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THE PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF THE POLITICS OF FAMILIARITY. RECKONING WITH NATIVISM IN *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE* BY CHINUA ACHEBE

OBIETNICE I PUŁAPKI POLITYKI SWOJSKOŚCI. ROZLICZENIE NATYWIZMU W *CZCIGODNYM KACYKU NANGA* CHINUY ACHEBEGO

Abstrakt: Artykuł rozpoczyna się od przeglądu stanowisk sformułowanych w okresie de- i postkolonialnym w ramach debaty na temat natywizmu. Ujawnia on, że natywizm stopniowo tracił na znaczeniu dla kolejnych pokoleń pisarzy. Na historycznym tle zrekonstruowane zostało „pragmatyczne" stanowisko Chinuy Achebego. Achebe, mimo że korzysta z tradycyjnych form i tematów, jest świadomy pułapek natywizmu, czego dowody znaleźć można w jego powieści *Czcigodny kacyk Nanga* (1966). Natywizm przedstawiony jest w niej jako program polityczny partii rządzącej, jednak traktowany jest tylko instrumentalnie, jako środek podtrzymywania władzy o kolonialnej proweniencji. Celem artykułu jest rekonstrukcja świadomie rozwijanego i wyważonego stanowiska Achebego wobec natywizmu, który odegrał istotną rolę w budowaniu nowoczesnej dekolonialnej narodowości, lecz w okresie, gdy walki ustały, okazał się pułapką.

Słowa kluczowe: natywizm, status społeczny, globalizacja, Chinua Achebe, *Czcigodny kacyk Nanga*, swojskość i obcość

Keywords: nativism, social status, globalization, Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People*, familiarity and otherness

Nativism as a writing strategy and as a mode of politics has been the subject of constant debate since decolonization. Several questions have been raised: about the politics of language and about the productivity of nativism in the means of culture and the organisation of social life. In the context of literature, nativists search for sources and artefacts of indigenous culture from the past (more or less romanticised), cultivate traditional forms that should be reincorporated into contemporary literary practise and postulate a radical turn towards the mother tongues. These three aspects of nativism have been labelled by Adélékè Adéẹ̀kọ́ as thematic/classical, structuralist/speculative and linguistic/artifactual nativism.[1] The problem of nativism is thus dedicated to the relationship between the local and the global and considers it crucial to examine its consequences: acculturation, political radicalism, problems with identity and the memory of the past.

In my contribution, I will briefly outline the main issues raised in the debate on the unproductiveness of nativism, which is conducted in the historical context of changing generations of writers for whom nativism as a mode of action begins to lose importance. In the context of this debate, I will discuss Achebe's position on nativism, which I will call the "pragmatic" approach. Nativism as a political programme of the ruling party in Chinua Achebe's novel *A Man of the People* (1966) has been discredited. Therefore, I will use postcolonial tools to analyse the circumstances of this discrediting in Achebe's novel and to nuance his critique of nativism itself. My aim is to prove that Achebe does not so much reject nativism as such, but rather the false political rhetoric of the decolonization era, which used nativist arguments and the reinforcement of their authority (as heirs to the struggle for liberation from colonisation) to act only in their own interests. As a result, the colonial origins of social differences and clear power relations were revived. Contrary to political rhetoric, very little importance was attached to the indigenous – languages, cuisine, clothing, education, etc. Domestic grievances such as corruption and government fraud were exacerbated by a

[1] A. Adéẹ̀kọ́, *My Signifier is More Native than Yours: Issues in Making a Literature African*, [in:] *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, eds. T. Olaniyan, A. Quayson, Malden–Oxford–Carlton 2007, p. 236–238.

sense of lack of self-worth, which was reflected in Achebe's critique in the theme of dominant imports of goods such as coffee, clothing and jewellery. By analysing several of the above elements, I will show that the goal of the critique in *A Man of the People* is to expose the *façade* of nativism used as nothing more than empty rhetoric.

COLLECTING PARTS OF A DISMEMBERED BODY: A BRIEF HISTORY OF NATIVISM

It is obvious that nativism was of great importance at the time of its emergence and manifested itself most clearly in the form of Négritude. It remained of fundamental importance during decolonization and thereafter, but – with the advent of subsequent generations – it gradually faded. Peter S. Thompson described this process by referring to a conference paper by Biyi Bandele-Thomas on the four generations of African writers and thinkers.[2] The first two generations: "explorers" and "realists", had a strong interest in the concepts of Négritude, both as its proponents and critics. The term "explorers" refers to the founders of the Négritude movement in the late 1930s (Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire), who defined its cultural, philosophical and political goals.[3] Négritude as the name of the movement was (most probably) coined by Césaire in the poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* published in 1939, but it was Senghor who formulated the most important declarations of the movement.[4] He defines Négritude as "*the sum of the cultural values of the black world*, i.e. a certain active presence in the world, or rather in the universe".[5] Senghor not only rejects the claim that Négritude is racist, but also denies that the main aim of the phenomenon is self-affirmation. So what is Négritude? It is a movement of becoming (self-realisation), the "philosophy

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[2] P.S. Thompson, *Negritude and a New Africa: An Update*, [in:] *African Literature*..., op. cit., p. 215–217.

[3] For a more detailed list of "explorers", not just those directly related to Négritude, see ibidem, p. 215.

[4] P. Hountondji, *True and False Pluralism*, [in:] *African Literature*…, op. cit., p. 264.

[5] L.S. Senghor, *Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century*, [in:] *African Literature*…, op. cit., p. 196.

of being", as Senghor called it.[6] In contrast to the European philosophical tradition with its pronounced difference (and dialectic) between matter and spirituality, body and soul, Senghor refers to the African ontological principle as a *synthesis*: "The African […] understands the world beyond the diversity of its forms as a fundamentally mobile and yet unique reality that strives for synthesis".[7] Négritude also means the ability to recognise and accept one's own *blackness* – in this sense, the term corresponds to black cultural nationalism and the pan-African statements about the "African personality".

These expressions of blackness, which depend on the glorification and romanticization of Africa in its mythical past, have led to highly polemical attitudes. And the "realists", the second generation of African writers, were raised against the idealism of the Négritude, among others, with a common need for a realistic description of Africa (its society, politics, education, etc.). This realist approach to historical and literary responsibility depended on the historical moment – the announcements and fulfillments of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s. A group of realist writers, Chinua Achebe, Kofi Awoonor, John Pepper Clark and Wole Soyinka, described themselves as "more forward-looking and less anxious to appear Western."[8] As a result, they strive for a balance between traditional and modern forms in their works. The critical distance from the legacy of Négritude is also manifested in the works of Achebe or Soyinka in the choice of English as the literary language. This choice of language is of great significance for the linguistic change proclaimed by the nativists – a radical turn towards indigenous languages and traditional, indigenous cultural forms.

The linguistic approach as a characteristic and influential part of nativism brings us back to the problem of the changing generations and their attitude to Négritude, the issue already discussed in relation to the "explorers" and "realists" – and indeed the question itself is one that was raised by writers and scholars in the 1970s. Thompson, referring to the Bandele-Thomas conference paper, describes this generation as "overshadowed by the great Nigerians",

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6 Ibidem, p. 197.

7 Ibidem, p. 198.

8 P.S. Thompson, op. cit., p. 215.

and therefore the realist attempts of the 1960s were bound to morph into a more pessimistic view of the present and the future by those who followed.[9] This pessimism feeds on the current political and social situation of African countries "the day after" decolonization and clashes with an optimistic[10] view of development, progress and the welfare state. The writers express a growing disappointment with the realization of these virtues and the slow pace of progress and point to the factor that has influenced this pace – neo-colonialism, the painful economic and unequal conditions for participation in the global movement of goods. Finally, it was not until the 1970s that there was a growing demand for African literature in African languages.

And since we have arrived at the question of language, let me briefly recall the important events that have shaped the discussion and highlight two viewpoints in the debate that have been largely generalized and polarized to give a clearer picture. It is very safe to assume that the events of the 1960s that set the debate on African literature in motion had a profound influence on the way the "language question" was posed in the 1970s. Two events that certainly influenced the wider debate took place in 1962: the conference at Makerere College in Kampala (Uganda) and the idea of the Heinemann African Writers series, which was edited by Achebe[11] for the following ten years. The Makerere conference brought together many of the later best-known writers, including Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Okot p'Bitek, Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o [James Ngugi]. The conference was entitled *African Writers of English Expression*, which in itself limited the scope of the discussion. The theme of the conference proved problematic and so, as both Achebe and Wa Thiong'o noted,[12] participants spent much time asking what

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[9] Ibidem, p. 216.

[10] And even overly optimistic, such as that described by Achebe in *The Trouble with Nigeria* – in 1979 General Olusegun Obasanjo declared that "Nigeria will become one of the ten leading nations in the world by the end of the century", see Ch. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Oxford–Portsmouth–Johannesburg 1984, p. 9.

[11] For more information about Heinemann's African Writers Series and its impact on future African writers and readers, see Ch. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, Edinburgh 2000, p. 50–53.

[12] See Ch. Achebe, *Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature*, [in:] *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*, London 2011 [e-book]; N. wa Thiong'o,

African literature was and the debate was moderated by asking more and more questions that sought to clarify the key issues: "Was it literature about Africa or about the African experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about non-Africans who wrote a about Africa: did their work qualify as African literature?"[13] And here we come to two contrasting attitudes to African literature that were only partially manifested at Makerere College.[14]

These two statements about the language of African literature are the following: first, the acceptance of the possibilities offered by "inherited languages" and the use of the language of a former colonizer to express in it a specific, genuine experience – and this practice can be brought to life in accordance with and respecting the rules of the language, but, and this is a much more common case, in opposition to grammatical, lexical, syntactical or punctuation rules; secondly, African literature should be written in indigenous languages, and writers who opt for the languages of the colonizers show that they are unaware that these languages are relics of imperialism. The former can be described as the pragmatic approach that prevailed at the Makerere conference, and the latter as nativist. The pragmatic attitude was characteristic of writers like Achebe, Amos Tutuola and Gabriel Okara, who did not deny the value of traditional forms but transposed them into language that was far removed from tradition and, as Wa Thiong'o states, "Best to make the borrowed tongues carry the weight of our African experience by, for instance, making them 'prey' on African proverbs and other peculiarities of African speech and folklore".[15] In *Politics and Politicians of Language*… Achebe addressed the accusations leveled against him (among others) by Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in*

Decolonising the Mind: *The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Zimbabwe 1981, p. 6.

[13] N. wa Thiong'o, op. cit., p. 6.

[14] The subject of the conference not only limited the question posed, but also influenced the list of its participants. Hence, Wa Thiong'o, barely after his debut (publication of two short stories in English) and still as a student, was present at the Conference – but neither Shaaban Bin Robert (Tanzanian Swahili poet) nor Chief Daniel Orowole Olorunfẹmi Fagunwa (Nigerian Yoruba author) could, as Wa Thiong'o sadly admits, get involved. N. wa Thiong'o, op. cit., p. 6.

[15] Ibidem, p. 7.

African Literature. The reasons why he uses English can be described as "pragmatic", as I mentioned above. Everyday life is expressed in English, the need for a country to communicate in a language that is known to all (Achebe notes that there are more than two hundred nationalities in Nigeria, which means more than two hundred language barriers), and furthermore, he criticizes Wa Thiong'o for presenting an unrealistic, idealised vision of an original linguistic community that he knows from his childhood.[16] To summarize the "pragmatic" answer to the "language question": The problem with the language of African literature does not arise from imperialist politics, but from linguistic pluralism – so it is not a question of the nation's linguistic tradition, but a question of the ability to communicate.[17] Although it may seem that Achebe ignores indigenous languages and traditional forms, he goes beyond English in at least three ways – in literature he uses indigenous languages (especially when he refers to proverbs or Igbo songs), traditional forms/genres (legends, rituals, parables) and when he uses English he creates a kind of hybrid structure, e.g. in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Hence he concludes: "For me, it is not *either* English or Igbo, it is both".[18]

On the other hand, there is a "nativist" answer to the same "language question", and it is not simply contradictory. The core of Wa Thiong'o's opposition

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[16] For this description, see ibidem, p. 10–11.

[17] Ch. Achebe, *The Education of...*, op. cit.

[18] Ch. Achebe, *The Song of Ourselves*, "New Statesman and Society" 1990, 9 Febr., p. 32. One of the reasons for the criticism of Achebe's literature, perceived as westernized, was that he did not write his novels as natives should read them – he assumed the reader would not be familiar with Igbo traditions, so he explains them and provides a commentary in the story. But this criticism is inaccurate, as Kwame Anthony Appiah explains: the first is because Achebe writes for a Nigerian audience (not just Igbo), and the second is that the basic principle of oral narrative (which is the material for Achebe's novels) is its familiarity, and this is because "the accumulation of detail is a device not for alienation but of incorporation" (K.A. Appiah, *Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism*, [in:] *African Literature...*, op. cit., p. 248). It is true, however, that neo-traditional African art often *is* Western audience oriented, especially when it is deliberately produced for sale in foreign markets (K.A. Appiah, *Is Post- in Postmodernism Post- in Postcolonial?* [in:] *African Literature...*, op. cit., p. 659–660).

to a monolingual community lies in the concept of language itself – it is the "language of real life", a language understood as part of the relationship between people that emerges when they participate together in the labour process.[19] Communication is becoming an essential means of collaboration. If the "language of real life" corresponds to the conditions of everyday life, this means that people develop harmoniously, i.e. that their language expresses their "life experience".[20] The first problems arise when children experience inconsistencies in expression at home (songs sung while working in the fields, bedtime stories – all in the mother tongue) and at school, where it is not possible to speak in the mother tongue unless you want to have your hands slapped with a ruler (the teaching programmes are mainly related to European literature, but also to geography and history).[21] The result of this inconsistency is the alienation of the child. To conclude the basic principles of the "nativist" standpoint, I would like to recall another argument from *Decolonising the Mind*, namely that the peasantry (as Wa Thiong'o argues) is excluded from participating in the creation of culture in English – and yet, as the author claims, the only way to defeat imperialism is for "writers in African languages should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions of an organised peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle".[22] As mentioned earlier, the "nativist" point of view was in the minority at the Makerere Conference, but Wa Thiong'o was not alone in his views. A year later, Obiajunwa Wali published the article *The Dead End of African Literature* in *Transition* magazine, which begins with a clear statement: "Perhaps the most important achievement of the last Conference of African Writers of English Expressions […] is that African literature as now defined and understood, leads nowhere".[23] And like Wa Thiong'o before him, Wali believes that the problem with African literature in English is that it is aimed at the wrong audience, more specifically, that it does

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19 Qtd. in N. wa Thiong'o, op. cit., p. 13.

20 Ibidem, p. 14.

21 See ibidem, p. 90–93.

22 Ibidem, p. 29.

23 O. Wali, *The Dead End of African Literature?* [in:] *African Literature*..., op. cit., p. 281.

not appeal to those who are not academically educated and have no knowledge of European literature and culture – and "constitute an overwhelming majority".[24]

The Makarere Conference was of course not the only one, but it certainly had a major influence on the future debate on the "language question" in the 1970s[25] and impacted on the generation coming of age. There is no doubt, however, that Négritude lost importance from this point onwards; even in Makerere its impact was rather weakened, invoked more from a critical distance.[26] In the last generation discussed by Bandele-Thomas, the importance of the whole paradigm of nativism is even less pronounced. The fourth generation (Titsi Dangarembga, Mbulelo Mzamane), which began publishing in the 1980s, was concerned with the question of the racism of Négritude. Moreover, as Thompson noted, this period was characterised by "silence". Those who most believed in the ideas of Négritude – Césaire and to some extent, in the sense of lowering its political profile, Senghor – were silent.[27]

THE PITFALLS OF NATIVISM

The history of the development of nativist discourse could not be complete without the counter-discourse – anti-nativism. It can appear in different variants and intensities, but the following arguments will complement the historical narrative reconstructed above. Some of the anti-nativist viewpoints have already emerged, but at least these two should also be mentioned: Frantz Fanon's view of nativism (and cultural nationalism) as merely an intermediate

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[24] Ibidem, p. 282.

[25] In the late 1960s, another important debate began – this time about teaching at school in English, which lasted until the 1970s. The first began in 1968 as a response to Dr. James Stewart's proposal that the Department of English should become "*less* British" and "more open to other writing in English (American, Caribbean, African, Commonwealth) and also to continental writing" and continued until 1969. The legacy of this debate was *The Teaching of African Literature in Kenyan Schools* Conference held in Nairobi School in 1974, when not only syllabus was discussed, but also comparative reading. For a more detailed account of the school teaching debate, see N. wa Thiong'o, op. cit., p. 89–90, 96–99.

[26] O. Wali, op. cit., p. 281.

[27] P.S. Thompson, op. cit., p. 216.

stage in the formation of national consciousness[28] and Paulin Hountondji's argument that nativism should be seen as non-ideological, which is far from the truth.

Let us first take a look at *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon describes the desire to search for indigenous cultural forms in the past, which is perceived as a sign of blindness and credulity, especially by intellectuals.

> Perhaps this passionate research and this rage are kept up or at least directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation, and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.[29]

In one sentence, Fanon pointed out several dangers of nativist domination: its motivation, i.e. the low self-esteem of those who seek the past (*self-contempt*, *resignation*, *abjuration*), the resulting idealism arising from romanticised vision of the past (*discovery of the beautiful and splendid era*), its argumentative character, i.e. the ability to exist in global terms (*rehabilitation of our existence*). Nevertheless, the whole process of retelling the past should only be a stage, an introduction to the real national culture, and instead it becomes increasingly influential in shaping the idea of a common African culture (or even more broadly, black culture), and this affirmative, generalizing concept is far from ideal for Fanon.[30] This logic is not only backward-looking and counter-revolutionary, but also racist. It is an extension of the generalization made by the colonizer (a response to the claim that there was no noble past or culture is a radical apology of indigenous cultural production), and while

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[28] Fanon's approach to nativism inspired many following, who also believed that nativism was a historical necessity, but if it is not to turn into a resentment, it must be worked out and surpassed later on. In this regard, see E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London 1994, p. 33–35, 252–254.

[29] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, preface J.-P. Sartre, New York 1968, p. 210.

[30] Ibidem, p. 212–213.

it praises the past, it ignores the historical processes that shaped different national cultures as well as everyday life with the challenges of decolonization[31].

Paulin Hountondji points out another relationship in which nativism is implicated – culturalism (synonymously referred to as traditionalism, cultural nationalism).[32] He defines it as "an ideological system" because "it produces an indirect political effect".[33] This political effect, which presents itself as non-ideological, is a covert statement, and therefore "first, the problem of effective national liberation and, second, the problem of class struggle"[34] have not been addressed at all. Cultural pluralism (or multiculturalism) is a concern of both cultural nationalists and anthropologists – and the lack of interest in addressing neocolonialism and class inequalities is presented as indifference.

It can be concluded that both critical views of nativism stem from the same need to open up to the present (for the authors it was the present of 1961 and 1973 respectively). Moreover, there is another reason to discuss these two critical positions – the correlation with Achebe's scepticism about nativism. The Nigerian writer recognizes the need to root the narrative in the past only to transform it into a productive basis for contemporary literary practice, hence he follows Fanon's reasoning. He is far from the archaeology of the past. Achebe seems even more concerned with Hountondji's position on the backward-looking perspective of culturalism. For this reason, he refers to Suzanne Cronje's book on the Nigerian-Biafran War and quotes this passage from essay *Stanley Diamond*:[35] "The problem came to be regarded as humanitarian rather than a political dilemma".[36] Neither compassion, nor tolerance, nor respect for the value of human life was the answer to the problem. These humanitarian aspects are certainly the most admirable, yet they did not

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31 Ibidem, p. 213-218.

32 For an in-depth analysis of the Third World nationalism as an imported Western discourse, see P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London 1986.

33 P. Hountondji, *True and False Pluralism*, [in:] *African Literature*..., op. cit., p. 266.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ch. Achebe, *The Education of*..., op. cit.

36 S. Cronje, *The World and Nigeria: The Diplomatic History of the Biafran War, 1967–1970*, London 1972, p. 211.

improve the living conditions of those involved in the war. The conflict was political and therefore required political thinking.

LANGUAGE, FOOD, CLOTHING, AND BUCKETS, OR HOW TO EXPOSE A SOCIAL STATUS

A Man of the People is a satirical political novel published in 1966. It was considered Achebe's most political novel,[37] not only because of the plot and the criticism it contains of the first attempts to govern decolonised African states, but also because only two days after the novel was published, a coup took place in Nigeria in 1966 – a coup whose prophetic description was to end the literary work itself. Achebe was labelled a prophet by foreign critics at the time and recognised as a conspirator by his countrymen.[38] Some scholars, such as Jago Morrison, also claim that this novel marks the beginning of a new phase in Achebe's writing, in which the focus shifts from the micro-space (the Igbo people) to the nation (mainly Nigeria). This can be seen in the author's own words:

> Right now my interest is in politics, or rather my interest in the novel is politics. *A Man of the People* wasn't a flash in the pan. This is the beginning of a phase for me, in which I intend to take a hard look at what we in Africa are making of our independence – but using Nigeria, which I know best.[39]

So if nativism interests Achebe as a form of political writing, it is primarily because it is demanded by the self-imposed theme of a new phase of writing – reflection on the early years of post-colonial states. In these early years it plays an important, if ambiguous, role, like a double-edged weapon, as

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[37] B.B. Kareem, *A Political Analysis of* A Man of the People *by Chinua Achebe*, "International Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities" 2017, vol. 1 (2), p. 60.

[38] See Ch. Achebe, *What is Nigeria to Me?* [in:] *The Education of...*, op. cit.; V. Dwivedi, *Aspects of Realism in Chinua Achebe's* A Man of the People, "African Study Monographs" 2008, vol. 29 (1), p. 11.

[39] Cited after ibidem, p. 11.

Momtajul Islam remarked[40]. This was also foreseen by Fanon, who assumed that the great challenge of decolonisation would be the use of nativism and nationalism in the liberation struggle and their subsequent overcoming once they were no longer valid as tools of resistance.[41] Beginning with *A Man of the People*, Achebe decides to examine the extent to which this challenge has been met.

A Man of the People tells the story of the ideological conflict between the narrator Odili and Chief Nanga, the Minister of Culture, who appears as a nativist politician but does not embody the ideas he considers important. He describes himself as a "man of the people" who represents the problems of the majority of his countrymen at the dawn of independence, but in reality he is guided by his own interests and indulges in corruption. Social inequality and disillusionment continue to grow until they find an outlet in the form of a *coup d'état* at the end of the novel. It is interesting that in a decade so fascinated by nativism, Achebe's position (already described in earlier parts of the article as sceptical and suspicious of nativism) becomes even more strident. This time, however, he focuses not only on issues of language or genre, but rather on the political dimension of nativist practises. Nanga's figure shows that nativist policies very often led colonial countries to independence, as they cemented national identity and provided the impetus to fight in the name of a common cause and interest, but the same activists and politicians who took power in decolonised countries began to pose the greatest threat. Islam explains this in part by the fact that the nativists were predominantly an elite social class, "a product of the colonial education system with knowledge of the English language".[42] The moment they gained political agency, they began to restore the colonial balance of power in the newly established states: "they eventually seized the political space and governmental positions of their native countries from the colonial invaders in the postcolonial era without any significant

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[40] M. Islam, *Struggle to Liberate a Nascent Nation from the Corrupt Native Ruling Class and Create a Distinctive Postcolonial Identity: A Case Study of Chinua Achebe's* A Man of the People, "Advances in Language and Literary Studies" 2019, vol. 10 (3), p. 117.

[41] F. Fanon, *The Wretched*..., op. cit., p. 213.

[42] M. Islam, *Struggle to Liberate*..., op. cit., p. 117.

changes in the master-slave narrative of the colonial period".[43] However, the critique of the implementation of the false rhetoric of nativism by no means exhausts the characterisation of Achebe's position. Indeed, the writer's belief in some of the core values of nativism, including an appreciation of local writing patterns, history, and languages, is evident in this and other novels. One can therefore assume that Achebe is not so much arguing against nativism as such, but exposing the use of this ideology as an empty platitude (which does not translate into political agendas and ways of managing decolonial states).

In order to achieve his literary goals of a new phase, Achebe had to carry out two mutually conditional, exposing measures in the novel: First, he had to expose the nativist discourse of politics as full of prefabricated formulas and empty platitudes, and second, he had to show how far removed this language is from the real conditions of life. So he had to scrutinise the way the characters speak in different social situations, but he also had to describe the space in which these speech acts take place. Through what is manifested in the space, Achebe manages to show the rupture between language and reality and expose the enormous social inequalities. In this part of the essay, I will analyse how these social inequalities are constantly represented in *A Man of the People*. To this end, I will examine both material and immaterial objects that embody class distinctions in the novel: drinks, clothes, jewellery, cars, toilets – on the one hand, and the use of language, titles, professions – on the other. Of course, the separation of these elements here only serves to show how much and in how many ways the difference in wealth manifests itself in the novel. Far from being separate, these elements are interwoven and inscribed in the structure of the fictional city. The analysis of the novel will therefore oscillate between the material and what this materiality incorporates into the political discourse of nativism. By exposing the tensions and contradictions between the two – what is real and what this reality represents – Achebe fulfils his political intention of criticising the decolonial moment and its effects.

The first thing to recognise is the specific conditions and forms of the novel's nativist language. English as a symbol of education and privilege has become an important part of the public debate in the Nigeria-like country. This is partly

[43] Ibidem, p. 118.

due to the political programme of the fictional ruling party – the People's Organisation Party – which changed course in 1960. It happened when the Prime Minister did not agree with the plan of the Minister of Finance, an educated man who wanted to solve the problem of the financial crisis in the international coffee market (a market of great importance to the country). He disagreed with the plan as the election date was approaching and decided to print fifteen million pounds instead. The finance minister vehemently disagreed with this decision, and several ministers joined him, so the prime minister summarily dismissed the recalcitrant members of the government, who were soon labelled in the press as neo-colonial intellectuals, "decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking", "intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees".[44] It would seem, then, that the value of indigenous languages would be at the centre of the newly created cabinet's interest. However, this was true only up to the point of an abstract political agenda. The programme was strongly influenced by the Pan-Africanist movement and the praise of tradition, as the following verses show: "We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are […] those who speak the language of the people" (4). The adherence to indigenous languages is a sign of appreciation of indigenous forms of communication[45] but at the same time an expression of open criticism of westernized intellectuals from the decolonial states:

> From today we must watch and guard our hard-won freedom jealously. Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of Western- educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage (5).

Notwithstanding the minister's statement above, members of the party, including Nanga himself, do not hesitate to use English in their speeches. The

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[44] Ch. Achebe, *A Man of the People*, intro. K. Maier, London 2001, p. 4. The following page references for this edition of the book will be given in parentheses.

[45] For the analysis of this dimension of the novel as stimulating self-esteem, see D.K. Satbhai, A. Raut, *Nativistic Elements in the Fictions of Chinua Achebe Mulk Raj Anand*, "Jetir" 2019, vol. 6 (2), p. 723.

reason for this is ironically expressed as follows: "Speeches made in vernacular were liable to be distorted and misquoted in the press" (12). It is safer to speak in English because only some of the local journalists understand this foreign language – therefore their statements are not polemicised in the press or quoted in articles. It will be different if they spoke indigenous languages – every lie, deception and piece of information could be uncovered, scrutinised and publicized. Moreover, it is interestingly opaque that the English language, which in the decolonial period bore witness to being a disciple of colonial education and often collaborating with the authorities (hence such a strong aversion to intellectuals), appears here in the guise of nativism. I will come back to this contradiction later.

From the novel we can conclude that different languages are favoured depending on the social context of the communication situation. No less than four different languages are used in the novel, as Angelina Riyandari points out, standard English in the narrative, dialogues in standard English, Pidgin English and native Nigerian English.[46] In intimate contacts, when talking to relatives or friends, the mother tongues (the last two of the above) were naturally chosen; in public contacts or a conversation with a stranger, English is more often used. Why do these languages work in such different communication situations? How is it that native politicians speak out in favour of their mother tongues and then choose English, except at election rallies where it is part of the political game to appear as a commoner (and therefore speak their language)?

I noticed that the political programme of the People's Organisation Party, which is known and respected by the people, states that Western education and the primacy of English should be disregarded, but the government representatives did not abide by these rules. Not only did Nanga know (and use) the English language, he was an educated man himself and also encouraged Obili to obtain a post-graduate certificate of education in London. This predominance of English as the official language of politics and governance was influenced by the fact that the intellectual elites running the newly formed countries were brought up in a colonial, European-style education. Encouraging Obili to study

[46] A. Riyandari, *The Language in Chinua Achebe's* A Man of the People, "Celt" 2003, vol. 3 (1), p. 26.

only at a foreign Western university is a reminiscence of those times when there was no alternative. This linguistic stasis in time is significant for Achebe – it illustrates the same process of unproductive stagnation that characterised the political, economic and social life of the early years after Nigeria regained independence. One thing that was new was increasingly corrupt governments.

If we look for the reasons for this superiority of standard English, apart from the colonial education of the new decolonial governments, they lie in the highly valued professions based on the knowledge of this language. One such profession in colonial times was that of district interpreter. The novel describes this profession and its afterlife in the period of independence, when the demand for similar services fell dramatically. Obili's father is a district interpreter. Obili recalls that his father was respected and powerful in the past (the past is not described in detail, but it must of course have been before decolonisation): "the District Officer was like the Supreme Deity, and the Interpreter the principal minor god who carried prayers and sacrifice to Him" (25). The translator's diminished *divinity* resulted both from his contact with the god himself (the District Officer) and from the fact that he possessed knowledge that was reserved for only a few. So what divinity really was, was an arrangement with the colonial administration and exclusive knowledge of the language – and those who had a higher social status. In the era of decolonisation, the social status of the district interpreter has suffered from his inadequacy as a master of the house (his pension is not enough to support his five wives and thirty-five children) and from alcoholism, but he still carries that part of "divinity" within him. These remnants of divinity also contribute to the privilege of standard English.

The issue of language, or rather the schizophrenic linguistic political structure – on the one hand asserting the primacy of indigenous languages, on the other supporting the use of Standard English for various reasons (convenience, custom and perpetuating the difference of colonial origin) – adds to the thread of education. The official party programme states that education, especially in Europe, is to be condemned, but it turns out that there is a need among party members to prove their worth by obtaining an academic title from Western academies. Chief Nanga, the most ardent of the accusers of Western education, is also on the hunt for diplomas and academic titles. He is

more than pleased to inform Obili and the journalist that he will be travelling to the United States in two months' time to earn his doctorate and thus receive the title "Chief the Honourable Doctor M.A. Nanga" (16). Obili also makes it clear that receiving an education is tantamount to belonging to the privileged class: "I had gone to the University with the clear intention of coming out again after three years as a full member of the privileged class whose symbol was the car." (100).

It is not only the English language and English education that play a privileged role over native languages and schools, the same applies to British cuisine, imported coffee, clothing and jewellery. Let us first consider the case of gastronomy, namely the division between a professional chef and a home cook, based not on expertise but on the range of dishes known. Professional cooks, mostly men, only know Western dishes, while home cooks are women who in turn prepare what has been prepared for generations. This difference in the assessment of the value of indigenous and Western cuisine and in the professional (and gender) division of labour becomes clear in the following plot line of *A Man of the People*. Chief Nanga and Obili, who were staying on the Nanga estate at the time, interviewed a young man who wanted to take up a job as a cook. When asked about his qualifications, he began to list the European dishes he could cook: "steak and kidney pie, chicken puri, misk grill, cake omlette", but when asked about African cuisine, he replied in the negative, explaining that "I get wife for house", and for African cooking, we can add. This kind of division of labour follows a very specific logic: "As long as a man confined himself to preparing foreign concoctions he could still maintain the comfortable illusion that he wasn't really doing such an unmanly thing as cooking." (41–42). The status of women resulting from this logic was perceived as both complementary[47] and subordinate to men[48] – women's labour consists of taking care of the household, i.e. cooking and looking after

[47] See N. Achebe, *Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching About Gender in Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'*, "Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies" 2002, vol. 1 (29), p. 121–143.

[48] See I.I. Agbo, B.U. Ijem, *Language and Gender Representation in Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'*, "English Language Teaching" 2019, vol. 11 (12), p. 55–63.

the children (which is more clearly expressed in *The Things Fall Apart*, for example), and this labour is clearly distinct from that of men, which is in some ways more prestigious (men can acquire titles, become a Mask, etc.). Although this gendered division of labour in Achebe's novels[49] deserves further attention, it has only a partial bearing on the topic under discussion in this essay – Achebe's political critique is class-based rather than culture-based – so I do not give it further attention.

Another object of Achebe's criticism, which he formulates from a nativist position, is the excessive attachment to imported goods and the negation of the value of goods that are produced locally. Coffee, clothing and jewellery are some of the imported products that appear in the novel. I will recall some of their conceptualisations in *A Man of the People* in order to understand the mechanisms of valuation of these goods and to show the nativist basis of the critique of the phenomenon itself.

Coffee plays an essential role in the economy of the fictitious Nigeria-like country, which, however, experienced a severe crisis in the 1960s. Moreover, it does not enjoy a good reputation, is considered tasteless and is not worth its price. This is best illustrated by the episodic but significant plot: Chief Nanga, accompanied by Obili, visited Simon Koko, the Minister of Overseas Training, who was drinking his coffee, but after a few sips he began to gasp and shake and moaned: "They have killed me". The cook was called in to explain why the poisoned coffee was served to Chief Koko. He wasted no words, took a cup of the poisoned liquid and drank it in one gulp. Then there was silence and the cook was able to explain the whole incident: Chief Koko had drunk the rest of his favourite Nescafé coffee for breakfast, so the cook brewed his own coffee, which he had bought from "OHMS". "'Our Home Made Stuff' was the popular name of the gigantic campaign launched by the government across the country to promote the consumption of locally made products" (31). The financial crisis prompted the government to strengthen the local economy, and

[49] One reason is that the characters' gender identities are labile, as in the case of Obierika, who was interpreted as the embodiment of female values; see Ch. Anyokwu, *Re-Imagining Gender in Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'*, "Interdisciplinary Literary Studies" 2011, vol. 2 (12), p. 19.

OHMS was one of the embodiments of this policy. Buying local products has resurfaced in the media as a form of patriotism. What was seen as poison was only a local product. In fact, this situation makes us aware once again that it is impossible to reconcile the party's programmes with its own actions – and this contradiction is of great significance, because the People's Organisation Party is once again dictating what is desirable for the people and not adhering to these instructions itself.

Clothing and jewellery play a similar role in emphasising social status. Again, the narrative provides us with an explanation. During the Chief's speech, Obili carefully observes the clothing of one of the guests present in the hall:

> His robes were made from some expensive-looking European woollen material – which was not so very strange these days. But what surprised me was that the tailor had retained the cloth's thin, yellow border on which the manufacturer advertised in endless and clear black type: 100% WOOL: MADE IN ENGLAND. In fact the tailor had used this advertisement to ornamental advantage on both sleeves. […] I noticed that whenever the man hitched up his sleeves which he did every two or three minutes he did it very carefully so that the quality of his material would not be lost in the many rich folds of the dress. He also wore a gold chain round his neck (58).

After reading this passage, one might say that being rich only matters if you can show that you are rich – but that is only true to a certain extent. Excess, abundance and the visibility of waste (of money, time and labour) are certainly ways of emphasising one's privileged status, as Thorstein Veblen wrote about *the leisure class*,[50] but in order to speak of abundance or scarcity, there has to be something like a common sense norm that changes historically and geographically. Returning to the reservation I made about the display of wealth, the novel's narrator clarifies that the material from which the robe is made is

[50] Th. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, New York 1918, p. 102–114.

"not so strange these days", it is not unobtainable, at least not in the capital. This excess of ornamentation, the robe's owner's obsessive fear of losing the ribbon in the folds of the sleeve, and the artificiality of a gold chain hanging from the neck like a crown jewel – all seem to indicate a persistent endeavour to be perceived as privileged.

So far, I have tried to show the realist dimension of Achebe's writing, which, incidentally, is consistent with the writer's previously suggested affiliation of the writer to the realist generation. It was based on the accurate representation of different dimensions of social life at a specific historical moment – a few years after the recovery of independence – in order to reveal the contradictions that emerge in the language of nativist politics, which designs this reality, and in what actually happens in it. Finally, in order to better understand this aphoristic representation, one should consider all the elements described so far in isolation, as they help to shape the fabric of the entire city as a *façade*. I will explain in a moment what this superficiality is supposed to consist of, but first let us recall the description of Bori from the novel. The topography of the capital is sketched without much detail in the following extract: "from the fresh-smelling, modern water-front to the stinking, maggoty interior" (49). The division of space is dichotomous: a modern neighbourhood by the sea (a kind of prestigious area) and overcrowded suburbs, nothing in between. One can of course ask to what extent it is possible to have such dichotomous structures (which are simultaneously presented as realistic) as those articulated by Achebe. This strong polarisation serves here as a rhetorical reinforcement of the author's political critique. Since exposing the falsity of the indigenous rhetoric of decolonial domination requires pointing out the gap between this language and the reality of life, this gap is deliberately exaggerated.[51]

The rhetorical effect of reinforcing difference and the wealth gap allows us to comprehend the image of Bori's topography as a particular *façade* at the centre (represented much like a political discourse of nativism) that hides everything that is inconvenient to the narrative of progress and modernisation.

[51] Hence, it is not that I want to polarize the representations of the decolonial moment in my interpretation, that polarization is part of the novel itself.

The imposing seaside district is referred to as a "front" which conceals everything that should be hidden from view. This method of urban planning is of course not new; a pioneering description of the *façade* structure comes from Friedrich Engels, who used it to describe Manchester.[52] Manchester's large, neat and tidy business district is built on two sides of a wide, unpopulated intersection. Then the working-class neighbourhoods extend concentrically. Far beyond, the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie reside in villas on the surrounding hills and commute to the city centre via the business district. Therefore, as Engels notes, they do not even see the poor living conditions of the working population, which for them represents an ideal urban solution. It is striking that the same solution was applied in Bori: "We drove through wide, well-lit streets bearing the names of our well-known politicians and into obscure lanes named after some unknown small fish" (49).[53] Further evidence is provided by Obili's description of the awakening city:

> I walked for hours, keeping to the well-lit streets. […] As dawn came my head began to clear a little and I saw Bori stirring. I met a night-soil man carrying his bucket of ordure on top of a battered felt hat drawn down to hood his upper face while his nose and mouth were masked with a piece of black cloth like a gangster. I saw beggars sleeping under the eaves of luxurious department stores and a lunatic sitting wide awake by the basket of garbage he called his possession. The first red buses running empty passed me and I watched the street lights go off finally around six. I drank in all these details with the early morning air (64).

The *façade* structure is erected *to conceal what is to be hidden from view*. So what is to be concealed in Bori, or *who* is to be concealed? The passage quoted

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[52] F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England, from Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*, introduction E. Hobsbawm, London 1969.

[53] Obili, observing the city, thinks that he himself would not even decide to travel through these obscure lanes, it was the decision of Jean, the US ambassador. He wondered if it was really a random choice to make him see the districts he usually bypasses, or maybe a deliberate call to embarrass him.

above provides us with the answer – it is those who emerge from the darkness in the morning and then disappear into unsupervised streets or busy city traffic during the day: Beggars, homeless people, labourers who keep the city clean and take care of the buckets for excrement. A *façade* structure is threatened for a brief moment, a moment of its visibility, but that moment passes as quickly as it appeared.

CONCLUSIONS

I see the flourishing discourse of nativism as evidence of a long and painful process of *collecting a dismembered body* during and after decolonisation. Parts of that body are likely to be lost forever, and it is true, as some have argued, that the desire to seek them unconditionally can turn culture into cultural archaeology, into unproductive scattered remnants of a glorious past. I am not suggesting that nativism is now only considered part of the history that has shaped important debates over the last century, but at the same time I believe that we must recognise that once a body has been dismembered, even if it has been successfully reconnected, such process leaves more or less visible scars. Moreover, I wanted to focus neither on the folding (e.g. ethnography) nor on the wound (colonisation), but on the possibilities of getting out of the impasse. And Achebe as a novelist has managed to do such a challenging thing – when he describes rituals, it is not as a relic, when he uses a traditional form, it is only to transform it to fulfil new expectations. Following the insights of Bandele-Thomas and Thompson, I have reconstructed the most important historically changing positions on nativism. The reconstruction of this extensive discursive framework was crucial because it made it possible to show Achebe's attentive reading of nativism in dialogue with other concepts. Although quite critical of the idea itself and sensitised to false decolonial nativist politics, and aware of the dangers seen by Fanon and Hountondji (ossified culture and culturalism), Achebe has drawn inspiration from the past in at least three aspects of his work: he has used indigenous languages and traditional forms/genres in a delicate way and he has enhanced the self-esteem of post-colonised people.

What I intended to show by analysing his political novel, which marks the period of the author's growing interest in issues of political and social critique at the state level, is that Achebe's critique of nativism was complex and

multidimensional. He did not want to criticise nativism as such, but rather to show how the new governments in the decolonised states, which are a direct continuation of the temporary governments from the period of struggle for liberation from colonialism, instead of implementing policies that serve society as a whole, more or less consciously recreate the colonial systems of oppression, power and inequality. By plunging into corruption and the accumulation of their own wealth, they exacerbate inequalities and use false rhetoric to pose as representatives of the people. Achebe makes it clear in his description of the People's Organisation Party that the official nativist agenda is constantly compromised by the contradictory actions of its members.

The interpretation of the novel as an intervention into the political reality of decolonisation in the 1960s mirrors the argument Achebe makes in *The Trouble with Nigeria*. He explains that the problem of the title concerns the "failure of leadership" and politicians who are corrupt, selfish, vulgar, etc.[54] The revolutionary, newly formed party, the Common People's Convention, is not successful (due to financial inequality with the ruling party and their oppression as persecuted people), moreover, most people are not even aware of the possibility of shaping the world differently (they are cynical and choose not to participate in the conflict). This pessimistic ending reflects the reckoning character of the post-colonial literature of the 1960s. However, a more optimistic sense can also be derived from the novel: the nativist policies, even if misguided in the hands of corrupt governments, have increased people's political consciousness to the point where they are beginning to see a *façade* structure on which their society is built. Even if this does not immediately lead to a successful political movement, at least not in the context of the events recounted in *A Man of the People*, it is certainly seen as a positive effect of nativism.

[54] Ch. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, op. cit., p. 1–2.

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NOTA O AUTORCE

Izabela Poręba, magister filologii polskiej oraz publikowania cyfrowego i sieciowego, doktorantka literaturoznawstwa na Wydziale Filologicznym Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego. Przygotowuje dysertację pod kierunkiem dra hab. prof. UWr Mariana Bieleckiego na temat postkolonialnej strategii przepisania. Jest redaktorką afiliowaną czasopisma naukowego „Praktyka Teoretyczna" oraz członkinią Akademickiego Centrum Badawczego Ex-Centrum Olgi Tokarczuk. Najnowsze badania publikowała w „The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture. New Series", „Toruńskich Studiach Bibliologicznych", „Śląskich Studiach Polonistycznych", „Academic Journal of Modern Philology" i „Tematach i Kontekstach". Interesuje się przede wszystkim teorią i krytyką postkolonialną oraz współczesną literaturą światową.

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