kingsley, or the Anglo-Indian and West African administrators, soldiers, and boxwallahs, and, even more frequently, their memsahibs.

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a standard version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all variants as impurities. As a character in Mrs Campbell Praed's nineteenth-century Australian novel *Policy and Passion* puts it, "To be colonial is to talk Australian slang; to be ... everything that is abominable" (Campbell Praed 1881: 154). Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of truth, order, and reality become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. For this reason, the discussion of Post-colonial writing which follows is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture.

In order to focus on the complex ways in which the English language has been used in these societies, and to indicate their own sense of difference, we distinguish in this account between the Standard British English inherited from the empire and the English which the language has become in post-colonial countries. Though British imperialism resulted in the spread of a language, English, across the globe, the English of Jamaicans is not the English of Canadians, Maoris, or Kenyans. We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, English, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. For this reason, the distinction between English and English will be used throughout our text as an indication of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world.

The field of Postcolonial Studies has been gaining prominence since the 1970s. Some would date its rise in the Western academy from the publication of Edward Said's influential critique of Western constructions of the Orient in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*. The growing currency within the academy of the term "postcolonial" (sometimes hyphenated) was consolidated by the appearance in 1989 of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Since then, the use of cognate terms "Commonwealth" and "Third World" that were used to describe the literature of Europe's former colonies has become rarer. Although there is considerable debate over the precise parameters of the field and the definition of the term "postcolonial," in a very general sense, it is the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period. The European empire is said to have held sway over more than 85% of the rest of the globe by the time of the First

World War, having consolidated its control over several centuries. The sheer extent and duration of the European empire and its disintegration after the Second World War have led to widespread interest in postcolonial literature and criticism in our own times. The list of former colonies of European powers is a long one. They are divided into settler (eg. Australia, Canada) and non-settler countries (India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Senegal, Sri Lanka). Countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe which were partially settled by colonial populations complicate even this simple division between settler and non-settler. The widely divergent experiences of these countries suggest that "postcolonial" is a very loose term. In strictly definitional terms, for instance, the United States might also be described as a postcolonial country, but it is not perceived as such because of its position of power in world politics in the present, its displacement of native American populations, and its annexation of other parts of the world in what may be seen as a form of colonization. For that matter, other settler countries such as Canada and Australia are sometimes omitted from the category "postcolonial" because of their relatively shorter struggle for independence, their loyalist tendencies toward the mother country which colonized them, and the absence of problems of racism or of the imposition of a foreign language. It could, however, be argued that the relationship between these countries to the mother country is often one of margin to center, making their experience relevant to a better understanding of colonialism.

The debate surrounding the status of settler countries as postcolonial suggests that issues in Postcolonial Studies often transcend the boundaries of strict definition. In a literal sense, postcolonial is that which has been preceded by colonization. The second college edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as "of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony." In

practice, however, the term is used much more loosely. While the denotative definition suggests otherwise, it is not only the period after the departure of the imperial powers that concerns those in the field, but that before independence as well. The formation of the colony through various mechanisms of control and the various stages in the development of anti-colonial nationalism interest many scholars in the field. By extension, sometimes temporal considerations give way to spatial ones (i.e. in an interest in the postcolony as a geographical space with a history prior or even external to the experience of colonization rather than in the postcolonial as a particular period) in that the cultural productions and social formations of the colony long before colonization are used to better understand the experience of colonization. Moreover, the "postcolonial" sometimes includes countries that have yet to achieve independence, or people in First World countries who are minorities, or even independent colonies that now contend with "neocolonial" forms of subjugation through expanding capitalism and globalization. In all of these senses, the "postcolonial," rather than indicating only a specific and materially historical event, seems to describe the second half of the twentieth-century in general as a period in the aftermath of the heyday of colonialism. Even more generically, the "postcolonial" is used to signify a position against imperialism and Eurocentrism. Western ways of knowledge production and dissemination in the past and present then become objects of study for those seeking alternative means of expression. As the foregoing discussion suggests, the term thus yokes a diverse range of experiences, cultures, and problems; the resultant confusion is perhaps predictable.

The expansiveness of the "postcolonial" has given rise to lively debates. Even as some deplore its imprecision and lack of historical and material particularity, others argue that most former colonies are far from free of colonial influence or domination

and so cannot be postcolonial in any genuine sense. In other words, the overhasty celebration of independence masks the march of neocolonialism in the guise of modernization and development in an age of increasing globalization and transnationalism; meanwhile, there are colonized countries that are still under foreign control. The emphasis on colonizer/colonized relations, moreover, obscures the operation of internal oppression within the colonies. Still others berate the tendency in the Western academy to be more receptive to postcolonial literature and theory that is compatible with postmodern formulations of hybridity, syncretization, and pastiche while ignoring the critical realism of writers more interested in the specifics of social and racial oppression. The lionization of diasporic writers like Salman Rushdie, for instance, might be seen as a privileging of the transnational, migrant sensibility at the expense of more local struggles in the postcolony. Further, the rise of Postcolonial Studies at a time of growing transnational movements of capital, labor, and culture is viewed by some with suspicion in that it is thought to deflect attention away from the material realities of exploitation both in the First and the Third World.

Despite the reservations and debates, research in Postcolonial Studies is growing because postcolonial critique allows for a wide-ranging investigation into power relations in various contexts. The formation of empire, the impact of colonization on postcolonial history, economy, science, and culture, the cultural productions of colonized societies, feminism and postcolonialism, agency for marginalized people, and the state of the postcolony in contemporary economic and cultural contexts are some broad topics in the field.

First, literal colonization is not the exclusive object of postcolonial study. Lenin's classic analysis of imperialism led to Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" which distinguishes between literal political dominance and dominance

through ideas and culture (what many critics of American influence call the "Coca-Colanization" of the world). Sixties thinkers developed the concept of neo-imperialism to label relationships like that between the U.S. and many Latin American countries which, while nominally independent, had economies dominated by American business interests, often backed up by American military forces. The term "banana republic" was originally a sarcastic label for such subjugated countries, ruled more by the influence of the United Fruit Corporation than by their own indigenous governments.

Third, some critics argue that the term misleadingly implies that colonialism is over when in fact most of the nations involved are still culturally and economically subordinated to the rich industrial states through various forms of neo-colonialism even though they are technically independent.

Fourth, it can be argued that this way of defining a whole era is Eurocentric, that it singles out the colonial experience as the most important fact about the countries involved. Surely that experience has had many powerful influences; but this is not necessarily the framework within which writers from--say--India, who have a long history of precolonial literature, wish to be viewed.

Although there has been sporadic agitation in some African quarters for reparations for the slavery era, most writers of fiction, drama, and poetry see little point in continually rehashing the past to solve today's problems. It is striking how little modern fiction from formerly colonized nations highlights the colonial past. Non-fiction writers often point out that Hindu-Muslim conflicts in South Asia are in part the heritage of attempts by the British administration in India to play the two groups of against each other (not to mention the special role assigned to the Sikhs in the British army); yet Indian fiction about these conflicts rarely points to such colonial

causes. A good example is Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) which deals directly with the partition of India from an almost exclusively Indian perspective.

Indeed, "postcolonial" writers often move to England or North America (because they have been exiled, or because they find a more receptive audience there, or simply in search of a more comfortable mode of living) and even sometimes--like Soyinka--call upon the governments of these "neocolonialist" nations to come to the aid of freedom movements seeking to overthrow native tyrants.

The limitation of the research is that it only sticks to the notion of post colonialism. Using the modality of post colonialism it unearths the postcolonial sentiments that Lessing foregrounds in the novel. The first chapter is the bird's eye view of the research .The second chapter analyses the text from the perspective of post colonialism. The last chapter concludes the research.

II. Resisting Western Values in Lessing's *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*

Lessing presents the Non-Western elements in the novel from two aspects: on the one hand Achebe present the uniqueness of the Afagan society while on the other hand he presents the degraded situation of afagan society through the presentation of the dark consequences of the evils of the colonialism in the postcolonial age which are both the non-western elements in the novel. These two events in the novel present the resistance against the Western values of life style.

One senses he believes the British tradition has permanently permeated the Kangan elite culture and his life. However, of the three former schoolboy chums, it is Sam who especially admired his European predecessors:

He was fascinated by the customs of the English, especially their well-to-do classes and enjoyed playing at their foibles. When he told me about his elegant pipe which he had spent a whole morning choosing in a Mayfair shop I could see that he was not taking himself seriously at all . . . Of course one may well question the appropriateness of these attitudes in a Head of State. (45)

Sam, however, is the only one to continue his worship of the British, and their intolerant, despotic rule. Ikem, transformed by the visit of the taxi cab drivers, later feels a new connection to the common people and rationalizes: "It [the cause of the unsuccessful government] is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being"(130). Thereafter Ikem seeks to bridge the gap between the rulers and the people by helping the people of his drought wrought homeland, the Abazon. After Ikem's death Chris undergoes a similar transformation, dying attempting to prevent the rape of peasant girl.

The novelist is perhaps one of the best examples of a writer using a language of Wider Communication for expressing indigenous ideas. In *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* utilizes relexification. In chapter nine, "Views of the Struggle", Ikem, one of the central protagonists, is a young journalist among a traveling delegation of men from his village home, Abazon. During a gathering in which Ikem is being honored one Elder stands and utters a speech which is filled with indigenous ideas. He alludes to customs and environments, which are conspicuously native to Abazon:

How do we salute our fellow's wen we come in and see them massed in assembly so huge we cannot hope to greet them one by one, to call each man by his title? Do we not say: To everyone his due? Have you thought what a wise practice our fathers fashioned out of those simple words? To every man his own! To each his chosen title! We can all see how that handful of words can save us from the ache of four hundred handshakes and the headache of remembering a like multitude of praise-names. (113)

Here, the words salute, handshakes and fellow men that the reader encounters are not meant to represent English speech. We know this because in chapter nine of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Lessing distinguishes between words that are actually uttered in English and those uttered in the mother-tongue, using italics to represent words which represent English. This becomes apparent when one elder from Abazon says, "I do not hear English but I when they say *Catch am nobody* tells me to take myself off as fast as I can" (117).

In the gathering taking place in chapter nine the elders of Abazon celebrate the fact that one of their sons, Ikem, is the chief editor of the National Gazette. "I had never read what they say he writes because I do not know ABC. But I have heard of

all the fight he has fought or poor people in this land" (112-13). Here Achebe melds form with function. If Achebe, like Ikem, is successful at conveying the ideas and experiences of the non-English speaking population of Abazon, then he is able to give voice to a native African experience throughout the English-speaking world.

The writer's intentions are affirmed by Ashcroft's notion of constitutive graphonomy. Ashcroft addresses the question, how does the non-English speaker, for instance, mean anything in English? He explains how writing about a native experience in a non-native language can signify its nature without reproducing it. Ashcroft bases this claim on the primacy of the message event. That is to say that the written text is a social event. Ashcroft's conception is supported by theory which is widely accepted about writing. Few will disagree that a writer is limited to a situation in which words have meaning. Many varying interpretations can be garnered from even the simplest texts. It is not the words themselves that create meaning, but the event of participants interacting. In this message event the writer and reader meet each other. By the logic of this metaphor, a text bridges a metonymic gap. The distance of each party from the point of understanding, or that point at which the experience is fully realized, helps to create the meaning of the text. In a sense no participant or communicator can claim fully to own any experience being communicated, but writers use creativity to bridge the gap between all those who are situated around the experience.

Bearing witness to the failure of social justice and democracy to take root in post-colonial Nigeria, he dramatized the impasse in the 1987 *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*. Set in the fictional nation of Kangan, a thinly disguised version of Nigeria, the plot revolves around the fate of two prominent male intellectuals victimized in a military crackdown orchestrated by the nation's president-for-life who

is a childhood friend. Narration shifts between these two characters and their female friend, who works in the Ministry of Finance. As aroused but impotent elite figures, they obviously were chosen by Achebe to reflect his own frustrations with Nigeria and mixed feelings about Africa's future. Those looking for heroic victories over oppression must look elsewhere than in Achebe's deeply complex and multilevelled work.

As Minister of Information, Christopher Oriko is in an unenviable position. Charged with the responsibility of defending the policies of a military dictator, who happens to be one of his oldest friends, he treads a fine line between loyalty, toadyism and subversion. He is intelligent enough to know how rotten the government is, but is too much of the detached intellectual to commit himself to struggle. It is clear that this position is not satisfying to Achebe, despite his own hatred for what colonialism did to the continent. Ikem Osodi obviously serves as a vehicle for his own dissatisfaction with post-colonial society.

In contrast to Chris Oriko's cynicism, Ikem Osodi is driven by compassion for Kangan's underclass. He decides to crusade against public executions immediately after attending one as a representative of the state-owned newspaper. Appalled by the cruel taunts of the crowd and inspired by the dignity of the doomed man (a common criminal), he writes an editorial the very next day that ended with a one verse hymn addressing the idea of further spiritualization:

The worst threat from men of hell
 May not be their actions cruel
 Far worse that we may learn
 And behave more fierce than they. (41)

Christopher is affirming the revolution against the westerners in the sense that the hellish domination against the non-west should be reacted fiercely.

Almost like clockwork, Christopher calls his old friend into his Ministry of Information office to warn him against writing editorials that might risk his career or worse his life. If Ikem is always acting impetuously, we understand that he has no choice given the urgency of his continent's problems. He is one of Africa's "impetuous sons," referred to in an excerpt from David Diop's poem *Afaganstan* that serves as an epigraph to chapter ten:

Afaganstan, tell me Afaganstan
 Is this you this back that is bent
 This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation
 This back trembling with red scars
 And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun
 But a grave voice answer me
 Impetuous son, that tree young and strong
 That tree there
 In splendid loneliness amidst white and faded flowers
 This is Africa your Africa
 That grows again patiently obstinately
 And its fruit gradually acquire
 The bitter taste of liberty. (74)

The above poem preserving the nationalism of Afaganstaness is the major point of the text to affirm the non western elements, in its narration of the African condition to be underdog in front of the white domination. The narrator is asking Africa why she is bending, in humiliation, in scars and in alienation as the faded flowers. Through the

depiction of the miserable condition of the African culture Achebe is hinting to the bitter taste of liberty in Africa.

Despite Ikem's sympathy for the poor, he is out of touch with them. He regards them sympathetically from afar but is not organically linked to their struggles. If anything, this goes to the heart of Achebe's novel: the inability of the nation's elite to connect with the masses. When a couple of members of the taxi-drivers union show up unannounced at his door one day to tell him how much they appreciate his support, Ikem is somewhat apprehensive at first. After one driver tells him in pidgin English how important his columns are to the rank-and-file, he is deeply touched.

Ah. How I go begin count. The thing oga write too plenty. But na for we small people he de write every time. I no sabi book but I sabi say na for we this oga de fight, not for himself. He na big man. Nobody fit do fuckall to him. So he fit stay for him house, chop him oyibo chop, drink him cold beer, put him air conditioner and forget we. But he no do like that. So we come salute him. (48)

The writer puts regarding the notion of humanism:

And I understand the meaning of his despair too. For here's a man, who has written a full-length novel and play on the Women's War of 1929 which stopped the British administration cold in its tracks, being accused of giving no clear political role to women. But the way I see it is that giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough, you know, like the women in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated menfolk. It is not enough that

women should be the court of last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late! (148)

Those looking for a stirring message about revolutionary struggles will not find any such thing in *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*. It is imbued with a very deep mood of futility that is only broken by the personal examples of self-sacrifice by the major characters. In the final chapter, the focus is on the birth of Ikem's daughter, for whom Beatrice holds a traditional naming ceremony. This gesture underscores the strong yearnings for some kind of reconnection with Africa's lost traditions that were trampled underfoot by colonialism. The infant is named Amaechina, or "May-the-path-never-close," in honor of her dead father Ikem.

The section of the novel narrated by Beatrice contains Ikem's statements about politics, revolution, and the role of women in both. Beatrice had once charged that Ikem had "no clear role for women in his political thinking (83)", despite the fact that he had written a full length novel and a play about the Women's War of 1929 which stopped the British administration cold in its tracks (84)". Long puzzled by this charge, he at last realizes: "You were damn right. You charged me with assigning to women the role of a fire brigade after the house has caught fire and been virtually consumed (88)". This realization in turn leads Ikem to examine the nature of woman's oppression in both European and African thought.

The original oppression of Woman was based on crude denigration. She caused Man to fall. So she became a scapegoat. No, not a scapegoat which might be blameless but a culprit richly deserving of whatever suffering Man chose thereafter to heap on her. That is Woman in the Book of Genesis. Out here, our ancestors, without the benefit of hearing about the old Testament, made the very same story differing only in local colour. At first the Sky was very close to the Earth. But every evening

Woman cut off a piece of the Sky to put in her soup pot or, as in yet another rendering - so prodigious is Man's inventiveness -she wiped her kitchen hands on the Sky's face. Whatever the detail of Woman's provocation, the Sky finally moved away in anger and God with it.

Though that kind of candid chauvinism might be O. K. for the rugged taste of the Old Testament. The New Testament required a more enlightened, more refined, more loving even, strategy -ostensibly, that is. So the idea came to Man to turn his spouse into the very Mother of God, to pick her up from right under his foot where she'd been since Creation and carry her reverently to a nice, corner pedestal. Up there, her feet completely off the ground; she will be just as irrelevant to the practical decisions of running the world as she was in her bad old days. The only difference is now that Man will suffer no guilt feelings; he can sit back and congratulate himself on his generosity and gentlemanliness:

Meanwhile our ancestors out here, unaware of the New Testament, were working out independently a parallel subterfuge of their own. Nneka, they said. Mother is supreme. Let us keep her in reserve until the ultimate crisis arrives and . . . Then, as the world crashes around Man's ears, Woman in her supremacy will descend and sweep the shards together. (89)

Although the mythical country of Kangan had shed its colonial bonds, the influence of its former British oppressors remained. The political gap created by the departure of the white man was quickly filled by a government dominated by militant, totalitarian leaders equally as oppressive as the white colonists. Like their former masters, the elite, rich black leaders taunt and look down upon the poor people they rule.

Gazing upon the masses standing in blistering noontime heat awaiting the public executions, Ikem wonders how the common person can bear to see shaded seats reserved for the VIP's remain wholly vacant. The distinction between the whites and the blacks is that the whites are sophisticated and they claim to be advanced which is only the discourse. The situation evokes the imperialist rhetoric for the oppression of the poor, a rhetoric adapted by the new native government:

You see, they are not in the least like us. They don't need and can't use the luxuries that you and I must have. They have the animal capacity to endure the pain of, shall we say, domestication. The very words the white master had said in his times about the black race as a whole.

Now we say them about the poor. (37)

Despite the changes in the government, the essence of the British attitude remained. The British philosophy and lifestyle continued because the country's new leaders were products of the imposed European culture. Ikem, Chris, Sam, and Beatrice were all educated in British schools, and they modeled their lives and beliefs after the lifestyle and philosophy they had been taught, the European British lifestyle. Through these characters' flawless English Achebe subtly underscores their British backgrounds. These characters' close affiliation with the white man results in bringing them respect and maintains the wide gap established by the British between the government and the common people.

The characters are not willing to incorporate the lifestyle of British life. But though they deny, they are obliged to be complicit to the British lifestyle. The Attorney General's comments to Sam reflect this separation:

As for those like me, Your Excellency, poor dullards who went to bush grammar schools, we know our place, we know those better than

ourselves when we see them. We have no problem worshipping a man like you. Honestly I don't. You went to Lord Lugard College where half of your teachers were English men. (22)

The connections to the British do not end with education; the new black leaders also seek to mimic the British life style. The close relationship Chris and Ikem share with Mad Medico, the only white character, illustrates their desire to emulate the British. Ikem comments, during his first interaction with the Brit, "We were enslaved originally by Gordon's Dry Gin. All gestures of resistance are now too late and too empty. Gin it shall be forever and ever, Amen"(49). The character are conscious of the revolution which has not been concretized yet. They are planning to revolt against the tyrannical authority of the Britishers.

Postcolonial authors must make this political point clear in the context of secondary roles, such as Stevens' service-oriented profession, because political problems are often blamed on the leaders alone. We are all implicated in the establishment and perpetuation of the social and political orders of our society. Lessing *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* articulates this theme in a Nigerian context. The relationship amongst texts and the dialogue such texts address brings to the fore the ideological coloration of a particular epoch or time. In instantiating this, the corpus of colonial fiction passes through a filter: the texts produced during this time, highlight imperial rule and its concomitants. Same goes for anti-colonial fiction, which gibbets imperialist incursion. Therefore, every text or literary work is derived from the ideological or politico-social realities of a particular time in the history of a people. Jean Howard echoes the same position:

In fact, I would argue that [. . .] attempting to talk about the ideological function of literature in a specific period can most usefully do so only

by seeing a specific work relationally – that is, by seeing how its representations stand in regard to those of other specific works and discourses. (30)

This is popular case in Achebe's political fiction. Every of Achebe's fiction has a trace of earlier ones at least indirectly. This is fundamentally true about his postcolonial fiction, which refracts Nigeria's postcolonial disillusionment as well as power abuse; and it is a product of "... a plural productivity in which multiple voices – textual, socio-historical and ideological – coexist and communicate" (92). Thus, in connection to Achebe's fiction – particularly his political fiction *Anthills of the Savannah*, which shall form the bulk of our textual analysis, attempts will be made to locate the place of intertextuality in this work – as the work is a textual tissue that relates to Lessing's earlier fiction as well as other writers' in content and perspective.

Lessing is widely known for his appropriation of precursory artistic elements in his art. Thus "Lessing is able to retrieve fascinating antecedent works to espouse his philosophical outlook, i.e., his belief in the cyclical theory of history" (377). This narrative pattern is characteristic of the Coleridgean suspension of disbelief paradigm, a concept coined by Samuel Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. The meat of Coleridge's phrase suspension of disbelief underwrites a writer (like Achebe) to inject what Coleridge calls human interest and a semblance of truth into a piece of fiction thereby making a reader to suspend judgment concerning implausibility. Intertextually, this means that a writer's ability to identify similar conjunctures in another work, which technically showcases verisimilitude, makes the reader to believe in the actuality of such aestheticisation. This artistic faithfulness is responsible for the Yeatsian invocation in Achebe's tour de force, *Things Fall Apart*.

Yeats' Ireland has some semblance with Achebe's Igbo universe in the novel. The locale Achebe portrays in the work is torn apart by colonial incursion.

The primal coalescence between art (literature) and truth cannot be glossed over; the quotidian deployment of art by writers to refract truth in our society is a case in point. Nigerian writers have appropriated literature to give expression to the socio-historical malaise that buffets the nation as well as harnessed it to give man a platform to know what is happening around his world in order to move in such world. This is quite pronounced in the postcolonial Nigerian novel, which chronicles the social facts in the polity. In his analysis of the debt of literature to the service of humanity and its truthful reconstruction of militarism in human society, C.O. Ogunyemi asserts that writers engage in writing because of "The sheer urge to record, as truthful as possible, an excruciating indelible, visceral experience which the author has been physically and/or emotionally involved"(109).

For postcolonial Nigerian writers, writing does not exist in a vacuum; every piece of fiction refracts truthfully the situations, atmosphere and realities in Nigeria. This veracious artistic faithfulness is what Wellek and Warren in their well-titled book, *The Concept of Criticism* call the "the reflection of reality" (239), a pattern Lindfors sees as the true account of a writer's state of their society.

The truth of the tragic, cataclysmic military experience in Nigeria has been a cardinal leitmotif of postcolonial Nigerian literature, especially fiction. In the foreword to *The Insider: Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria*, Emmanuel Obiechina adds credence to the reality of the tragic atmosphere that Nigerian writers dramatize in their works: "out of every serious crisis in the life of a people there comes a deepening insights into the true nature of man and of human society" (vi). This is the tradition in which novels that reconstruct military experience in Nigeria

were born; Lessing's *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* follows in the footsteps of this mould. In the novel, Achebe takes us on a roller-coaster of military dictatorship in Nigeria fictionalized as Kangan, the setting of the novel. The novel also adumbrates subsets of power struggle and feminist agitation, which are annealed on the anvil of militarism. In the main, Achebe's major thematic preoccupation in *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* is military governance, which he considers a mere aberration. It is a regimen that rather aggravates the same inanities that characterize civilian administrations. Commenting on the truth of Achebe's political fiction, A Man of the People, Jago Morrison says that:

There are certainly close correspondence between the political developments of the mid-1960s in Nigeria and those that are depicted in the novel. Achebe's account of the military takeover at the end of his text, in particular, comes remarkably close to describing the actual events that followed. (116)

This is also similar to the conjunctures that *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* prefigures; it is a dramatization of political excesses as well as state usurpation of power in the successive military juntas that exemplified Nigeria after her political independence in 1960.

Published in 1987, Lessing's *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* deftly reconstructs postcolonial Nigerian space in the vice-grip of militarism. How the colonialism use the ideology to divide and rule the natives individuals has been presented in the novel. In dramatizing this notion, the opening statement in the novel exemplifies militarized Nigerian postcolony:

You are wasting everybody's time, Mr. Commissioner for Information. I will not go to Abazon. Finish! Kabisa! Any Other

business? As Your Excellency wishes. But...But me no buts, Mr. Oriko! The matter is closed, I said. The tone that pervades the above exchange, which is speckled with language of altercation and naked force, suggests that Kangan is enmeshed in a political muddle that the Nangas and Sams have made of democracy on the African continent. In addition, the above exchange pushes sturdily to the fore that “the military and democracy are in dialectical opposition ...The military demands submission, democracy enjoins participation; one is a tool of violence, the other a means of consensus building for peaceful co-existence. (34)

The plot rotates around the fate of two prominent male intellectuals oppressed in a militarized crackdown orchestrated by the nation’s ‘president-for-life (Sam), who is a childhood friend. The novel’s sequence of narration moves between these two characters and their female friend, Beatrice, who works in the Ministry of Finance.

As Kangan’s Minister of Information, Christopher Oriko is in a position to wield influence since he is part of the government but cannot because of the president’s absolutist power base. The president’s militarized power network does not allow opposition or alternative view. This is exemplified in the manner the presidency runs the Ministry of Information by dictating to it what should be done. This is responsible for Chris and Ikem’s hot debate about the latter’s editorials, which the president had asked Chris to moderate. As Ikem argues, “... as long as I remain editor of the Gazette I shall not seek anybody’s permission for what I write” (44). Ikem is challenging the whites claiming that he will not be submissive in regard to the independency and the freedom of his nation. He rejects every kind of compromises to destroy his nation. However, as the novel unveils, Ikem’s idealism to

change his world, Kangan was met with brutality and his sudden death, which again portrays the power of the bullet and the gun.

After the death of Ikem, Chris went into hiding and wanted to escape the country because Sam's toadies wanted him for their master. In his bid to do this, Chris was killed by Sam's security operatives. Chris' killing is one of the fiercest forms of brutality. This incident took place as Chris wanted to rescue a schoolgirl who was being abducted by a police officer. The police officer in question was stealing some beer before he saw the schoolgirl and wanted to rape her. The girl was being mishandled and brutally treated by this officer that Chris was touched to come to her rescue, which is evident from "The police sergeant was dragging her in the direction of a Small cluster of round huts not far from the road and surrounded as was common to these parts by a fence of hideously-spiked cactus. He was pulling her by the waist, his gin slung from the shoulder"(215).

Chris' intervention in this despicable drama caused him his life: He unslung his gun, cocked it, narrowed his eyes while Confused voices went up all around some asking Chris to run, others the policeman to put the gun away. Chris stood his ground looking straight into the man's face, Daring him to shoot. And he did, point-blank into the Chest presented to him. As Ojinmah avers, "In Achebe's view, the circumstances of Chris's death typifies the depravity of military dictatorships to whom human life has become worthless" (91). In order to clobber opposition and dissenting views, the military in Nigerian politics employs violence and militarization of operation to sustain itself in power. The military in this sense see might as right and coercion as a substitute for democratic principles. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe considers the solders as being worse than the civilian government they

ousted; they have in this regard perfected killing, torture, intimidation, terror, violence and have in the final analysis militarized the social space.

The novel presents how the war is causing the loss of humanity making the colonized obliged to fight each other without any reasons, that is due to the impact of the false ideology of the Whites. In instantiating this:

In *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* Achebe sees the soldiers as not being any better than the civilians that they ousted; if anything, they have become worse, having perfected torture, intimidation and cold-blooded killings as weapons to cow the opponents of their policies.

And believing that they are accountable to no one but themselves, And having the ultimate weapon – the brute force of the army at Their beck and call – they have to see governance as a matter of How long they are able to stay in or cling to power. (86)

The above insightful, gripping remark by Umelo Ojinmah, which is characteristic of *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* suffuses the cosmos of Achebe's postcolonial novels. In this direction, "scenes of political brigandage and thuggery as we find in Achebe's *A Man of the People* (149) are self-evident in *Anthills of the Savannah*, where Achebe indicates that "There were unconfirmed rumours of unrest, secret trials and executions in the barracks" (14). Achebe considers the use of violence and brutality as a form of police state. This indication presages the Gestapo regime in Hitler's Germany. In *No Longer at Ease* (1960), the nature of violence here is essentially that of psychological violence and threat. The protagonist of the novel Obi Okonkwo is in crisis. The wellspring of his crisis is that he is in a society whose societal values and mores are completely out of sync with his personal values and aspiration. This situation in Obi's world pushes him to marginality and cultural

transition thereby constituting psychological violence as well as emotional trauma, which in the final analysis threaten his wellbeing and survival. Thus, “Whilst Obi is an alienated, confused protagonist, the world he inhabits is shown as threateningly empty” (90).

The political history of Nigeria resonates with how a nation should not be run. One of the reasons for this form of inept mode of governance is military rule. Sanyo Osha in his piece, “Ethics and Revisionism in Nigerian Governance”, lends credence to the militarization of Nigeria’s political space; a departure from the true import of good governance, which is evident from the belief “Nigeria is one of the best examples of how a nation should not be run. Its disastrous history of protracted military rule has virtually destroyed all facets of its national existence. And Militarism is a scourge that mere cosmetic reforms cannot eradicate” (82).

The three main characters in *Anthills of the Savannah*: Chris, Ikem, and Beatrice whom Achebe portrayed as representing the voice of change are faced with diverse forms of inhumanity ranging from political assassination, violence, threats, repression and intimidations. As Achebe illustrates, these trio symbolize “the cream of our society and hope of the black race” (2). The trio’s dilemma is similar to the fate of real people in postcolonial Nigeria, which Osha is linked on militarism above.

Starting with Beatrice Okoh – “A female is also something” (87), Achebe presents a woman who is in a struggle with the apparatuses of Sam’s power game to fight for the political rights of women in her society, Kangan. Although the militarized social milieu in Kangan makes Beatrice’s quest difficult, she eventually makes the voice of women to be heard: “This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented” (232). Understandably, the repressive system in Kangan is a direct fall-out of African traditional institution that

marginalized women and the people. This form of oppression is occasioned by militarism.

In the case of Ikem Osodi, he was killed by his Excellency's hatchet men for standing up for the truth. Though Ikem tried the hardest to use the pen to smother militarism and dictatorship through his editorials in the National Gazette, which he edited, but he was eventually felled by the guns. This goes to questioning the capacity of the pen and dialogue to triumph over militarism in Kangan. As the sergeant declared: "Oh no. The pen is mightier than the sword. With one sentence of your sharp pen you can demolish anybody" (131). This did not materialize; rather, Ikem was brought down by the bullet. The death of Ikem is a celebration of raw force and brutality to silence opposition. After Ikem's speech at the University of Bassa on the insensitivity of Sam's mode of governance, he was accused of regicide because the powers that be reckoned that his speech radicalized the students as well as the people. Ikem's speech was titled "The Tortoise and the Leopard – a Political Meditation on the Imperative of Struggle" (153). Symbolically, Ikem choice of words for the speech paints in a bold relief the militarization of the status quo. The tortoise represents the people as well as the intellectuals, while the leopard signifies might and raw power. It was essentially because of this event that the Excellency (Sam) asked for Ikem's head after his speech was misquoted to incriminate him; the next day, the national paper, National Gazette had a headline as thus: "EX-EDITOR ADVOCATES REGICIDE" (162). At the behest of Sam, Major Sam Ossai (Samsonite), Sam's hatchet man was ordered to arrest Ikem – and he was killed in the process:

In the early hours of this morning a team of security officers effected the arrest of Mr. Osodi in his official flat at 202 Kingsway Road in the Government Reservation Area and were Taking him in a military

vehicle for questioning at the SRCH headquarters when he seized a gun from one of his escorts. In the scuffle that ensued between Mr. Osodi and his guard in the Moving vehicle, Mr. Osodi was fatally wounded by gunshot. (169)

The atmosphere above paints a shocking picture of a society caught in a mesh of blood-curdling violence, tension and apprehension occasioned by men in khaki to curb opposition.

Sam, the military commander and dictator of the fictional Kangan (unambiguously Nigeria), who assumed the presidency-for-life in a coup d'état, brooks no resistance to his authoritarian regime. In clobbering his political opponents and the resistance from the people, Sam used violence and brutality. Major Johnson Ossai (later Colonel) is Sam's (Excellency's) Chief Security Officer; he is the main character used to perform most of the brutal and violent operations. Ossai's portraiture in the novel parallels Nazi's chief of Gestapo (the Secret Police), Heinrich Himmler, who was executing the people during the monstrous reign of Fuehrer (Third Reich). As the sabre-rattling and belligerent Director of State Research Council (14), Sam uses Ossai to force submission and loyalty from the masses through the instrumentality of coercion, killings, violence and brute force. A case in point was when Sam used Ossai to dowse agitation from the Abazon delegation regarding draught in their province, which the Excellency (Sam) had neglected because the people's welfare does not matter to him. Thus, with the help of Ossai, Sam's anxiety regarding the drought in Abazon was "swiftly assuaged by his young, brilliant and aggressive Director of State Research Council" (14).

Two taxi drivers visit Ikem, who is a government official in a post-colonial African nation (implied to be Nigeria). Good questions to consider while reading this

passage are: What role do the cabbies play in the maintenance of the oppressive government? What kind of power structure is familiar to them, and why does familiarity (habit, ritual, shared social codes) make a power structure desirable, even enjoyable, despite its oppressiveness?

As he drove to Mad Medico's place that afternoon Ikem turned over and over in his mind one particular aspect of the visit of the taxi-driver and his friend-how it seemed so important to him to explain his failure to recognize an admired personality like Ikem; and how adroitly he had shifted the guilt for this failure round to the very same object of admiration for driving a battered old Datsun instead of a Mercedes and for driving with his own hands instead of sitting in the owner's corner and being driven. So in the midst of all their fulsome and perfectly sincere praise of Ikem those two also managed to sneak in a couple of body-blows.

Ikem could understand well enough the roots of the paradox in which a man's personal choice to live simply without such trimmings as chauffeurs could stamp him not as a modest and exemplary citizen but as a mean-minded miser denying a livelihood to one unemployed driver out of hundreds and thousands roaming the streets-a paradox so perverse in its implications as to justify the call for the total dismantling of the grotesque world in which it grows-and flourishes.

But even in such a world how does one begin to explain the downtrodden drivers' wistful preference for a leader driving not like them in a battered and sputtering vehicle but differently, stylishly in a Mercedes and better still with another downtrodden person like themselves for a chauffeur? Perhaps a root-and-branch attack would cure that diseased tolerance too, a tolerance verging on admiration by the trudging-jigger-toed oppressed for the Mercedes-Benz-driving, private-jet-flying,

luxury-yacht-cruising oppressor. And insistence by the oppressed that his oppression be performed in style.

Achebe seemingly contradicts himself by having the characters who emulated the British lifestyle, Ikem, Chris, and Sam, murdered. The murder of Sam suggests the people do not endorse the British style of totalitarian rule, but the deaths of Chris and Ikem, new leaders of the people, suggest that the country is also not yet ready for democracy. The three murders reflect the political chaos of backward Kangan. Achebe, however, ends on a hopeful note with the birth of Elewa and Ikem's child.

Ikem's speech in the twelfth chapter of *Anthills of the Savannah* indicates the slew of problems that Nigerians face under the elite's power. Ikem proves that those who are in power ignore the needs of the masses. The ruling class plays by a different set of rules than those which they preach. Using religion and money as tools to maintain their power, they enslave the masses to their culture. As a result of the change from colonialism to independence and the changes caused by a meeting of two cultures, Nigerians assimilate to a form of the English culture. The relationship between religion and economic class exemplifies this confluence of culture and replication of English practice - Religion and Class among the Colonized. As a storyteller, Chinua Achebe voices his criticisms of the distributions of Nigerian power with storytelling devices such as irony, characterization, style, ethos, and setting.

Ikem claims that Nigeria's problem, as described in the fictional Kangan nation, lies in the oppressive ruling class rather than the external threat of colonization. He criticizes the elite for perpetuating the governmental corruption by remaining ignorant to the common people's problems: "Those who preside over the sabotage of the nation by their unproductively and frauds are the real villains, the real oppressors, who make sure that all the rural inhabitants of Kangan remain powerless

and in poverty"(40). Even though they sit in the center of power, the elite still describe the nature of their governmental system as appalling. Essentially, Your Excellency, a military figure, rather than a civil leader, governs without a system of checks and balances. The Postcolonial government rules blindly by avoiding the problematic issues: "Anything inconvenient to those in government is NTBB [Not To Be Broadcast]" (55). Instead of dealing with these "inconvenient" issues, the government silences them. Because Ikem exemplifies a NTBB issue, the government restricts his power.

The government silences Ikem for speaking out against this corruption. He describes the social scale descending from the elite to the common people. Using the European technique of prophetics, Ikem attacks the establishment and the people as a means to drive the people into action. He attacks the system for letting the corruption perpetuate and the people for not acting against the system:

The sweeping, majestic visions of people rising victorious like a tidal wave against their oppressors and transforming their world with their theories and slogans into a new heaven and a new earth of brotherhood, justice and freedom are at best grand illusions. The rising, conquering tide, yes; but the millennium afterwards, no! New oppressors will have been readying themselves secretly in the undertow long before the tidal wave got really going. ÖR eform may be a dirty word then but it begins to look more and more like the most promising route to success in the real world. (90-91)

With the potential improvement of society, Ikem instills a sense of hope in his people and in doing so, he unifies himself to their cause. Achebe ends his narrative with the story of the naming ceremony; his method of story-telling creates a national unity

among the elite and the masses. The ceremony, symbolic of democracy, closes the gap between the elite and the poor because the rituals cross-class lines; it also represents Achebe's vision of a cross class unity with people from different religions and social classes in attendance. Prior to the ceremony, Beatrice, who comes from an elite, Christian fundamentalist background, looks down upon Agatha, a Muslim servant, with condescension and disrespect. The ceremony portrays Beatrice's newfound respect for those different from her religiously and economically.

Beatrice welcomes Elewa, a member of the masses, into her home exemplifying her effort to raise the Kangan nation by uniting herself with those she once shoved down. Her compassion conveys the message of Ikem, a martyr to the cause of freedom. Given the honor of naming the daughter of Elewa and Ikem, Beatrice expounds " There was an Old Testament prophet who named his son The-remnant-shall-return. They must have lived in times like this. We have a different metaphor, though; we have our own version of hope that springs eternal. We shall call this child AMAECHINA: May-the-path-never-close"(206). The child represents the culmination of Ikem's ideas because she is a product of his union with Elewa, a woman of a different religious and economic background. This unification provides the impetus for further unification.

The ceremony closes with the image of Beatrice, the elite Christian, Elewa, the poor Christian, and Aina, the poor Moslem, congregated in song and dance. As Elewa's uncle completes the sacramental breaking of the kolanut, he praises this unification of spirits to the Christian God:

May this child be the daughter of all of us
 May these young people
 here when they make plans for their world not forget her. And all other
 children
 We have seen too much trouble in Kangan since the white

man left because those who make plans make plans for themselves only and their families. (211-212)

As he reiterates Ikem's message, the uncle unites his hopes for the Kangan nation with his hopes for his niece's future. As shown by Achebe, traditional storytelling threatens the people and ideas in power. In a fictional setting, Ikem shows how the Nigerian government handles such opposition; he was fired from his editorial position for commanding his people to do: "Go home and think" (145)! In present day Nigeria, Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed for bringing Ikem's proclamation to reality. The government silences Ikem and Saro-Wiwa for spreading the idea: "that we may accept a limitation on our actions but never, under no circumstances, must we accept restriction on our thinking" (207). Both of these leaders use speeches and the written word to spread their message. As Achebe tells his story, he sends a message which forces the reader to ask questions. Ironically, he tells his message in the English language, the language of his colonizers, which most Nigerians cannot understand; he appropriates his Postcolonial thought to the English language. He applies the traditional method of storytelling to traditional stories about colonial oppression. By using technique to enforce theme, he guides the reader through the shift from the elite to the poor. Not only does this bring the reader deeper into the novel, it also shows the effects of Postcolonialism on the Nigerian culture.

Achebe seeks to link, rather than oppose, the question of African women's roles to the larger problems of the post-colonial nation. Ikem's love letter to Beatrice, in conjunction with the novel's hopeful, women-centered ending, most specifically attempts this. In the love letter Ikem writes his realization that the major flaw in his vision for his country is its failure to provide a clear role for women. He introduces the letter to Beatrice:

You bloody well did. And you were damn right. You charged me with assigning women the role of a fire-brigade after the house has caught fire and been virtually consumed. Your charge has forced me to sit down and contemplate the nature of oppression-- how flexible it must learn to be, how many faces it must learn to wear to succeed again and again. (94)

Before he starts to read the letter aloud, he has credited his new understanding of women's roles with sparking a new understanding of social change in his country. He goes on to outline this in the letter. First he establishes that "women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the book of Genesis, the very oldest. But they are not the only ones" (90).

The problem with the present orthodoxies of deliverance, he continues, is that do not recognize that "There is no universal conglomerate of the oppressed. Free people may be alike everywhere in their freedom, but the oppressed inhabit each their own peculiar hell" (90). Given that the oppressed are unlikely to unite, it is foolish to expect any sweeping revolutions or sudden cures for society.

Experience and intelligence warn us that man's progress in freedom will be piecemeal, slow and unromantic. In his letter Ikem puts "Revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable stretch of quagmire but it does not confer freedom, and may indeed hinder it" (90). With this letter, Ikem defines consideration of the of women as a world-wide oppressed group as both important for the future of the nation, and as a catalyst in his vision of his country's future. Gyatri Chakrawarti Spivak in her "Can Subaltern Speak?" colonialism has to be negated through revolution.

The naming ceremony at the novel's end further ties the empowerment of women to the strengthening of the country, underlining the concepts Ikem introduced in his letter. Elewa's uncle arrives at Beatrice's house to find that Elewa's child has already been named a boy's name meaning may-the-path-never-close by the women. At first he is disturbed by this breach of tradition, but he comes around in this speech to the younger people:

Do you know why I am laughing like this? I am laughing because in you young people our world has met its match. Yes! You have put the world where it should sit... My wife here was breaking her head looking for kolanuts, for alligator pepper, for honey and for bitterleaf. . . And while she is cracking her head you people gather in this whiteman house and give the girl a boy's name. . . That is how to handle this world. (210)

The women, who have simultaneously broken the rules of race and gender, "produce something wonderful like this to show you suffered. Something alive and kicking"(207). They embody hope for the future of the nation. This assertion that women are integral in the building of the new African society emphasizes the damaging effect of oppression outside the colonized-colonizer relationship. Thus the novel's answer to the post-colonial dilemma lies in broadening views of what is important to examine in a post-colonial society or in a work of post-colonial fiction.

Achebe and Saro-Wiwa's treatments of women's roles bring up the conflict of agendas present within post-colonial fiction. The issues the educated narrator from Dukana face in her position to help her village raise awareness of conflict between Western concepts of improvement of the lives of women and the preservation of cultural structures so crucial to the spiritual health of the village community. Achebe

goes beyond the notion of conflict to propose that hope lies not in separating women's issues from society's issues, but in integrating them, and in looking to women continually in the process of social change. Both novels stress the necessity of post-colonial analysis which looks past the typical indigenous vs. colonial oppression structure. Both let the term post Modernist writing lacks the blatant clarity and straightforwardness of preceding literature, therefore placing great demands on the audience. Despite being inundated with an abundance of description, modernist writing places equal emphasis on each detail, forcing the reader to decide the importance of the each. In a similar fashion, by shifting narrators, Achebe presents many views of characters, allowing the reader to choose the most truthful perspective. Known as stream of consciousness writing, this modernist style often also ignores strict chronology. Ideas are expressed as they flow into the mind. When offering a description of Sam, Ikem begins to discuss Mad Medico before the character has been formally introduced, an example of the non-linear narration.

The events until this point had occurred in the present, however in this chapter the time shifts to the future and the lives of Sam, Chris, and Ikem are remembered by Beatrice. This subtle shift is reflected by brief, off handed comments by Beatrice: "But something had happened not so long ago to change our lives and, on this particular Saturday . . .and that's one lesson I've learned from the still unbelievable violences we went through." (76-77). Both remarks reflect the hindsight of the narrator. Following this chapter comes a seemingly out of place chapter on myth, that is not fully explained by Achebe, offering one more example of stream of consciousness writing and non-linear narration.

The Wind Blows Away Our Words shares some resonance to another postcolonial fiction *The Remains of the Day*. Both *The Remains of the Day* and

Anthills of the Savannah reveal the ideological implication of people who have secondary or helping roles in the support of someone else's political project. These roles raise questions about the nature of a vocation and the dynamics in the relationship between employer and employee, government and the people. In Remains, the character Stevens discusses that leap of faith necessary to give one's life focus. In other words, without a vocation (a project, goals, or ideals), we remain in limbo, immobile, but when we choose one, we now become partially responsible for maintaining a power structure that helps some people and harms others. It is this responsibility from which Stevens' seems to shirk in the following passage. The novel clarifies the domination upon the colonized in the domination of the colonizers. However, if he is writing this persuasive passage in his diary, that he must have some doubts about its verisimilitude:

If a butler is to be of any worth to anything or anybody in life, there must surely come a time when he ceases his searching; a time when he must say to himself: this employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him.' This is loyalty intelligently bestowed. What is there 'undignified' in this? One is simply accepting an inescapable truth: that the likes of you and I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs of today's world, and our best course will always be to put our trust in an employer we judge to be wise and honorable, and to devote our energies to serving him to the best of our ability....How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say, the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided, even foolish? (200-201)

In this excerpt, Stevens understands that at some point, one must make a commitment to what one believes. However, he does not want to accept the responsibility for helping further Lord Darlington's racist projects, thinking that if he did not know what was going on at the time, then he cannot be held responsible. This bad faith, however, is a cowardly shirking of responsibility. If Stevens' had a fuller understanding of power dynamics, he would know that an ideological commitment means supporting some ideals at the expense of others, that no cause is without its bad side. Of course, Stevens need not openly supported a racist program, either. Taking responsibility is an important theme in some postcolonial literature because it makes a person face up to his or her complicity in the colonial structure, so that, when the structure shifts to internal rule, we realize that we must take responsibility for the problems of the new (including some of the same) ideologies and not just ascribe blame to those persons currently in power. Blaming leaders may be satisfying in the short term, but it does not change the power dynamics, which should be the first priority.

Postcolonial authors must make this political point clear in the context of secondary roles, such as Stevens' service-oriented profession, because political problems are often blamed on the leaders alone. We are all implicated in the establishment and perpetuation of the social and political orders of our society. Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* articulates this theme in a Nigerian context. Two taxi drivers visit Ikem, who is a government official in a post-colonial African nation (implied to be Nigeria). Good questions to consider while reading this passage are:

What role do the cabbies play in the maintenance of the oppressive government? What kind of power structure is familiar to them, and

why does familiarity (habit, ritual, shared social codes) make a power structure desirable, even enjoyable, despite its oppressiveness? (67)

As he drove to Mad Medico's place that afternoon Ikem turned over and over in his mind one particular aspect of the visit of the taxi-driver and his friend-how it seemed so important to him to explain his failure to recognize an admired personality like Ikem; and how adroitly he had shifted the guilt for this failure round to the very same object of admiration for driving a battered old Datsun instead of a Mercedes and for driving with his own hands instead of sitting in the owner's corner and being driven. So in the midst of all their fulsome and perfectly sincere praise of Ikem those two also managed to sneak in a couple of body-blows.

Ikem could understand well enough the roots of the paradox in which a man's personal choice to live simply without such trimmings as chauffeurs could stamp him not as a modest and exemplary citizen but as a mean-minded miser denying a livelihood to one unemployed driver out of hundreds and thousands roaming the streets-a paradox so perverse in its implications as to justify the call for the total dismantling of the grotesque world in which it grows-and flourishes.

The truth of Achebe's fiction fundamentally lies in its capacity to mirror diverse perspectives and narratological patterns as indicated by other writers in relation to the same subject matter that he articulates in his earlier fiction. Essentially, in his political fiction, there is a distillation of Achebe's preoccupation to address one major concern: the political impasse and power usurpation in postcolonial Nigeria. This method of artistic representation is akin to the West Indian postcolonial literary experimentation on mosaic of sources, which Henry-Louis Gates calls tropological revision. This is in relation to postcolonial Nigerian literature that is given to alluding diverse narrative patterns that coalesce to paint a similar and familiar picture

characterizing Nigeria's postcolonial condition. In the Gatesian locution, this thesis is considered as "the manner in which a specific trope is repeated with differences, between two or more texts" (xxv).

The issue of power abuse is very crucial in understanding the political history of postcolonial Africa, particularly Nigeria. This is inextricably linked to Ngugi's statement above concerning conflicts and contradictions that stem from power in postcolonial Africa. So, *Anthills of the Savannah* is richly "Achebe's reaction against the negation of the expectations of national independence from colonial rule" (472). This is a form of negation anchored in power drunkenness.

In his "A Dictionary of Literary Terms", Martin Gray asserts that the realist tradition is a literary and aesthetic approach appropriated by writers "who show explicit concern to convey an authentic impression of actuality, either in their narrative style, or by their serious approach to the subject matter" (241). This method of refracting social facts in a given social space amounts to "literary aesthetic of truth-telling" (4), which according to Dwivedi is the hallmark of Achebe's literary enterprise.

Chinua Achebe has been particularly successful in creating a realistic representation of an African environment. He is one of the major writers from the African subcontinent who have given a new direction to English-language African literature by representing, realistically, an African environment and giving expression to a sense of increasing disgust and unrest within its population.

One of the facets of disgust and unrest on the African continent according to Dwivedi above is military dictatorship, a recurring decimal in Nigeria's political equation given the lack of direction of her political leadership. It is to this end that Gbemisola Adeoti notes:

The military is not only a dominant political force in the country's postcolonial governance but also a recurrent subject in its narrative fiction, poetry and drama. In the works of ... Chinua Achebe... one is confronted with the tropes of power abuse, economic mismanagement and poverty among other legacies of military regimes. (6)

Military intervention in Africa particularly Nigeria has become a major source which writers use as a canvas for reconstructing real, identifiable events in the body polity. And for Achebe, shying away from the realities in postcolonial Nigeria, not the Lacanian "The Real", will amount to sheer formalist literature: "Art for art's sake is just another piece of deodorized dog shit" (25).

One major reason for military intervention in Nigerian politics is failure of leadership, which Achebe himself sees in his chapbook on leadership in Nigeria, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983) as "the trouble with Nigeria" (1). And as Achebe observes in *Anthills of the Savannah*, The prime failure of this government began also to take on a clear meaning:

It can't be the massive corruption though its scale and pervasiveness are truly intolerable; it isn't the subservience to foreign manipulation, degrading as it is; it isn't even this second-class, hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed... It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vitalinner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being. (141)

Traditionally, the military have no idea of governance. This is the case with Sam, His Excellency. Sam's characterization smacks of militarism, which is a reality in political history of Africa. Sam is a quintessence of "soldiers-turned-politicians"

(141) in Africa. Sam's leadership in Kangan dovetails with undemocratic, military mode of governance in Africa, particularly Nigeria.

Another way of measuring the realist nature of the novel is lodged in the manner in which women are marginalized and repressed in political participation and governance in Kangan, a simulacrum of Nigeria. In the novel, there are clear demonstration of power play and political tyranny meted against women. This gendered social space, which marginalizes as well as discriminates against women, is typical of postcolonial Nigerian state. This contention has been taken further in this analysis:

It should be remarked that the dominance of the military as subject in Nigeria's postcolonial literature does not imply the absence of other engagements. Some writers have explored the crucial issue of gender in social formation. The contention is that colonialism merely exacerbated gender imbalance in indigenous cultures as men were obviously privileged in the operation of the colonial machinery. Political independence had not washed off the sludge of patriarchy.

(9-10)

In an exchange between Beatrice and Ikem, it is self-evident how the gender-blind Kangan society operates: "The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest. But they are not the only ones. There are others –rural peasants in every land, the urban poor" (98).

The characterization above is in tandem with the actualities evident in postcolonial Nigeria, where women are oppressed politically through the instrumentality of political coercion, militarism and exclusion. The societal texture

captured here is one which is inseparably linked with the realities in postcolonial Nigeria. Part of these realities is women political disempowerment, which need to be reversed for participatory, populist and democratic governance. It is to this end that Umelo Ojimah argues that in *Anthills of the Savannah*, “Achebe believes that the time is now, for the new nations of Africa, to invoke the female principle, not necessarily in its original form of keeping women” (103) in the back burner through gendered political space.

It is within the parameters of the realities in postcolonial Nigeria that Crawford Young in his polemical piece, “The End of Postcolonial State in Africa? Reflection on Changing African Political Dynamics” gives the following illuminations:

Military intervention became the sole mechanism to displace incumbents, but the put schist in power normally formed a new single party to legitimize permanent status for his rule. Thus citizens became once again merely subjects, facing an exclusion from the public domain reminiscent of colonial times. One important difference: whereas the colonial state asked only obedience, the postcolonial polity demanded affection. Mere submission did not suffice; active participation in rituals, loyalty (support marches, assemblies to applaud touring dignitaries, Purchase of party cards, display of the presidential portrait, Participation in plebiscitary elections) were mandatory. (25)

The above landscape is what Achebe considers as “electoral merchandising” (160) in *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*, a fall-out of political coercion and militarism. The craft of *Anthills of the Savannah* is a synecdoche of the realities in postcolonial

Nigeria and Africa by extension. Put simply, the conjunctures in Nigeria are what the novel refracts.

To sum up, this novel by raising the issues about different social, cultural, religious and marginalized identity of the Nigerian people, explores the native identity and revive the marginalized Nigerian literature as well. Similarly, Achebe through this novel challenges the mainstream history and culture of Western society by bringing dominated and colonized social dogma of Nigerian society at the centre that is brilliant job of the writer. As a whole, this novel represents the native Nigerian marginalized identity and their social ethos and along with it, this novel also attacks to the mainstream history and Western culture with powerful factual evidences. Achebe through this novel presents the non-Western cultural values and at the same time he also resist against the Western mainstream culture.

III. Conclusion

Considered a powerful contemporary writer primarily in the realist tradition, Lessing has explored many of the most important social, political, psychological, and spiritual issues of the twentieth century. Her works display a broad range of interests and focus on such specific topics as racism, communism, feminism, and mysticism. While Lessing is perhaps best known for her acclaimed and controversial novel *The Golden Notebook*, many critics find the short story form more suited to her temperament and concerns.

Lessing was born in Persia (modern-day Iran) to English parents. At an early age she moved with her family to Rhodesia, in southern Africa, where her father struggled as a farmer. She attended public schools until her teenage years, when chronic eye problems forced her to return home, thus ending her formal education. As a young woman, Lessing relocated to Salisbury, the capital of Southern Rhodesia, where she supported herself through various secretarial jobs. During World War II, she was active in pro-communist organizations, and in 1949 she emigrated to London, England. In London, Lessing established herself as a fiction writer, critic, journalist, and political activist. She joined the English Communist Party in 1952 and resigned about five years later. In 1956 she was banned from returning to Rhodesia, presumably for anti-apartheid sentiments expressed in her writings, and she continues to live in England. Although details of Lessing's personal life are sketchy, critics agree that in her fiction, Lessing draws significantly from her own experiences.

When Lessing began her literary career in the 1950s, she was promptly recognized as an accomplished short fiction writer in the realist mode. The tales collected in her first short story volume, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* (1952),

introduce the theme of alienation, which Lessing delineates chiefly through protagonists of English descent living as colonialists in Africa. Isolated from each other and from the native people by class, age, gender, and racial barriers, these characters suffer the fragmentation that Lessing views as a direct consequence of apartheid. In *African Stories* (1964), Lessing further chronicles racial issues from a variety of social perspectives. In these and many other of her African stories, including *The Antheap*, "Eldorado," and "Flavours of Exile," Lessing accentuates the estrangement of her characters by portraying the vapid nature of their lives against lush African landscapes. Among Lessing's most acclaimed volumes of short fiction, *Five: Short Novels* (1955), *The Habit of Loving* (1957), and *African Stories* contain tales concerning racial problems in African settings, the dynamics of married life, and the emancipation of modern women.

Much of Lessing's fiction has definite political intentions; her involvement with communism is evident in many of her early works. In the novella *Hunger*, a straightforward social commentary in the manner of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, Lessing relates the experiences of Jabavu, an impoverished African boy from a small village who comes to a large modern city to better his condition, only to be assaulted by the town's depravity and inequities. Although some critics feel Jabavu's ultimate victory over his own cultural inadequacies and the evil forces operating in such an urban white environment strains believability, *Hunger* remains one of Lessing's more popular novellas. The pieces in Lessing's later collection *The Temptation of Jack Orkney, and Other Stories* (1972) contain analyses of the volatile international political situation during the 1960s. In other stories, Lessing examines the nature of marriage and childbearing, focusing on how the roles of wife and mother affect her characters' creative lives. In these

works, Lessing often presents strong-willed, independent heroines whose needs for love do not counteract their desires for self-sufficiency—a recurrent theme that anticipated many feminist concerns.

Lessing is generally recognized as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. Using detailed, realistic descriptions, symbolism, and imagery to evoke a wide range of environments and moods, Lessing achieves what Edward J. Fitzgerald termed “tension and immediacy” in her work. Critics argue that her enlightened portrayal of marriage and motherhood, her anti-apartheid stance, and her experimentation with genre and form have made her an exciting—and often controversial—literary figure. In fact, commentators have regarded her exploration of such complex issues as racism, communism, feminism, psychology, and mysticism as courageous. Several critics have discussed her place within world literature and have investigated her influence on other writers.

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