

# Literature as an Instrument of National Security: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a Case Study

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**Abstract:** Insecurity has become a global concern. Governments of the World spend a large portion of their annual budgets on insecurity, Nigeria inclusive. This paper attempts to show how literature can be used to curb insecurity in Nigeria using Chinua Achebe's *things fall apart* as a case study. The paper further examined the definition of insecurity, a brief history of insecurity in Nigeria, causes of Insecurity, effects of insecurity and efforts of Nigerian government in curbing insecurity. Conclusions were also made.

**Keywords:** Literature, Instrument, National Security, Chinua Achebe, *things fall apart*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

We shall begin this paper on literature as it relates to national security with the words of Datondji (1980: 63) below:

*All the problems we are faced with, and which we cannot cope with properly, are clearly stated in African novels and there is no doubt that the teaching of these lessons to growing generations can be of great benefit, by making them, so we hope, avoid the mistakes or misadventures of their intellectual elders.*

Security of life and property has become the major challenge of contemporary societies, Nigeria inclusive. The Boko Haram attacks, herdsmen attacks on farmers, militancy in the Niger Delta as well as kidnapping activities, according to Ugbegili (2019), are major forms of insecurity in Nigeria. Governments have adopted many measures to tackle the problem of insecurity in their societies. In spite of all these efforts, the problem of insecurity, globally, escalates every day. Just a few decades ago, the global concern was the HIV/AIDS pandemic. All of a sudden, security has become the first item on the agenda of the different governments of the world. The Nigerian government, through its policies and other measures has been battling with the problem of insecurity for years. The government's efforts have tripled since the birth of the ill-fated terrorist group called *Boko Haram*. The result has been nothing but incessant waste of lives of innocent citizens and hard-earned property. This means that there is still a lot to be done. This is where our approach comes in, that is, the literature approach. This is because insecurity is a societal problem and literature is directly linked with society. Writers, from time immemorial, have treated all subjects under the sun in their works. They have, most of the time, put their

works at the service of their epochs, treating any burning issues of the time. Maduka (2006:213), writing on Chinua Achebe, says:

*Chinua Achebe has consistently used his works to fight for the restoration of Africa's place in world history. He firmly believes that a writer should be sensitive to the "burning issues" that ravage the economic, political and cultural life of the continent; if not, he will be socially irrelevant.*

This shows that literature has a lot to offer as far as the problem of security in this country is concerned, seeing that the problem has defied all solutions so far.

Security, in the layman's parlance, simply means safety. However, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978 Edition), defines the term in many ways one of which is very apt to our discussion, that is "protection against lawbreaking, violence, enemy acts, escape from prison etc". This means that safety is synonymous with protection. It is from this perspective that security is being observed as interest in the protection of life and property of the citizens of any country, Nigeria being the main focus. This work also attempts to show case how proper application of knowledge of literature can be instrumental to sustainable national security. We wish to observe, right from the onset, that the problem of insecurity is not peculiar to only Nigeria. One only needs to tune one's television set or radio to international news for one to be shocked by the degree of violence wracking our world. The social media is filled with violent scenes and occurrences around the globe.

We wish to observe too, that no citizen except one mentally deranged, would dare go out to unleash violence on the community when he is not sure, to a monumental degree, of getting away with it. We also wish to observe that insecurity and violence are blood brothers. Insecurity is the harbinger of violence. Our final observation is that it is erroneous to allow our minds to rush towards the youths anytime violence and insecurity are discussed. The youths are but conveyor belts through which unpatriotic, disgruntled, adult citizens unleash their base emotions on their fellow citizens if they fail to get their own ways.

Our focus is on Nigeria, using Chinua Achebe's most translated novel *Things Fall Apart*, as a case study. Nevertheless, we

shall make reference, from time to time, to other countries as well as other African novels as the need arises, since literature and national security are universal issues. We wish to declare too, that it is erroneous to see it as an aberration, any discussion about literature in the light of security. This will be obvious when we define the term literature.

Having made these preliminary observations and declarations, let us now indicate how we intend to handle this study. We are first going to discuss, the concept called literature. Then we shall consider the current global security situation in general, and the Nigerian situation in particular, highlighting the factors that encourage insecurity, the effects of insecurity and the different steps taken by the Nigerian government to tackle this problem. After this we shall consider the political situation as portrayed in the traditional society of *"Things Fall Apart"*. This will entail the study of the ways through which security of life and property was ensured in the traditional setting. Also, an attempt to juxtapose these avenues with the current Nigerian realities will be done.

#### *Definition of Literature*

Literature, a word whose origin is traced to the latin word "Literaturae", meaning "writings" has been used to designate fictional and imaginative writings - poetry, prose fiction and drama. In an expanded use literature, according to Abrams (2005: 152-153) refers to:

*any other writings (including philosophy) history and even scientific works addressed to a general audience that are especially distinguished in form, expression and emotional power.*

This definition shows that literature cuts across all disciplines. History has shown that literature has been instrumental in many revolutions and rebellions in different societies of the world. The essential function of literature, according to Echenim (2000: 131) is to "promote a situation of dialogue between the producer and the consumer of the text, a dialogue that is predicated on the existence of the fundamental functions of literature that are both aesthetic and didactic".

Since literature portrays the life of a people in relation to their environment, it therefore has a very close relation with man and the society. In fact, Abiola Irele (1981:2) asserts that:

*The imaginative writing stands both as a direct representation of the concrete facts of our collective experience and as a reconstruction, in the form of image, of the states of consciousness induced by that experience.*

It can be deduced from the above that literature is a kind of archives of experiences. African literary works are closer to a reality and to an experience that makes Africans, Nigerians inclusive, feel a part of.

#### *A brief history of insecurity in Nigeria*

Two decades ago, when one heard of violence, insecurity, massacre, refugees and so on, one's mind usually rushed to the Middle East, a region which from Biblical times, has been plagued with violence. The times have since changed. The whole world seems to be enmeshed in one big web of insecurity. Insecurity, or rather security, tops the agenda of government policies in Nigeria today.

Before the upsurge of the insurgent group of terrorists called *Boko Haram*, security was a matter of concern only in the Niger Delta region as militants continued their attacks on oil companies. The major internal security threats in Nigeria between 2003 and 2007 as confirmed by Abolurin (2015) came from the Niger Delta zone of the country. This was because militia groups became proliferated. It is the *Boko Haram* terrorists group that has caused rising tension in the country as its members continue with their wanton destruction of lives and property of innocent citizens including foreigners.

#### *Causes of Insecurity*

*Injustice:* Whenever there is breach of justice, the injured party strives to revenge by hitting back at those who failed to administer justice, as well as the offender. Sometimes innocent people get in the line of fire.

*Poverty:* This is linked to the high rate of unemployment among members of the working-class. The devil, they say, finds work for idle mind. We wish to state here that there is no distinction between members of this group and their illiterate counterparts. When educated people finish their National Youth Service, go back home to rot year after year with no jobs, something in them is bound to snap one day. The result can be outright rebellion against the times, the society, the government, their families, the system etc. The greatest chunk of revolt will be directed at the government that, they believe, has failed in exercising civil rights and liberties. Civil rights, according to Microsoft Encarta Premium 2009, is used to imply that the state has a positive role in ensuring all citizens equal protection under law and equal opportunity to exercise the privileges of citizenship. Protection, according to a British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, (Encarta Premium), is not a principle, but an expedient. Popper, a British philosopher (Encarta premium), cautions that we must plan for freedom and not only for security, if for no other reason than that only freedom can make security secure. This means that when an individual is unemployed, he is disgruntled and prone to crimes which sometimes translate into violence,

*Permissiveness:* In developed societies, especially in urban centres, permissiveness has increased so fast that in spite of all the efforts and science and technology advancement, the young people do not know what to do with the freedom they are given. Parents neglect their children for material means. Faced with diverse problems of their growing years, young people run away from them and resort to drugs, violence, crime, pornography etc.

*Corrupt and unpatriotic leaders:* One of the major challenges and obstacles to the attainment of success in developing countries, as observed by Ugbegili (2019: 29), are the issues of corruption and insecurity. According to him, corruption fans the embers of poverty, crime and by extension, insecurity. When leaders desire to remain in power or get into power by all means, they use their ill-gotten wealth to lure the unemployed and embittered citizens to attack their opponents through violent ways.

*Effects of Insecurity:* One needs no deep contemplation to figure out the effects of insecurity as these stare one in the face. Some of them are :

*Spread of HIV/AIDS:* The large movement of people induced by the spate of insecurity, as is the case in some northern states of Nigeria, means overpopulation in the new area of settlement. This puts a strain on accommodation resulting in overcrowding. Illicit unions will be born leading to the spread of the virus.

*Infiltration by terrorists:* In cases where the government creates a temporary camp for displaced citizens during disasters, this refugee camp of sorts, sometimes turns out to become a safe haven for terrorists who might infiltrate to persuade, convince, coerce and educate some victims on how to hit back at their supposed enemies.

*Rise in spending on defense matters by the government:* Insecurity increases defense spending, often generating a regional race for arms. In Nigeria, for example, large groups of armed personnel are regularly dispatched to Jos, Kano, Kaduna, Borno, Abuja and so on, where conflicts seem to persist. This means acquisitions of more vehicles, ammunition and equipment by the government.

*Disruption of economic activities:* Investors, both foreign and indigenous, will regard the country as an economic risk even after the conflict has been settled.

*Increase in the cultivation of hard drugs and rapid growth of terrorism:* As more people are recruited into gangs, the instructors toughen them up by introducing them to hard drugs which correspondingly raises the demand and necessitates more cultivation.

*Creation of a large number of refugees:* This effect imposes a heavy economic burden on the government in terms of relief materials.

*Increase in smuggling of illegal arms:* when there is a conflict in any country, manufacturers of illegal arms find an opportunity to test their weapons by smuggling them into the crisis-hit countries.

*Increase in crime wave:* Insecurity raises the level of crime especially kidnapping. People, who were once self-reliant and suddenly find themselves relying on public charity as a result of insecurity, might do anything to get back their dignity. One of the commonest means is kidnapping for ransom.

*Increase in corruption and poor governance:* Relief materials given to disaster victims are sometimes diverted in transit by government personnel. The sad thing about insecurity is that when there is crisis, it is not only the area concerned that suffers but the neighbouring areas too are affected. This tallies with what Bannon and Collier (2003) assert that "the costs of conflict do not stop at the borders of the unlucky country. The country's neighbours and the global community are also affected". This is the situation with Nigeria at present. Many countries have lost citizens to the Boko Haram.

#### *Efforts of the Nigerian government*

The Nigerian government has not been passive over the rising spate of insecurity in the country. These are some of the measures it has taken to address the situation: sensitization messages on the television and radio, cash donations to victims or their families, cash and relief materials to churches that are bombed, enlightenment programmes, enlisting the police to accompany demonstrators even when such demonstrations are peaceful, establishment of agencies like the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), dialogue, amnesty programme (as in the case of the Niger Delta militants) etc.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a historical novel depicting the advent of the Europeans into Ibo culture and society. Nine villages made up the society presented in the novel. Every society, either traditional or modern usually experiences instances of conflict from both within and without. The nine villages, at one time or the other, had conflicts that resulted in clan wars. At other times, conflicts were settled peacefully saving lives and property. Instances where conflicts were resolved without bloodshed and security was not threatened, have been carefully selected as follows:

*1st instance:* When a cow was let loose on somebody's farm.

In this case a young lad inadvertently opened the gate of his father's cow shed and a cow escaped and destroyed a neighbour's farm. An alarm was raised. Everyone in Umuofia depended on his farm so this was a serious crime. Achebe tells us how this problem was solved on pg. 80:

*When they saw it, they drove it back to its owner who at once paid the heavy fine which the village imposed on anyone whose cow was let loose on his neighbours crops.*

It has been observed earlier that injustice was one of the causes of breach in security. If the law was not enforced and the owner of the cow made to pay "at once", the farm owner would have exacted his own revenge, perhaps by destroying the offender's farm too, or engaging him in physical scuffle with machet, the commonest weapon in Umuofia village. People would have taken sides, pitching one family against the other. Also, it is not indicated in the narrative if the offender was a title holder or not. Nobody was above the law. Justice was not delayed or denied and so a crisis was controlled.

*2nd Instance:* When Okonkwo accidentally shot and killed Ezeudu's son during Ezeudu's burial.

Okonkwo, the great wrestler and warrior, a man of title and very wealthy, accidentally shot and killed the boy as he danced the traditional farewell dance to their father. Okonkwo ran into exile that same day despite his social standing in the village because that was what the law demanded. The next morning Okonkwo's house was burnt down, his animals killed, his farm destroyed by Ezeudu's family members. Achebe tells us this succinctly on pg 87:

*It was the justice of the earth goddess they had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend*

*Obierika was among them, ... And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender*

Some of the violence experienced in Nigeria has, at its very source, a powerful and influential offender, who used his power and position to escape punishment as recommended by the laws of this country. The victims will never forget and will eventually take the laws into their own hands. The powerful offender may not be accessible but his kith and kin would be within reach.

*3rd Instance:* When Enoch unmasked the spirit "Egwugwu". Egwugwu was a masquerader who impersonated one of the ancestral spirits of the village. One of the greatest crimes a man could commit in Umuofia, was to unmask an "Egwugwu" in public or insult its immortal prestige. Enoch was an overzealous convert to the new religion of the white man, which was Christianity. Christianity condemned the traditional idol worshipping by the villagers. Enoch had expected his action to result in a holy war, but, as Achebe tells us on pg. 133, "wisdom prevailed in the camp of the faithful and many lives were thus saved". Enoch's overzealousness that resulted in fanaticism was condemned by the church. He was hidden in the parsonage. When the egwugwu's came back to retaliate, only the church was set on fire, no lives were lost because the members of the church did not go to fight back since they know their member was at fault. Other converts with fanatical propensities were thereby discouraged.

Therefore, fanaticism and over-zealousness should be condemned and discouraged right from the onset by leaders of any groups or religious sects. People should not misplace loyalty by fighting a wrong cause in the name of solidarity or brotherhood.

*4th Instance:* The District Commissioner's reprisals for the burning of the new church by the *egwugwus*.

The incident discussed in No 3 above took place in the absence of the District Officer. On his return, he did not order for the destruction of the community or the burning of their shrines too. He invited the elders for dialogue, then trickishly arrested

them, asking their community to pay a fine for their release, which they did. This was because the *egwugwus* who burnt the church were masked and could not be identified. Therefore, their elders were arrested. With this insult on the elders, never again did the masked spirits commit another havoc in the story because the elders, thenceforth, held them in check.

*5th Instance:* Maltreatment of the arrested elders by the court messengers while in detention. This is the same instance as the preceding one. While in prison, the messengers, who were Ibo men too but working for the white man, maltreated the elders. They shaved their heads, starved them and prevented them from going out to ease themselves. This means that offenders, no matter their status, should not be treated with kid gloves while in detention. If criminals are identified but not found, their traditional elders should bear rested. This way, the community will ensure that their members stay away from crime. Arrested Boko Haram members arrested were allowed to escape while in a modern, secure, detention centre a few years ago in Nigeria. This indicates that some members of our communities members are untouchable.

*6th Instance:* Recreational activities- The Wrestling Match.

The wrestling matches organized by the nine communities annually helped to provide the people with avenues to dissipate unused energy after the planting season. Local communities should organize recreational activities to engage their citizens.

*7th Instance:* The role of age groups

Age groups played a vital role in the traditional setting in the novel. Members were required to be of impeccable character. In times of crisis, age groups were called upon to help. When the elders of Umuofia were arrested by the white man, the village crier summoned all the men to a meeting "from the Akakanma age-group upwards" (pg 139).

If there are age-groups in Nigerian communities, members of Boko Haram will belong to these groups and their identities will be known. Members of other age-groups will lodge complaints of their violence to the community elders and affected age-groups will be asked to call their erring members to order or face heavy penalties. This is because, as Brinkerhoff (2002) says, the resolution of conflict requires that all parties share the objective of resolution.

## II. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to discuss the prevailing problem of insecurity in the country and how literature can help in tackling such problems. If the government encourages the teaching of literature in schools, the citizens of our countries will learn ways of handling chaotic situations in the society by drawing from the well of knowledge left by our ancestors and recorded in books. The paper has identified the causes of insecurity, its effects, the government's efforts to tackle this menace and the results of all these efforts. Furthermore, the paper has identified instances of conflicts in *Things Fall*

*Apart* and how the conflicts were resolved without mayhem. It is our hope that the appropriate authorities will adopt the strategies elucidated in this paper to ensure that Nigerians live without fear of insecurity.

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