

Dr. Suchetana Banerjee

Symbiosis International University

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts

India

An account of contact: Teaching literatures from Africa in India

Teaching Achebe's *Arrow of God* to a class of 4th year undergraduates made me perceive a series of fault lines about the idea of shared postcoloniality. Through this paper I will try to give an account of what I understand as fault lines of post colonialism as is perceived in the majority of Indian academia, how postcolonial identity becomes celebratory selves and how these assumptions of homogeneities lead to dangerous notions of uniformity. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a mandatory site that every disciple of postcolonial studies pays homage to. My reason for choosing to teach *Arrow of God* was to avoid paying that homage and bring in a fresh perspective, and more so to point out the complexity of narrative and writing which was not Western in either form or content.

During our few first readings the concept of shared postcoloniality worked well but it started getting difficult when Achebe continued breaking boundaries of narrative immanence in order to offer an interpretation. The problem arose as on one hand; we were presented with fictional events whose criterion is not referential truth but rather plausibility within parameters established by the text itself. on the other, we were presented with an explanatory voice that makes interpretive claims—truth claims – of a wholly different order than those made by the narrative itself.

In the second preface to the novel Achebe writes “We should be ready at the very least to salute those who stand fast, the spiritual descendants of the magnificent man, Ezeulu, in the hope that they will forgive us.” Colonialism itself appears, as an expression of a way of life that is, in itself and of its own nature, aggressive: an aggression that can express itself as well through mediocrities and ambitious cynics as it can through heroes and true believers. And this way of life is, essentially, us: a category that includes the postcolonial generations – the “us” of Achebe's preface and trying to locate this historically became an exciting exercise.