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## Revealing the Influence of Colonialism Through Setting in Chinua Achebe's "Marriage is a Private Affair" (1952)

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### ABSTRAK

Chinua Achebe mengungkap dampak dari kolonialisme melalui karyanya yang berjudul "Marriage is a Private Affair" (1952). Cerita tersebut berisi tentang Nnaemeka, sang tokoh utama yang terpengaruh oleh nilai-nilai modern yang dibawa oleh para penjajah yang melawan keinginan ayahnya dengan menikahi Nene, seorang wanita dari suku yang berbeda. Keputusannya menggambarkan dampak kolonialisme, dimana kepercayaan dan nilai-nilai baru mengubah dan menghilangkan adat istiadat yang telah berlangsung lama, menyebabkan ketegangan dan perpecahan dalam keluarga dan masyarakat. Melalui tulisannya, Achebe menggambarkan pengaruh kolonialisme terhadap karakter seseorang, di mana mereka dipaksa untuk beradaptasi dengan nilai-nilai baru yang dibawa oleh penjajah sambil bergulat dengan tradisi yang mengakar kuat dalam warisan budaya mereka, yang mengarah pada konflik internal antara mengadopsi ideologi baru dan mempertahankan budaya mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dampak kolonialisme berdasarkan teori Homi K. Bhabha yang menyatakan bahwa kolonialisme telah menciptakan dampak yang kompleks terhadap budaya lokal dan identitas masyarakat yang dijajah, yang menghasilkan situasi di mana budaya asli terkadang terhapus atau dimodifikasi. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dimana penulis mengumpulkan data dari beberapa sumber. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa dampak yang digambarkan dalam cerita pendek tersebut adalah munculnya individualisme, lahirnya multikulturalisme, penyebaran agama Kristen, dan memburuknya patriarki. Pada akhirnya, cerpen Achebe menyoroti dampak kolonialisme yang dalam dan kompleks terhadap identitas pribadi dan budaya yang dijajah.

Kata kunci: kolonialisme, dampak, budaya, nilai-nilai

### ABSTRACT

Chinua Achebe exposes the impact of colonialism through his writing in a short story, "Marriage is a Private Affair" (1952). The story follows Nnaemeka, the protagonist who has been influenced by the modern values brought by the colonizers, going against her father's wishes by marrying Nene, a woman from a different tribe. His decision illustrates the impact of colonialism, where new beliefs and values change and eliminate long-standing customs, causing tension and division within families and communities. Through his writing, Achebe portrays the influence of colonialism on one's character, where they are forced to adapt to the new modern values brought by the colonizers while grappling with the traditions that are deeply rooted in their cultural heritage, leading to an internal conflict between adopting the new ideology and maintaining their culture. This study aims to examine the impact of colonialism based on Homi K. Bhabha's theory that colonialism has created a complex impact on the local culture and identity of the colonized people, resulting in a situation where the original culture is sometimes erased or modified. The method used is descriptive qualitative, where the author collects data from multiple sources. This study found that the impacts depicted in the short story are the emergence of individualism, the birth of multiculturalism, the spread of Christianity, and the worsening of patriarchy. Ultimately, Achebe's short story

highlights the deep and complex effects of colonialism on the personal and cultural identities of the colonized.

Keywords: colonialism, impact, culture, values

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## INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is a political system in which one country dominates and exploits the economy of another for its own economic and political gain (Čief & Pražiak, 2012). It is also not uncommon for colonialism to have an impact on cultural and environmental aspects (Firdaus et al., 2024). The emergence of the Industrial Revolution is an example of when colonialism began as a result of changes in the way of production in Europe (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). The Industrial Revolution ushered in a new production system that replaced the previously slave-based economy. The slave trade and slavery at this time had fulfilled the function of providing primitive capital, including the causes of colonialism in Africa, where the ruling country sought investment from accumulated capital and the need for raw materials (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Colonialism harmed Africa, causing the country to lag. The inadequate technology in this African country is the result of a poor educational foundation that colonists should have created correctly to drive technological growth in Africa (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). At the time, education was limited to writers, interpreters, craftspeople, and production supervisors who could eventually assist the colonialists in exploiting Africa's riches.

Another effect of colonialism in Africa was the isolation of its economy. The colonialists cut off the African economy's ability to produce goods, provide infrastructure, and trade markets (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Colonizers established Africa to provide raw materials and primary products for later use in the colonial country's industries. Meanwhile, Africans were denied access to the manufacturing industry. African raw materials are purchased at meager prices, and items made overseas are sold at premium prices. This situation generates tremendous poverty among Africans. Colonialism had the greatest impact in Africa on establishing class distinctions in social and political life (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). These classes consist of the comprador bourgeoisie, minor bourgeoisie, proletariat, and farmers. The African small bourgeoisie functioned as a conduit for colonialists to take and drain African economies. The tiny African bourgeoisie has long exploited the workers and farmers. Colonialism introduced classes into Africa, resulting in the

widespread political instability and socioeconomic stagnation that most African countries face today. The terrible impoverishment of the majority of Africans, mostly headed by the small bourgeoisie, as well as the subjugation of the masses by those with access to state power, are all manifestations of colonialism in African countries.

Chinua Achebe's "Marriage is a Private Affair," published in 1952, shows the battle between social class divisions in postcolonial Nigeria. This paper investigates the impact of colonialism on cultural values and family ties, as well as opposing viewpoints on marriage. The story follows Nnaemeka, an Ibo adolescent living in Lagos, and his love affair with Nene, a woman from a different tribe. Nnaemeka decides to marry Nene, even though her father, Okeke, will not consent since Okeke follows the Ibo tradition that marriages must be planned by the parents and performed within the same tribe. When Nnaemeka sent a letter to his father informing him of his plans, Okeke became enraged and severed connections with his son. For years, Nnaemeka and Nene lived peacefully in Lagos, but they were unable to mend their connection with Okeke. This disagreement exemplifies the contrast between the older generation's traditional ideals and the younger generation's more modern perspectives. Colonialism transformed Nigeria's social structure and cultural values. In this story, we see how Nnaemeka, who is educated and lives in the city, has a more modern perspective on marriage, emphasizing love and equality, as opposed to his father's ideas, which are greatly affected by tradition. Finally, the account depicts how colonialism altered Nigerian society, resulting in long-standing contradictions between tradition and modernization. Okeke, who represents the older generation, ultimately reconsiders his position after seeing a photo of his grandson and recognizing that the world has changed.

This paper aims to explain some of the impacts that occurred during colonialism in Africa in 1952 through the setting of the story "Marriage is a Private Affair." Through this paper, we will explore how British colonization brought the impacts that changed traditional values and social cultures, specifically in Nigeria. By focusing on individualism, the acquaintance of multiculturalism, the integration of Christianity,

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and patriarchy, this paper aims to emphasize the broader cultural and societal alterations caused by colonial influence. Ultimately, this analysis will provide a better understanding of how colonialism impacted Nigerian society and the long-term impacts on its people and cultural practices.

## METHOD

The methods used in research include several ways, such as the research strategy chosen or how to collect data. All of these methods depend on the object, problem, and purpose of the research (Rochani, 2011: 224; Prasetya, 2022: 31). Literary studies research usually uses qualitative research methods because qualitative research can use any approach as long as the approach is justified in research rules (Prasetyo, 2022: 32). Qualitative methods can be interpreted as research procedures that produce data in the form of words, sentences, or paragraphs related to the research. (Nasution, 2023: 11). In qualitative research methods, there are several ways to collect data, namely (1) interviews, (2) direct observation, and (3) written documents. Data collection by interview is done to find out directly about people's experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data collection through direct observation is by making observations about detailed descriptions through the activities, behaviors, and attitudes of the person (Rochani, 2011: 241; Prasetya, 2022: 39). In literary research, literary works in the form of novels, films, poems, short stories, dramas, and so on can be used as a data source (Siswanto, 2005: 63; Prasetyo, 2022: 37). Therefore, the author uses the object of a short story entitled "Marriage is a Private Affair" by Chinua Achebe as a data source.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The time and place setting of this story, Nigeria in 1956, has a significant effect on the influence of colonialism that we have chosen as the main focus in analyzing Chinua Achebe's short story "Marriage is a Private Affair." Nigeria is one of the former British colonies (1914-1960) that became independent on October 1, 1960. During the colonial period, many impacts occurred and changed the social and cultural aspects of Nigeria. In this section, we will explain what the impact was and how it resulted in socio-cultural changes in Nigeria.

### The Emergence of Individualism

Western nations, including the British, are famous for their high level of individualism. Their colonization of other countries brought with it this

concept. Individualism considers rationality of moral rights as serving the values and values of people they care about and taking responsibility for their actions (Odo, 2022). The British colonization of Africa brought with it individualism, which influenced the mindset of the people. In the beginning, Africans practiced collectivism, which considers their moral sense to be a servant of the collective and, as such, have a strong incentive to delegate responsibility to others, to their belief system or ideology, and to forego expressing themselves even if they are right and the collective is wrong (Odo, 2022). Nowadays, Africans tend to abandon their true cultural value of collectivism, which has held the conformity caprices of the continent over many decades of their forefathers, to embrace the foreign value of individualism (Odo, 2022).

The concept of individualism can be seen in Chinua Achebe's "Marriage is a Private Affair." The protagonist, Nnaemake, who has migrated to Lagos, a crowded city where some of the population has been influenced by this concept, also adopts it. This statement can be proven by the sentence, "I can't—we must—I mean it is impossible for me to marry Nweke's daughter" (Achebe, 1952, p. 2). This sentence came up when he was talking with his father about his arranged marriage with Ugoye Nweke, a girl from the Ibo tribe. This sentence, especially the bolded one, shows a strong rejection of his arranged marriage with Ugoye, which is a traditional, collectivist practice. On the contrary, he speaks up for his right to choose whom he wants to marry, which is aligned with the concept of individualism, namely prioritizing personal aspiration. There is another sentence that can prove that he (Nnaemeka) has adopted the concept of individualism: "Moreover," he said, "I am engaged to marry another girl who has all of Ugoye's good qualities and who..." (Achebe, 1952, p.2). This sentence shows that Nnaemeka has already engaged with another girl, without her father's knowledge, which is aligned with the concept of individualism. The sentence in bold indicates an individualistic attitude, namely making his own life choice without considering his father's disapproval and without considering the tradition of arranged marriage, where the family or the eldest person makes the decision.

### The Birth of Multiculturalism

Colonialism introduced the concept of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism describes a society with divergent political and cultural backgrounds (Akwuebu, 2018). In other words, multiculturalism brings different cultures together. This can create awareness of the importance of tolerance and diversity, but it can

also lead to identity conflicts. The growth of multiculturalism was driven by the immense immigration of Europeans of Southern and Eastern origins to the United States and Latin America on the one hand and the rising imperialism of Europe in sub-Saharan Africa on the other (Akwuebu, 2018). In Africa, colonialism brought with it the concept of multiculturalism, which led to the formation of various countries, including Nigeria.

In Nigeria, colonialism brought the concept of multiculturalism that united the many tribes there. It is not quite certain how many ethnic groups Nigeria consists of, but it is widely believed that Nigeria consists of a minimum of 250 ethnic groups—with Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo as the three dominant ones—and a maximum of 400 with over 400 different languages (Political Bureau Report, 1987; Awogbade, 2004).

The existence of the "Igbo" tribe, commonly referred to as "Ibo," is also mentioned in Chinua Achebe's story "Marriage is a Private Affair." The Igbo people, especially the protagonist Nnaemeka's father, Okeke, who upholds the customs and traditions of their tribe, strongly oppose Nnaemeka's marriage to his wife, Nene, who is not part of the Igbo tribe. "Yes. They are most unhappy if the engagement is not arranged by them. In our case it's worse—you are not even an Ibo." (Achebe, 1952, p. 1). Although not directly mentioned, these statements, especially the bolded ones, can be inferred to mean that the Igbo tribe can only marry each other, in accordance with their traditions. The story goes that Nnaemeka and Nene met in Lagos while both were studying there. We need to know that Lagos is a densely populated city. The city was even the capital of Nigeria in 1960. As a densely populated city, this city has certainly become one of the cities where the British colonial headquarters are located. Their presence (the colonizers) certainly influenced the concept of multiculturalism there. Nnaemeka, who came from a small village and then migrated to Lagos to study, was also influenced by this concept. This can be proven by his choice to marry Nene, who is clearly not from the Igbo tribe. Meanwhile Nene, who had been living in Lagos from the beginning, had already been influenced by the concept of multiculturalism brought by the colonizers. This statement can be proven by the sentence, "In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city (Lagos), it had always seemed to her (Nene) something of a joke that a person's tribe could determine whom he married." (Achebe, 1952, p. 1). This sentence shows that

multiculturalism has become commonplace in Lagos, especially inter-ethnic marriages.

### **The Integration of Christianity**

Colonialism in Nigeria caused considerable religious changes, particularly the introduction and expansion of Christianity. Prior to colonial domination, Nigeria was home to a diverse range of indigenous religions, as well as Islam, particularly in the northern regions. At the entrance of British missionaries during the colonial period, Christianity began to spread, notably in southern and central Nigeria, resulting in the conversion of many indigenous people. The introduction of Christianity not only changed the religious environment, but it also had a significant impact on social development, especially cultural standards.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the Ibo people believed in a supreme deity called Chukwu, sometimes known as Chi-Ukwu or Chineke. This deity was revered as the creator of the world and everything in it, and he was identified with every facet of the universe. The Igbo people thought that Chukwu was the ultimate source of all things and that he oversaw everything on earth, in heaven, and in the spiritual world. In addition to the ultimate deity, the Igbo believed in a multitude of spirits and deities known as Alusi, who were worshiped and served in their traditional religion, Odinani. These spirits were related to many areas of existence, including natural phenomena, ancestors, and the earth.

The conversion of the Igbo people from their traditional religion to Christianity was a multidimensional process influenced by European missionaries, education, and social change. In the nineteenth century, British missionaries erected schools, hospitals, and churches to provide education and treatment to the Igbo people. Western education, which included religious instruction and the Bible translated into Igbo, increased the accessibility and appeal of Christianity. Economic opportunities provided by colonial and missionary institutions aided conversion efforts. Many Ibo individuals and families converted to Christianity, frequently under the influence of family members or friends who had previously converted.

The arrival of Christianity not only affected the religious environment, but it also had a significant impact on societal transformation. As Christianity became more popular, the impact of Christian communities and acceptance by powerful persons strengthened its place in Ibo society. In the story, there is a statement expressed by Nnaemeka's father, "What one

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looks for in a wife are a good character and a Christian background." (Achebe, 1952, p.2). This statement indicates the growing acceptance of Christianity in Igbo society, where devotion to Christian principles has become an important factor in choosing a partner. Beyond traditional qualities like good character, the emphasis on a Christian background demonstrates how Christianity has become intertwined with conceptions of morality and social status in Igbo communities. This shows a shift in cultural norms, with religious affiliation becoming a defining factor in marital compatibility, showing the tremendous influence of missionary work and societal transformation in Igbo society.

### **Patriarchy**

Colonialism caused several things to happen, including patriarchy. Patriarchy has long been the main characteristic of traditional society. It is the structure of a set of social relations with a material basis that allows men to dominate women (Stacey 1993; Kramarae 1992; Lerner 1986; Humm 1989; Aina 1998). In the story "Marriage is a Private Affair," there are several patriarchal things done by the father to his son, "When she stopped schooling several years ago, her father sent her to live in the house of a pastor where she had received all the training a wife could need." (Achebe, 1952, p. 2). Okeke subtly tells him that the woman Nnaemeka deserves to marry is capable of serving him well as a husband. Following training as a lady at church, according to Okeke, signifies she is a decent woman. In addition, when Nanaemeka told about the woman he loved with a background as a teacher, "St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, says that women should keep silence." (Achebe, 1952, p. 3). Okeke's statement relates to the precise verse most likely referring to 1 Corinthians 14:34, which states, "Women should remain silent in the church. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says." Okeke's usage of this scripture demonstrates his rigorous interpretation of Biblical teachings in support of his conventional and patriarchal beliefs. Okeke defends his opposition to Nnaemeka's choice of Nene, a modern and educated Christian lady who does not fit his traditional standards. This exchange exposes Okeke's trust in male power and control, which reinforces the patriarchal institutions that colonization shattered and perpetuated in various ways.

Colonialism also had a huge impact on decision-makers, where men held leadership and decision-making positions, while women focused more on the household and family. In Igbo society, men usually hold political and social

authority, while women are often restricted to domestic roles (Victor C. Uchendu, 1965). "Marriage today is different from what it was in my day. If you want to marry a girl, you must let your people see her and approve of her." (Achebe, 1952, p. 3). The quote illustrates Okeke's inability to accept Nene, despite the fact that Nnaemeka has feelings for him. Reinforcing the patriarchal Okeke idea that family elders, particularly men, have the final say in marriage approval, overriding a person's preferences and genuine love. Furthermore, Okeke's emphasis on marrying within ethnic and religious groupings is an example of patriarchal control over personal choices, "You must marry our village girl. No Christian woman should come here." (Achebe, 1952, p. 4). This control is based on societal standards and expectations about how people, particularly women, should spend their lives. The patriarchal framework prioritizes the preservation of cultural and religious traditions, which frequently results in the marginalization of rights and autonomy. Okeke's statement promotes the impression that women are supposed to follow traditional gender roles and conventions. In this culture, women are viewed as property or commodities to be traded within the family or community, rather than as persons with their own agency and interests.

Colonialism in Nigeria was a powerful force that caused substantial changes, fundamentally altering the country's character and social systems. The impacts are varied, including the emergence of individualism, the birth of multiculturalism, the integration of Christianity, and patriarchy, as explained above. These impacts had a major impact on Nigeria's growth and continue to influence its modern identity. Reflecting on these impacts reveals the complexities of colonialism's legacy and emphasizes Nigerian society's resilience and adaptation in the face of transformational change.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that colonialism had a complex influence on Nigerian society. This period introduced western education, which stressed individualism and personal choice while opposing the Igbo people's community traditions and collective thinking. Additionally, colonialism promoted multiculturalism by encouraging inter-tribal encounters and marriages, which diversified social dynamics and broadened cultural horizons. British colonial power also introduced Christianity, which dramatically impacted indigenous Igbo religious practices and

ideals, incorporating new beliefs into the cultural fabric. Furthermore, colonial impact shaped patriarchal and masculinist ideas, cementing gender roles and hierarchies within society. These enormous changes, as described in the story, demonstrate the complicated and long-lasting consequences of colonialism on Nigeria's social and cultural landscape.

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