

A Critical Study of Social Stratification in Selected Novels by Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi and Chinua Achebe

Ashraf Abdelbaky

B.A. in English language and literature (Beni-Suef University, Egypt), 2007

M.A. in English language and literature (Minia University, Egypt), 2014

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English



School of Humanities and Social Science

Faculty of Education and Arts

University of Newcastle, Australia

Supervisors:

A/Prof. Jesper Gulddal

(Principal Supervisor)

A/Prof. Alistair Rolls

(Co-Supervisor)

Professor. Ghada Abdel Hafeez

(Co-Supervisor)

April 2021

The University of Newcastle, Australia

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program
(RTP) Scholarship.

Statement Of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Ashraf Abdelbaky

1/4/2021

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, **Mr Mohamed Lotfy Ibrahim Abdelbaky** (1948-2009), who made me the man I am today. A sincere teacher and school principal, he always believed in the importance of education. He struggled to raise his five children until they graduated from university—his sincere advice is still engraved in my mind. He is my role model whose way of life is – and will be – an inspirational source for me. My dear father encouraged me back in 2008 to start doing my Master hoping to get a PhD.

Ashraf Mohamed Lotfy Ibrahim Abdelbaky

Acknowledgment

Alhamdulillah, all praise is due to Almighty Allah for His blessings and the strengths He has provided me to complete this thesis. I would like to express my deepest gratitude and special thanks to some people who have been blessed with their support throughout my PhD research. First, I am profoundly indebted to my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Jesper Gulddal, who provided me with generous and expert supervision. He has also been an incredible mentor and an example of an ideal supervisor. I am immensely grateful for his tremendous support in passing all the challenges in this journey, whether academic or personal.

Many thanks to Associate Professor Alistair Rolls for his extraordinary effort and touch on this thesis. Despite joining the supervision team at the very end, his generous willingness to give his time to read my thesis has been very much appreciated.

Particular thanks go to Professor Ghada Abdelhafeez, my co-supervisor, for her valuable guidance and encouragement throughout the last ten years. Thanks for her sincere support; she has always been there to help and motivate me to accomplish my PhD thesis.

I am also grateful to Professor Roland Boer for giving me the chance to come to the University of Newcastle in 2015 as a visiting academic in a mission program sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education in Egypt. Thanks for being my principal supervisor at the beginning of this journey and for all the pearls of wisdom I have learnt from you.

I am also thankful to all my friends who supported me on this journey: My university friends whom I worked with in the International Students Department, University of Newcastle Islamic Society and Newcastle Arab Students Society; my community friends Muhammad Thalal, Abdelmen Swan, Sheikh Mohammed Ali, Abdirahman Odowa and Mohammed Abdullah Osman (Al-Zool); and my childhood friends Ahmed Shaban, Hatem Bakry, Ahmed Bakry, and my dear inspirational friend Alaa Abdulhady.

I also owe a deep debt of heartfelt gratitude to my dear wife, Suzan, for the supportive and stimulating environment she has provided for me and the strength she has inspired me with. Thanks for giving much care to our beloved daughter Layla. Special thanks to my late father-in-law for being keen on encouraging me to complete my PhD thesis.

“Thank you” is not enough to express my gratitude for my dear mother, who inspires me with her generous heart, unconditional love and continuous praying for me. Great Thanks to my siblings: Manal, Ahmed, Marwa and in particular my dearest younger brother, Osama, who always assists me and sacrifices his time looking after my dear mother.

Abstract

This study examines social stratification in the Egyptian society before and after the 1952 revolution, as represented in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's novels *al-Ard* (1954) and *al-Fallah* (1967). It also analyses the pre-colonial and colonial Nigerian Igbo society represented in Chinua Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964). In doing so, the study draws upon Max Weber's three-dimensional approach of social stratification (class, status, and party) to interrogate these societies. Through using this methodology, I am not only interpreting social stratification in these novels but also presenting how the authors try to critique their society and how they use literature to introduce their specific agendas. Both Egypt and Nigeria have unique histories, cultures, and social structures. Examining social stratification in the chosen Egyptian and Nigerian novels provides new angles of discussion on religion, culture, and postcolonialism. The colonial and postcolonial encounters of these two countries not only continue to recur today but continue to determine the destiny of millions of people. This analysis argues that social order representations in these societies show that al-Sharqawi's novels develop a new form of socialist realism (i.e., new realism) and that Achebe's novels employ ethnographic realism. This study redirects the scholar's attention to the fields of socialist realism and ethnographic realism in literature.

Table of Contents

Statement Of Originality	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgment	iii
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
Research Aims	3
Research Questions	3
Research Methodology	4
Research Significance	5
Research Organisation	6
Chapter 1.Social Stratification: A Theoretical Framework and Literary Background	7
1.1 Max Weber’s Approach to Social Stratification: A Theoretical Framework	8
1.2 Social Stratification in Egyptian Novels: A Literary Background	14
1.3 Social Stratification in Nigerian Novels: A Literary Background	39
1.4 Conclusion	54
Chapter 2.Socialist Realism Revisited: A Critical Analysis of Social Stratification in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi’s <i>al-Ard</i>	56
2.1 Al-Sharqawi’s <i>al-Ard</i> as a Prototype of New Realism	56
2.2 <i>Al-Ard</i> ’s Characters as Models of New Realism	62
2.3 The Significance of the Setting in <i>al-Ard</i> ’s New Realism	79
2.4 Formal Signals of Class: Titles, Clothes, and Language	87
2.5 Conclusion	91

Chapter 3.Social Stratification in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi’s Post-Revolution Village in <i>al-Fallah</i>	93
3.1 Contextualising Socialist Realism in al-Sharqawi’s <i>al-Fallah</i>	93
3.2 Class, Status, and Party in <i>al-Fallah</i>	100
3.3 The Universality of the Setting in <i>al-Fallah</i>	120
3.4 Signs of Class: Titles, Clothing, and Language	125
3.5 Conclusion	130
Chapter 4.Social Stratification of Pre-Colonial Igbo Society in Chinua Achebe’s <i>Things Fall Apart</i>	132
4.1 Introduction	132
4.2 Social Structure in Pre-colonial Umuofia	134
4.3 The Influence of Colonialism on Igbo Social Stratification	159
4.4 Conclusion	166
Chapter 5.Social Stratification of Colonial Igbo Society in Chinua Achebe’s <i>Arrow of God</i>	169
5.1 Introduction	169
5.2 The Classless Society of the Pre-colonial Igbo	171
5.3 The British Class-oriented Society	192
5.4 Conclusion	198
Conclusion	200
Works Cited	207

Introduction

Literature does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it arises from historical conditions, social transformations, and individual experiences. Literary creation cannot do without the social, cultural, historical context, the writer's ideology, and the critical dimension influenced by social developments. Social developments usually result in the emergence of complex social structures, which appear clearly when these societies' social stratification is studied. The most widespread critical lens used to interpret social structures has been the Marxist approach, which links social classes to the ownership of the means of production. However, this approach has been criticised for failing to sufficiently consider the complexity of social structures in modern societies and the expansion of the social hierarchy. Therefore, critical studies have looked to broader approaches such as Max Weber's three-dimensional social stratification: class, status, and party.

The present study draws upon Weber's approach to scrutinise social stratification in four selected Egyptian and Nigerian novels. The two Egyptian novels are *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* by Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, and the two Nigerian ones are *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe. The study seeks to identify how these novels show the impact of both the ruling regime and colonisation on the social hierarchy of Egyptian and Igbo society, respectively. While *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* are concerned with Egyptian society before and after the 1952 revolution, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* deal with Igbo society in the pre-colonial and British colonial periods.

Moreover, given the authors' particular political tendencies, this study seeks to identify how the Egyptian novels represent a new form of socialist realism and how the Nigerian novels manifest ethnographic realism. On the one hand, socialist realism was first developed in a European context and presupposed an industrial economy that sharply divided the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The impact of colonialism and the different cultural make-up of Arab countries created a unique social structure that incites Arab authors to represent such conditions in their

literary works. On the other hand, critical studies of societies represented in literature have paved the way for literary criticism to integrate with other fields such as anthropology and sociology. Among such integrative attempts is ethnographic realism, which discusses literary works written based on the author's own experiences and observations.

There are four reasons for conducting this study. First, Egyptian and Igbo societies have a rich history and unique social, political, and economic systems, making it essential to analyse how these constituents have influenced their social dynamics and hierarchies. Second, both writers witnessed significant political and social challenges that inspired their literary works, some of which are considered the most influential in literary history. Third, the four novels selected in this study are regarded as masterpieces by Arabic and African critics, as explained later in the analysis. Finally, there has been a tendency among previous studies of Egyptian and Nigerian novels to limit discussion to those novels' thematic and technical aspects. Though some critical studies have been conducted on the representation of social classes, there is still a scarcity of works examining and comparing social stratification in Egyptian and Nigerian novels. One reason for this is that such studies require a complete understanding of the language and culture in which the text was initially written.

Nevertheless, of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's novels, only *al-Ard* has been translated into English (under the title *Egyptian Earth*), French, Russian, and other languages. The Nigerian novels are written in English with some embedded Igbo terms and proverbs. *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into over fifty different languages, including French, Arabic, German, Spanish, and Chinese, while *Arrow of God* is translated into French and German. The critical discussion in this study is based upon a reading of the original texts, not the translated ones. Quotations from *al-Fallah* are accompanied by my own translations of the Arabic text. In some instances, these translations reflect the difficulty of rendering Arabic cultural and religious terms with no English equivalent. In the case of *al-Ard*, the English translation overlooks many critically significant parts

in the source text, most of which are in the colloquial Egyptian dialect. As a result, for the purposes of citation, I have relied on the translated version, *Egyptian Earth*, as far as possible, supplementing when necessary my own translations of the missing parts from the original Arabic version, *al-Ard*. One of the challenges faced in the course of this thesis has been the lack of secondary resources in English on Egyptian novels, especially *al-Fallah*. The Arabic-language materials used are translated into English by me and cited accordingly.

Research Aims

This study critically examines social stratification in Egyptian and Igbo society during periods of political upheavals in the 20th century, represented in the four selected Egyptian and Nigerian novels. It traces the change in social structure of the Egyptian Society before and after the revolution of 1952 and that of Igbo society before and after British colonisation. Through this analysis, this study aims to show why these Egyptian and Nigerian novels can be considered an exhibition of new forms of socialist realism and ethnographic realism, respectively, in light of their authors' personal experiences and political ideologies. Also, it is intended to highlight why this analysis of these novels under study represents an essential contribution to the analysis of postcolonial and African works of literature and modern Arabic literature, and our understanding of Egyptian and Nigerian societies and history.

Research Questions

It is anticipated that the researcher will be able to answer the following questions by the end of the study:

1. How does a Weberian analysis of al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* demonstrate how the ruling regime in Egypt before and after the 1952 revolution transformed the social structure of Egyptian society?

2. How do al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* represent a new form of socialist realism, and how can the Weberian analysis of social stratification be used to highlight this?
3. How does a critical analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* reveal the role of British colonisation in transforming the structure of Igbo society?
4. How do Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* use ethnographic realism to address the social stratification of pre-colonial and colonial Igbo society?
5. What are the differences between the Igbo society's social structure and that of the British coloniser in light of the Weberian approach?
6. Does critical analysis of these four novels provide an insight into their authors' political or religious ideologies?

Research Methodology

The Weberian tri-dimensional approach to class stratification is the theoretical cornerstone of this study. Weber's theory is drawn from his article "The Distribution of Power Within the Community: Classes, *Stände*, Parties", which is translated into English by Dagmar Waters et al. (2010). To better elucidate the Weberian approach, I will briefly outline Karl Marx's theory of class, which assumes that the relationship to the means of production determines a people's class and compare it to the much broader theory of social stratification developed by Weber. According to Weber, society's hierarchical arrangement has three parameters: class, status and party. He believes that class stratification is determined by economic order, while status stratification is judged according to other criteria such as personal skills, achievement, birth and occupation, though it is sometimes economically conditioned. Weber also maintains that political affiliations or belonging to a party can confer power and social status to an individual. Catherine Brennan explains Weber's opinion regarding status stratification and class stratification, saying that "when the acquisition and distribution of goods take place in a relatively stable economic environment,

stratification by status will prevail. But under conditions of technological and economic change, class stratification will predominate” (164).

Given the scope of its social stratification, which is both broader and more detailed than that of Marx, the Weberian approach makes it possible to analyse the literary works examined in this study in terms of the different dimensions of social stratification; it will not restrict this analysis to only one dimension, namely the economic one. Furthermore, since this study is concerned with examining the social structure of 20th-century societies (i.e., Egyptian society and Nigerian society), Weber’s approach is more suitable, as such societies are more complex and varied socially, economically, and politically than older societies. The political and social patterns of these modern societies were influenced by colonialism. They also have different means of production, leading to social variations. Although *Things Fall Apart* depicts the life of the pre-colonial traditional Igbo society, which might be said to be rather old; the Weberian approach is still more appropriate to be used in the critical analysis of this novel for two reasons: first, this old traditional society seems highly complex with all the African qualities and traditions it has, and second, the broadness of the Weberian approach does not make it fall short in analysing the less complicated traditional old societies. These various factors make a Weberian approach more appropriate in the present study than a typical Marxist one.

Research Significance

The thesis aims to identify some of the socio-political circumstances and cultural aspects of Arab and African societies represented in fiction, a field that still needs more research and analysis. It is expected to contribute to the existing literature in three different ways:

- First, the study not only examines how al-Sharqawi and Achebe address social stratification in their novels, but it also discusses the way in which they call for reforms or revolutionary action through their writing.

- Second, it highlights the role of Arabic and African literary works in resisting imperial hegemony in Arab and African societies, which, in turn, has helped give birth to a rich history of Arabic and African literature.
- Third, this study, along with previous critical studies conducted in the field, is expected to enrich critical research by highlighting the socio-political nature of Arab and African societies and reviving scholarly interest in socialist realism and ethnographic realism within the deep structure of the modern Arabic and African novels.

Research Organisation

This thesis is divided into an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction puts forward the research aim, the research questions, the method, and the organisation of the study. The literary background and theoretical framework are discussed in Chapter One. This part analyses Max Weber's approach to social stratification and presents a literature review of Egypt's social structure before and after the 1952 revolution and of Igbo society before and after the period of British colonialism. It also seeks to identify how the literary strategies of socialist realism and ethnographic realism are employed in Egyptian and African novels. Chapters Two and Three apply Weberian theory to *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah*, respectively, while Chapters Four and Five apply this theory to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. The main objective of Chapters Two and Three is to trace the contextualisation of socialist realism in a new agrarian Arab context, highlighting the social stratification of Egyptian society before and after the 1952 revolution. Chapters Four and Five are concerned with analysing and comparing the social structure of traditional Igbo society and modern British society to relate them to Achebe's political tendencies and aspirations. More detailed descriptions of each objective and analysis are given in the respective chapters. The Conclusion provides a summary and an evaluation of the thesis as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 1. Social Stratification: A Theoretical Framework and Literary

Background

This chapter discusses the manifestation of social stratification in both Egyptian society before and after the 1952 revolution and Nigerian Igbo society before and during colonisation. I discuss Max Weber's social stratification approach to examine the presentation of social structure in the selected novels. I also investigate what happens when socialist realism, which originates in a Western-European industrial context, is exported and applied in a different, non-Western setting. I trace the emergence of socialist realism in Arabic literature, particularly in Egyptian novels. In the Egyptian context, I examine how the rise of Arabic nationalism and socialism, and the 1952 revolution, brought about a unique form of socialist realism in Arabic literature. In the Nigerian context, I study how the standard form of colonialism and postcolonial thinking developed before and after independence. Moreover, I analyse how these two political and historical paths arguably result in different literary styles and forms, leading to socialist realism in the Egyptian novels and what I shall call ethnographic realism in the Nigerian novels.

In this chapter, I examine the origins and history of socialist realism; the literary genre developed from Marxist philosophy, initially in the Soviet Union. It spread to Western Europe first, particularly France and Germany, before moving internationally to colonised and semi-colonised countries. I present the standard definitions of socialist realism, exploring how it has become a significant literary genre, which has provided an insider's view of Marxism's development in Arabic literature since it emerged as a direct response to a long period of Western colonisation. Besides, I examine how it has gained attention as a literary genre through which writers could call attention to social and political issues concerning class conflict, class consciousness, class solidarity, and social justice. In this respect, I draw upon the insights of influential Arab critics Husayn Muruwwa, Mahmoud Amin al-Alim, and Abdel-Azim Anis to

examine the specific development and transformations of socialist realism in the Arab world in general and in Egypt in particular.

This chapter also presents how ethnographic realism manifests itself in African novels. It sheds light on the impact of colonisation on modern African literature, focusing on the history of revolutionary ideas in African literature and how writers use their work to reject stereotypical images of Africa, favouring a more faithful image of the African people and their values and traditions. Such writers present ethnographic literary works that introduce different aspects of African culture. To this end, I discuss some influential African writers and critics whose work have played a significant role in defending their nations against the coloniser.

1.1 Max Weber's Approach to Social Stratification: A Theoretical Framework

Social stratification is an essential concept in many fields, including sociology, psychology, history, and literature. For centuries, theorists and sociologists have analysed the concept of class stratification. In his book *Social Class and Stratification*, Peter Saunders defines stratification, linking it to the geological layers of rocks that form the earth's crust. Like these rocky layers, "the different 'layers' or strata of social groups [...] are thought to be arranged, one on top of the other, in various human societies" (1). However, he adds that, unlike the geological strata which do not interact with each other, "in even the most rigid and hierarchical of societies there is some degree of interaction between groups at the top and those at the bottom" (3). So social mobility operates as "one group may 'rise' in power and status over time while another group may 'fall'" (3).

The most prominent theoretical analyses of social class are those of Karl Marx and Max Weber. It should be noted that Marx's theory of class, or his class analysis, is not meant to show class stratification within society. Instead, Marx's class theory should be understood and evaluated for its primary purpose, that is, "as an analytical tool for the explanation of the structural change in societies characterised by a capitalist mode of production" (Stolzman and Gamberg 106). Hence,

Marx is mainly concerned with social change within the capitalist system rather than social strata.

In the opening of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels explain:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (33)

Thus, the distinctive feature of the capitalist system, or “the epoch of the bourgeoisie”, as described by Marx and Engels, is social bilateralism. Marx and Engels believed that in comparison to the societies “in the earlier epochs of history” (34), which are conceived of as constituting differentiated classes and complex social stratification, capitalist societies are arranged into “two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat” (34). On the one side, the bourgeoisie is defined as “the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour,” while the proletariat refers to “the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live” (33).

It is essential to understand that peasants formed the majority in some societies in Marx’s time, although they did not necessarily form the majority in his countries of reference (i.e., Britain, France and Germany). They had to compete with the bourgeoisie, who had the upper hand in everything: “the lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class” (Marx and Engels 48). There was no win-win outcome in this competition, as the middle classes could not fulfil the growing demands of markets “because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production” (45). Hence, they perish and disappear in

the face of modern industry and sink gradually into the proletariat. In the sense that this middle class gave up its fight to survive and to “roll back the wheel of history,” their fight is not seen as “revolutionary,” but “conservative” (49).

In light of this, Marx’s social stratification is based only on relations to production, according to which society is classified into two major classes (i.e., the bourgeoisie and the proletariat). However, Marx and Engels affirm that the social conflict between these two classes is at the core of capitalism, which eventually causes its collapse and the emergence of socialism, then communism. For them, “not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons — the modern working class — the proletarians” (43). They believe that communist society can resolve this social stratification by giving everyone equal ownership of the means of production.

Max Weber agrees with Marx that economic factors determine social stratification. In this respect, Weber’s theory does not reject that of Marx; instead, it develops and extends it. Weber stresses that economic factors are not enough to define people’s position within the class structure. He contends that Marx’s social stratification view is straightforward, and he introduces a theory of social stratification based on three components: classes, *Stände* (status groups), and parties. This tridimensional approach shows how wealth, prestige and power are all intertwined.

In his essay “The Distribution of Power Within the Community: Classes, *Stände*, Parties”, Weber argues that the distribution of power or “the chance of a person or a group to enforce their own will even against the resistance of others involved” (137) is determined not only by the economic order (class) but also by the social order (status) or the legal order (party) of this person or these people: “social honour (or prestige) can also be the basis for power...The legal order [party] is an additional factor that enhances the chance to possess the power” (138). Hence, to apply a Weberian approach, it is first necessary to understand the difference between these three terms. For Weber, the economic order is “merely the way in which the economic goods and

services are distributed” (138). Weber places people who have a similar level of wealth or property in the same class. Accordingly, he believes that people can be classified economically as propertied and propertyless. “Class situation”, therefore, can only be determined by wealth or property, i.e., economic situation (“The Distribution of Power” 139). He also subclassifies propertied people into four groups. The first group consists of those who own property such as “residential houses, factories, depots, or stores, agriculturally usable land” (139), whether on a large or small scale. The propertied can also be those who possess “mines, domestic animals, people (slaves)” (139). Also, those possessing the tools of production or capital (money or goods) are considered to belong to this class. Finally, those with ownership of the products of their own labour or the efforts of someone else’s labour fall under this classification (139).

On the other hand, the assetless or propertyless are those who “have nothing to offer but their labour itself or the products created by their own labour” to be able to survive (“The Distribution of Power” 138-139). According to Weber, this category of labour-providers can be subclassified according to the types of service or labour they provide, or “whether they provide a continuous or discontinuous relationship to the recipient” (140). In this way, the class situation is nothing but a “market situation” (140). Weber adds that this class situation primes people for “communal action” such as revolts or protests by workers against their masters (140). Social action, or what Weber also calls “the mass action by the members of the class” (140), is not only influenced by a “shared intense feeling about a similar situation, especially an economic one” (141), but it can also emerge from other cultural elements such as “intellectual conditions” (140). Education, for example, can assist the rise of people and lead to social awareness or consciousness.

Brennan discusses how organising the individuals in the same class situation helps technically in raising class-consciousness organisation. Brennan takes the case of the rural proletariat in East Elbe as an example to examine the rise of their consciousness. He explains that

“technical problems of organisation were exceedingly difficult because these agricultural workers were dispersed far over the land.” (142). According to Weber, “the rural proletariat were able to develop an anti-landlord class consciousness under normal political conditions only in an isolated fashion against *individual* masters, who customarily combined a naive brutality with camaraderie” (qtd. in Brennan 142-143).

Weber also discusses the term *Stände*, or “status group” or “social order,” and maintains that while classes are stratified according to their relations to production and the acquisition of goods, *Stände* “are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by specific lifestyles” (“The Distribution of Power” 148). People’s lifestyles are not only affected by their economic situation but also by other aspects. Thus, although social order, or prestige, “is highly determined by the economic order, and in its turn reacts upon it” (“The Distribution of Power” 138), the honour of a *Stände* is based on other qualities and qualifications, including “marital, physical, and psychological eligibility” (145). Weber claims that each occupation, for example, is a status group. In this sense, people who share high prestige belong to the same status group regardless of their wealth or property level. Therefore, the different stratum of propertied and propertyless people can have the same high social order or status as other classes, but each for different aspects.

Nevertheless, the sociological structure of what Weber terms “parties” depends on the “kind of communal action” they seek to influence society. In this sense, communist parties should seek to achieve the principles of communism, trade unions should seek to secure improvements in the working conditions of people, and so on. For Weber, parties can have members from different classes and status groups, as “they neither have to be pure ‘class’ parties nor pure *Stände*-related parties” (149). To attain power, parties can resort to various means, including violent or disruptive actions, or “campaigning for votes with coarse or subtle means using money, social influence,

power of speech, leading questions, suggestion, and crude hoaxes, to the point of rougher or more elaborate tactics of obstruction within parliamentary bodies” (149).

Reinhard Bendix discusses the contrast Weber made between the concept of *Stand* or status group and class:

For Weber as for Marx, the basic condition of “class” lay in the unequal distribution of economic power and hence the unequal distribution of opportunity. But for Weber this economic determination did not exhaust the conditions of group formation. A concept had to be formulated that would encompass the influence of ideas upon the formation of groups without losing sight of economic conditions. In contrast to the economically determined “class situation” we wish to designate as “status situation” every typical component of the life fate of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*. (105-106)

Bendix explains that Weber did not consider the unequal distribution of economic power as the only factor determining class condition. Although Marx and Weber agreed the economic situation is the primary determinant of class situations, Marx’s analysis is not inclusive. It is mono-dimensional, as it does not explore the other aspects that can determine how groups are formed, which Weber looks at in his multidimensional analysis of class stratification.

Thus, rather than restricting my analysis in the present thesis to a single dimension, which is to say, the economic one, the broader and more detailed scope of social stratification offered by Weber’s approach will make it possible for me to examine my corpus of literary works in terms of the different dimensions of social stratification that they present. Indeed, Weber’s approach is particularly well-suited to my purposes since twentieth-century Egypt and Nigeria’s social structure is socially, economically, and politically complicated. The political, as well as social patterns of both these modern societies were influenced by colonialism. They also had different means of production that led to highly complex social stratification. Consequently, the current

study draws upon Weber's insights into the concept of social stratification. It examines how each social stratum has its values and ideologies. Moreover, it highlights the emergence of more than one stratum within each class and how they share some similarities in belonging to the same social class but differ in their status.

1.2 Social Stratification in Egyptian Novels: A literary Background

This section is divided into three parts. Part One discusses the Egyptian social structure before and after the revolution of 1952. Part Two highlights the origin and characteristics of socialist realism in general and how it is adapted in the Arab context to present a new form called "new realism". Part Three briefly introduces the life and works of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi whose two Arabic novels are the subject of this study's analysis.

1.2.1 Social Stratification in Egypt Before and After the 1952 Revolution

This study examines two Egyptian novels, al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah*. The first covers the period of the 1930s (before the 1952 revolution); the second revolves around the 1960s (after the 1952 revolution). I am concerned in this section with the social stratification of Egypt throughout these two periods. This will enable an understanding of Egyptian socialism through the literary interpretation of these novels. The revolution of 1952 put an end to the monarchy and the feudalist landlords. Although the republican regime attempted to bridge and dissolve the social gap between Egypt's social classes after the revolution, some status differences continued to exist. Before the revolution, there was a distinct difference between the social structure of the Egyptian city and that of the village, with the latter having a less sharply stratified population. Selma Botman states that most Egyptians were "fellahin", or peasants, who lived in the villages "in

primitive mud-brick dwellings shared with farm animals” (73); she adds that social mobility from the village to the city was in most cases “unrealistic” (6).

In contrast, those in urban areas, despite being dependent on the villages’ agricultural activities, were socially quite different. Before the revolution of 1952, Egyptian urban society was divided into three principal classes: upper, middle, and lower. The upper classes included landlords, cabinet ministers, parliament members, high-ranking army officers and the new industrial bourgeoisie. They sought to strengthen themselves by becoming “fused and intermarried until they became indistinguishable” (Marsot 110). Nepotism and favouritism dominated their relationships: they controlled political life and sought to extend their political power under patronage. During the rule of Sidqi Pasha in the 1930s, “party politics” (*al-hizbiyyah*) had become synonymous with personal corruption and patronage” (Gordon 14). Specific titles, such as *Pasha* and *Bey*¹, were granted to this class members as a sign of nobility and high rank. In his article “The Egyptian Revolution”, Gamal Abdel Nasser describes pre-revolution nepotism after the 1939 Treaty: “merit was no criterion for rewards, nor was there any equality of opportunity; privileges were reserved for relatives and favorites of ministers in power” (202). The upper class used religious figures as tools to support them, such as “the ulema² [sic] and the leading imams (prayer leaders)”, who “have acquired the same social and religious authority and prestige (though not function) as the clergy in Christian communities” (Botman 110).

¹ *Pasha* and *Bey* are Ottoman courtesy titles, traditionally applied to leaders or rulers at the time of the Ottoman Empire, which then continued to be used in the Arab countries beyond the Ottoman rule. Sometimes, *Bey* appears as *Bayh* or *Beik*.

² Ulama are the religious scholars; singular; alim.

The urban middle class was not socially or politically crucial before the 1952 revolution. They were of higher or lower levels. This class had a deal of internal social diversity, as it was linked to both the higher and the lower class. The higher middle class was composed of intellectuals, university graduates, government officials, small merchants, and owners of small businesses (Messiri 37). This middle class was not strong enough, which resulted in the political dominance of the “conservative landed elite” (Botman 150). Botman believes that if Egypt had had a stronger middle class under the monarchy, “it might have acted in defense of democratic practice for its own class interests” and “might have tried to disable the highly placed agricultural landlords who regularly disrupted the course of liberalism and might have succeeded in reducing their hegemonic political control” (150). However, the urban lower class were those closest to the peasants in the village and were the working classes “whether industrial or craftsmen, servants, peddlers or office-boys” (Messeri 37). Most of this class were “illiterate” (37).

Nevertheless, this social differentiation was not so different in the village from that in the city. On top of the rural social stratification were the landowners, who were absent from the village most of the time. Below the landowners were the government representatives such as the village mayor, *Omda*³ or *Sheikh albalad*. Such positions “were the prerogative of the famil[ies] highest in status and wealth within the village set-up” (Baraka 19). However, the village

³ *Omda* (or *Umda*) is the chief or the mayor of the village. From the reign of the Ancient Egyptians to that of Muhammad Ali, “village sheikh” was used instead of *Omda*, both of which refer to the chief of the village. After Muhammad Ali’s period, *Omda* was commonly used to refer to such a local ruler who is responsible for maintaining stability and security in the village. He used to be selected by popular votes, and to work without any pay to gain some reverence and stature among the people. However, this role started to disappear after 1952 revolution and was replaced by a police station except in the very small villages where the *Omda* is appointed by the government (Fahmy 229).

merchants, the peasant landowners and village's religious men, the literate people such as letter writers, postmasters and teachers were regarded as people from the rural lower middle class.

Although the isolation between the Egyptian cities and villages resulted in differences in the social stratification of both, the acquisition of social status in urban and rural areas was mainly based on land ownership. In other words, family status was judged according to inherited land: when a family lost its land, it lost its status. Social mobility within the village could be acquired in other ways, such as through marriages of convenience and education; however, these had to be associated with landholding. The economic and social gap between the upper class, and the middle and lower class, increased so much under the monarchy that an uprising or a national revolution became necessary. Al-Sayed Yassin explains that this uprising aimed to reconstruct the social structure to make it more egalitarian and allow the lower and middle classes to lead a happy life (199). He adds that this could be achieved by "eliminating the feudalist and capitalist stratum who exploited the people and monopolised the national resources and their wealth" (199). Consequently, the revolution of 1952 came not only to eliminate monarchy but also to eradicate feudalism, and thereby "reshaping Egyptian social stratification" (199).

The revolution was led by the military officers, "primarily from middle and lower class background" (Johnson 163), at the head of whom was Gamal Abdel Nasser, "a postman's son from Upper Egypt" (163). Saad Eddin Ibrahim contends that the officers who launched the 1952 revolution "were all from the middle petit-bourgeois class" (Johnson 117) and that they entered the Egyptian Military Academy as a result of the Egyptian Treaty of 1936, "which allowed the Egyptian government a greater measure of freedom to build a bigger national army" (117). These army officers seized Egypt's political power and forced the king and his family into exile abroad. From 1952 to 1960, the army embarked on development projects that led to the absorption of a large peasantry segment into the working class. The expansion of education led to a steady increase in the size of the Egyptian middle class. The Agrarian Reform, which was passed in the

same year, was in favour of the peasants, as it prohibited the landlords from owning “more than 200 feddans⁴ of land” and seizing land, which “was then redistributed to the peasantry in parcels of not more than 5 feddans each” (164). After this reform, “agricultural cooperatives were expanded and became an important part of the redistribution plans” (165).

Moreover, the National Charter of 1962 and the Constitution of 1964 were important as they “engender[ed] basic changes in the structure of the Egyptian society and advocate[d] a new form of social organisation which was socialistic in nature and national in scope” (Abu-Laban 179). The Charter asserted socialist principles, which included “destruction of imperialism”, “ending of feudalism”, “ending monopoly and the domination of capital over the Government”, “building of a powerful national army”, and “establishment of a sound democratic system” (Johnson 3). Such socio-political measures came to be known as “Arab Socialism” (Ibrahim 119).

All these changes and principles had a tremendous impact on Egypt’s social structure, so much so that this revolution is regarded as a “fully-fledged social revolution, transforming the role of the state and the structure of society in mid-century Egypt” (Ibrahim 117). Ibrahim notes the revolution led to “a sociopolitical coalition of three social classes: the middle petite bourgeoisie, the urban working class, and the rural poor” (117). The coalition targeted the upper-class landed bourgeoisie or the feudalists. As a result, the holdings owned by the old upper class were reduced, and this class lost a lot of social privileges, including their social titles, which led to most of them leaving Egypt. Those who stayed avoided public life.

With the end of the monarchy and the old upper class, power and high status were seized by the army elites (the leaders of revolution) and those who would technically serve the

⁴ An Arabic unit of area equal to 1.038 acres.

government. Although the 1952 revolution did not seem to be designed for the specific advancement of the middle class or the *petite bourgeoisie*, the most significant benefit was conferred on this class. Afterwards, Egyptian rulers came mainly from this class and “consequently symbolised its values, aspirations, and also its limitations” (Ibrahim 120). The army and technical elites enjoyed a better social standard than that of the rest of the Egyptians. They formed a new upper class, most of whom came from the pre-revolutionary middle class and others from rural areas. According to other criteria, such as competence and reliability, its members were selected not according to their economic status.

Below this new upper class was the middle class of salaried or self-employed professionals and senior army officers. However, there was no clear-cut line between the new upper and middle classes because their backgrounds and professions were similar. The only real difference was in the amount of authority the upper class held. Also, upward social mobility started to operate within these classes: “The removal of every member of the older upper class from every position of political and economic power automatically meant an opening and an opportunity for a middle-class member to move up and fill the vacancy” (Ibrahim 120). Below the middle class, there was a lower class, consisting of unskilled people with no substantial income and rural origins.

The post-revolutionary rural social structure of Egypt almost persisted, with the elimination of the absentee landlords. However, the Agrarian Reform laws and the redistribution of lands allowed some of the remnants of feudalism to have up to 200 *feddans* of land and the peasants who previously had no land to acquire some. However, many were still without land, “and [...] had to rely exclusively on income from land tenancy and from casual labor” (Oweis 50). With the increase of the salaried positions in the city, many villagers migrated to the city, yet others stayed in the village and worked on lands. The kinship did not have the same power to control the village’s relationships as it had before the revolution. In some villages, organisations such as cooperatives and political parties started to substitute the family’s role, with the aim of

“expand[ing] the social base of the regime to the lower classes that had previously been excluded from political life” (Hibbard 58).

1.2.2 Socialist Realism in Arabic Novels

Socialist realism has a profound impact in many fields, one of which is literature. Socialist realism can provide a genuine basis for understanding society’s social stratification or structure and its development and changes throughout history, including social mobility. This influence of socialism on literature and literary criticism reached its peak with Soviet propaganda, including literary works, which promoted socialism and attacked capitalism. In the early 1930s, socialist realism was a new school of writing that met a perceived need for literary works in a new way that was better aligned with the general socialist agenda.

Socialist Realism: Emergence, Features and Development

There is no one fixed definition of socialist realism because socialism varies according to writers, places, times, and the nature of creative practices. It arose from the Marxist view of literature and art, specifically from writers’ experiences in the Soviet Union. It emerged as a stream of literature and criticism in the Soviet Writers Conference in 1934. Attending writers committed themselves to the aims and struggle of the working class. In this respect, Maxim Gorky, the prominent Russian and Soviet writer, is regarded as one of the first exponents and founders of socialist realism. Gorky et al. shared Tolstoy’s hatred of capitalism in Russia. His view of capitalism as the enemy is manifested in his statement, made at 1934 Congress, that:

It would be silly and even criminal to underestimate the enemy’s strength. We are all perfectly well aware of the strength of his industrial technique – particularly that of the war

industries, which eventually will be directed against us, but will, inevitably, provoke a worldwide social revolution and destroy capitalism. (par. 50)

For Gorky et al., the best way to fight and overcome this enemy was through literature. He stressed that socialist works should focus on realistic representation of society. They recommended that these works might not be purely fictional, but that they should contain elements of nonfiction, such as histories “of towns once ruled by independent princes or located on the old borders” related through “sketches and stories” (Gorky et al. par. 50). Although Gorky died two years after making his speech at the conference, his role in promoting socialist realism is essential. Gorky looked to “the political and organisational strength which were growing among workers and began a life-long association with Lenin and the Bolsheviks” (qtd. in Kelly 109). This was the mood in which his works *Mother* (1906), *Enemies* (1906) and others were produced. Significantly, Gorky’s *Mother* is considered the first novel of revolutionary struggle embodying the principles of socialist realism; indeed, it demonstrates most of the characteristics of socialist realism that Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov, a Soviet Communist Party leader, would propose in 1934. In addition to maintaining historical accuracy, “the novel ingrains socialist thinking in his or her readers by interpreting real-life conditions from a Marxist perspective” (Zhu 9).

Socialist realism inherited the main principle of nineteenth-century realism. It resembled the earlier writings of realism in attempting to offer a detailed representation of reality. Realism emerged as a literary trend in France in 1832 when the French writer Honoré de Balzac conceived a vast series of novels, novellas and analytical essays known as *La Comédie humaine*. Balzac delineated the social forces shaping French society and described the different social classes: the aristocracy, the upper and middle classes, the urban working classes, the peasant class, and the industrial class. It should be noted that there was a controversy over whether to consider Balzac a realist or a romanticist. The first part of *La Comédie humaine*, “*Études de mœurs*” (“Studies of Manners”), is explicitly concerned with the social manners and varieties of human beings, and it is

in this part where “Balzac’s ‘realist’ style is most in evidence” (Somerset 81). Yet, the second two parts, *Études philosophiques* and the *Études analytiques* (“*Philosophical Studies* and *Analytical Studies*”), clearly present Balzac’s romantic vision of human beings, and in these sections, as Richard Somerset states, Balzac tends “to use the voice of impassioned insight rather than the voice of objective Realism” (82). Still, this strange duality makes many critics, such as Ferdinand Brunetiere and Émile Zola, appraise him as the founder of the Realism Movement in France. His remarkable realism and primary interest in social issues were so crucial that Engels considers him “a far greater master of realism” (3). Balzac’s detailed presentation of the history of the French society during the restoration period (1815–30) and the monarchy (1830–48) is so influential on Engels that he writes he has learned from it “more than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period together” (3).

It is noteworthy that socialist realism emerged in response to critical realism. Whereas critical realism emerged under capitalism in Europe, socialist realism emerged under socialism in Russia. Notably, it began in the Soviet Union with a political agenda, rather than a literary one, as writers were instructed to represent workers’ reality and peasants’ everyday lives. Some felt that this entailed a sacrifice of their artistic status: no longer could their writing reflect what they believed, felt or thought. As a result, ideologically, socialist realism became doctrinaire, and, artistically, it became the means of promoting the Communist Party’s policies. Therefore, socialist realism has a literary function and a political function. Its primary goals are to portray the reality of the working class and peasant life in society and reveal the struggle against feudalism and capitalism as the forces opposing socialism.

In his analysis of the difference between critical realism and socialist realism, Georg Lukács maintains that while critical realism is mainly concerned with “a critical understanding of the present” (95), which is vital to understand the past, socialist realism focuses on “understanding of the future” (95), which necessitates portraying the individuals or the social forces working

towards that future from the inside. As a result, socialist-realist works are more capable of portraying revolutionary individuals or “human beings whose energies are devoted to the building of a different future, and whose psychological and moral make-up is determined by this” (Lukács 96), something which the critical realism fails to do. Besides, since socialist realism is concerned with the future, Lukács believes that it is “a possibility rather than an actuality” (96), which is more difficult to be realised. So based on the perspective and its realisation, socialist realism, for Lukács, is more able to both “portray the totality of a society in its immediacy and to reveal its pattern of development” (99). Socialist realism differs from the earlier forms of realism in having a dialectical method of reflecting real life, based on the Marxist principles that urge the writer to depict the different socio-economic and political conditions and ideologies in societies.

Lukács also argues that the central perspective of socialist realism is “the struggle for socialism” (93). Hence, for him, one of the differences between socialist realism and critical realism is that socialist realism is “based on a concrete socialist perspective” (93). It is used to describe “from the inside” (94) the human forces aspiring for socialism. In other words, it aims at exploring the human qualities that contribute to making “a new social order” (Lukács 94). This concreteness of perspective involves an awareness of both the structure, development and ideology of the society as a whole. Hence, socialist realism is more comprehensive than critical realism as it examines society as a whole entity. However, some critical realist writings were comprehensive and reflected their writers’ awareness of the historical reality of their era, as found in Balzac’s and Tolstoy’s writings (Lukács 96).

Adapting Socialist Realism in the Arabic Context: Arabic Socialism

Arabic literature witnessed some developments in the first quarter of the twentieth century after the emergence of new literary schools. Many European literary schools have influenced Arab writers and critics, making them adopt such schools’ theories in their own literary works. For

example, the poets of the Apollo school, such as Ahmed Zaki Abu Shadi and Ibrahim Nagi, were influenced by English Romanticism, while Taha Hussein was influenced by French criticism. Translation played a vital role in introducing Western concepts and theories to Arabic literary criticism. One of these literary schools, which was influenced by Marxist theories, was socialist realism. This section discusses how socialist realism was adopted from the Soviet Union and contextualised in the Arabic context.

In almost all Arab countries, colonialism pushed many writers and critics to embrace socialist philosophies, especially Marxism, and employ them in their writing and interpretation of Arab literary works. Arab writers found that Marxism addressed their concerns effectively, thereby influencing scores of writers in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. A group of Arab writers who adopted Marxism in their works tried to promote its principles to stand against the oppression and injustice of the ruling class and colonialist domination. The more influential Marxist critics and writers in the Arab world include Salama Musa, Luwis Awad, Husayn Muruwwa, Youssif Idris, Abdel Rahman Al Sharqawi, Ahmed Rushdy Saleh, Salah Hafez, George Tarabishi, Abdel Azin Anis, and Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim. These writers and critics, along with others, adapted socialist realism to the Arab context, calling for socio-political commitment and avoiding art for art's sake. They faced the challenge of how to reconcile or adapt Marxist philosophy within an Arab context that was not industrialised or socialist; instead, it was mainly agricultural with a unique culture and identity. In this section, I trace how socialist realism came onto the literary scene in the Arab world, particularly Egypt. I also present the leading writers and critics who adopted a socialist philosophy in their writings and the factors that helped develop that genre.

Salama Musa (1887-1958) is regarded as one such distinguished Arab critic in the first half of the twentieth century influenced by Marxism. He was a journalist, writer, and one of the founders of Arab socialism. He called for political and economic independence from Britain.

Musa maintained that the period between 1923 and 1930 witnessed a debate regarding the modernisation of literature in Egypt. According to Musa, the progressive trends in those heated debates revolved around the necessity of having modern Egyptian literature that was not “based on classical Arabic literature” (Awad 185). In return, the style of such literature should not be classical like that of the famous prose writer Al-Jahiz; rather, it should be “modernistic” and “flirt with the vernacular” (185). In his book, *Al-Adab Li al-Shaab (Literature for the People)*, Musa explains that “literature should be for the sake of life, that is for people, society, and humanity. The writer should have a message to perform as the prophet performs his mission [...] Therefore, the modern Egyptian writer cannot be inspired by classical Arabic literature” (55). Similarly, Arabic literary criticism should lay aside the values and principles of Arab classical critics, such as Al-Jurjani, Ibn al-Athir, and Ibn Rashiq, and adopt “European criteria and values” (185). Musa emphasised in these debates the importance of creating a distinctly Egyptian mode of novel and drama. More importantly, as Luwis Awad notes, Musa also called for an integration between the problems of society and literature, making literature “humanistic” in its ends and “universal” in the issues and problems it tackles (Awad 185). Therefore, Musa called for a focus on the social issues of all classes in society rather than one class alone, as was the tendency of the old Arabic literature. He explains that in old Arabic literature, we find nothing about the worker, the farmer, the trader, or women because they were regarded as illiterate and uneducated. Authors focused on stories of kings and princes and their leadership roles with the people. We also find thousands of recommendations, commandments, and orders by King Suliman to Arshedair, Alexander, and Mouawaia, which centre on the throne, war, rulers, and forgiveness. All of these affairs were the interests of a small ruling class (Musa 21). It is worthy to note that although the suffering of workers and slaves are represented in Jahiliyyah Arabic poetry (Arabic poetry in the pre-Islamic period) such as Antarah ibn Shaddad’s poems, the dominant trend of the literary works, especially the prose fiction, at that time was to delineate the life of the literate class with the use of stories,

proverbs and maxims. Another prominent Egyptian Marxist critic who came after Salama Musa is Luwis Awad (1915-1990). Awad was an Egyptian intellectual and English literature professor at Cairo University who studied literature at Cairo, Cambridge, and Princeton. One of his most influential writings is *Socialism and Literature*, in which he traces the development of literary movements from the 1900s to the 1960s, highlighting socialist literature. Abdul-Nabi Isstaif states that this book emphasises Awad's call for "literature for life's sake", which was made in Beirut when Egypt had a socialist transformation in 1963. Isstaif regards this book as "one of the most important theoretical statements on the social function of literature by a Marxist-inspired Arab critic" (113). He stresses that literature had a social function in Egyptian society during the 1960s, a social change period. Socialist Egyptian writers and critics used Marxism to stand against social and political transformation in Egyptian society. Isstaif maintains that Awad had a keen interest in socialism from his study at King's College, Cambridge, between 1937 and 1940, and actively promoted Marxist thought during the 1940s in articles, books, translations, and creative writing (115).

We cannot overlook the fact that the political events in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s influenced intellectual trends, especially socialism. The Marxist organisations and parties that emerged at the time influenced the thought of writers and intellectuals. The most prominent sources of influence were magazines such as *Al-Hesab* and *The Spirit of the Age*, whose ideas stemmed from Marxist writings. In his book *Al-Sahafa al-Yasarya Fi Misr 1925-1948 (Leftist Press in Egypt 1925-1948)*, which was dedicated to his grandfather Awad Salameh who died in defence of press freedom in Egypt in the 1930s, Refaat El-Saeed describes Sidqi Sobhi, the prime minister in the 1930s, as "a tyrant" because the latter had confiscated all opposition newspapers and abolished the constitution. This led to a demonstration calling for the constitution, freedom, and a free press in which his grandfather Awad Salameh died (7). El-Saeed speaks of the importance of the press to the leftists at that time, noting that it was not only a media platform but

that it also had political purposes: it was “the public face of a secret organisation” (7). It was sometimes used as a “tool of assembly, organisation and mobilisation” (7) for its activities. El-Saeed also discusses the history of the communist movement in Egypt, which began in the 1940s: “In the 1940s, was the birth of the new communist movement” (7). As a result of this movement, communist organisations emerged, at the top of which was the National Committee for Students and Workers. There were many conflicts among these organisations, which eventually led to “the independent Egyptian proletariat” (7). El-Saeed notes that the tyranny of Sidqi reached such a degree that he asked the Egyptian Senators to approve “an unconstitutional anti-communist bill”, which some considered “a flagrant violation of the constitution” (8). However, the Egyptian Senators were influenced by the verses of Kamal Abdul Halim’s poem “Determination”. After Sidqi had read it for the Egyptian Senators, they voted for the bill. Therefore, the period of the 1940s is considered “the core of the history of the contemporary Egyptian leftist movement” (8).

El-Saeed mentions that any attempt to establish a socialist newspaper was prevented because of the Socialist Party’s anti-government policies. One such attempt was the weekly socialist youth newspaper *Al-Shabiba*, which was closed by the Ministry of the Interior, effectively muzzling its journalists. Because it was challenging to run a newspaper without a licence, the Socialists issued “non-periodical newsletters, which do not require special permission” (12), and they distributed these newsletters themselves in public, thereby expressing their own thoughts. The most prominent leftist newspapers at that time were Salama Moussa’s, such as *al-Mustaqbal*, *al-Mufid* and *al-Majala al-Jadida* (9).

Nevertheless, in 1945, with the help of some foreign Marxists and some acquaintances in the Ministry of the Interior, Egyptian Socialists were able to run the first socialist magazine *al-Fajr al-Jadeed* (*The New Dawn*), which remained in operation until late 1946 when Sidqi closed all opposition platforms (113). It should be noted that the pieces published in this magazine, the format of its cover, and even its slogans reflected the vision of revolutionary liberal socialists.

Examples of these slogans are: “a magazine of free culture”, “we strive so that no one would regret life”, and “a magazine of national and intellectual emancipation” (114). However, changing the magazine’s agenda into that of a political nature “clearly outlined its Marxist features” (114). It started to adopt slogans supporting the national movement in Egypt at the time, such as: “We are telling the truth, but we cannot say it in full,” and “a magazine of national liberation and democratic struggle”, which refers to the repression of the freedoms practised by Sidqi’s regime then and the nationalist tendency towards freedom (115). *Al-Fajr al-Jadeed* also focused on the role of revolutionary and socialist literature.

Literature played a significant role in disseminating and supporting these ideas, and there were several attempts to “understand literary trends and artistic tools based on a Marxist approach” (El-Saeed 121). El-Saeed explains that the literary works published in the magazine were inspiring and enthusiastic, including Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi’s poem “Al-Fajr al-Jadeed” (“The New Dawn”), which opens with the following lines:

My glory-seeking comrades, we have been, for long, unaware.

So come on!... The path to glory starts to glare!

Great freedom, to struggle for we all shall declare. (121-122)

El-Saeed added that this magazine provided examples of revolutionary foreign literary works urging Egyptians to start a revolution (124), including a study on Vladimir Mayakovsky, a leading poet of the socialist revolution in Russia/the Soviet Union. The aim of all these literary works and artistic publications was to encourage writers of the period to “pay attention to the problems of their people and stop talking about palaces and lilac flowers” (125), i.e., to abandon Romanticism and adopt socialism, awakening the socialist literary trend in Egypt.

However, socialist realism developed and grew further in the second half of the twentieth century in the Arab world because the environment was fertile for it. There was a wave of Egyptian writers and critics in that period who called for social and political commitment in

literature. Samah Selim notes that the intellectuals who appeared at the end of the Second World War had already been radicalised “by the political and psychological experience of the war itself, the growing intensity of the peasant and labourer unrest throughout the 1940s, the spread of socialist and communist ideology on university campuses, and the war in Palestine and the creation of Israel in 1948” (135). Selim observes further that terms like “progressive” or “committed” literature, “new realism” (*Al-Waqi’iyyah al-Jadidah*) and “socialist realism” (*Al-Waqi’iyyah al-Ishtirakiyyah*) have been used interchangeably to describe the type of politically engaged fiction that emerged in the 1950s and to distinguish it from other kinds of realist writing (139).

Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987) was one of the distinguished Arab and Lebanese Marxist intellectuals who adopted a dialectical view of historical development. Muruwwa’s writings include *Ma’a al-Qafila* (1952) (*With the Herd*); *Qadaya Adabia* (1956) (*Literary Issues*); *al-Thawra al-Iraqia* (1958) (*The Iraqi Revolution*); *Derasat Naqdia fi Daw’ al-Manhaj al-Waqi’y* (1965) (*Critical Studies in Light of the Realistic Approach*); *al-Mawkef al-Thawri fi al-Adab* (1980) (*The Position of Revolution in Literature*); and *Derasat fi al-Fikr wa al-Adab* (1993) (*Studies on Thoughts and Literature*). All of these writings are concerned with realism as a literary approach. Muruwwa lived during a time of revolutions and witnessed the intellectual, cultural, and political uprising in the Arab World. This political background “had its impact on his scientific, academic and intellectual career, theories and practices” (Boulos 295). For all the contributions Muruwwa made to the field of socialist realism, Habib Boulos regarded him as the founder of socialist realism in the Arab world.

Muruwwa believes that “it is inaccurate to use the term ‘Socialist Realism’ to refer to the realism adopted by intellectuals in non-socialist countries” (70). The reason is socialism reflects a socialist life led by the people and can be seen in their daily practices (70). This is why he uses “New Realism” instead of “Socialist Realism” to refer to a literary approach based on dialectical

and historical materialism in non-socialist countries. He sets forth this literary approach in his books *Qadaya Adabia* and *Derasat Naqdia fi Daw' al-Manhaj al-Waqi'y*. Isstaif comments on the role of one of Muruwwa's book in revisiting this approach in Arabic context:

His [Muruwwa's] book *Qadaya adabiyya* (Literary Questions) (Cairo, 1956) is a fascinating example of how some Arab critics tried – particularly during the 1950s –to employ certain concepts related to Socialist Realism in their encounter with various aspects of modern or classical Arabic literature, or to adapt them to the needs of Arab society by elaborating an Arabic version under a variety of names. (156)

The same can be seen in his book *Derasat Naqdia fi Daw' al-Manhaj al-Waqi'y*, in which Muruwwa gives a detailed description of the characteristics of new realism. Muruwwa contends that realistic literature is for society, and consequently, for life. In his definition of realism, Muruwwa believes that it is a multi-faceted term whose definition may be “different from one country to another according to the conditions and characteristics of each country or may vary from one group to another within the same country according to the differences in the intellectual trends and the social affiliations” (97). He defines “New Realism” as referring “implicitly to the multiple phases of this trend, and how it has developed through these phases during the same time” (98). This shows how this trend is developing, growing, and adapting in accordance with the movement of life and society (98). Thus, this trend, for him, is “strongly connected with Arab life and society and the development of its struggle for national, intellectual and social freedom” (98). Amar Akash believes that Muruwwa's criticism encourages the literary text to be historically connected with society and its conditions. However, this does not deny the author's right to be subjective, the fact that Muruwwa respects and defends (par. 5).

Having been influenced by Socialist thought, Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim and Abdel-Azim Anis enriched the Egyptian literary scene by publishing their book *Fil-Thaqafah al-Misriyyah* (1955) (*In the Egyptian culture*), which included an introduction to Muruwwa, in which they

criticised the literary schools of the famous writers of the first half of the twentieth century, such as A'bbas al-A'qqad, Taha Hussein, and Ibrahim Al Mazini. They believed that the writer's responsibility was to understand and represent the social struggle of their times and that their understanding should not only be "comprehensive" but also "advanced" in a way that "transforms writing into a message and the writer into a devoted prophet" (34). Moreover, one of the accusations of socialist realism at that time was the separation between the form and the content, giving much importance to the content. However, Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim and Abdel-Azim Anis do not separate form and content but rather believe that a successful writer is one who balances between form and content, so the form does not overshadow the content nor the content overshadow the form.

In his review of the same book, Sameh Naguib points out that the two authors faced sharp criticism and accusations of communism, materialism, and lack of understanding: "How dare two young men from the communist movement criticise the figures of Egyptian literature and the traditional concepts that these figures have established as fixed principles in the world of literary production and criticism?" (par. 3). Selim describes this book as the "critical manifesto of 1955" and states that it "formally inaugurated the era of 'new realism' in Egypt" (139).

One of the primary concerns of the Arabic novel since its emergence had been highlighting the social issues that people face. The aim was to explore the realities of the people rather than to entertain them. Before examining how social issues were presented in Arabic novels, it is necessary to account for their emergence. Fatema Mousa reveals that the history of the novel in Egypt followed the same development stages as its Western counterpart. However, she believes that "there is a big difference in how rapidly each development took place: the English novel achieved in two centuries what the Arabic novel did in half a century or less" (94). Robin Ostle contends that "the Age of Translation and Adaptation in the Arab world revealed the extent to which it had borne fruit when the novel *Zaynab* was published in Egypt in 1913" (104). *Zaynab*

(1913) is considered by many critics to be the first complete Arabic novel, deviating from the traditional form of *Maqāma*⁵. *Zaynab* was written by Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956), “the son of the ‘umda of the village of Kafr Ghannam in the delta, and a typical member of that new Egyptian meritocracy which was rising to prominence in the first decade of the twentieth century” (Ostle 104). Paul Starkey regards *Zaynab* “not merely as an important milestone, but indeed as a focal turning point in the development of the Egyptian and Arabic novel” (102). He comments on Haykal’s use of colloquial Arabic for dialogue between farmers and formal Arabic for the narrative parts, mentioning that it provides a model that many succeeding writers adopt (103). Starkey believes that “Haykal’s attempt to integrate an element of social criticism into a Western-style plot provided a model for future development” (103). Writers who followed in Haykal’s footsteps include Ibrahim al-Mazini, A’bbas Mahmud al-A’qqad, Taha Husayn, and Tawfiq al-Hakim, who continued the development of Arabic novels in the 1920s through to the 1940s. For many years, the Arabic novel was markedly dominated by Egyptian writers until writers from other Arab countries like Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon started to gain recognition for their works. Roger Allen observes that Egypt provides a model for developing the novel in the Arabic-speaking world “because historical, geographical and cultural factors combined to make it the most chronologically-advanced milieu” of the modern period (43).

Throughout the twentieth century, the village dominated the setting of many Egyptian novels, with many writers focusing on relations between the peasants and their village in at least

⁵ *Maqāma* or *maqāmah* (pl. *maqamat*) was the only established literary genre in pre-modern Arabic literature. *Maqama* in Arabic means the place where people gather to listen to the rhetoric. It is a fictional rhymed prose, a collection of independent stories embedded with short metrical poems. The most famous *maqamat* are *al-Harīrī’s Maqāmāt*; see Cachia 75-78 for more information.

one novel. Taha Husayn, Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and Muhammad Husayn Haykal were among those writers who explored the village in their works before the 1952 revolution. While Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, Abd al-Hakim Qasim, Yahya al-Tahir Abdallah, Yusuf al-Qa‘id, Khayri Shalabi, and Abd al-Fatah al-Jamal have given much attention to the village in the post-revolutionary period, other writers like Yusuf Idris and Baha’ Tahir each published two or three influential novels about the village. These writers all serve to “prove that much of the modern Egyptian narrative canon is made up of village novels” (Selim 2).

Most of these village novels describe the socio-economic conditions of Egyptian society. Unlike the urban form of socialist realism in the Soviet Union, the rural Egyptian environment was fertile for developing the unique rural form of socialist realism in the Egyptian novel. Socialist realism appears and develops in the countryside, which writers found it convenient to express what they were going through in society for two reasons. Firstly, the oppressed class is more visible in the countryside than in the city. The peasants spent most of their time on their land, facing poverty and fatigue. Secondly, the peasants are producers and not consumers like people in the city. Feudalists in the village exploit the peasants and oppress them, and they do not participate, like peasants, in the production process. El-Sayed El-Aswad explains that rural Egyptian life and the “peasants’ world view have had a great impact on poets, and novelists who have drawn genuine pictures of the life of the countryside” (16). He adds that this impact is much more discernible in the works of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, Yusuf Idris, and Abdel-Hakim Kassem (16).

Ostle comments in technical terms on the style of language in these village novels in the context of the socialist realism of the 1950s. He observes that most of the works “leaned heavily on the vernacular”, which was the common language of the peasants and the working people, “not only in rendering dialogue but also in the fabric of narration” (185). However, he adds that the

vernacular in these works is not used for artistic purposes, for such writers give paramount importance to content over form” (185).

In this study, I have selected Egyptian novels in order to represent the Arabic novel. For the purposes of this thesis, al-Sharqawi’s *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* are considered village novels that belong to the socialist realism genre. Examining *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* from a socialist realism perspective sheds light on the social, political and economic conditions of Egyptian society before and after the revolutionary period.

1.2.3 Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: The Rebellious Peasant⁶

This section is a primarily biographical discussion of al-Sharqawi’s political stance and literary aspirations. It is divided into three main parts: the first outlines his childhood and education; the second presents an overview of his literary career, examining whether his literary works explicitly or implicitly address political and social concerns; and the third investigates how he introduces a new form of socialist realism into Arabic literature.

Al-Sharqawi’s Childhood and Education

Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi (1920-1989) was born in Dalatun village in Shebin al-Koum city, in the Egyptian province of Menoufia. The environment in which writers live plays a critical role in forming their personalities, rendering them capable of influencing their environment. Therefore,

⁶ *Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: The Rebellious Peasant* is a title of a book written by Kamal Mohamed Ali, which is expressive of al-Sharqawi’s political position and literary views.

we cannot overlook the environmental impact on the life of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi when we know that, as Kamal Ali notes, “all his elder brothers used to go to Cairo for education and return to the village every summer with books to read during summer holiday” (45). Ali adds that al-Sharqawi “was able to read the titles of these books and their authors’ names, such as Taha Hussein, A’bbas Mahmud al-A’qqad, Ahmad Shawqi, Dr Muhammad Hussein Hikel and Mustafa al-Manfalouti” (45). Such names were engraved into his memory. His writings were later influenced by most of these figures. He went to the primary school in the village and “memorised some *juz*’ (parts) of the Holy Qur’an with the help of the village scholar” (45). It seems that al-Sharqawi had been connected to the land since his childhood: before going to school, he used to “get bathed in the small canal, roll his body in the dust and cover his face and head with mud to look like a demon with his same-age young boys and girls” (Ali 45). In 1935, while at secondary school, he went to Paris, where he stayed for a year. When he came back, he became more interested in literature. Although he joined the Faculty of Law, he “sometimes used to attend the meetings held at the Faculty of Arts, as well as the weekly lectures delivered by Dr Taha Hussein” (Ali 46) because of his strong passion for literary works. An additional influence was al-Sharqawi’s father, who played a fundamental role in shaping his political positions and literary aspirations later. His father was a man of knowledge and culture, keen on buying newspapers and urging his children to read and understand what they were reading. He also helped them understand the important cultural and political issues in the country at that time. During the summer holidays, al-Sharqawi’s father held cultural events in his house, which al-Sharqawi attended along with his father’s friends who were graduates of the famous college at Cairo University, Dar al-Ulum, and the famous Islamic Egyptian University of al-Azhar. These events were centred on literary and religious topics, which left a significant impact on al-Sharqawi’s linguistic skills, polemical language, narrative techniques, and argumentative writing style.

Al-Sharqawi's Literary Career

Al-Sharqawi's educational and cultural background was a significant factor in developing his sense of language and literature. Notably, after graduation, he did not work as a lawyer for long (1943-1945) because of his desire to be a writer. He worked as an inspector for the Ministry of Education for a short period, then worked as a journalist for several Cairo newspapers and magazines (1952-1977), including *Al Gomhuria* and *Ruz El-Youssuf*, and "wrote a weekly column for Al-Ahram under Jamal Abd al-Nasir" (Goldschmidt and Johnston 363). He later became "the secretary-general of the Supreme Council for Arts" (Goldschmidt and Johnston 363). Al-Sharqawi is regarded as one of the first Egyptian intellectuals to use the platform offered by journalism to spread his leftist ideas, preaching for democracy and equality among citizens. Such journalistic leanings towards democracy and equality helped plant the seeds of revolution that endangered the Egyptian monarchy in 1952.

Besides his career as a lawyer, journalist, and political activist, al-Sharqawi was a multi-skilled pioneering author during the late 1940s. His contributions to Arabic literature include, among others, introducing a new trend into Arabic poetry, creating revolutionary verse drama, founding a new socialist realistic trend in the Arabic novel, and establishing a critical approach to the biographies of prominent Islamic figures. In this way, al-Sharqawi is one of the first Egyptian men of letters to excel in different literary genres. What makes his literary production unique is the genuineness in demanding that the rights of the Egyptian people to freedom, dignity, and identity be respected. This genuineness is reflected in characterisation, major and minor plot formation, and the language of narrative and dramatic passages. His great novels are *al-Ard* (1954) (*Egyptian Earth*), *Qulub khalia* (1956) (*Empty Hearts*), *Al-Shawre' al-Khalfya* (1958) (*Back Streets*), and *al-Fallah* (1967) (*The Peasant*). He also wrote critically acclaimed plays like *Masaat Jameelah* (1962) (*The Tragedy of Jameelah*), *Al-Husain Shaheedan* (1969) (*Al-Husain the Martyr*) and *Al-Husain Thaaeran* (1969) (*Al-Husain the Revolutionary*). In the field of Islamic writings, he wrote

Muhammad Rasool al-Hurriya (1962) (*Muhammad the Messenger of Freedom*), *Ali Imam al-Mutaqeen* (1984) (*Ali the Imam of the Pious*), and *al-Faruq Umar* (1987) (*The Just Umar*). This last piece was banned, but it influenced Egypt's intellectual life and culture circles until he died in 1987.

His novels show his sense of advocacy and call for freedom, which stemmed from his legal apprenticeship. The authoritarian drift of the new republican regime after 1952, which abolished political parties and erected a personality cult around President Gamal Abdel Nasser, eventually disappointed al-Sharqawi. He turned to the theatre, writing some of the earliest Egyptian poetic plays in contemporary Arabic language. He and other writers felt the need to expose the socio-political conditions that had affected them in their writing. Some of these conditions were related to communism. As Thuraya al-Usayli notes, "during that period, the communist movement was strong and tried to find supporters in the Arab world, and some poets, especially al-Sharqawi, were influenced by it" (17).

Al-Sharqawi's Socialism

Al-Sharqawi was a socialist-realist whose novels, plays, poetry and articles are well-known for their realism and commitment to the social concerns of Egypt during the first half of the 20th century. He called for democracy and social justice. His works reflect a great love for the Egyptian village, where he depicted the sufferings of the Egyptian peasants and their protest against both the autocratic government and colonial forces. He remained true to his rural identity and faithful to the villagers who constituted the majority of the Egyptian population at the time.

Being concerned with social issues, al-Sharqawi used his writing to express his opinions on Arab social and political events. To put it simply, his writing was the medium that he chose to explain his ideas to his readers: as Medhat al-Jayar puts it, it "represent[ed] a reproduction of

historical events in a way which accords with the demands of social and political realism” (159-161). Accordingly, most of his literary production called for the two central missing values at that time: democracy and social justice. Additionally, it reflected a great connection to Egyptian village life in all its detail and with all its miseries. He depicted the Egyptian peasants’ sufferings and their protest against the social problems at work in the countryside: autocratic government, colonial forces and the bourgeoisie. His worldview is perhaps best encapsulated in the following statement:

If I belong to those who can die in defence of the right, freedom, the good, brotherhood, and all that I believe in, and if I fight oppression with a spirit of a martyr and passionate love of life; so why cannot I tolerate hardships, no matter how strong they are, for the sake of the freedom of expression? (qtd. in Kamal Ali 47-48)

Such emotional words were influential, especially on the youth. Sawsan Bakeri observes that al-Sharqawi’s words attest to “the sincerity of his passion and that these sincere words encourage his generation to claim their lost rights” (par. 17). Because of this revolutionary sense in his writings, he was prevented several times from writing by the government, and some of his works were banned. In this respect, he says: “I am not one of those who write to make a living. For that reason, I suffered a lot when I was forced to stop writing, and one day after a day, all the psychological pains turned into severe physical pains” (qtd. in Kamal Ali 47).

Despite his opposing ideas and opinions, al-Sharqawi received several awards from the Egyptian government during his lifetime. In 1974, he won the State Merit Award in Literature, which was awarded to him by the late President Anwar al-Sadat, and the Honorary Medal of Literature and Arts. In 1979, he was also one of the Lenin Peace Prize winners, which was presented by the Soviet Union, in recognition of the socialist realist trend of his most famous novel *al-Ard*, which was initially published in serial form in *al-Masri*, one of the most influential newspapers in Egypt in the 1950s in terms of its cultural and political impact. The novel achieved

great success and was translated into English in 1962 by Desmond Stewart. In 1970, it was adapted into a movie directed by the famous Egyptian director Yusuf Shaheen.

Many factors helped shape al-Sharqawi's ideology, including thematic choices, political positions, and literary leanings. The rural environment where he grew up, the educational and cultural atmosphere in which he was incubated, the political and historical events he witnessed, and the French and Soviet socialist cultures he took in, all impacted his writings. He was influenced by Chekov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and some French writers such as the realist writer Alain Robbe-Grillet and others whose works he read during his study visit to Paris in the early 1950s (Abdel Ghani 21). One month before his death, al-Sharqawi made "a trip to the Soviet Union" (Reuters), where "he attended the 70th-anniversary celebrations of the Socialist October Revolution" (Ali 127) in Moscow, which attests to his adherence to socialism until the end of his life.

1.3 Social Stratification in the Nigerian Novel: A literary Background

This section is divided into three parts. Part One deals with the social structure of pre-colonial and colonial Igbo society. Part Two discusses ethnographic realism in African novels. Part Three is concerned with the personal and literary life of Chinua Achebe, whose two African novels are under study in this thesis.

1.3.1 Social Stratification in the Nigerian Igbo Society Before and During Colonialisation

This study is also concerned with the portrayal of the social stratification of Igbo society before and during colonialisation as presented in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. The events in the first novel cover pre-colonial Igbo society until the arrival of the missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, while the second novel revolves around Igbo society during

colonialisation. Igbo, or Ibo, is an ethnic group that lives in Southeastern Nigeria. The social structure of the Igbo people can be examined in three phases of their history: pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. Although sometimes, the Igbo are referred to as a “tribe”, the African “tribe” is considered a European invention (Ranger 248-250). In his book *Home and Exile*, Achebe rejects this notion and prefers to call the Igbo people “a nation” (4). He believes that the term “tribe” does not apply to the Igbo people because they are not “primitive” and they “are not linked by blood ties”, irrespective of their shared culture (4). Among the basis of his argument is the fact that they speak one language, but not “one dialect”, and that their political and social identity does not have “one recognised leader” (4).

In pre-colonial times, the Igbo nation was unlike any nation now. Traditional Igbo society was made up of “largely autonomous villages or group of villages” (Booker 110). In other words, they were self-governed, not ruled by any outside forces; indeed, one of the striking features of the Igbo’s social and political structure is this absence of centralised authority. Achebe states that each village “shared the running of its affairs among its menfolk according to the title, age, occupation, etc.; and its womenfolk who had domestic responsibilities” (*Home and Exile* 5). Thus, instead of one identified leader, a group of men used to govern each village. These men were usually the village elders who were believed to represent the tribe’s ancestral spirit, such as the *egwugwu*, the clan of Umuofia in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.

The social structure of the traditional Igbo people is detailed in Don. C. Ohadike’s article “Igbo Culture and History”, in which he maintains that the Igbo people in each village socially organised themselves according to “patrilineage” (238). In other words, they organised their family and social relationships by lines of descent from one’s male ancestors. This means that each Igbo village had members who were related by blood ties. The smallest social unit is known as “uno, or house,” consisting of a man, his wife and his children, followed by a group of related houses or “umuanna, or lineage”; and finally, the whole village or town “obodo” (Ohadike 238).

Each village represents a social segment with its own lineage. The social stratification model of the traditional Igbo societies is based on a hierarchy of status that distinguishes the Igbo people according to age, sex and wealth. However, this socio-political model of the Igbo village is characterised by “equalitarianism”, which “gives to all its citizens an equal opportunity to achieve success” (Ohadike 234). This makes the Igbo people “status-seekers” (230). As such, Igbo society is very democratic and competitive. To gain high status in the Igbo society, one must try hard to gain economic power or wealth through personal achievements and talents.

Victor. G. Uchendu believes that irrespective of age and sex, economic power or wealth can lead to a high social rank, which in turn leads to political power: “a forward-moving and talented young man who can acquire wealth and ‘convert’ it into the traditionally valued status symbols (such as title-taking) is allowed to wield political power over his peers and elders” (234). Ebere Nwaubani points out that this egalitarian system managed to make the social order in Igbo societies “quite open” as there was always “a possibility of social mobility for the industrious” (8). Furthermore, gaining high status could also lead to the acquisition of titles. Most Igbo men struggled to gain titles, but not all of them succeeded. The highest title in Igbo society was that of *ozo*. The *ozo* was “no longer an ordinary human, but a god” (Ohadike 241). To obtain this title, an Igbo had to work hard to get junior titles and “must have accumulated enough wealth” (Ohadike 241). A titled Igbo man could seek membership in the council of chiefs. This social stratification system promoted respect among these groups, with the senior age-groups at the top.

However, with the absence of mechanisation in traditional agricultural Igbo societies, an Igbo family’s size played a significant role in securing labour and more remarkable achievements. So, wealth and high status could be acquired through marriage; as Ohadike puts it, “monogamy was a sure avenue to poverty” (243). This is why the rich Igbo men practised polygamy. An Igbo man’s wives were not only responsible for the domestic chores, but they also used to “grow crops, part of which they sold in the marketplace” (243), which helped improve his economic status.

Another social stratification of Igbo society is that which is based on age. Nwaubani refers to this social system as “the age-grade system”, which “stratifies the population according to seniority, and the individual’s position within the system constitutes an important index of social status” (6). In Igbo society, the top age-group was the council of the elders. These are the “oldest living representative[s] of the founding ancestors” (Ohadike 239). Although such councils had religious and political authority in the Igbo village, they could not act or decide without the approval of the village and “some degree of consensus” (239).

Under such a council, the people are sub-classified into several age-groups or age-classes. Each age-group is known as *ogbo* or *otu* and it had its own responsibilities (Ohadike 239). Each age-group consists of men (or women) of the same age. They are composed of the junior age-groups (aged fifteen and below), who are accountable to “do minor jobs like fetching water, cleaning footpaths, sweeping the streets”; the middle-aged men (sixteen to forty years old), who represents “the fighting forces”; and the senior male age-groups (aged forty and above), who are “responsible for judicial matters” and political issues (Ohadike 240).

Another social system classifies the traditional Igbo people into two classes: the free Igbo and the slaves or the *osu*. Suzanne Miers and Richard L. Roberts identify three types of unfree men or slaves in Igbo societies: “the cult slaves (*osu*), pawns (*nnonou ego*), and chattel slaves (*ohu*)” (439). However, the term *osu* is applied to any slave “dedicated to the service of a deity” (439). Unlike free Igbo men, the *osu* was deprived of many social rights. For example, “he could not intermarry with the free-born, not attend their assembly” (Wren 23). Also, unlike the bought slaves (*ohu*), the *osu* could not be “bought nor sold” (Miers and Roberts 439). Hence, the pre-colonial Igbo social stratification system is multi-faceted, as it is based on wealth, age, and gender, and allows a degree of social mobility within a democratic socio-political system, albeit one that excluded the slaves or the *osu*.

However, Igboland was vulnerable to British colonisation, which started in 1900 and had a significant effect on the Igbos' cultural, political and religious life. Although there were British invasions and warships in some Igbo villages in the nineteenth century to protect the British expeditions and traders in the Niger River, "it was only in 1900 that British imperial government declared Igboland a protectorate and embarked upon formal conquest" (Ohadike 253). Colonialism unleashed specific changes that had a high impact on the Igbos' social, cultural, and political structure. Such changes included "western education, wars, new monetary system, land alienation commercialisation, improved transportation system, urbanisation" (Chuku 85). In her book *The Igbo People: Culture and Character*, Mazi O. Ojiaku speaks about the impact of the British, who, she believes, affected Igboland not only economically but also religiously and socially. She points out that "the trio – commerce, colonialism and Christianity – brought about many social, cultural and political changes in Nigeria" (42).

With an autonomous political system in the Igboland, the British found it difficult to reinforce their power: "the greatest challenge was how to rule the hundreds of Igbo towns and villages that recognised no centralised governments" (Ohadike 255). Colonial forces were more familiar with the hierarchy of kingdoms and empires; therefore, they worked to centralise such political institutions. In this way, they imposed on the Igbo people a new political system of appointed officials. This system is called "the warrant chief system", which Gloria Chuku believes to be a "rape of the indigenous political institutions of the Igbo" (86). This system was a type of indirect colonial rule, and these chiefs were called "warrant" because "their sole legitimacy derived from a colonial legal document, the warrant" (Ohadike 255). Chuku maintains that this system turned the egalitarian system of traditional Igbo into a "bureaucratic" one (86). It also altered the social stratification of traditional Igbo society. Instead of giving high rank to the elders' council, who used to make the final decisions before colonialism, this high rank was granted to warrant chiefs irrespective of their age, hard work or achievements. Some of these men were given

a warrant office even if they were not titled. This was simply because “some of them were persons of no consequence [...] and because they were corrupt, abusing their position and power, and accumulating wealth at the expense of their people” (86). As a result, cases which ought to have been determined by the council of the elders “would be tried by strangers”; these people might have been trained in “English law, but they had little or no knowledge of native laws and customs” (Ohadike 255).

Under this system, Native Courts were created, which “superseded the popular village assembly, the sovereign body of each autonomous polity” (Chuku 86). As a result of this system, title-taking was not indicative of social status, and some of the titles such as the *ozo* “lost its appeal [...] when colonial officers stripped traditional Igbo chiefs of their power and then subordinated them to British-appointed warrant chiefs and Western-educated Africans” (Ohadike 241). However, the Warrant Chief system started to decline in the 1920s with what is known as the anti-tax riots.

Missionary education and the introduction of Christianity also influenced the social order. However, such influence on the older generation of the Igbo society was not like that on the younger generation. While the Igbo elders rejected this influence and “were also the custodians and defenders of their people’s core values, mores, and time-honoured traditions which they had inherited from the ancestors and to whom they are accountable”, the young generation believed that the colonial missionaries were “agents of excitements and adventure” (Okwu 149). Unlike the colonial officials, the missionaries were preaching peace and were involved in various activities that served even the pre-colonial Igbo. Being aware of this positive effect, the Igbo elders “allowed their children and the youth to associate with the missionaries while they themselves refused to give up their faith” (149). As a result, this new class of educated Africans was given some social prominence over the others because they spoke English, the language of power and authority. They became more respected, “influential and prosperous and thus were regarded as

special Africans” (Okwu 149). As a result, the traditional pathways to prestige and wealth were disrupted because “the colonial authorities sidestepped the educated elite, often, the aged and illiterate ‘gentlemen’ who were given authority were disappointed” (Njoku 35). Thus, education was a potent means of changing the social structure, authority, and system of Igbo society.

In addition, such missionaries introduced salaried employment, “which in turn contributed to the emergence of a clerical class of workers, and the rise and growth of urbanisation” (Ojiaku 42). Ohadike explains that during the colonial period, many Igbo people “ventured far from home and congregated in urban centres at the work place, and in institutions of higher learning” (236). In this way, education and urbanisation affected the social order of Igbo society as a new class of educated and employed Africans emerged. This class was not age-based or wealth-based, but they earned much more social stature in colonial Igboland.

Other studies, however, have concluded that the European influence over Igbo social structure from the 1900s to the 1920s was less significant. Adiele Afigbo argues that colonialism did not significantly change Igbo Indigenous society’s social order. Instead, he believes that “the political organisation of the Igbo village group never broke down or got disorganised under the colonial rule” (348-49). He adds that the competence of this social order was just “curtailed by the establishment of an all-interfering central government”, which is represented by the Warrant Chief system. Raphael Chijoke Njoku supports this view, maintaining that “colonialism did not destroy the indigenous society but engaged it in the process of cultural negotiation” (83). Many young Igbo people were sent to be educated in missionary schools as “parents continued to encourage their children to aspire for wealth and public influences” (30). Those who received a missionary education remained attached to their families and communities. The young men who went to the schools looked for “employment in the government, the missions, and the trading house” (33) and consequently had a solid social influence; however, the old people who “were attached to the older society protected their position” (Afigbo 427).

1.3.2 Ethnographic Realism in the African Novel

Colonialism had a significant impact on African literature: political and historical incidents resulted in different literary styles and forms, leading writers to present novels that can be classified under ethnographic realism. George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman define ethnographic realism as “a mode of writing that seeks to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life” (29). They add that the ethnographic realist usually pays attention to that the details he experiences in his life. In other words, a literary work written in the mode of ethnographic realism presents an insider’s perspective: it is a representation of one’s own culture. L.L Langness and Gelya Frank argue that ethnographic representation is generally an “accurate description of another way of life” (18), but unlike ordinary ethnography, “it does this through the addition of character and plot” (18). In this view, the author of ethnographic fiction makes realistic representations about a specific culture accessible to the reader by adding fictional characters and events. Nancy J Schmidt believes that Langness and Frank’s definition of ethnographic fiction reflects an outsider’s perspective since it focuses on truthful cultural observations made by an outsider to the community or the culture which this work is about. She points to exceptions that cast some doubt on Langness and Frank’s definition. One of these examples is Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, which appears to fit Langness and Frank’s definition but is “not written with anthropological considerations in mind” (8) because it is a fictional work written by a creative writer (i.e., Achebe) about his own culture in the past. So, Schmidt argues, the analysis of such novels as ethnographic fiction cannot be done in the same way as when we examine the works of anthropologists “because [such novels] were written with literary, including aesthetic, considerations demanding primary consideration” (9).

In many of their novels, Achebe and other African authors such as Laye, Thiong’o, Iyayi, Armah, and Soyinka wrote literary works due to the ideas, values and feelings they experienced in their societies at the time of colonisation. Omafume F Onoge states that modern African literature “was born in a hostile milieu” (387), which attempted to deform the image of pre-colonial Africa

and its values and viewed Africans as savages and uncivilised. In Onoge's opinion, colonialism was led to the "alienation of the African people" (387). Onoge also stresses that "modern African literature was conditioned sociologically by the colonial milieu" (388). Such European authors present Africa from the outsider's point-of-view. However, some African writers were fully aware of this bias, and their works reflect the insider's and outsider's point-of-view. One of these writers is Chinua Achebe, whose literary works are "reactive" (Onoge 388). Achebe acts against such distortions of the African past. He and other African writers have been preoccupied with presenting the issues in their societies before and during colonialism. There has been an unfair distribution of resources in African countries after independence, which has led to class conflicts and struggles. Therefore, class issues, including social, economic and political disorder, have been among the literary themes that concerned some of the African writers.

The stereotypical images of Africa depicted by European authors are greatly by Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Joyce Cary in his work *Mister Johnson* (1939). Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) describes the journey of an English man called Marlow to Congo. Conrad's depiction of Africa as an uncivilised, gloomy, and wild continent, his objectification and degradation of the African people, and his discriminative description of them as "unhappy savages" (Conrad 80) motivated Achebe to write the essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1975), where he condemns Conrad's work and describes him as a "thoroughgoing racist" (11). He continues his attack against *Heart of Darkness* by stating that it is "a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today" (15). Achebe was attracted to Conrad's novella as a child, as he states to Robert Siegel in a radio interview (2009), in which he describes Conrad as "a seductive writer. He could pull his reader into the fray" (Achebe). Achebe realised later, however, that he himself belonged to the group described in the story as "savages" and that it was his role

now as an African writer to defend them. He told Siegel that it was inappropriate to “portray my people – any people – from that attitude, from that point of view” (Achebe). This is why Achebe believes that the true heart of darkness in Conrad’s novel is the author’s racism. Achebe’s feeling of duty towards his own people resulted in several novels and essays addressing this issue. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel laureate, states that *Things Fall Apart* was “the first novel in English which spoke from the interior of the African character, rather than portraying the African as an exotic, as the white man would see him” (“Chinua Achebe of Bard College” 28). As its title suggests, *Things Fall Apart* covers the collapse of a social, political, and economic system and the emergence of a new one. Overall, the novel is divided into three parts, the first of which covers the pre-colonial period, while the second and third cover colonialism. Achebe successfully depicts different cultural aspects in the novel, especially in part one, in which he presents Igbo culture by detailing its social structure, ceremonies, laws, religious beliefs, customs, and cultural practices. The narrative takes place in the 1890s, a few years before Nigeria formally became part of the British Empire.

Hence, Achebe and some other African writers sometimes present realistic and ethnographic accounts of Africa through fictional events and characters from an insider perspective. Some of these themes are related to colonialism, such as the struggle between tradition and change in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo, the protagonist, attempts to maintain his social status which is eroded by British rule. Another theme is cultural contact and cultural conflict in Achebe’s novel *Arrow of God*, in which the mission-educated son of the chief priest, Oduche, “becomes a symbol of the disintegration of the traditional religion of which the chief priest is the pillar” (Ngara 31). Achebe’s other novels, such as *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), present a grim picture of Nigerian society after independence. Similarly, a call for a public reaction against the capitalist class loyal to Kenya’s previous coloniser appears in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Devil on the Cross* (1980),

Matigari (1986), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2004). This call is best introduced in *Petals of Blood* through one of the speeches of Nyakinyua, the most respected woman in the village who performs most of their traditional ceremonies. Nyakinyua encourages the working-class villagers to go to Nairobi to face the corrupted elite:

I think we should go. It is our turn to make things happen. There was a time when things happened the way we in Ilmorog wanted them to happen. We had power over the movement of our limbs. We made up our own words and sang them and we danced to them. But there came a time when this power was taken from us. [...] They ate our forests. [...] Then they sent for our young men. They went on swallowing our youth. [...] They have continued to entice our youth away. [...]. They send us others who come every now and then to take taxes: others to buy our produce except when there is drought and famine. The MP also came once and made us give two shillings each for Harambee water. Have we seen him since? Aca! That is why Ilmorog must now go there and see this Ndamathia that only takes but never gives back. We must surround the city and demand back our share [...] But Ilmorog must go as one voice. (115-116)

The influence of imperialism is also described ethnographically in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) by the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah. Armah depicts the struggles against political corruption and disillusionment in postcolonial Ghana. *Abiku* by Debo Kotun similarly depicts a political satire of the Nigerian military ruling class. Most postcolonial African novels offer certain representations of reality through their themes of class conflict or struggle. Jude Agho discusses how the conflicts between the bourgeoisie (the ruling class) and the proletariat have become dominant in contemporary postcolonial African fiction. Agho states that African literature initially stood against colonialism and later against neo-colonialism. He adds that “the neo-colonial phase of Africa’s political evolution has been largely dominated by ill feelings against the

political class whose members assumed the mantle of governance at the exit of the colonialists” (95). He explains further that both the political and intellectual classes shared the same aim during the colonial period, which is to say, to get rid of the colonisers. Nevertheless, in the postcolonial period, intellectuals, inspired by Marxist ideology, used their writings to stand against the power of the political class (96). This stresses colonialism’s influence in creating struggle among the classes after independence and giving power to capitalism. Consequently, the modern African novel developed a sense of revolt against the neo-colonialism inherent in African society.

The African novel provides representations not only of African political life but also an insider’s perspective on changes to its social life. Emmanuel Ngara points out that the African novel “not only arose with the emergence of a class but also at a time of violent social change” (30). By “a time of violent social change”, Ngara means a time of “agitation for independence” (30) and the African struggle for liberation from imperialism and colonialism. Ama Mazama maintains that this struggle against colonisation “was articulated as a battle to eradicate the African homeland of economic parasites and hostile foreigners” (42); as a result, all Africans everywhere were engaged in struggles to obtain their human rights. This included farmers, peasants and workers who had “shown their willingness to reunite and revive Africa in its cultural renaissance” (42). Not only was the lower African class engaged in such struggles, but the emerging higher class also played its part in the African liberation. A new class of African intellectuals was “a product of the colonial missionary education” (Ngara 30).

This educated class emerging from the African elites was called “the African intelligentsia” (Mazama 43); among them were Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Festus Iyayi, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, and Maik Nwosu. Such intellectuals “dominated the leadership of the liberation movements, to unite their efforts and reintroduce the African Personality onto the world stage” (Mazama 43). These efforts were mainly literary, including novels like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958, two years before Nigeria’s

independence, and Ngugi's first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, published in 1964, one year after Kenya achieved independence. For Ngara, therefore, the period between 1957 and 1967 was not only a period of political agitation against colonialism but also "a decade of lively artistic creativity when African writers of English or French expression emerged as a force demanding the world's attention" (30). Their artistic productivity was expressive of "the rising political consciousness of the African people" as well as their "new-found aspirations" (30).

Consequently, many African authors, including the intelligentsia, wrote literary works based on the ideas, values, and feelings they had experienced in their societies at the time of colonisation. They used their works to resist this stereotypical picture of Africa and to present in its place what they considered the real image of African people, their culture, and their traditions. Their feeling of duty towards their people resulted in novels and essays responding to accusations made against the African people and restoring their proper place in humanity. Such novels are considered ethnographic because they aim to offer a full descriptive account of the African culture. *Things Fall Apart* was among the first of this kind.

In his review of the mutations of ideology in the criticism of Nigerian literature, Chidi Amuta discusses four literary criticism schools: Art-For-Art Criticism, Bourgeois Cultural Anthropological Criticism, Bourgeois Sociological Criticism, and the Radical Imperative. Amuta states that, for Art-For-Art Criticism, the purpose of writing is "the creation of beauty irrespective of the social context of the individual artist" ("Criticism, Ideology and Society" 121); he believes that this purpose stems from the imperial conception that the correct cultural values are those that follow "the supremacist assumptions of the erstwhile colonialists" (121). Amuta observes that Bourgeois Cultural Anthropological Criticism either laments the breakdown of traditional Nigerian cultures, as clearly witnessed in the "Westernisation of aesthetic consciousness" in the works of leading Nigerian writers, or tries to give voice to traditional forms such as "folklore and tribal customs" in modern English Nigerian literature (123). As for Bourgeois Sociological

Criticism, it emerges because some critics realise that their literature is oriented towards social issues in Nigeria. One of those critics is Abiola Irele, who refers to his critical insights as “the sociological imagination” (124). As for the Radical Imperative, Amuta explains that writers such as Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike shaped Nigerian literary criticism in the late 1970s with a radical tendency in a bid to achieve “national self-assertion” (128).

In *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*, Adam Mayer presents a history of revolutionary ideas in Nigerian society. He explains that “Chinua Achebe’s party, the People’s Redemption Party, the oldest political party in existence in the country, with roots in 1978 Kaduna [a state in north-western Nigeria], is still in operation, and it proudly displays its Marxian inspirations” (2). He points out that some Nigerian authors, like Achebe, Iyayi, and Ifeoma Okoye, played a crucial role in developing the social movement in Nigerian society with their writing.

1.3.3 Chinua Achebe and the African Novel

Chinua Achebe was a novelist, poet, critic, and literature professor in the United States of America, and he also taught at the university level in Nigeria for a period. He was born and raised in an Igbo village in Nigeria called Ogidi (now a large town in the state of Anambra). His parents, Isaiah and Janet Achebe, were among the earliest Christian converts in their district, were devoted to the Church (Isaiah worked a catechist), and raised their children as Christians. His father Isaiah was deeply tied to the writings of the White Man. This and other aspects of the portrayal of the devoutly Christian Isaac (“Nwoye” in *Things Fall Apart*) and Hannah Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* comprise in key respects a portrait of Chinua Achebe’s parents. However, his parents were also attached to the traditional culture of Igbo society, which Achebe saw collapse under British colonialism.

As a result, he “decided to switch from Medicine to a course in English Literature, Religious Studies and History” (Innes 8). He wanted to enhance his skills to write about African culture. In the English Literature course, he read not only “Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth” (8) but also writers “considered ‘relevant’ to Nigerian students: Conrad, Joyce Cary and Graham Greene” (8). All these literary readings, along with the History Course and a course about the West African religions, incited him to study the culture of his own people, “mainly through oral accounts but also through written records of missionaries, administrators and anthropologists” (Innes 8). In his works, Achebe criticized many aspects of the European colonization of Africa. After publishing his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe wrote, amongst others, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah*. In these novels, he portrays African culture imaginatively and counters the Western vision of Africa. Not only in his novels but also in his essays where we can see how defensive the African culture is. In his essay “The Novelist as a Teacher”, he mentions how he would be satisfied if his novels teach his readers that African “past -with all its imperfections- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them” (45).

As noted above, Achebe’s literary works were a direct response to European fictional distortions of Africa. In addition to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, we might also mention Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (1939), in which the novel’s protagonist, Mister Johnson, is described as a childish and semi-educated African man. According to Achebe, the proper response to works such as Conrad’s and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* was to write a counter-narrative. In his interview with Jerome Brooks in the *Paris Review* in 1994, Achebe says, “If you don’t like someone’s story, write your own” (153). Achebe adds that he does not mean to urge people not to read Conrad, saying:

I teach Heart of Darkness, I have a course on Heart of Darkness in which what I'm saying is. Look at the way this man handles Africans. Do you recognize humanity there? People will tell you he was opposed to imperialism. But it's not enough to say, "I'm opposed to imperialism." Or, "I'm opposed to these people —these poor people —being treated like this." Especially since he goes on straight away to call them "dogs standing on their hind legs." That kind of thing. Animal imagery throughout. He didn't see anything wrong with it. So we must live in different worlds. Until these two worlds come together we will have a lot of trouble. (153)

For his part, Achebe shows how native Africans loyally defend their land in the face of British invaders. Achebe shows a society in harmony with itself and with its own specific cultural and religious beliefs. He also highlights some of its more shocking aspects, such as the Igbo practice of killing twin babies: whenever twins were born, they “were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest” (*TFA* 58). He also displays even-handedness in his portrayal of the Igbo people’s communalism, which stands in contrast to their individualism in making a living and gaining a reputation. Achebe’s impartiality is a function of his realism. Achebe’s realistic picture of the Igbo people contradicts the European representation of the African people as uncivilised and savage. However, his representation is not meant to romanticise African culture and history. Eric Sterling explains Achebe’s portrayal of Africa as follows:

Achebe presents Nigerian society in a matter-of-fact and objective fashion, portraying the beauty of the Igbo society and its traditions, yet also depicting the problems that are inherent in the culture, such as killing a member of the community (in this case, Ikemefuna) because of an order from an oracle; or killing twins because of a superstition. (191)

Achebe was not trying to glorify Igbo culture but, instead, to present it as it was. He presents African history with all its frailties and imperfections. In addition to the practice of killing twin

babies, Achebe also describes how privilege is given to males over females. These ethnographic representations of customs, traditions and other cultural practices make Chinua Achebe's works valuable as a corrective to colonialist fantasies about Africa.

1.4. Conclusion

This chapter discusses Weber's theory of social stratification with its three components: Class, Status and Party. It demonstrates that this multi-dimensional Weberian approach is a more appropriate analytical tool to examine the social structure of modern societies since these societies are more socially, economically, and politically complicated. Highlighting the social stratification in Egypt before and after the revolution of 1952 and that of the Igbo society before and during colonialism, help understand both Egyptian and African socio-political changes as literally represented in al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* respectively. It also shows how the al-Sharqawi contextualises socialist realism into these novels when presenting the social structure in Egypt in the first and second halves of the twentieth century; and how Achebe's novels present an ethnographic representation of the social structure of the pre-colonial Igbo society and during colonialism.

Chapter 2. Socialist Realism Revisited: A Critical Analysis of Social

Stratification in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard*

This chapter studies social stratification in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard*⁷ (1954). Using Max Weber's examination of the notion of social stratification as its conceptual framework, the chapter scrutinises how al-Sharqawi represents social stratification in Egypt in the 1930s in a way that makes the novel one of the most prominent examples of socialist realism in Arabic literature. It explores how socialist realism, as a form initially developed in industrialised, capitalist economies, is adapted to address the early twentieth century's Egyptian agricultural economy. The chapter also seeks to identify central tenets of socialist realism, whether explicit or implicit, in *al-Ard*. In this way, I argue that through *al-Ard*, al-Sharqawi attempts to introduce an Egyptian version of socialist realism – what Husayn Muruwwa labelled “New Realism”. This view of the novel as a foundational New Realist literary work focused on social stratification is supported by analysing its characters, setting, language, and narrative.

2.1 Al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* as a Prototype of New Realism

The period from the 1930s witnessed the Soviet Union supporting anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements throughout the world. At that time, the critical standard to judge literary works of art in the Soviet Union was realism. In other words, a good work of art should be reflective of life. In this light, the cultural development of socialist realism was one facet of this much broader realism.

Since *al-Ard* is written by a socialist-realist author in a non-socialist country and presents ordinary people's lives, mainly peasants, it may be described as a New Realist novel. In this light,

⁷ The Arabic title of the novel “*al-Ard*” means “the earth”. However, the English translation of the novel bears the title *Egyptian Earth*. Some critics also use “*The Land*” as the title of the novel.

I examine *al-Ard* through Muruwwa's concept of New Realism, as discussed in theoretical terms in the previous chapter. Al-Sharqawi takes the art of the novel as an outlet to express his emotions and interactions with the reality of Egyptian society, highlighting significant events in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century, such as the 1919 revolution, the suspension of the 1923 constitution, and the tyrannical regime of the People's Party at the time of the Prime Minister Ismail Sidky in the 1930s, when an oppressive monarchy had been restored, the parliament dissolved, and the constitution suspended.

Al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* introduces a new form of character, setting, language, and narrative that serves the novel's new realist agenda. New realism applies to different genres and forms of art and rejects "the restriction to similar artistic moulds or styles" (Muruwwa 99). Muruwwa believes that writing in light of new realism is not only an intellectual or dynamic process, but also "a process in which the mind (consciousness), affection and imagination all together take part, and the role that both affection and imagination play is indispensable" (101). Furthermore, he suggests that without this imagination, the work of art will lack its dynamism and aesthetic foundation (101). The aesthetic value of the work of art stems from what the writer's imagination and emotions add to it, making it more appealing for the reader than the rigid historical facts. For example, Muruwwa criticises Luwis Awad for not being able to identify the tragic elements in al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard*, such as "the strong deprived love, the thirsty earth on the banks of the Canal [...], the vice made by suppressed virtue [...], the human forces aspiring for the future: the future of Egypt which was, in the thirties, struggling for the land, the constitution, and independence" (127-128). This observation casts doubt on Awad's claim that realistic literature is devoid of imagination.

This new realism does not bind al-Sharqawi's imagination; instead, it unleashes it in a skilful way that prevents it from being idealised. Hence, al-Sharqawi's fictional portrayal of the Egyptian village in *al-Ard* markedly steers away from the stereotypical romantic image of the

Egyptian village where people live happily in tranquillity and self-sufficiency with no trouble, as depicted in Mohammed Hussein Heikal's *Zaynab* (1930), the first modern novel in Arabic literature. *Zaynab* centres around the nature of life in the Egyptian village and introduces its traditional social and political relationships. In *al-Ard*, the narrator compares his village to that of *Zaynab*:

The children's eyes were not consumed by flies. In Zaynab's village, men did not pass blood and pus in their urine, nor were they convulsed with pains which did not leave them till they were silent... Zaynab's village had never tasted the whip, as my village had. On the other hand, Zaynab's village had never known the thrill of defying destiny, the foreigner, the Umda, the government, and of winning, too, at times. (*Egyptian Earth* 221)

This quote illustrates how al-Sharqawi rejects the romantic description of the village's beauty as it appears in Haykal's *Zaynab*. Instead, he discusses its people's ideologies and their struggle, focusing on human existence, freedom, rights for the Egyptian peasants, and national liberation: there is "more than a difference of ideological perspective and worldview here in this shift" (Siddiq 92). Muhammad Siddiq contends that the shift in the titles from *Zaynab* to *al-Ard* is suggestive of *al-Ard*'s non-individualistic themes compared to *Zaynab*'s: "from the human individual in *Zaynab* to the contested land in *al-Ard*" (92).

al-Ard presents the peasants' dilemma in a small village in the 1930s in Egypt when they are exploited by a powerful local landowner, an agent of the corrupt government. A combination of the local *Umda* and the British-controlled police and army rule most of Egypt. The *fellahin* (peasants) are at the mercy of the repressive *Umda*, who freely steals their land and imprisons them, ostensibly without reason. A new road is to be built, which will take much of the peasants' valuable farmland without compensation. The novel also presents the deteriorating economic conditions in the village when, for the first time, the peasants sell their main crop, cotton, at a low price to survive. Most of the novel's events concerning how the *fellahin* resist this oppression are

told through the eyes of a 12-year-old boy who returns from his school in Cairo to find his village torn by dispute and fear. The crisis comes when Mahmoud Bey, the representative of the government in the village who is still associated with the former British coloniser, orders the peasants to irrigate their fields for only five days a month instead of the regular cycle of ten days. It is a demand that threatens the whole life of the village. Instigated by a feudalist *Pasha* who owns 200 acres and a tyrannical government, this demand creates a conflict between the peasantry and their oppressors. Control over means of production, such as capital, labour, machinery and raw materials, is regarded as the primary factor in determining class and also the reason for the class struggle. In this case, the conflict arises as a direct consequence of Mahmoud Bey and the *Pasha's* exploitation of the poor peasants, notably by taking the latter's water to irrigate their own lands and building a new road that links the village to the palace of the *Pasha*.

al-Ard offers a representation of certain aspects of 1930s Egypt, whose socio-political and economic conditions President Abdel Nasser describes in his article "The Egyptian Revolution":

In 1936, a treaty provided for the ending of British occupation, but it also required a permanent agreement between Egypt and Britain - a provision very likely to mean permanent occupation. After 1936 the British took the opportunity of party frictions to renew their intervention in Egyptian affairs. The thirst of party leaders after power was also utilised by King Farouk to realise personal ambitions at the expense of the vital interests of the people. He claimed exemption from taxation and got control of thousands of acres of state property and entailed land. Merit was no criterion for rewards, nor was there an equality of opportunity; privileges were reserved for relatives and favourites of ministers in power. The results were nepotism and corruption. Egypt had a working constitution, but it veiled arbitrary rule. (202).

The combination of the Egyptian monarchy with the British coloniser, the improper distribution of land, the feudalists' monopoly of opportunities and privileges, and favouritism and nepotism in legal power were the sparks that ignited the 1952 revolution.

The revolutionary sphere of *al-Ard*'s story makes it a socialist realist novel, and it places al-Sharqawi among the socialist realist novelists who are different from earlier realists, such as the critical realists. On the one hand, critical realists, such as Walter Scott, Honoré de Balzac, and Leo Tolstoy "show an awareness of the social process, including the role of the working class, though critical realists do not necessarily promote the cause of the proletariat" (Booker, *Encyclopedia of Literature* 601). In Arabic literature, Naguib Mahfouz's works stand out as a model of critical realism, notably in novels such as *Bidaya wa Nihaya* (1949) (*A Beginning and an End*) and *Madaq Alley* (1947) (*Roqaq al-Madaq*), in which he presents a realistic image of Egyptian society in all its positive and negative aspects. Anwar al-Ma'addawi believes that *Bidaya wa Nihaya* reaches the climax of realism in portraying the life of Cairenes (757-59). However, this portrayal is devoid of promoting socialist actions to overcome the challenges that face society.

On the other hand, the socialist realists are strongly committed to "the cause of the proletariat", and they usually show a strong "sense of historical movement toward the revolutionary victory of the working class" in their literary works (Booker *Encyclopedia of Literature* 601). This affirms what Maxim Gorky stresses about the method of socialist realism in literature, since, for him, literature tends "not just to reflect reality," but is instead "what rises above existing reality" (qtd. in Gutkin 39). Hence, the socialist realist should show three realities: the past, the present, and "the reality of the future" (39). This third reality is an optimistic one, which shows "what ought to be" (39). In 1967, Vladimir Kirshon, a Soviet writer and organiser of the Association of Proletarian Writers, addressed socialist realism, when it was still a new term, in his book *O literature i iskusstve* (1964) (*About Literature and Art*). A. Kemp-Welch explains why Kirshon defined socialist realism as a proletarian method, saying:

In his view, socialist realism was simply 'the method of the proletariat' in art. The method was proletarian because this was the only class which while existing in the present, also belonged to the future. By showing the most essential relations – those of class – between characters in a book or play, a socialist realist would also promote consciousness of classless relations to come” (144).

In this way, socialist realism often tells stories of how apolitical individuals become conscious of their class position and material interests; in other words, how they develop a political and revolutionary consciousness.

Al-Ard is no exception. The peasants' suffering in defence of their land, their growing socio-political consciousness and solidarity, and rebellion for freedom, are the novel's central themes. Mohamed Hassan Abdullah maintains the effect of *al-Ard* at the time of its publication was so significant that it “raised an extensive debate for its realistic representation of a new growing society while condemning the main sources of frustration and corruption in the past and the present” (95). He also adds that the novel helped create Marxism and realism as a new direction for Arabic fiction, namely “Socialist Realism” (95). In *al-Ard*, we find that corruption and foreign occupation are criticised; it constitutes a call for freedom in a socialist vein. Thus, al-Sharqawi is one of the first writers to expose the farmers' experience during the feudal system and Egypt's long British occupation. This condition forced them into a constant struggle for mere survival. In the following sections, I examine how social stratification is presented through characters with a distinctive language in an untraditional setting, constituting a new form of socialist realism in Arabic literature.

Abdullah notes al-Sharqawi was influenced by the Italian novel *Fontamara* (1933) by Ignazio Silone, which was translated into Arabic by Issa Naouri in 1963. Like al-Sharqawi, Silone lived in “one of the mountainous villages in southern Italy, and his village resembles the village of al-Sharqawi in the “*al-Ard*” with a difference in the “methods used by the masters to deceive the

peasants” (Abdullah 101). He explains that the problems of water, religious people, teamwork, and the conflict between the city and the village, *Fontamara* addressed these themes first. However, this is not a challenge to al-Sharqawi’s ability to present an honest novel depicting his own environment or “his own vision of a certain environment” (101). Gaber Asfour explains that when they invited al-Sharqawi to the Department of Arabic Language in Cairo University in 1974, he said that he derived the character of Waseefa from a real person in his village. Al-Sharqawi also talked about the influence of the novel *Fontemara*. Asfour writes:

It is not important to prove the origin of Waseefa in the village of Dalatun. The most important thing is to confirm what al-Sharqawi has achieved in terms of a realistic and successful achievement on multiple levels. The narrative language confirms the realistic connotation of characters and events. There is the awareness of locality and privacy that highlights land in its relationship to the duality between the hypocritical sheikh who justifies injustice and the rebellious sheikh who rebelled against injustice. The multiplicity of personality levels, its internal conflicts, the response of its internal composition to its external features, its interaction with events, and the response of events to the logic of causation, the ability to embody the social reality of the village in its struggle, movement and change, we will find in front of us a typical model of realistic literature that Mahmoud Amin Al-Alam and Abdel-Azim Anis were called a practical model for reflection theory at that time. (“Literary papers: Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi”)

The last extract illustrates al-Sharqawi’s skills in presenting a new form of New Realism in Arabic literature. In the following sections, I scrutinise how *al-Ard* is regarded as a typical example of the genre.

2.2 *Al-Ard*’s Characters as Models of New Realism

Weber maintains that in a class-oriented society, people are stratified only according to their economic order. For Weber, the economic order is “merely the way in which the economic goods and services are distributed” (138). Weber placed the people who have a similar level of wealth or property in the same class. Accordingly, he believed that people are economically classified into the propertied and the propertyless. As a result, the “class situation” can be determined only by wealth, property, or assets (economic situation) (139). Weber also further classified the propertied people into four sub-groups. Those who own property such as “residential houses, factories, depots, or stores, agriculturally usable land” (139), whether this is on a large or small scale, are the first group. The propertied can also include those who possess “mines, of domestic animals, people (slaves)” (139). Besides this, properties can be the tools of production or any capital (money or goods). Finally, a person’s ownership of products of their own labour or efforts or someone else’s labour comes under this classification (139).

Based on the Weberian approach, al-Sharqawi creates social stratification in *al-Ard* among his characters, who encounter challenges and develop throughout the novel. This social stratification is based on the characters’ economic situation. Those who possess land or any other properties belong to a social stratum higher than those with less or no property. Al-Sharqawi introduces two forces that struggle against each other in the village. The ruling class, consisting of the *Pasha*, Mahmoud Bey, the police chief, and the *Omda*, represent the first force. They oversee the enforcement of law and order in the village. They are exploiters, dictators, and oppressors who work solely for their own prosperity, with no concern for the village’s peasants.

The ruled class, the peasants, including Muhammad Abu Suweilim, the chief guard, Sheikh Hassouna, the headmaster of the village school, and Abdul Hadi, the young revolutionary of the village, are vivid examples of a counterforce. Most of these peasants possess a piece of land. The conflict between these two social strata stems from the propertied ruling class’s attempt to seize the ruled class’s property, and the latter’s struggle to defend their property out of a sense

of loyalty to their land. To highlight the struggle of the ruled class, al-Sharqawi does not focus on the ruling class's characters as much as he does on the peasants, making them the novel's protagonists.

It is interesting to note that al-Sharqawi's socio-political representation of Egyptian peasants in *al-Ard* counters that of Karl Marx, who delineates the French peasants during the 19th century. Marx contends that these peasants do not have political power and constitute a political party, for they are not "revolutionary" but "conservative" (63). He believes that their lack of education or sophistication results in their lack of political awareness, for they "cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (62). On the contrary, the Egyptian peasants in *al-Ard* constitute the majority of the population and are capable of forming a community that has strong national bonds. Al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah* shows the growing political awareness of the Egyptian peasantry and their role in forming the political organisation of the Socialist Union in their village. That is why al-Sharqawi chooses the revolutionary protagonists of *al-Ard* from the peasantry to present his new form of socialist realism.

G. Žekulin explains that socialist realist literary works should address past, present, and future, and the protagonists of such works should represent what *was* in the past and what *is* at present and what *ought to be* in the future (474). These representations reflect the two qualities of the protagonist: realism and idealism. Žekulin adds that in socialist realism "characters must be based on reality but at the same time they must represent the ideal. The blend of these two qualities is the answer: the character, while 'real', must be at the same time 'ideal'" (474). In *al-Ard*, al-Sharqawi adapts socialist realism to an Egyptian agrarian context through his characterisation. He chooses his typical and ideal protagonists from the peasantry. These peasant protagonists are both typical of the Egyptian peasants during the monarchy. Hilary Kilpatrick comments on al-Sharqawi's realist presentation of various characters in the novel:

Equally authentic is its representation of village types and forms of behaviour. Umdah (village headman), imam, shopkeeper, schoolteacher, smallholder, landless peasants, all come to vigorous life, even if most of them are stereotypes. Unexpectedly for an author with pronounced Marxist convictions, the vanguard of the struggle against oppression is represented by the smallholders, the most heroic figures in the novel, and this serves to justify some lyrical passages conveying the peasant's profound attachment to his land.

(250)

Kilpatrick believes that all the characters portrayed by al-Sharqawi in *al-Ard* are faithful reflections of people one might meet in real-life scenarios of the kind depicted in the novel. However, al-Sharqawi places greater focus on the smallholding peasants than other characters in the narrative, such as Abdul Hadi, Abu Suweilim, Waseefa and Mohamed Effendi. He introduces them as idealistic as a means of developing a revolutionary spirit throughout the novel. He does not, on the other hand, invest any one of them with individual heroism. One reader may consider Abdul Hadi the hero for being the most powerful and revolutionary young man of the village; another reader may attribute this role to Waseefa for being the rebellious woman; a third may designate Abu Suweilim the hero for being the inspirational leader. There is, in other words, no one hero around whom the novel revolves, as more than one character develops and helps promote class consciousness in the village. This consciousness can be developed by an individual or a group of people who act as heroes influencing others; indeed, one of al-Sharqawi's literary contributions to the New Realism genre in Arabic novels is precisely that he presents collective heroism. This sees prototypical Marxist characters uniting for a common cause and struggling for their socio-political and economic freedom, manipulated by their exploiters (i.e., the owners of means of production, the capitalists, and dictatorial leaders). Abu Suweilim, Abdul Hadi and Sheikh Hassouna are more than mere fictional characters; they are depicted as symbols of a continual quest for freedom, justice, and equality in society. They lose their jobs and are put in

prison, yet they continue to resist the government's unjust laws. Al-Sharqawi calls on all the oppressed to continue to stand against their oppressors.

I contend that al-Sharqawi's collective heroism stems from his socialist principles, according to which the individual should be a part of a group; in this case, the peasants who stand against the ruling class. Even though Abdul Hadi appears as the main hero who always embraces socialist values and stands against the government to defend peasants' lands. There is a collective discussion around the village's challenges, and there is no central dominating opinion. Mona H Mones observes that al-Sharqawi's use of the technique of shifting the point-of-view between the different characters in his novel has two purposes:

First, he created a sense of communal life, and, second, he made clear that his village community consisted of one largely homogenous group of peasants. (i.e. Abdul Hadi, Abou Souelam, Shenawi, Al Hag Youssef, Mohamed Effendi, Al Sheikh Hassouna, among others) who were fighting the same enemy, namely, the government authorities (i.e., the 'pasha, the 'oumda', Abdel Ati among others) for the same aim, namely, to safeguard both their rights of free citizenship, and the property of their lands. (261)

This renders the novel a new form of socialist realism: it presents all the peasant characters mentioned above as protagonists who fight communally against the ruling regime.

Another feature that makes this novel an example of socialist realism in its new form is al-Sharqawi's optimistic trend, represented by the positive heroes who aspire undesperingly to gain their freedom. Žekulin states,

The affirmative attitude of Socialist Realism results in the emergence of the "positive" hero. This is logical. How is one to assert, to propound, to teach, to show the way, by means of a work of art and not by any other means, if one does not possess within the work of art a tool to do this? The author's mouthpiece and tool is the character in whom his ideals are embodied and through whom they are made to come to light. (471)

Here, Žekulin indicates the significance of the positive hero who speaks and acts on behalf of the socialist realist author. Their speech and collective action advocate a political revolution against corruption.

Collective action – what Weber also calls “mass action by the members of the class” (“The Distribution of Power” 140) – is not only influenced by a “shared intense feeling about a similar situation, especially an economic one” (141) but can also emerge from other cultural elements such as “intellectual conditions” (140). Therefore, education, for example, can lead to social awareness or consciousness. This consciousness happens gradually, and it usually necessitates that people “work together to resist oppression” (140). Thus, the consciousness of the oppressed (ideology) arises from “the material realities and struggles, but once it has arisen, it informs the further struggle” (140). Although such a struggle may not reap what it sows, carrying on this endless struggle is positive for a socialist realist. In *al-Ard*, this positive struggle manifests itself in various incidents, such as writing the petition asking for increasing the irrigation days, throwing the steel of the new road in the river, and the women’s act of attacking and beating the *Umda*. The peasants’ petition clearly emphasises al-Sharqawi’s tendency for revolutionary ideas as a form of resistance to the new irrigation laws. Thus, the petition reveals the possible consciousness of the peasants and shows class solidarity. Nevertheless, the *Umda* and Mahmoud Bey use their signatures to serve their own interests by building a new highway to link the *Pasha*’s new house with the main road to Cairo:

The new petition, which Muhammad Effendi and Mahmoud Bey had taken to Cairo, had nothing to do with irrigation. The *Umda* had tricked the village, and in collaboration with Mahmoud Bey had forced the villagers to sign a document requesting the construction of a highway, to run across their land, linking the *Pasha*’s new palace with the main road to Cairo. (*Egyptian Earth* 128)

Douglas Magrath notes this new road's figurative meaning in creating a connection between the village and Cairo. He argues that this new road is expected to link not only the *Pasha's* palace but also the villagers to the modernity of daily life in Cairo: "The villagers are looking away from their formerly mosque-centred society towards a modern way of life symbolised by the new road that links the previously isolated village to the city" (201). Unsurprisingly, in al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah*, an extension of the story of *al-Ard*, the city-educated villagers participate in releasing the peasants from jail. This fulfils the expectation that "this new road will open the door of education to the next generation who now can ride buses into the city to attend school" (Magrath 201). However, I argue that the construction of this new road may imply a negative figurative meaning too. From a Marxist perspective, there is a metaphorical significance of a modern road linking the *Pasha's* palace to Cairo across the peasant's land. It is a figuration of the power that links the large landowners and the government at that time. Therefore, I contend that the main aim beyond building the new road is the connection between the *Pasha's* palace and Cairo as the seat of the government rather than the connection between the isolated village to the modern life of Cairo.

Because the petition has been changed and the new road is under construction, conflict escalates between the peasants and the government, resulting in three leading revolutionary peasants being sent to prison for opening the canals and throwing the road-building equipment into the river. After they have signed the petition and thrown the steel in the water, a new social awareness emerges among this group of peasants. Another form of protest that shows the villagers' growing sense of rebellion occurs when they use sarcasm against the chief of the police and the village's vice chief at the funeral of the village chief. For the first time, they fail to treat the police chief and his followers with respect and, instead, start making fun of them. Such sarcasm is an example of resistance against the representatives of the government. The welcoming ceremony for the government ministers also demonstrates the discontent of the people with the government. The police chief gathers labourers, farmers, and even prisoners to welcome the

ministers and teach them the slogans they are supposed to chant upon the ministers' arrival. Unexpectedly, the people disobey the mayor's orders and turn the ceremony into an enthusiastic demonstration, with slogans directed against the government:

He returned to the villagers. They must shout: Long Live His Glorious Majesty! Long Live the People's Party! And above all, Long Live Sidky! And this last shout must be intoned rhythmically, many times [...] You must shout in rhythm... You know what rhythm is? ... You have your beledi drums... You must shout rhythmically, as to a drum! Just as you used to do, in 1919. Didn't you shout, Long Live Egypt ... very musically? Long Live Egypt! And in the elections, you used to shout Long Live The Wafd! Didn't it go like that? Now you must shout Long Live Sidky in the same rhythm. Just the same. (*Egyptian Earth* 178-179)

The above extract highlights the political upheavals in Egyptian society in the early 1930s. The narrator begins the novel by recalling his memories from the past and talking about political corruption. He starts telling the story, disappears, and comes back at the end of the story. His role is no less important than that of other characters, even though al-Sharqawi presents him as anonymous. The word "my village" recurs across his narration as well as in descriptions throughout the novel. An example can be seen when he compares his village to the village described in Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's *Zaynab*: "I wished that my village could be a village without troubles, like the village where Zaynab lived [...] The farmers there had no troubles with their irrigation water, the government did not take their land away, nor did they send men in khaki to flog them with whips" (*Egyptian Earth* 221). These lines reflect the narrator's sense of belonging to the village.

According to Weber, stratification by status is determined by the "monopolization of ideal and material goods or opportunities" ("The Distribution of Power" 146). Abdul Hadi is one of the leading characters in the novel: he belongs to the land and is aware of its problems. He has a high

standing due to his ownership of land. As the narrator states, “an acre ... a separate acre: it gave him a special standing in the village. Not only in the village but also town, Abdul Hadi could sit with his uncle in the Armenian café with the Umda, with all the notables” (*Egyptian Earth* 40). Owning that one acre of land escalates Abdul Hadi to a higher stratum in his class. Ahmad Muhammad Attiya stresses Abdul Hadi’s financial and social status, stating that he is “a petty-bourgeois who owns an acre of land” (49). Although that one acre of land may seem insignificant, owning even a small piece of land would have been considered a fortune for an Egyptian peasant at that time, and it would have placed him on a higher stratum than the lower-class landless peasants, mostly if he was “one of ten who owned an acre, or more, in the village” (*Egyptian Earth* 40). This land possession affords Abdul Hadi “a special standing” (*Egyptian Earth* 40) and some village privileges. Nevertheless, it is not only this small piece of land but also his physical, warrior-like attributes (he is the best stick player⁸ in the village) that give him high social status.

Al-Sharqawi introduces the revolutionary spirit of the peasants to highlight the novel’s socialist and nationalist principles. Al Mousa states that “the peasants’ developed sense of nationalism manifests itself in their attachment to the land as a part of the decolonizational process at work in the novel” (127). Al-Sharqawi introduces the spirit of the peasants and labourers’ revolt against the corrupt regime through the positive heroic characters of Abou Suweilim, Sheikh Hassouna, and Abdul Hadi, who develop a growing sense of nationalism in the village. The government punishes them for protesting by firing the first from his job as the chief guard of the village, moving the second to a faraway city in Egypt as a school headmaster, and taking half an

⁸ Playing or dancing with a stick or cane is an Egyptian village tradition. It is called sometimes *Tahtib*, the Egyptian Stick-Fighting Martial Art.

acre of land from the third. These three characters resist the government in various oppressive incidents, such as the government's election, the suspension of the 1923 constitution, the new rules of irrigation and the new road's construction. Not only do they stand against the government, but they also urge the members of their class and the whole village to rebel against all forms of oppression and to defend their land.

Abdul Hadi's revolutionary character appears when he challenges the orders of the government and criticises its violations of the law:

You call this a government? A government which steals half our water- and for whose benefit, Alwani? You know, as well as I do, ...for the Pasha, the Pasha who's recently bought a stretch of new land, land not fit for dogs to eat off, and he wants to improve it by taking our water ... Wonderful, wonderful, this government of ours! Stop the wheels, shut the canals ...I can see blood will be flowing before water. (*Egyptian Earth* 48)

These few lines clearly show the language of protest and dissatisfaction. Along with the peasants, Abdul Hadi decides to stand against the new irrigation laws. Al-Sharqawi tries to show the nationalist resistance against the British coloniser by recalling the 1919 revolution.

It is crucial to analyse the critical revolutionary role of Muhammad Abu Suweilim, Waseefa's father, and Sheikh Hassouna in uniting the village's peasants and urging them to stand against the government's tyrannical orders. Both can be regarded as typical examples of the positive hero of Soviet-style socialist realism. A.I. Revyakin describes the positive hero of Soviet literature as a "genuine man, a man of clear conscience, in whom are incorporated the best spiritual properties and moral features of the working people" (qtd. in Žekulin 471). They are inspirational leaders to the peasants in the novel. Nedal Al- Mousa states that the primary source of inspiration for the peasants' resistance and anti-government sentiment in the novel is the 1919 revolution, which led to the UK ending its protectorate and withdrawing from Egypt 1922 (132). One of Abu Suweilim's inspirational speeches centres around reminding the peasants of the

collective spirit of the revolution of 1919, implicating the necessity of working together to stand against the current corruption. Al-Sharqawi presents the spirit of the protest of Sheikh Hassouna when he “tried to incite the village to revolt, as they had done when the English exiled the national leader” (*Egyptian Earth* 133). Sheikh Hassouna refuses to welcome the deputy of the People’s Party when he visits his school. He even urges the peasants to revolt against that visit. As a result, he is sent away to a remote village.

Male characters express the novel’s revolutionary spirit, but female characters also play a vital role. The key example is the role played by Waseefa, who leads the village against oppression in *al-Ard*. An example of her revolutionary contribution is the scene of the women’s march towards the house of the village’s chief; it shows women standing against the oppression of a government that arrests their men. They humiliate the village’s chief by insulting and beating him in front of his family and guards. Waseefa, the daughter of Abu Suweilim, is an example of a girl brought up in a family that adheres to revolutionist ideas.

Although Waseefa exhibits revolutionary tendencies, she also aspires to class mobility. She knows about Abdul Hadi’s intention to propose to her, “but she could not decide what she felt. She had set her mind on marrying someone who wore a tarboosh, like her sister’s husband” (*Egyptian Earth* 18). Above all, these words show Waseefa’s reluctance to marry within her own class. At the beginning of the novel, she expresses her desire to have a relationship with the young narrator because he lives in the city. She daydreams about living in the city among people with prestige. In this way, she is an ideologically conflicted character whose function is to warn against automatic identifications of a character with one particular class. Waseefa belongs to the peasants’ class and lives in the village, but her heart is attached to living in the city.

According to Weber, this labour-provider can be sub-classified according to the type of service or labour they provide, or “whether they provide a continuous or discontinuous relationship to the recipient” (140). In *al-Ard*, examples of these propertyless people include

Sheikh Shinawi, Kadra⁹, and Alwani. Through such minor characters who are not developed in any significant way throughout the novel, al-Sharqawi demonstrates how social status can play a part within the propertyless class. Sheikh Shinawi's high social status stems from his religious power as the Sheikh and the Mufti of the village. However, Sheikh Shinawi has lost his social position among the people in the village due to his loyalty to the government. He turns into an opportunist who seeks to gain an advantage from every situation and misuses his occupation. For example, the Sheikh appears as a tool in the government's hands to spread and legitimate their ideology throughout society. As a religious leader in the village, he uses his eloquence and sharp tongue to convince people to follow the regime. His bombastic language makes people think he knows more than he does. He is a profiteer, happy to live and work with whoever has the power. Abdel Rahman Fouda notes that "the author depicts a bad image of the Sheikh through his physical description" (350). The narrator describes him as saying, "A tall, burly massive man with a thick scruff and huge belly that likes food and feasts. We as children thought that he could put a cow in his tummy" (*Al-Ard* 13)¹⁰. Abdel Fattah Osman explains that that "al-Sharqawi uses the descriptive style and dialogue to uncover the external features of Sheikh Shinawi as well as the internal ones and to highlight his negatives. He makes him talk in a colloquial language a lot to create a vivid realism which is the author's concern" (qtd. in Fouda 356).

Through the character of Shinawi, al-Sharqawi introduces several philosophical and religious observations. First, it should be noted that al-Sharqawi is not against religion itself in the

⁹ It is the translator in *Egyptian Earth* who opted for Kadra although the correct spelling of this name, based on how it is pronounced in Arabic, is *Khadra*.

¹⁰ I will use the format (*Al-Ard* page number) for all the quotes which is taken from the original Arabic text, translated by myself, and (*Egyptian Earth* page number) for the quotes taken from the English version.

novel; instead, he is against religious leaders like the Sheikh. In other words, al-Sharqawi adopts an anti-clerical rather than an anti-religious position. Magrath claims that “although the main thrust of his works is political in nature, he touches on religion and its misuse by the authorities as an impediment to the social awareness and progress of the people” (201). Al-Sharqawi wants to unmask religious leaders who misuse religion. Until the end, he remained a socialist despite his Islamic leanings; his brand of socialism included belief in Islam and was consistent with the religious obligations of prayer, fasting, and charity. Dr Sherif al-Sharqawi, his son, talks about his last days when “he used to keep praying and crying when he listens to the Qur’an” (qtd. in Kamal Ali 140). Al-Sharqawi did not see Islam and socialism as opposed; instead, he sought a way to see their connection. Mohammad N. Jalal mentions that al-Sharqawi’s Marxist leftist writings at the beginning of his literary career “tended to adopt some of the Islamic thought aspects and relate such thought to the leftist calls for social reform” (57).

Second, the representation of religious people in the novel indicates that class stratification and class struggle are affected by religion’s well-established role in Egypt. Religious figures are often in complex situations when it comes to social and political struggles. They may stand against some political parties or work with others depending on whether these aims of such parties align with their own. They may work with socialist movements such as religious socialists. Some of them may be so opportunistic as to support the class in power. Sheikh Shinawi is an example of a religious figure who works for his own advantage: he supports the government by urging people to follow the orders and practice the true religion so that their land would prosper. He blames the peasants, not the government, for the hardships and sufferings they face in the village.

In *al-Ard*, al-Sharqawi not only represents the positively privileged characters but also describes the negatively privileged ones. Among these socially unprivileged characters, we encounter the female prostitute Kadra. Her notorious reputation degrades her social status. Al-Sharqawi describes Kadra as “a girl who danced at every wedding, a girl who would openly

discuss sexual relations, on whatever occasion, and who would sell herself cheaply on a feast day, or a harvest celebration” (*Egyptian Earth* 38-39). Her financial condition is so miserable that she “would sell herself to the youths of the village, and so cheaply, sometimes for as little as a cucumber, on a hot summer day” (*Egyptian Earth* 69). The peasants disgrace Kadra’s death as she commits suicide, which is both religiously and culturally considered a foul deed: “but to kill herself, that was a sin, in God’s eyes, the worst sin of all” (*Egyptian Earth* 142). For them, she is such an outcast that “it was best to bury her quickly, before the townspeople heard about the murder” (*Egyptian Earth* 142), without any funeral. Abdul Hadi’s suggestion that she should be buried in Sheikh Shinawi’s grave-plot implies a subtle irony as he claims that “he [Sheikh Shinawi] and she [Kadra] were similarly propertied: The Sheikh owns nothing in the village except his grave-plot” (142). In this sense, Abdul Hadi assumes that both Sheikh Shinawi and Kadra belong to the same social stratum. Abdul Hadi’s ironic remark about the social status of Kadra and Sheikh Shinawi suggests immorality of their means: to attain materialistic benefits, Kadra sells her body, and Sheikh Shinawi sells his religion.

Kadra’s immorality is defended by Jihan Zakarriya on the grounds that Kadra’s sexual behaviour is just for money and that it is not an option for her since she has no family or other source of income. She believes that it is harsh that the peasants “judge the morality of a Muslim woman, ignoring the denial of her economic rights and opportunities that forced her to sell her body for money” (12). Zakarriya does not only blame the male villagers for such cruel judgement but also blames the female characters such as Waseefa, “who disrespect Khadra and other working women” (12), which indirectly renders the village as a place with a “sexist culture” (12).

The fact that peasants who have sexual relationships with Kadra are not disrespected in the same way tends to confirm Zakarriya’s point about sexism. If a woman, to survive, resorts to prostitution is condemned by the community, but a man who also resorts to prostitution—for pleasure but not survival—is not condemned as much, then Kadra’s status is based on her

society's gender norms. But al-Sharqawi asks us to look at prostitution, not in moral terms, but in terms of economics. As a Marxist, al-Sharqawi is not much interested in morality, and he sees morality as secondary to the material conditions of production. Therefore, from a Marxist perspective, Kadra is the ultimate proletarian, having only her body to sell. She can be seen as part of the author's analysis of land, labour, and status in a 1930s Egyptian village.

However, while I see that Kadra is nothing but a victim of social oppression, I contend that Zakarriya's judgment is subjective and exaggerative. Being socially victimised, Karda reflects the dire economic conditions during the 1930s in Egypt, which compelled some poor women to resort to prostitution as a source of income. Mostafa Baiuomy confirms that "poverty and the bad economic conditions are the causes of the phenomenon of the prostitute" (57-58). Thus, by introducing characters such as Kadra in his novel, al-Sharqawi attempts to show the wide gap between the people in the village that made a character like Kadra have nothing, even a place to be buried after her tragic death. At the same time, it is harsh to say that the village's culture is gender-based discriminative for disrespecting, as Zakarriya states, a working female like Kadra. Villagers disrespect Karda not for her gender or her economic independence but for the kind of work she does. Under no condition, even severe poverty, would the Egyptian culture, whether in a village or town, legitimate sex trade. It is significant to note that the villagers respect the work done by "the migrant girls who went from farm to farm, working by the day...they sold their labour, having nothing to offer, not owing even a scrap of soil for themselves" (32-32). Even though, those girls are treated as inferior for having no land, not for their work as labourers. Also, at no point does Waseefa look down upon Kadra for making her living; she indirectly expresses her sympathy for her socio-economic status, which pushes her to do such offensive work: "Ah, my poor Kadra! Every fiesta, and you're worth no more than a piece of corn!" (*Egyptian Earth* 32). It is not only the sex trade but also sex outside a marital relationship that is not socially accepted in the village. This is clear when we see how Waseefa begs the narrator not to tell anyone about the hug they

have together in secret: “But listen...this is important. By all you hold dear, don’t speak a word of this to anyone. Not a word, I beg of you. This village is full of scandalmongers. If you told them...please, please ...I’ve never done this before, never” (*Egyptian Earth* 29). Her fear of being disgraced by the villagers and even by her lover for what she has done signifies how shameful this act is in the village’s culture.

Kalish Pyakuryal observes that both Marx and Weber consider control over property to be a fundamental element in determining an individual’s life chances or class. However, their interpretations are not identical. For Marx, the defining feature of class is ownership and control over means of production, whereas Weber refers more directly to the ownership of property per se. Weber added two other factors to Marx’s privileging of material factors: legal power and prestige. Thus, Weber considers property, legal power, and prestige as the three factors that shape hierarchies in any society. He adds that differences in property create classes, while differences in power create strata (22). According to this schema, Kadra and Alwani are outcasts in the village because they own nothing.

From a Marxist perspective, all these characters belong to the peasant class. However, according to Weber, they have different social and legal statuses. These are called class fractions in Marxist analysis, but they indicate status for Weber. Nevertheless, Weber points out that status operates within a class in the sense that economic situation, level of education, occupation, and personal and physical qualities are some of the indicators of a person’s social standing (428). In *al-Ard*, characters such as the *Umda*, Abdul Hadi, Sheikh Hassouna, Abu Suweilim, Mohamed Effendi, Alwani, and Khadra belong to different strata within the peasant class owing to the different social standing they acquire. The *Umda* gains power due to his political and economic position: he owns land and has legal power by representing the People’s Party. Sheikh Shinawi belongs to a higher stratum due to his religious occupation in the village. Abdul Hadi is part of the small-holding peasants, as he owns one acre of land. For their part, Muhammad Effendi and

Sheikh Hassouna are high-status peasants because of their level of education. Mohammed Effendi has particular prestige among the peasants because he is highly educated and owns the land.

Muhammad Effendi and his brother Diab represent two different strata. They inherit fifteen *kirats*¹¹ from their father, but Muhammad Effendi increases his land to one *feddan* and twenty *kirats*. Despite being his brother, Diab sleeps in the stable to guard the animals because he is an illiterate peasant taking care of the land while Muhammad Effendi stays in a superior room: “Diab found his brother shut in the room he had specially built on the roof, removed from the quarters of Diab and his mother. As Muhammad Effendi had built his room after becoming a schoolmaster, their mother called it ‘the Effendi’s study’” (*Egyptian Earth* 95). Education and skills give Muhammad Effendi a higher status than his brother besides the land he has acquired. This difference between two brothers who are nonetheless members of the same class is shown when Muhammad Effendi rides on his donkey while Diab walks barefoot beside him.

Weber contends that any physical contact with low-status people can disgrace the person and is regarded as “ritualistic impurity” or a stigma that can be “atoned for by religious rituals” (144). Characters like Kadra and Alwani are deemed to be negatively privileged and outcasts for being landless. Talking to Kadra, for instance, is considered disgraceful due to her infamous reputation. She lacks the three elements required for positive privilege, namely “origin, lineage, and, above all, land possession” (Siddiq 95). Muhammad Siddiq comments that “failure to meet these requirements dooms individuals like Alwani and Khadra to permanent outsider status” (95). This disgrace or stigma follows Kadra in death: “the outcast Khadra is denied burial in the

¹¹ One *feddan* consists of 24 *kirats*.

cemetery of the village” (95). The peasants’ refusal to let the dead Kadra physically near their grave-plots affirms her ritualistic impurity.

This status classification not only manifests itself among the peasants but also among the government’s legal representatives. According to Weber, “the legal order can guarantee power as well as honor” (“The Distribution of Power” 138). Weber explains that it is “an additional factor that enhances the chance to possess power and create an honorable reputation” (138). Thus, the legal position of the *Umda* is what gives him honourable status among the peasants in the village. However, Weber adds that “the legal order cannot always secure [power and honor]” (138). The social status of the *Umda*, for example, is degraded in front of the city’s government employees who enjoy a higher legal status. Waseefa describes this hierarchy among the men of government:

Neither Alwani, nor the Sheikh who employed him, nor yet the Magistrate himself counted for anything. Everyone went in fear of the official above him. The Magistrate who was omnipotent in the village, was subservient to the governor of the province, and he had been seen kissing the hand of the Minister of the Interior, when that official had visited the school where her sister’s husband worked (31).

It seems that the power of the legal representatives in the village reduces when compared to those in the city who enjoy a higher degree of legal power.

2.3 The Significance of the Setting in *al-Ard*’s New Realism

The setting in *al-Ard*, specifically in terms of the time and place of events, adds to the novel’s socialist realism. The author weaves the events of *al-Ard* relying on the relationship between the characters and the setting. Rachel Webb contends that “the cultivated agrarian landscape imprints and shapes the fellahin’s resistance as a catalyst for political action, and grounds the peasants’ participation in anti-colonial politics” (251). Hence, the village is not a static place; instead, it is a

dynamic one where characters react with their surroundings, face their problems and aspire to overcome them.

Place in *al-Ard* is so significant that it is used as the novel's title. Al-Sharqawi presents different connotations for the earth as a means of production, home and source of dignity for *al-Fallah*. From the beginning, he makes it clear to his readers that the land is the "only source for the physical and spiritual existence of the characters" (Al-Sayed 83). It is the source of wealth for the peasants, both in terms of agricultural production and social status. Above all, *al-Ard* symbolises independence, belonging and honour. Al-Sharqawi uses place to build and develop his characters: it has a significant effect on their actions and words; it gives them strength, shaping their past, present, and future. The following lines reflect on the various meanings of *al-Ard* (the land) for Abdul Hadi:

The earth itself seemed to him a symbol of strength, of that which will endure forever, and of honour! In all the night there was nothing to see. And yet he knew it all, he knew every inch of it, every detail. This land was his own life and his own history. When a boy Abdul Hadi had been given a little hoe, the same tool that his father had carried before him. And when he had grown up, and his history of this land, of its crops, of its beasts, since the time he had first tethered a buffalo ... that had been when he was eight.... he remembered hammering the wedge into the earth. Not one detail connected with this land would he ever forget, and after him his son would inherit his memories with the land itself. ... the land never let you down. (*Egyptian Earth* 40)

As this extract shows, Abdul Hadi's actions and socio-political beliefs stem from the land. The idea that Abdul Hadi inherits this land from his father and that it is "his life", that it never lets him down, stresses the significance of this land as a home with a source of honour.

Al-Sharqawi's presentation of agricultural tools, livestock and crops, including the *fas* (hoe), the buffalo, and cotton, beans, and sugar cane, indicates the materialistic value of the land.

Their value to the peasants is demonstrated in the scene when Massoud's wife's buffalo falls in the well. The villagers rush to save it, and it is "lifted out by the efforts of the men" (*Egyptian Earth* 124), after which it is stated that "life has returned to Massoud's wife" (*Egyptian Earth* 124). The peasants' collective effort to save the buffalo in this scene, which follows a quarrel over irrigation water, signifies the material worth of the buffalo and the land on which it works. Waseefa stresses the value of land ownership when she states: "he who has no land, has nothing, not even honour" (*Egyptian Earth* 32). As M. Jassim al-Musawi puts it, "the [peasants'] love for the land is not necessarily limited to problems of exploitation" (121). The land is considered a core symbol of human struggle.

Al-Sharqawi chooses an unnamed place and indefinite title for his novel because this enables it to function as a symbol of all Egypt rather than simply the tale of one Egyptian village battling for social reform, freedom and justice during the British colonisation. This enables him to portray Egypt's suffering under the rule of Ismail Sidky's government in the 1930s. Significantly, the English translation of the novel by Desmond Stewart in 1960 bears the title *Egyptian Earth*. Stewart's choice of this title highlights the sense of a pan-Egyptian struggle. Not only does the author give *al-Ard* significance by making it the title of his novel, but he also presents several events in the novel that focus on the land. Al-Sharqawi presents the Egyptian village from the inside, showing its mechanics and function as a microcosm of the Egyptian countryside. Examples of these events in *al-Ard* include, as we have seen, the irrigation days, the building of a new road passing through the land, and the peasants' struggle to maintain their land.

As suggested above, there is a close relationship between the setting and the characters in the novel. Saleh al-Sayed states that the title of *al-Ard* attaches a great significance to the place of the novel; yet, starting the novel with listing the characters like Waseefa and the others implies that it is these characters who "react with this place, giving it its identity and peculiarity; and in return, the place gives them their identity, culture and sets of values" (85). This intimacy even

extends to stays in prison; indeed, al-Sayed adds that the prison in *al-Ard* is “an enlightening tool for the peasants as they meet there the political prisoners who broaden their minds about the current state issues and evoke boldness and courage in them” (89).

Al-Sharqawi highlights the differences between the village and the city in the novel. Sayed Ali points out a dichotomy between the village, where the peasants (the protagonists of the novel) live and where the events occur on the one hand, and the city on the other (58). The following example, voiced by the narrator, makes this opposition clear:

I know my village very well ... especially in those twenty years of hard working when the village used to send some of its young male and female job seekers to the city from where they returned much paler and more exhausted than they were when they went there. There were others who lived for long in the city and then returned, scraping a living in the village. (6)

These lines show how the job-seeking peasants suffer in the city, resulting from the unequal distribution of job opportunities and inequality of earnings. Selim explains that “the problem of social identity in both a personal and a political sense is repeatedly articulated in the novel through the trope of the ‘clash’ between the countryside and the city as it is lived by individuals and by entire communities” (3). For his part, Sayed Ali argues that the conflict between the village and the city is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it shows how the words “land” and “homeland” are synonymous: “the village/land is the homeland...while the city does not only represent (what is outside the homeland), but it is viewed as (what is against the homeland)” (58). Ali accounts for this by maintaining that the danger and threats that usually befall the village “come from the city and are brought about by those who belong to it such as the government, the People’s Party, Pasha Mahmoud, the British, the mayor of the village, the mounted camel police... etc.” (58). Secondly, the conflict makes the words “‘Egyptians’ and ‘peasants’ synonymous, in contrast with the British and the Pasha” (Ali 58), with the former representing the original owners of the land and the latter

its enemy. It is my argument here that what makes the city a source of threat to the peasants in the village is mainly its distance from the means of production, its parasitic dependence on the farmers for their agricultural provisions, and the centralised legal power in the city. Therefore, individuals who live in the city find it difficult to lead a rural life. Likewise, those who move to the city face the challenges of keeping their principles and morals in such a materialistic urban setting.

Depicting the village as the homeland, as Sayed Ali does (64), places considerable importance on it. All those who leave the village, whether by choice or by force, are deemed unpatriotic. In *al-Ard*, exile from the village is “a result of a government’s penalty for its inhabitants (such as exiling Sheikh Hassouna to the city), or of a punishment by the villagers for the traitors such as the expulsion of Sheikh ‘Sha’ban from the village” (64). On the other hand, even those who choose to leave it for “seeking some advantages in the city (such as what happens with the educated Effendis and job hunters)” (64) are no exception. Ali points out that this physical detachment from the village is always enforced upon the villagers who are related emotionally to the village as “none of the villagers who are connected with the land left the village by choice” (64).

The setting of the novel is not restricted to the village but extends beyond it. Al-Sayed argues that the narrator in *al-Ard* expands the novel’s place by moving from the village to the city. For al-Sayed, this expansion process includes Cairo and its prison. An example of this process can be seen when Mohammad Effendi goes to Cairo to submit the petition to the prime minister. He sits in a café in al-Ataba El-Khadra and is shocked once he discovers that the petition requires establishing an agricultural road passing from the village to Cairo through the lands of the peasants. Mohammad Effendi’s rejection of this petition suggests the peasants’ objection to such an aggressive expansion of the city.

As for time in the novel, there are two periods to examine: the time in which the novel is set and the time in which it was published. On the one hand, the novel narrates events in the 1930s as expressed at the beginning of the novel:

For at that time Cairo was in a state of continual unrest. From what my brothers said amongst themselves, as well as from the newspaper, I knew that a man called Sidky ruled Egypt with fire and iron, having first suspended the constitution in the interests of the English. And I had seen him unleash English soldiers with red faces on the streets of Cairo, to bolster up his authority. At that time, I was in the Muhammadiyah Primary School, and every day I heard machine-gun fire. On my way home after school, the whole city would vibrate with firing, and nevertheless every morning the workers were on strike once more, and the students were demonstrating. The Khedivial Secondary School used to pour on to the streets every morning, shouting: Long Live The Constitution! Freedom! Independence! Down with Sidky and his English masters. (*Egyptian Earth* 11)

Through his narrator, al-Sharqawi references real political figures and occurrences during the 1930s, such as the rule of Sidky Pasha, the suspension of the constitution, the labourers' strikes and students demonstrations, which adds to the realism of the novel. On the other hand, *al-Ard* was published in 1954, a post-revolutionary period when "Egypt passed the first Socialist law for the first time in January 1953," after which the ownership of the Egyptian lands was changed in favour of the peasants (Attiya 48). Moreover, the direct reference to the 1919 revolution in the novel is critically significant. This reference may refer to two other dates. The first is "1933 in which the events of the novel take place, as they occur 14 years after 1919, as mentioned in the novel" (S. Ali 60), while the second is 1953 when this novel was written, as indicated at the beginning of the novel: "the events happened 20 years before" (*Al-Ard* 6), that is, during the 1930s. There is clearly a connection between the time of the novel's publication (1954) and the time of the events recounted (the 1930s). Muhammad Siddiq observes this relationship,

enumerating some of the social and political upheavals in Egyptian society during the 1950s and how this novel critically highlights the events that led to such upheavals:

This remarkable literary intervention was an expression of the broader social, political and ideological changes that swept through the Arab world between the two World Wars, leading into the revolution of 1952 and the experience of the turbulent Nasser years. The land [al-Ard] thus marks a significant turning point in the history of the Egyptian village novel in both a socio-political and a literary sense. (127)

Exposing the struggle of the peasants against the feudal system in *al-Ard*, al-Sharqawi implicitly refers to the oppression of feudal policies, the end of which he highlights in his later novel *al-Fallah*, where he aligned with the 1952 revolution and provides legitimacy for the Nasserite land reform and the equal distributions of land that occurred in its wake.

Choosing a period of political and social conflict in Egypt, such as the 1930s, can be interpreted in a range of different ways for the novel's setting. Abdel Mohsen Taha Badr comments on the choice of the 1930s as the time of the events in the novel, stating that "al-Sharqawi chooses that period because the farmers faced the worst forms of oppression at that period which makes it logical to receive the violent forms of resistance by farmers" (119). However, other critics believe that this choice is an attempt by al-Sharqawi to direct his readers' attention, allegorically, to the political conflicts during the time of the novel's publication. Although the novel's events take place 20 years earlier over a relatively short period in the four months of the summer holiday, they have a bearing on the 1950s. Muslin observes that "the action of al-Sharqawi's *The Earth* [al-Ard] (1954) is set twenty years before the time of its publication, most probably in order to veil the immediacy of the critical historical moment the text was presenting" (254). Paul Starkey stresses the same opinion that al-Sharqawi's novel is primarily related to the events of the early 1950s, for it expresses hidden or potential fears about the regime of the Free Officers. He observes that "although al-Sharqawi was apparently writing of events

during the 1930s, he was also at the same time almost certainly expressing an unspoken fear about the course of developments under the Free 'Officers' regime" (126).

Starkey's argument that al-Sharqawi's story is an allusion to the socio-political issues of the 1950s is convincing. My argument, however, is that the allusion is not intended as a condemnation of Nasserite socialism as much as to advocate it, but it is intended as a condemnation of the corrupt practices of some Free officers and the remnants of feudalism. It is undoubtedly the case that the period when the novel was published witnessed several dramatic socio-political changes. Social classes were changing after the overthrow of King Farouk and the establishment of the republic. Some people rose to the top of the social pyramid, including the military. At that time in its history, Egypt witnessed one of the most important revolutions, namely the 1952 revolution by the Free Officers. The interference of the Free Officers' regime in Egypt's political, economic, and social life restricted the extent to which intellectuals and writers could express their opinions. In his book *Political Islam and the Coming Battle*, Mustafa Mahmoud speaks about the fears of writers during the rule of what he calls "the Nasserite gang" (59). He believes that the socialist regime constituted "a tragedy" (59), as Nasser used to "rule the country with an iron hand", muzzling "mouths and break[ing] pens" (59) in an attempt to suppress the press and prevent the freedom of expression. Although al-Sharqawi was one of the sincere supporters of the 1952 revolution and the President Gamal Abdel Nasser, he was forced to resign from *al-Joumhouria Newspaper*, the daily national newspaper during Nasser's regime, after publishing an article denouncing the corrupt practices of some of the Free Officers and remnants of feudalism at that time. This was "an arbitrary forced action to get rid of 40 pioneer writers", among whom were Taha Hussein and al-Sharqawi (Hakim par. 32). It is here when al-Sharqawi felt that "the revolution is denying him, and Gamal Abdel Nasser, with all the authority he has, was unable to defend him or the other writers" (Hakim par. 33). Since then, his view about the government has changed as he stated to Moody Hakim, "I did not expect that the conflict over

power would start so early. The government is using the law of power instead of using the power of law” (par. 34). It is noteworthy that al-Sharqawi’s *al-Fallah* sheds light on some of the corrupt officials’ violations and the feudalism remnants.

2.4 Formal Signals of Class: Titles, Clothes, and Language

In this section, I identify some formal features of the novel that raise questions of class and social stratification. I discuss how characters’ clothes, attributive titles, and language reveal something about their class or status.

In *al-Ard*, al-Sharqawi uses clothes as symbols of class. References to the *tarboosh*, the *gallabya*¹², and the coloured dress are frequent across the novel. This repetition is used as a tangible representation of class stratification. The *tarboosh* (a red fez) appeared in Arab countries and Egypt at the beginning of the era of Muhammad Ali Pasha and continued to be worn in Egypt until the last king of Egypt, King Farouk. The *tarboosh* is of Ottoman origin, and its use in Arab countries was limited to people in the cities; it was not worn by peasants in the villages and the countryside. It was an official piece of clothing for leaders, politicians, dignitaries, senior officials and mayors, as well as wealthy people of high status (Nazal para. 5-6). During the monarchy in Egypt in the nineteenth century, “many of the middle and upper classes, especially in the towns, [wore] a semi-European dress; and the Turkish Tarboosh” (Murray 31). In *al-Ard*, Waseefa’s aspiration to marry a man with a *tarboosh* reveals her desire to belong to a higher class and to lead a life of social privilege. Moreover, the coloured dress she usually wears is a sign of her difference from her peers. She is described as “no ordinary village girl, from her dancing walk, from the

¹² a loose-fitting traditional Egyptian dress, worn by both men and women.

angle at which she held her pitcher with a plump hand, and from the brightly coloured dress-which only one girl in the whole village wore” (*Egyptian Earth* 104). Also, the narrator points out that Waseefa’s sister “had married a man who had moved to the town and now wore a tarboosh, as well as a jacket over his gallabya” (*Egyptian Earth* 4). Here, al-Sharqawi uses the *tarboosh* as a symbol of the higher stratum that Waseefa’s sister joins when moving to the city. Although she is pretty happy with Abdul Hadi’s love, she looks forward to getting married to Muhammad Effendi, whose clothes make him look like a townsman.

The potential of clothes to reflect social status can be seen in the recurrence of words like “suit” and “jacket” “shoes” and “tie” in the novel. These items are connected with city lifestyle, signifying that those who wear them belong to a higher social status. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator expresses this: “it has been four or five years since I finished my primary school and returned to the village in the summer holiday, carrying books and dreaming of going to high school where I would wear long slacks, a small-pocket-hidden jacket, a tie swaying with the blowing wind, and shoes” (*Al-Ard* 19). At the end of the novel, the narrator talks about his wish that his father would buy him “a new suit” (*Egyptian Earth* 244) when he goes to the town. Also, the “slippers” worn by Waseefa are used to denote the peasants’ low class, in contrast to the “shoes” worn by the narrator’s uncle. In this way, al-Sharqawi describes some characters’ clothing to show how social stratification is apparent within each class.

Al-Sharqawi’s presentation of various titles mirrors the hierarchy of class and status. These titles include *Bey*, *Pasha*, *Umda*, *Sheikh*, *Effendi*, chief of the guards, mayor, and others. For example, *Effendi* (Mister) signifies a high status that a person holds through education. Mohammed Effendi is a teacher who likes reading articles in the newspapers to the peasants in the village. In other instances, al-Sharqawi refers to characters in the novel by their titles alone, such as the *Pasha*, the country’s *Sheikh*, the police chief, and the police Commissioner. Bayam Karimi claims that:

Al-Sharqawi wants to present these characters as negative people who oppress the peasants and the weak working class by exploiting them as they are supporters of unjust authority and are not interested in the people and have no language other than power, oppression, and killing of innocent people. (227)

Karimi argues that “al-Sharqawi despises them so much that he does not like to present them by their names; therefore, he belittles them by not choosing names for them and just mentions their titles” (227). It is my argument here that al-Sharqawi’s reluctance to mention the names of these characters can also be seen as a strategy of alienating them and making them seem more distant, which stems from his socialist leanings and the associated valorisation of the peasants. On the contrary, he chooses significant names for all peasant characters, even the propertyless ones such as Kadra, who belongs to the low-status people. The Arabic name *Khadra* خضرة is used in a symbolic manner by the writer. It connotes green land, ripe, close to nature, and the primitive. These connotations serve the idea that Khadra could be the raw material used by upper classes for their own benefits and as such she represents the proletariat. This name is also associated with honourable and chaste women, while Kadra appears as a woman with neither honour nor chastity. It is perverse that her name belies her honour in the novel. I argue that this is a form of parody that is meant, besides adding humour, to ridicule Kadra’s behaviour (i.e., unchastity) and appreciate the opposite of this behaviour (i.e., morality).

Al-Sharqawi uses a mixture of colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic. While the language of narration is Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha), the language of dialogue, notably that of the peasants, is colloquial. With this linguistic mixture, al-Sharqawi successfully uses language as a tool to help identify social stratification. Al-Sharqawi does not follow the traditional language that is used in the Soviet socialist realism novel, as demonstrated by Katerina Clark:

The language to be used in socialist realism was circumscribed. There were to be no sub-standard locutions, no dialecticisms, no scatology, and no abstruse or long-winded

expressions – let alone the neologisms and trans-sense language that had been favoured by the Russian avant-garde. In consequence, most socialist realist writers used only a somewhat *comme il faut* version of standard Russian, resulting often in stilted dialogue (this was one of the trends that was reversed in the post-Stalin era, starting from the late 1950s). (175)

Clark elaborates further, noting that the language used in socialist realism is restricted to Standard Russian. Undoubtedly, the language of the Russian socialist realist novel that was mostly set in the industrialised areas is different from that used in an agricultural economy like Egypt in the 1930s. The industrial revolution, which usually manifests itself in the city, necessitates the introduction of new technical terms and the use of the language of science and machinery (the modern standard). At the same time, in the simple life of the village, most peasants are uneducated, and they use simple language and vernacular dialects. By using simple colloquial language in *al-Ard*'s dramatic passages, al-Sharqawi creates a New Realist novel. Kilpatrick stresses the same argument, explaining that *al-Ard* "makes extensive use of dialogue in the colloquial of the Delta; the feel for the violent, aggressive way of speaking characteristic of the peasants is perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the illusion of realism in the novel" (250).

This use of simple language describes the characters' social status and where they are located in the village's social hierarchy. For example, the language used by Muhammad Effendi and Sheikh Hassouna is different from that spoken by Abdul Hadi and Diab; it reflects their level of education and cultural background. For instance, Muhammad Effendi and Hassouna are highly educated: Muhammad Effendi likes reading the newspaper and masters writing in Standard Arabic, as he demonstrates with the petition; Hassouna, for his part, is a headmaster and a graduate of Al-Azhar University, who sometimes speaks in Standard Arabic. Karimi observes that "some characters speak both languages; the formal language (Fusha) and the colloquial language, such as Sheikh Hassouna" (267). He explains that this brings the novel closer to realism. It

addresses the readers in their own language and expresses their concerns in the same dialect that the characters use.

The characters' colloquial language adds a distinctive feature to the novel and functions as a class stratification marker. Selim contends that the novel is a typical example of the socialist realist genre because of "its scrupulously mimetic inscription of colloquial dialogue" (160); indeed, as Selim emphasises, colloquial language is one reason why *al-Ard* is regarded as a socialist realist novel. This point is borne out in many episodes in the novel when colloquial language is used to ratchet up the revolutionary spirit of the peasants in the face of socio-political oppression: "Oh, Thief British, you stole my barley, wheat and beans! Oh, Thief British, you stole my barley, wheat and beans! (*Al-Ard* 343). Such songs chanted by the peasants glorify the socialist principles to which the Nasserite regime would later adhere.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude, al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* is one of the key examples of socialist realism in Egyptian literature. The story of the social struggle of the peasantry against feudalists, which is the result of class stratification; the characterisation; the untraditional setting as well as the formal indicators of social stratification, including language, titles and clothes; all these elements render this novel a specific form of socialist realism or, as Muruwwa calls it, "New Realism".

Applying a Weberian approach to social stratification, the characters in the novel have been shown to be divided into two classes – the ruling and the ruled – in each of which status plays a part. Al-Sharqawi presents the ruling class or the government as an external force driven by greed and class interests, while the ruled class is a group of ordinary peasants struggling to defend their land. The idea of the community coming together in activism is a feature of socialist realism. Social conflict results from the economic gap between these two classes, which calls for mass action by the ruled or the peasantry. The collective heroism that al-Sharqawi creates by

presenting many characters taking part in this mass action and the spirit of optimism for freedom and justice felt in the peasants' struggle contribute to making al-Sharqawi a pioneer of New Realism in the Arabic novel.

As I have argued, presenting historical incidents in the 1930s does not isolate al-Sharqawi from the time of the writing and production of his novel in the 1950s. By writing *al-Ard*, he can be said to be highlighting and promoting the revolution of 1952 with its socialist ideology. Such a reading forces a comparison of the events lived by the author and those that he describes in the novel. By leaving this comparison implicit, al-Sharqawi encourages reflection in his readers in the 1950s and seeks, in so doing, to raise the individual socialist awareness in his audience. The novel emphasises past oppression to illuminate the subtle differences between it and Egypt's current situation at the time of publication. This contrast is what makes al-Sharqawi's pro-socialist ideology all the stronger and more memorable. *Al-Ard* also attests to his patriotism and nationalism, as well as his advocacy and support for Egypt's political independence from the outside forces of the British and the inside ones of the feudal system.

Chapter 3. Social Stratification in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's Post- Revolution Village in *al-Fallah*

This chapter presents how al-Sharqawi develops a local form of socialist realism by depicting social stratification in a new agrarian Egyptian context in the 1960s, presenting a typical socialist realist novel in Arabic literature. In doing so, and in such a new form of Arabic literature, he supports the Nasser government. I draw upon the insights of Max Weber to examine class, status and party in *al-Fallah*. The chapter also seeks to identify New Realism's central tenets, which are sometimes explicit and at other times implicit in *al-Fallah*. To do so, I analyse different elements in the novel, namely plot, characters, setting, and style, explaining how the novel manifests class stratification. Al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah* presents the customs, traditions, language, and lifestyle of the peasants in a fictional Egyptian village. I demonstrate how al-Sharqawi attributes collective heroism to the peasants in the novel. Furthermore, I examine the complex social and political relationships of 1960s Egyptian society, which witnessed *al-Fallah's* (the peasant's) struggle after the revolution. In doing so, I analyse how al-Sharqawi's use of the vernacular Egyptian Arabic in his narrative adds to the novel as a new realist genre. Additionally, I examine *al-Fallah* according to the social and historical contexts in which it was produced.

3.1 Contextualising socialist realism in al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah*

Like *al-Ard*, al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah* presents a local form of socialist realism in an agrarian context. Similarly, the novel introduces a new model of characters, settings, language modes and usages. Before discussing how *al-Fallah* constitutes an example of New Realism, it is essential to scrutinise the context in which it was written. In his article "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties", Sabry Hafez describes the period of the 1960s in Egypt in the following terms:

The sixties was indeed a decade of confusion, a decade of numerous massive projects and the abolition of almost all political activities; massive industrialisation and the absolute

absence of freedom; the construction of the High Dam and the destruction of the spirit of opposition; the expansion of free education and the collective arrest of the intellectuals; the reclamation of thousands of acres and the catastrophic detachment of the Sinai peninsula from Egyptian territory in the defeat of 1967; severe censorship and the emergence of evasive jargon among the intellectuals; the deformation of social values and the students' and workers' upheavals; the enlargement of the public sector and the pervasive growth of corruption. During this decade, there was no public activity not subject to official control; everywhere one encountered not living but official beings concealing their personalities beneath a carapace of conformity, people who acted out social roles and repeated, automatically, slogans that were often contrary to their real hidden opinions. (68)

Hafez's description outlines the many economic, social and political changes Egypt experienced in that period. The general socio-political atmosphere at that time was characterised by authoritarianism. It was an autocratic one-party regime in which Abdel Nasser had absolute power to govern the country with the Socialist Union Party and the military. Hafez points out that Egyptian novelists attempted to address the complexities of this period to find out "the radical changes in the national character's attitude towards reality" (68). He maintains that such changes and political instability "left [their] mark on the novelist's response and his work" (69).

Norman Cigar observes that "the ideological ferment which characterised the Arab world of the 1950s and 1960s was to give rise to the adoption of various 'national' versions of socialism by a number of regimes and to considerable interest in the emerging ideological system" (152). He explains that Arab socialism is closely associated with the personality of Nasser; indeed, it was referred to as "Nasserism", "an ideology acclaimed as an original and suitable blueprint for the social, economic and political salvation not merely of Egypt (or the UAR as it was known from 1958 to 1961) but for the rest of the Arab world as well" (152). Thus, socialism has its features in Egypt and the Arab world as well. Likewise, socialist realism takes on a unique form in the Arab

world, referred to as New Realism as seen in the previous chapter. Jack Crabbs Jr. argues that the influence of socialism in literature in the 1960s led to the production of socialistic art in which poetry and drama were encouraged to embrace socialist values and to teach “people love of humanity rather than romantic love” (408).

Hafez claims that “in the Arab world, the changes in the social reality are closely related to changes in the Arabic novel and have altered the nature of the relationship between them” (93). The Egyptian novel responded drastically to Egypt’s socio-political struggles in the early 1930s and 1960s. Derek Hopwood stresses this point, stating that many novels were written during the revolution “by party hacks who used their characters, especially the peasants, as mere tools to put over the message of the regime” (147). He mentions al-Sharqawi’s *al-Ard* as an example of the novels that deal considerably with the Egyptian peasants’ lives and notes that revolutionary ideologies support *al-Fallah*’s main concerns that pertain to the peasants. He views al-Sharqawi as a socialist realist writer who presents his sincere political commitment:

He had been a socialist before the Revolution and joined a Marxist study group while at university. His later work became more openly committed and perhaps less in literary value. *The Peasant* (1967) relates a village’s struggle against members of the old exploiting classes, this time with the government on its side rather than against it. (147)

Like *al-Ard*, *al-Fallah* is closely marked by the socio-political context in which it was written. Selim argues that *al-Fallah* was written as a revolutionary novel and expressive of “the broader social, political and ideological changes that wept throughout the Arab world between the two World Wars, leading into the revolution of 1952 and the experience of the turbulent Nasser years” (127). In his attempt to develop socialist realism in his Egyptian context, al-Sharqawi presents how social stratification in Egypt in a certain period creates conflict between two opposing forces. In *al-Fallah*, several socio-political episodes are portrayed in the narrative in a

way that supports this assumption. Other critics, such as Ali Jad, argue against seeing al-Sharqawi's oeuvre as Socialist Realist. However, he does consider *al-Fallah* to be a Socialist Realist novel. He states that "it is not until his [al-Sharqawi's] last novel, *al-Fallah*, published comparatively recently (in 1968) that he definitely and consciously assumes a socialistic position" (222). Jad adds that although Egyptian literary critics describe al-Sharqawi as "a socialist realist novelist" (223), he maintains "his novels until the very recent *al-Fallah* have little to do with Socialist Realism" (223). I disagree with Jad's opinion that al-Sharqawi's works before *al-Fallah* have nothing to do with socialist realism, and have dedicated the previous chapter in this thesis to exploring how socialist realism is presented in *al-Ard*. I agree with him that *al-Fallah* has much to do with socialist realism, which is very clear in its form and content, as analysed in the following sections.

With *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi moves from a portrayal of the peasants' struggle against the injustice of feudalism in a pre-revolution monarchy and a society loyal to British colonialism, as presented in *al-Ard*, to a depiction of post-revolutionary society, and thus of socialism and agrarian reform. Nevertheless, the corrupt officials and opportunists represented by the aristocracy and the remains of the feudal system have assumed leadership roles and are still exploiting the peasants, depriving them of freedom and political rights. As a result, this struggle creates social stratification among two opposing forces: the peasants on one side, and the corrupt officials and remnants of the feudal system on the other side. Significantly, unlike in *al-Ard*, the struggle ends with the triumph of the peasants at the end of the novel.

This socialist-realist representation is evident in al-Sharqawi's choice of *al-Fallah*'s title ("the peasant"), reflecting the central theme around which its main events revolve, i.e., the peasant's struggle. *Al-Fallah* is a singular word in Arabic; nonetheless, it is not exclusive to an individual peasant. In Arabic rhetoric, the definite article "al" can be an all-inclusive definite article that, if added to a singular word, can give a much more all-embracing meaning than if it is

added to that word's plural form (Al-Maraghi 111). Therefore, the title does not refer to an individual peasant; instead, it includes all peasants. However, this title raises a question about this place: whether "al-Fallah" refers just to all the peasants in the village depicted in the novel or, on the other hand, it extends to peasants in other Egyptian villages as well. Thus, I suggest that the definite article in the title is a periodical article and thus indicates a specific critique of Nasser's socialist regime. This suggests that what happens in that Egyptian village in *al-Fallah* was likely to have occurred in any other Egyptian village during Nasser's rule. In other words, the village mentioned in the novel functions as an allegory for all Egyptian villages in the country in the 1960s. Moustafa Al-Dabaa is of a similar opinion when he notes that "the singular noun of the title entails all the peasants" (294), but he also raises the possibility that this definite article is an "identifying article" used to make the reader identify a new type of peasant, namely, the socialist peasant (293-294).

From the beginning of the novel, al-Sharqawi presents several episodes that promote socialist thought, both implicitly and explicitly. It is not until the first encounter between the unnamed narrator and his cousin, Abdel Azim, who visits him in Cairo to submit an official complaint to the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, that al-Sharqawi presents the peasant's awareness of recognisably 1960s socialist principles. Abdel Azim's language displays his adherence to socialism, which surprises the narrator, who asks him: "Motherland? Socialists? What is all this, Abdel Azim? I have not talked with you for years" (*Al-Fallah* 5). The narrator also wonders about Abdel Azim's knowledge not only of politics but also "of arts and literature" (27) and maintains that his in-depth and accurate speech reflects "the role of literature and arts in the socialist society" (27). Abdel Azim's reference to the "motherland" points to a specific form of Arab socialism that flourished during the 1960s, which Nasser created in Egypt and the Arab world. Omar Khalifah argues that "it is in that first encounter that the narrator realises the progressive transformation that has occurred in the consciousness of the semi-illiterate Abdel Azim after the revolution" (46).

Moreover, for the first time in the Egyptian novel, *al-Fallah* introduces in Abdel Azim a particular revolutionary and enlightened peasant capable of speaking about socialist concepts, notably the 1952 revolution and Nasser's *The Charter* (1962).

It is a convening of the Socialist Union committee meeting that creates a clash with Rizk Bey, the village's Socialist Union committee secretary. After his return from Cairo, Abdel Azim calls for a meeting without the approval of Rizk, who refuses to attend, stating, "I will never accept an invitation to a meeting that I did not set myself because I am the one in charge in this village. I am the one who calls for meetings" (*Al-Fallah* 38). However, Abdel Azim succeeds in organising the meeting. The peasants agree to appeal against transgressions of the unnamed agricultural supervisor because they are "flagrant violations against the interest of the peasant, the revolutionary progress and the reform laws" (*Al-Fallah* 101). In his oppressive practices against the village, Rizk seeks support from a mysterious character, Ismail, a young man who arrives from Cairo in a luxurious vehicle and claims that he is a government delegate. Ismail is an outside force that comes to the village and acts in a problematic way by claiming to be the head of the Cooperative Association and ordering that all peasant meetings be cancelled: "how dare you call for a meeting without the approval of the president of the Cooperative Association and secretary of the Socialist Union committee of the village! It is such chaos! This is against the country's law" (*Al-Fallah* 103). Comparatively speaking, the actions committed by the outside force in *al-Ard* are far more horrific than anything done by Ismail in *al-Fallah*. The outside force in *al-Ard* is represented by sergeant Abdullah and the Camel Corps, who enforce a curfew in the village and punish and beat anyone who stands in front of them with their whips: "Suddenly, cries rang out. Before they could move aside, a buffalo ran down the lane, followed by a donkey thudding its hind legs in panic and children colliding with the sturdy wings of ducks and geese. The Camel Corps is here! Their whips are at work in the village.... Run boy!" (*Al-Ard* 217). The outside force

in *al-Fallah*, on the other hand, creates a conspiracy against Abdel Maqsud and Abdel Azim's revolt, after which they are arrested.

It is crucial to notice the difference between the arrest scenes in *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah*. In *al-Ard*, the scene occurs during the former regime of Sidky, which was under British supervision, while in *al-Fallah*, it happens during Abdel Nasser's rule, a nationalist socialist regime. This explains the difference between the two situations that take place, respectively, before and after the 1952 revolution. In *al-Fallah*, an atmosphere of uncertainty prevails throughout the scene as the peasants try to solve the puzzle of the sudden disappearance of Abdel Maqsud and Abdel Azim in the city. A peasant says, "the government is ours, and the final word is for us, so who dares to kidnap them!" (*Al-Fallah* 149). A collective, revolutionary consciousness starts emerging among the peasants after they learn of the imprisonment of Abdel Azim and Abdel Maqsud. They do not face severe humiliation and torture like the peasants in *al-Ard*, who were beaten, kicked, "forced to drink the urine of horses", and "sit upon iron spikes" (*Al-Ard* 174-175). *Al-Ard*'s village is silent and powerless, waiting for the release of the men from the prison, while the entire village in *al-Fallah* moves to break them free. First, they send a telegraph to the president complaining about what has happened to the people and the village and the violations committed by those remaining from the feudal system. After a long dispute over the telegram's content, they agree to write: "*Mazlumyn Elhaqona* (Oppressed – Help!)" (*Al-Fallah* 154), and send them to the president along with one signature on behalf of the villagers. Sending a telegraph suggests that the Nasser government is amenable to the simply expressed complaints of the peasants. On the other hand, the petition in *al-Ard* is signed by all peasants in the village, and Mohamed Effendi requests to

write the petition for the peasants: “I will write the petition. I will make it convincing, and it will express both quiet hope and strong disapproval. I will write it in the style of al-Manfalouti¹³” (*Al-Ard* 72).

Salama Musa points out that “the socialists’ struggle in the parliamentary elections is proof that they are entering houses via the front door. They want to reach their purposes by legitimate means” (25). At the end of the novel, the peasants defeat Rizk and his supporters in the elections. Following the socialist realist genre, *al-Fallah* has a happy, formulaic ending that demonstrates the fruitfulness of the ideological struggle: the release of the arrested peasants, triumphing over the remnants of feudalism, and the successful election of the Socialist Union in the village. Gary Saul Morson contends that the socialist realist novel has a “mandatory happy or ‘constructive’” ending (122). G. Žekulin stresses the same tendency; he believes that one of the characteristics of the socialist realist novel is “the compulsory happy ending, or the heroic ending, or, finally, the ending, where virtue is recompensed and praised, while vice is punished and rejected” (471). This is what al-Sharqawi presents at the end of his novel in the form of the peasants’ triumph over Rizk at the elections.

3.2 Class, Status, and Party in *al-Fallah*

al-Fallah mainly centres on the social conflict between two opposing forces: the Egyptian peasants versus the vestiges of the feudal system and corrupt officials. This social conflict is mainly over the ownership of the means of production. From a Weberian perspective, which uses

¹³ A great Egyptian writer of poetry and prose. He was educated at al-Azhar University and wrote many literary works. His style of writing is highly elevated.

“market” situations to order classes, Egyptian society is class-oriented, with individuals stratified into upper and lower classes. According to this Weberian approach to class stratification, people belong either to the propertied class or the propertyless (“The Distribution of Power” 138). Weber further subdivides the propertied class into different groups in terms of “the ‘meaning’ they can (and do) give to the utilisation of their property” or “the money value of it” (139). In other words, the propertied person’s situation within their class is determined by the type and the characteristics of the property they own. The propertyless class are classified according to the type and the duration of the service that they provide (139).

In *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi presents two forces that lie under the same socialist system: the first is the oppressor that is represented by the vestiges of feudalism and corrupt officials, while the second is the oppressed, represented by the peasants and workers. Like *al-Ard*, *al-Fallah* spotlights the struggle of the second force (the peasants and workers), among which we find both propertied and propertyless characters, the quantitative scale of whose holdings may, according to the Weberian approach (139), determine their qualitative situation or social status within the class. One of these characters is Abdel Azim, whose father was a propertyless person who does not always have enough money to pay for basic transport costs, which prevented Abdel Azim from continuing his education. At one point, he refuses to let his cousin hail a taxi for him to go to the Ministry and declares that he will walk, claiming that “walking is healthy” (*Al-Fallah* 9). However, although deprived of education, Abdel Azim aspires to social mobility. This is shown by how he helps his son, Fathi, to gain an education and the privileges that come with it: Fathi, he proudly announces, “stays in the University dorm, and, God willing, he wants to study atoms...God willing, he will be an atom scientist like a scientist called Curie from Paris” (5-6). Although Abdel Azim is not thoroughly educated, he is somehow informed of what is happening worldwide. His son, Fathi, and others like him, whose parents send them to cities to receive

education, represent the middle class for which Abdel Nasser advocated, which was meant to dissolve the gap between the higher and lower classes in Egypt.

Moreover, Abdel Azim consistently declares his discontent with Rizk's practices, with all the manifestations of corruption in Cairo and the press and media's failure to address the peasants' real problems. Morroe Berger states that "In 1960, President Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic incidentally focused attention upon the Egyptian peasant in a speech explaining his reasons for nationalising the press. Devoted to sensational trivialities, he said, the press ignored the 'true' Egypt" (qtd. in Ayrout xvii). It is worth noting that the "true Egypt" in Nasser's quote above refers to the Egyptian peasant. In this way, al-Sharqawi uses Abdel Azim's dissatisfaction with the press to reflect Nasser's opinions about the press's role in the 1960s – his viewpoint is significantly Nasserite. The villagers are highly critical of the newspapers to distract people's attention with sensational articles on fashion and celebrities and ignore the peasants' significant and sensitive issues. As one of the characters remarks, "they are busy writing about football, fashion, nude photos (pornography), celebrities, gossip, praising and backbiting each other, [...] even when they write about Socialism, they give us wrong information" (*Al-Fallah* 156).

The novel makes a distinction between socialism in the city and the village. Ironically, the Socialist Union secretary, with his silk collar, luxurious French tie, and strong-smelling perfume (*Al-Fallah* 12), mocks the socialist peasant Abdel Azim, stating that "he seems to be one of the socialist peasants of these days! What a socialist peasant he is! Still, we will see more... how beautiful you've become, my country!" (12). I contend that it is socialist stratification that makes socialism of the Socialist Union secretary different from that of the peasant. The villagers have a lower-class form of socialism than those who live in the city. It also reflects something else, namely the fact that many socialist leaders around the world were not working class. It may also reflect something else, namely the fact that many socialist leaders around the world were not working class. It is worth noting that stratification is prior to socialism here. Nevertheless, Abdel

Azim's comment in response to the official's description of him as a socialist peasant to be "radical" (12) is even more satirical. The city appears in the novel as a source of fear and danger. The peasants emphasise this feeling when Abdel Maqsud and Abdel Azim disappear: "there is no guarantee that two villagers can be safe in the city" (149). Their fear of the city makes them distrustful of forces from outside the village (152).

The village peasants are dissatisfied due to government officials' violations and Rizk's abuses against their lands. Berger explains that "President Nasser has assured the peasant that 'Arab socialism' does not mean an end to private ownership of land or that the small plots will be taken from their new owners" (qtd. in Ayrout xx). Nevertheless, Abdel Azim once told his cousin, the narrator, that "what one learns in the field cannot be acquired from all the books of the world. I started to learn reading again, but what I learn in the field is something else, something more important" (*Al-Fallah* 10).

From a Weberian perspective, political parties can be a third source of power. However, Weber claims in individual cases, "parties can represent interests determined by 'class situations' or the situation of the 'Stände', and thus recruit their followers accordingly" (146). In *al-Fallah*, the Socialist Union in the village aims to respond to the peasants' needs, protect their rights and establish socialist principles. However, Weber adds that such parties "neither have to be pure 'class' parties nor pure Stände- related parties; and mostly it is only partly the case, and often not at all" (146). The Socialist Union in the village combines members from different classes and status-groups. They include Rizk, a propertied remnant of feudalism who owns seventeen acres, and his supporters; Abdel Azim, the propertyless, uneducated peasant; Abdel Maqsoud, the propertyless, employed peasant; Insaf, a propertied peasant; and others with different social ranks.

However, although the main goals of this Union are social equality among all villagers, some of them do not seem to be loyal to the socialist ideals; instead, their political affiliation is a front for their personal interests. According to Weber, the goal of parties' communal action can be

“factual”, as in the case of the implementation of a program to reach an ideal. The goal can also “be personal, for example sinecures, power, and honours for the leaders and the followers of the party” (“The Distribution of Power” 149). In *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi presents Abdel Azim as a party member with a “factual” goal, as opposed to Rizk, whose membership in the Socialist Union Part is based on personal advantages. Abdel Azim’s insistence on meeting with a socialist representative shows his adherence to socialism. Abdel Azim reveals Rizk’s manoeuvres at the meeting of the members of the Cooperative Association. He stands against him when he tries to convince the villagers that they should reconcile: “I believe that these elections will separate the people and change their hearts... Please read al-Fatiha¹⁴ for the sake of the prophet” (*Al-Fallah* 286).

Abdel Azim’s reaction and the words that he chooses express his revolutionary spirit and his adherence to the socialist principles, making him one of the positive characters who contribute to the novel’s happy ending:

Abdel Azim started suddenly to wave his hand in the air as if he were punching an invisible enemy: he did not allow Rizk to complete his speech and no one could stop Abdel Azim from saying: ‘What does someone like you think the peasant is? Is he a blindly driven animal? We are the owners of this land, and socialism belongs to us.’ (286)

Furthermore, Abdel Azim’s response to Sheikh Tolba’s calls for reconciliation between the peasants and Rizk Bey reveals how selfless he is. Although he was unjustly imprisoned and was about to be killed by Tawfeek Abou Hasaneen, one of Rizk’s allies, he is ultimately ready to

¹⁴ Reading “al-Fatiha” (the first chapter in the Holy Qur’an) for the sake of the prophet is an Egyptian Islamic custom when people want to start a new chapter or a fresh page in their life. It is more associated with some occasions like marriage, reconciliations, sharing a new project with a person, etc.

follow Rizk Bey's orders to reconcile with Rizk for the sake of the people in the village. Abdel Azim states:

We are kind-hearted. I pardoned Tawfiq Abou Hassanin for what he has done. We got enough. We are ready to read al-Fatiha for the sake of the Prophet that our hearts will not bear hard feelings, although neither I nor the village will ever forget what happened to us in prison because of you. (*Al-Fallah* 288)

Here, Abdel-Azim appears to be a wise character who waives his rights for the sake of the whole village. However, he is not naïve; he declares that this reconciliation does not mean that there will not be any elections for a new board of the Cooperative Association and a new steering committee for the Socialist Union: "But, it is a must to have elections" (*Al-Fallah* 288). This is one of several instances of collective action in the form of the working class's political and social consciousness, one of socialism's objectives. Abdel Azim recalls Abdel Hadi's character in *al-Ard*; he stands against Sidky's government's oppression with the same bravery. Both of them have that revolutionary spirit, with one main difference: Abdel Azim's knowledge. It is the socialist age that Abdel Azim lives in that makes him knowledgeable and decisive in calling for his rights. In comparison, Sidky's cabinet enslaved the peasants and governed with oppression and promoted ignorance.

Weber contends that "party actions are oriented towards attaining social 'power', which means that they are directed towards influencing communal action [...] regardless of its content" (14). Unlike Sidky's government in *al-Ard*, which seeks to suppress the peasants and take away their rights, the Socialist Union during Abdel Nasser's regime, as seen in *al-Fallah*, tries to influence the peasants, providing them with specific social privileges, including the agricultural reform law. In Gamal Abdel Nasser's era, ministries were formed to serve the peasants, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agricultural Reform and the Ministry of Irrigation. Social justice and equality are voiced in the many famous slogans of Nasser's era, including

“Raise your head brother, the age of injustice, enslavement is over” (*Al-Fallah* 121). Moreover, al-Sharqawi presents peasants singing: “The land belongs to whom? To the peasant, and our president said, the land belongs to whom, to the peasant. Our beloved Gamal and our leader said, ‘the land belongs to whom, to the peasant... to the peasant’” (*Al-Fallah* 177). And then there is Salem, who shouts: “I am the Revolution’s son; who are you? The Revolution is mine” (*Al-Fallah* 129). These slogans and other similar ones in the novel demonstrate how literature after the 1952 revolution was politicised and aimed at serving the revolution’s agenda. Such singing reflects the peasants’ love of Nasser, and it echoes how the novel serves as political propaganda for Nasser’s regime in the guise of literature. Khalifah states that “the publication of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi’s novel *al-Fallah* (the Peasant) in 1967 marks the first incident of turning Nasser into an audience in a work of fiction” (45). *Al-Fallah* is considered the first Arabic novel that presents the character of Nasser in fiction. Key to this is al-Sharqawi’s selection of characters in *al-Fallah*. As Samah Selim points out, the anti-colonial struggle resulted in the need for “a potent emblem of national identity” (1) that can stand in the face of a foreign power. It was discovered that no one could play this role better than the peasant. As a result, the peasant started to dominate modern Egypt’s political and intellectual discourse; he started “to be so closely identified with national culture that much of the artistic and intellectual production in Egypt is made in his image and the state itself rules in his name, or at least claims to do so” (Selim 1). In *al-Fallah*, among the characters who symbolise this cultural identity and the growing political awareness is Abdel Maqsd Effendi, who is highly ranked in the village due to his education and occupation as the primary school headmaster.

Weber believes that each occupation represents a status-group, which “normally assumes the social ‘honor’ by virtue of a specific ‘lifestyle’, which is established by the occupation” (“The Distribution of Power” 148). The lifestyle of teaching that Abdel Maqsd leads grants him a high social stature in the village. He is a man of principles who uses his position as a school headmaster

to serve the ruling regime as he teaches the youth and the elderly the principles of *The Charter*, authored by Nasser. He opens night literacy classes and gives speeches to the people in the mosque every Friday. He teaches traditional culture in the village and travels to the capital city to continue his education at College of Teachers. Later, he returns to the village to deliver contemporary education linked to the rural environment in which the students live: “the handicrafts, created by boys and girls themselves, are expressive of the local environment... and the hope for the future... the High Dam” (*Al-Fallah* 81). Crabbs quotes Sakr Khafaga’s statement about the role of educators during the socialist period, in which he maintains “professors and teachers were urged to come out of their ‘ivory towers’, to ‘participate’ in society, and to work to instil a ‘socialist mentality’ in the universities” (387). The night classes that Abdel Maqsd gives reflect the development that happened in the village infrastructure. He is trying to teach his students socialist principles, which he draws from *The Charter*.

Weber states that “political affiliation” is instrumental to giving a person a reputable standing with his status-group (“The Distribution of Power” 145). At the end of the novel, the village elects Abdel Maqsd as the Cooperative Association president instead of Rizk. From that time on, Abdel Maqsd becomes the figure on whom everyone counts, including the schoolteachers and their students studying in the capital city. Abdel Maqsd is the model of a rural intellectual committed to socialist values. This reflects the dramatic changes that took place after the Revolution, which included giving peasants the chance to participate in the nation’s political bodies and legislative organisations. Abdel Maqsd plays the same role as Sheikh Hasouna in *al-Ard*. Similarly, Sheikh Hasouna is a school headmaster, and he participated in the 1919 demonstrations against the government when he was a student. The main difference between these two characters is that Abdel Maqsd gets power through his political and legal role as a Socialist Union representative and the Cooperative Association in the village.

Another influential character whose political affiliation to the Socialist Committee after being elected at the end of the novel confers on her a high status is Insaf, Umm Salem¹⁵, a widow who struggles in life to raise her young son, Salem. Insaf's role in the novel is to highlight the transformational role of women during Nasser's era. She travels to the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in Cairo alone and passes the villagers' complaints to the minister, which results in the transfer of the agricultural supervisor and the beginning of official legal investigations into the violations in the village. Insaf plays an essential role in precipitating events in the novel. She encourages the villagers to stand against Rizk and reminds them of her meeting's outcomes with the minister, who listened attentively to her complaints. Her political and social awareness is made clear when Sheikh Tolba calls for reconciliation between Rizk and the peasants; indeed, she is not convinced by this reconciliation, which she regards as one between a wolf (Rizk Bey, in this case) and sheep (the peasants) (*Al-Fallah* 289). Before the 1952 revolution, silence had historically been women's lot in what was a patriarchal society. Insaf's revolutionary spirit is comparable to that of Waseefa in *al-Ard*. At the end of the story, the peasants elect Insaf as the treasurer of the village's Cooperative Association, a social action that highlights the equality between men and women in political life. Such equality in this village context was one of the principles of socialism and one of the articles in Nasser's *The Charter*.

Another female character, Tafida, is deployed in the novel to highlight women's empowerment in the village. Despite being the daughter of Sheikh Tolba, Tafida supports the peasants. When she first hears about the release of the two villagers who had been held in custody,

¹⁵ "Umm Salem" is Kunya for Insaf. In Arab culture, Kunya is a form of teknonymy by which a parent is called by the name of his first-born son or daughter preceded by "umm" (mother of) for the mother, and "abou" (father of) for the father. The Kunya is used to show respect for others.

she yells, “Long live justice!” (*Al-Fallah* 166) and calls for the removal of the supervisor. Tawfiq Hassanin threatens her, telling her to “shut up” and attempts “to slap her face”, but, in response, she stops his hand and pushes it back forcibly, proclaiming “If you ever think about slapping me again, I will cut your hands off, go to hell with your heavy hand” (*Al-Fallah* 167). Through the character of Tafida, al-Sharqawi also stresses the changes that happened in terms of women’s socio-economic position in the village, as demonstrated early in the novel in the dialogue between Abdel Azim and the narrator, who is looking for a servant from the village:

“Please search for a rural female servant.”

“There is nothing called ‘servant’ anymore.”

“A maid, I mean!”

“Man, the factory has already started. None of the village girls, nor any of the girls from the whole region, needs work in Cairo. Everyone serves themselves. The girls are working in the factory and studying at the literacy night classes in the village school. Otherwise, let them work per hour like in foreign countries. The age of ignorance has gone...The age of exploitation has gone.” (*Al-Fallah* 21-22)

The author’s aim here appears to demonstrate the modernising effects of socialism in the village under Nasser’s rule in the 1960s. Douglas Magrath maintains that “the conflict between tradition and modernism [that] began in *al-Ard* continues in *al-Fallah*” (201). He speaks about the changes that occurred in the Egyptian village: “The Socialist Committee now takes the money that was formerly spent on ‘Saints’ Days’ (*mawlid*) and buys clothing for the poor. Many peasants now work in factories and the children attend the school where they study progressive principles” (201). In other words, instead of traditional pre-revolutionary clichés, such as “contentment is an inexhaustible treasure” (*Al-Fallah* 95), a non-individualistic culture begins to take shape through a reallocation of material resources to serve the lower classes, or less privileged *Stände*, and the inculcation of progressive socialist values into the minds of children in schools. A new set of

values has replaced the old clichés: “the revolutionary path is the only bridge through which the Arab nation can move from past to future” and “the inevitability of the socialist solution” (*al-Fallah* 94).

As Weber points out, gaining a high status can be attributed not only to one’s skills but to one’s birth. Such honour is passed down to “descendants who were raised [from birth] in the conventions of their *Stände* group” (“The Distribution of Power” 147) and should not be stained by “participating in economic labour” (147). In *al-Fallah*, Rizk Bey is an excellent example of inherited honour. He is a propertied high-status person who lives in a villa on the main rural road at the village’s entrance. His daughter studies Arts in Cairo and lives with her uncle, Farhat Bey, whose young children study at Cairo schools. He usually reminds the villagers of his father and his current roles as the Socialist Union committee secretary and Cooperative Association director to justify the high social standing and legal power that he enjoys. According to Weber, “the legal order can guarantee power as well as honor, but at least normally, it is not the primary source of either. The legal order rather is an additional factor that enhances the chance to possess power and create an honorable reputation, but the legal order cannot always secure them” (“The Distribution of Power” 138).

Similarly, Rizk gets power through the three defining factors of power as indicated by Weber: class (economic status), *Stände* (social status) and party (legal order). His legal power stems from his position as the president of the headquarters of the Cooperative Association. However, this legal power does not secure Rizk’s honour because his misuse of this power does not make him an honourable man in the eyes of the peasants. He commits many violations against them, such as using the Cooperative Association’s agricultural machines on his own land and depriving the peasants of their right to use them; exploiting the agrarian reform act; and forcing them to sign blank contracts. He gives Salem two barren acres as his share of the agricultural reform instead of the two fertile acres he used to have. As a result, he loses the confidence of the

peasants in the elections. Although he tries to reconcile with them, it is too late. The peasants' political consciousness proves stronger than his fanciful promises and words:

It is chaos. This is not how elections should run. Do you think that I am greedy for the council or the committee? Both of them are under my control. I am Rizk Bey, the son of Attallah Bey, and I will teach you how to behave yourselves! You are against the Revolution against socialism. (Al-Fallah 291)

Rizk's anger upon losing the Association's election, hence his political power, shows his concern about losing his social prestige. His mention of his father is his attempt to assert his high status. The peasants elect Abdel Maqsud as the new president of the Cooperative Association, Abdel Azim as the Socialist Union committee secretary, Insaf, a revolutionary woman in the village, as the treasurer, and Rayan, a young man in the village, as her assistant. The agricultural supervisor is removed and a new one appointed; the villagers control the agricultural machines and display them in a parade.

While al-Sharqawi presents Rizk as a politician who misuses his power, he also presents Sheikh Tolba as a villager with spiritual power, which he misuses to gain personal and social monopolies. Like Sheikh Shinawi in *al-Ard*, Tolba is the Sheikh and the preacher in the village, a role that gives him heightened prestige among the villagers. He is regarded as the mufti in the village. A mufti is a religious scholar who gives Fatwa; a non-binding legal ruling or interpretation on an issue of Islamic law. Sheikh Tolba says, "I have been reciting the holy Qur'an and have had a reputation since you were in your mother's womb, and people have been asking my opinion and fatwa since you were in your mother's womb" (*Al-Fallah* 44). Although he belongs to the peasant class, he usually serves the more powerful social class. He typifies false appearances of religion and virtue. Throughout the novel, he blindly follows authority and tries to exercise his spiritual role to serve Rizk Bey, who gives him a steady salary to recite the Holy Qur'an every day at the Cooperative Association's headquarters. His hypocrisy is made apparent when he supports Rizk's

decision to seize fertile lands from the peasants and replace them with barren ones. He is a religious tool used by Rizk to justify the latter's corrupt practices. His speech is always full of Quranic verses designed to give his words the legitimacy of religion. When the Cooperative Association's financial records are reviewed, it is discovered that the Sheikh's salary is recorded as five pounds instead of the one pound that is given to him monthly. He considers that all manifestations of modernity go against tradition, and he urges people to respect Rizk Bey in honour of his father's memory. Adopting the rhetoric of socialism, production, and commitment to laws, among other tenets of socialist ideology, Sheikh Tolba falsely claims that Rizk Bey is a socialist seeking the peasants' interests.

Hamdi Sakkut sketches a comparative analysis of the man of religion in *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah*, claiming that in *al-Ard* "he hobnobs with the camp of power" (38) while in *al-Fallah*, he "appears to be respected by the *fallahin* and sympathetic to them" (38). The first description seems more defensible than the second. Sheikh Tolba, the prototypical man of religion in *al-Fallah*, is not respected by the peasants, and he shows them no sympathy. In an attempt to defend Rizk's corruption, Sheikh Tolba blames the villagers for the injustices inflicted on them, which he argues is a punishment for their lack of faith and neglect of religious rituals. His lack of principles can be seen in his reaction to the Association's elections: he raises his hand as an expression of approval during the elections, supporting the *fallahin*, and then shakes his head with grief and changes his mind.

Thus, in both *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah*, the Sheikh is presented by al-Sharqawi as a greedy man who does not share the peasants' concerns or problems. He is propertyless and is close to the economically dominant powers, where he uses religion to justify the exploitation of the peasants at the hands of this class. Therefore, al-Sharqawi's anti-clericalism, which stems from his socialist ideology, shines through both novels: he condemns the clergy to the extent that they are mere tools in the ruling class's hands and those in power.

Al-Sharqawi also presents the character of Borei, a lawyer in the Socialist Union Committee in the city, as a corrupt official who hinders the progress of socialism by supporting the vestiges of the feudal system. In a meeting with Borei, the narrator criticises the new officials, claiming that “the Socialist Union committees must be not only leaders but also role models” (*Al-Fallah* 189). However, Borei maintains his line: “every Socialist committee includes leaders, and they are role models too” (*Al-Fallah* 189). Borei also defends Rizk Bey against the peasants, saying:

How dare they do not to approve Rizk Bey as the secretary of the committee? Your honour, this is chaos! Rizk Bey, the Cooperative Association’s revolutionary director and the Socialist Union committee secretary, is in the village! How dare they hold a meeting against his will? Where are the rules that should be respected and followed? This is chaos. Rizk Bey is a real socialist productive man. He contributes to increasing the national income, while others, I mean his enemies such as Abdel Azim and Abdel Maqsud, delay production. Any peasant, worker or anyone else who raises discussions that delay work is considered a saboteur. Definitely a saboteur! Then, allow me to say, if any peasant incites the people to stand against the owner just because he is the owner, he violates the rules. Rizk Bey has his stature, your honour! He was working in the National Union with me, I swear to God! Any peasant disrupting production, raising riots, and casting doubts on any official working in the Socialist Union Committee and the Cooperative Association in the village, is a reactionary, communist, an agent of feudalism, anti-socialist and a saboteur. (*Al-Fallah* 189-190)

The misleading propaganda in this speech leads to the unravelling of Borei’s hypocritical support of the feudal system. The narrator is led to wonder how a person with such anti-socialist views, and who is thus against freedom for the peasants, holds the Socialist Union’s leadership (*Al-Fallah* 196). However, the narrator’s defence of socialism is not as ardent as that of Ammar al-

Shibini, a technical worker in a textile factory, who explains to Borei the struggle of the peasants and labourers:

The battle becomes fierce. This battle is not only against the remnants of feudalism and capitalism but also against the opportunists and sloganeers, against the leftist opportunists. The rightist party is exposed to us, and we can face it. The real danger comes from the leftist opportunists who hold many vital positions in the country. They are the undercover enemy who permeates our society. (Al-Fallah 199)

Ammar al-Shibini's passionate speech explains the workers' awareness of socialism and the anti-socialists and feudalist remnants' hidden objectives. However, Borei believes that Ammar's opinion is "extremist" and that his ideas are radical and inapplicable in a "moderate socialist country" like Egypt (*Al-Fallah* 200). Nevertheless, in response to Borei's accusations, Ammar explains the relationship between man's socialism and freedom. He wonders how a socialist activist can be arrested in the era of socialism. He adds that people like Borei, with "their intimidating style" (*Al-Fallah* 200), create panic among the people. This panic makes people hate socialism and "destroys all the productive forces, stability and hope which every productive person should feel to be able to produce" (*Al-Fallah* 200-201). Ammar's words reveal a new dimension in the definition of socialism and the unique kind of socialist nationalism in Egypt. He provides the reader with the definition of socialism, explaining how its enemies try to stand against it and how some people profit by claiming to support it. He also gives an example of socialism in other countries and maintains that "the socialist experiences in all countries in the world have proved that lack of respect of public freedom has delayed the socialist development" (*Al-Fallah* 201). Because of their stand against public freedom and individualism, Borei and his ilk are accused by Ammar of being terrorists, "the enemies of socialist development", and opportunists who care "for [their] own business only... protect [their] prestige and interests using the power of the police" (*Al-Fallah* 201). Finally, he elaborates that freedom is at the core of

socialism. Freedom, he argues, “scares those like you [Borei] who belong to the new class because it exposes the opportunists, the sloganeers, and the enemies of socialism and freedom” (*Al-Fallah* 201). Ammar adds that the absence of freedom in capitalist societies is due to “economic pressure and the neediness which limit the freedom of man” (*Al-Fallah* 202), while in socialist societies, there is no such economic pressure and neediness because “the people are those who own the means of production, trade, banks and everything” (*Al-Fallah* 202). Ammar echoes Nasser’s statement in *The Charter* regarding the relationship between socialism and freedom: “Democracy is political freedom while socialism is social freedom. The two cannot be separated since they are both indispensable to true freedom” (*Al-Fallah* 34).

In his introduction to Henry Habib Ayrout’s *The Egyptian Peasant*, Morroe Berger notes that “Arab socialism”, as proclaimed in 1961, “has not affected the countryside very much, nor have its tenets been applied there nearly so much as to the urban economy” (xx). I contend that what al-Sharqawi is trying to present to his reader is that socialism still has much to do in the village and still needs considerable time to achieve Nasser’s ideal society. In her visit to Cairo to submit a complaint against the feudalist Rizk to the minister of the Agrarian Reform, Insaf speaks to Abdel Maqsud about how life in Cairo is different from that in the village and wonders why, in the age of Nasser’s socialism, there is still a social gap between classes. She also comments on the luxurious fashions of people in Cairo with their fancy cars and the westernised women walking expensive dogs:

The lands were distributed among the peasants. The Pashas have disappeared. No one of the radical anti-revolutionists now has the fortune to give his wife money to spend on dogs and buying cars. From where did they get this fortune, Abdel Maqsud Effendi? Please tell me, Mr Principal! (*Al-Fallah* 116)

Abdel Maqsud believes that the social class that Insaf is describing is not the old aristocracy, which has already disappeared, but a new class that has “class aspirations” (*Al-Fallah* 116). He

adds that people of this class, depending on circumstances, can find themselves in positions to earn high salaries and to amass great wealth (*Al-Fallah* 116). However, he states, “the president is working to reduce the gap between us and this new class” (*Al-Fallah* 117). This is mentioned as a question that comes up frequently in *The Charter*: “[yet,] the removal of the clash between classes, makes it possible, by eliminating the exploiting class, to dissolve peacefully class distinction” (Abdel Nasser 77). Thus, for Abdel Maqsud, the existence of a new wealthy class is temporary, and it will gradually disappear. My argument here is that al-Sharqawi’s reference to the president’s attempt “to dissolve the barriers among social classes” and the emergence of a new class, which can be described as the new aristocracy, constitutes an admission that socialism is still in progress and that any social change is a slow process, one that necessarily leaves behind some traces of previous social systems. This does not, however, hinder the process of social development. Likewise, the remnants of feudalism in Egypt under the socialism of President Nasser did not prevent the government from accomplishing its socialist objectives, one of which is clearly stated by Salem, Insaf’s son, when he says: “We want to live like those who live in the city ... we want to live that kind of life that the president has made conceivable for us!” (*A-Fallah* 118).

Žekulin contends that the socialist realist work of art must seek to fulfil “the criteria of ‘partyness’ [...], optimism and socialist humanism” (468). For him, the most crucial criterion is partyness. As its name suggests, partyness describes the act of belonging or sharing the ideology of a specific party. In *al-Fallah*, characters belong to the Socialist Union, and most of them adhere to this Union’s rules and values. The second criterion of socialist realism is optimism, which “is determined by the awareness, based on materialism, of the historically inevitable victory and final triumph of the toiling people” (Žekulin 474). *Al-Fallah*’s optimistic outlook is demonstrated by the determination of some characters, such as Abdel Maqsud and Abdel Azim, to defend the villagers’ interests against feudalism, and achieve freedom, which they attain at the end of the

story. This awareness can be seen in the words of one of the village students attending the Cooperative Association meeting, commenting on the reconciliation of Rizk and the peasants: “this is a class conflict. It will never be resolved neither by reading al-Fatiha nor by reading the whole Holy Qur’an. This conflict is so major and bitter that our enemies use every means, even the barbaric ones, in it” (*Al-Fallah* 289). This comment by the student can unravel the peasants’ social and political consciousness, and that they are aware of their rights, the nature of their enemies (the remnants of feudalism), the power of their means, and how they (the peasants) can defend themselves against them. As for the third criterion of socialist realist work of art which is Socialist humanism, Revyakin explains that it is the “recognition of man as the highest value. It affirms the social and national equality of individual men, the brotherhood of peoples freed from every kind of exploitation and coercion, the struggle for peace in the whole world, the struggle for communism” (qtd. in Žekulin 474). The struggle in *al-Fallah* suggests that peasants seek to achieve equality and justice in a post-revolutionary society. Al-Sharqawi manages to achieve all these unities in *al-Fallah*. His positive characters present socialist values based on liberating the people from subservience to a minority that owns or controls the means of production, and by them and through them, he propagates this ideology. He also portrays their struggle as active and persistent. This is especially the case of the peasants Abdel Azim, Abdel Maqsud, and El-Hilali, who suffer imprisonment to gain their freedom. They never lose hope and manage to smile when they are falsely accused of being corrupt.

In his analysis of the intellectual characters of Egyptian novels set around the Nasserite regime, Samah Idris classifies these fictional intellectuals in terms of their attitude or stance towards the regime into seven kinds: the strong supporter, the apologist, the critical supporter, the rejectionist, the opportunist, the escapist and the antagonised. He views Abdel Maqsud, Ammar, and the narrator as apologists. For him, the apologist always justifies “the faults and failures of the Nasserite regime by way of intellectual and historical arguments” (97). He further subdivides this

group into two types: while the first group makes excuses for Nasser's regime and attributes the corrupt practices to the revolution, the second group links these practices to "opportunism and remnants of the old feudal regime" (97). Samah Idris maintains that the three intellectuals (i.e., Abdel Maqsud, Ammar, and the narrator) belong to the second type of apologists because, as we have seen, they blame the bureaucratic corruption on the general public. He adds that these intellectuals see Egypt as two states: one an Egypt ruled by Nasser and his supporters, such as the head of internal security, and the other an Egypt ruled by the opportunistic, anti-socialist remnants of feudalism (112). Based on these characters' rational arguments, which have been the focus of this section, they can be considered not only socialist propagandists but apologists.

al-Fallah's characters are connected to *al-Ard's* in various ways. Abdel Mohsin Taha Badr believes that the author of *al-Fallah* wants his characters to be "an extension (sequel) of the characters of *al-Ard*" (177-178). For example, Badr argues that "Rizk Bey can be considered an alternative for Mahmoud Bey in al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard*" (180). *Al-Fallah* can therefore be considered an extension to *al-Ard*. As Badr notes, "al-Sharqawi wanted to keep the same characters to make his novels *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* as a 'dual story' that record history of an Egyptian novel and capture the change that happened to its peasants" (157). He contends that this goal is not attained directly because of "the great time interval between the periods in which the two novels' events took place" (157). To achieve this goal, the author tries to create "alternatives to these characters, changing their names, modifying the behaviours of some of them and introducing some characters whom the new circumstances impose their existence" (Badr 157). However, we may wonder about the significance of setting the novels in different historical periods if the characters are functionally the same. For instance, what the feudalist Mahmoud Bey does in *al-Ard* with the peasants is almost the same as what the feudalist Rizk does in *al-Fallah*, albeit with a different historical background in each novel. I argue here that al-Sharqawi intends this historical duality to reflect the positive impact of socialism on the Egyptian peasants, both in

terms of their mindset and their gradual recourse to communal action. In other words, the socialist peasant is no longer the same as he appeared in the period before the 1950s. The new socialist peasant is more reluctant to see his land taken away, more revolutionary, and eager to rebel in defence of his rights. This is why al-Sharqawi introduces more than one revolutionary hero in *al-Fallah*. The narrator highlights this difference when he compares the pre-revolution peasant and the post-revolution peasant in *al-Fallah*:

In those days, the peasant was in a dilemma, either justice or freedom. It is a tragic choice in itself, but the farmer always chose freedom. Rizk, do you know which calamity are you and those who protect you bringing down to the people? It is a great affliction. He, who used to be an exploited worker during your father's days, is now mourning those days even though he now owns land, and nobody exploits him. He possesses the strength of freedom; however, men like you rob his confidence, security and freedom. You, in the name of socialism, are crushing all that is wonderful and noble in socialism. (Al-Fallah 281)

However, Abdel-Azim Anis maintains that there are many social and political considerations that the writers must consider when they introduce "the revolutionary hero" in their works, who should be presented "as he is and without any exaggeration or falsification" (139). For Anis, although this revolutionary hero exists in every phase of our life, "writers fall short in fully presenting such a hero" (139). Anis also "rejects regarding people as the hero of a work of art and considers this a kind of falsification" (139-140) because "people in the Capitalist society consist of different strata which are not equal neither in their political conflicts nor in their interests, and even in the same stratum we have the public and their leaders" (140). In this sense, Anis believes that it is a social and political responsibility of literary writers to present individual heroes "if they want to contribute to the battle for liberation and democracy through their works" (140). In this point, I agree with Anis because this is typical of the Egyptian society in the 1960s as depicted in *al-Fallah*: we can find people in the same village belonging to different social strata and with

different aims and aspirations; however, only those characters seeking to achieve socialism and freedom can be called revolutionary heroes, such as Abdel Azim, Abdel Maqsud, and Insaf.

The role of the narrator in the novel is no less important than that of those revolutionary heroes mentioned above. As in *al-Ard*, we have an unnamed narrator, but this time he is a mature narrator who participates in commenting on the events; he is also present throughout the story, unlike the narrator in *al-Ard*, who appears at the beginning, disappears in the middle, and reappears at the end of the story. Thus, the story of *al-Fallah* is told by a narrator who is sometimes involved in the events and, at other points, acts as an eyewitness, observing the conflict between the peasants and the remnants of the feudal system. There are nonetheless some similarities between the narrators of *al-Fallah* and *al-Ard*.

There are also similarities between the author and the narrator. For example, both were born in a village; both lived in the city; both are cultured, and both spent a year in Paris (*Al-Fallah* 4-5) and are concerned with the village's problems. We learn that the narrator was at high school in 1935, which corresponds to the period of al-Sharqawi's schooling, and he graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1943 as, too, did al-Sharqawi. It is noteworthy that the narrator's cousin Abdel Azim revealed the narrator's political and social leanings at the beginning of the novel. His cousin urges him to leave the capital city and come back to live in his birthplace, the village: "Come on, man, and spend a fortnight in the village. It is your hometown. How come you are a socialist and live between Cairo and Europe!" (*Al-Fallah* 5).

3.3 The Universality of the Setting in *al-Fallah*

al-Fallah's setting, both its historical timeframe and geographical locale, is similar to that of *al-Ard*. Interestingly, the setting is mentioned at the very beginning of both novels. In both texts, the narrator is introduced as he decides to go back to his village: "I do not know which part of the soul suddenly evoked this great nostalgia for everything there ... in that corner of the quiet world on

the small river” (*Al-Fallah* 1). Al-Sharqawi is constantly drawn to the unnamed Egyptian village, which the narrators in both novels simply refer to as “my village”. Khalifah states that *al-Fallah* “revisits the same geographical entity, albeit differently” (45). These differences do not concern the place itself; instead, what has changed is the socialist period in which the second novel’s events occur. At that time, the conflict between the peasants and the opportunists was escalating. However, by the end of the story, the narrator says: “Spring returned to my village” (*Al-Fallah* 256). This is a metaphor for resolving the conflict and the triumph of socialist principles in the village.

In both novels, the village has a close connection to the city. Sometimes, al-Sharqawi compares the two spaces in his novels by presenting a character from the village who lives in the city, such as the narrator in both texts, or by having a villager visit the city. Examples include Mohamed Effendi’s visit to Cairo in *al-Ard* when he goes to submit the petition to the government, and Abdel Azim’s visit in *al-Fallah*, when he goes to meet the Minister of Agrarian Reform. In both examples, the peasant’s trip to the city is loaded with the burden of defending the peasants’ rights; it has nothing to do with tourism or leisure.

It is worth comparing the peasants’ views of the city in *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah*. In *al-Ard*, the peasants find much to admire in the city. Waseefa, for example, aspires to marry a man from the city and is curious to know more about women’s lives there, what clothes they wear and what they eat. However, this admiration disappears in *al-Fallah* and is replaced by a sense of contempt for, and condemnation of, the city’s lifestyle. Abdel Azim thinks that the best women to marry are those from the village. His cousin reminds him of what happened when he talked to one of the female students at the university who did not look down on him as others did, and as a result, he believed she was of rural origins: “since then you have seen all virtues belong to the village” (*Al-Fallah* 14). The peasants’ attitudes to the city are negative because both the government and the press are focused on it, while the countryside is neglected. Al-Sharqawi’s comparison of the city

and the village highlights that the village is associated with the means of production in a predominantly agrarian economy, compared to the city, which is the source of luxury, corruption, and political decadence and discord.

In *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi mentions real places when he compares the life of people from different parts of the world: “for sure, thousands of lovers are now in the Luxemburg and Bolinas parks, on the banks of Volga, in Hyde Park and the beaches of Australia” (*Al-Fallah* 61), while other people lead a miserable life in Palestine and “human flesh is torn apart by dynamite in the south of Yemen” (*Al-Fallah* 61). Others still suffer in Vietnam:

In Vietnam, the heads of people were cut with a knife, and the serial killers wander in the markets with the blood-dripping and freedom-dreaming heads of the revolutionary people in their hands. Even animals do not know this sinful pride when they prey, do not have all this ability to lead, nor do they have this barbaric joy when they see the ray of life is dead in the eyes of their victims. (*Al-Fallah* 61-62)

Here, the author’s point is that what is happening with the peasants in this particular village in the novel is similar to what has happened to many other people in different parts of the world.

Al-Sharqawi’s reference to such incidents of suffering in different parts of the world is an attempt to create a common cause that unites the people around the world, including the peasants in the Egyptian village in this novel. This unity of the common cause contributes to the universality of the novel.

Historically, *al-Fallah* discusses the socio-political developments that occurred in Egypt between 1952 and 1965. The historical events of this period are essentially part of a continuous development dedicated to the awakening of working-class consciousness in Egypt and other colonial and postcolonial societies around the world. The treatment of Egypt’s peasantry in the spirit of socialism adds a new dimension to the international trend of socialist realism. Žekulin believes that socialist realist literature reflects socialism and its final aim, which is “to unfold ...

the chief content of our epoch – the movement of society towards communism” (472). Correspondingly, the final aim of *al-Fallah* is to portray an epoch in which people were full of the courage and determination to liberate themselves from oppression and to seek to be treated equally, economically and socially. This attitude characterises the socialist epoch of Gamal Abdel Nasser.

According to al-Alim, the novel has a particular imagined time that should be considered different from the novel’s real time or “objective time” (13). For him, this imagined time may be “partial or general, individualistic or social” (13). Al-Alim states that “the time of the novel can relate to a particular character, a specific event, incident or experience, a group of people, or a social turning point” (13). He adds that there is usually a link and interaction between the imagined time and the real time. Typically, *al-Fallah*’s events cover a specific time mentioned directly in the novel on more than one occasion. For instance, Sheikh Tolba mentions it when he talks about his age to one of the peasants: “I was born in 1900, and we are in 1965. This means that I am 65 years old” (*Al-Fallah* 272-273). The narrator also mentions the time of the events of the novel twice. Once, when he talks about Tafida, who “was a little girl ten years ago when her father used to pull her with him when he recites the Qur’an every morning in the houses of the rich people. I [the narrator] have seen her for ten years, in the summer of 1955” (*Al-Fallah* 36). The second time is when he wonders about the suffering of the village: “I wonder who creates this despair in the spirits of the peasants after thirteen years of the Revolution!” (*Al-Fallah* 241). However, this imagined time is closely linked to when the novel was written in 1968.

Badr explains that “al-Sharqawi writes *al-Fallah* in 1968, nearly fourteen years after he wrote *al-Ard*. The time of publication between the two novels does not exceed more than fourteen years, but the events of the novels exceed more than one-third of a century” (157). I argue that al-Sharqai selects the time of *al-Fallah*’s events because of the radical changes that appeared in the Egyptian village in the 1960s. He also wants to present the Egyptian village after the 1952

revolution. It witnessed different socio-economic and political changes under Nasser's rule, such as the construction of new factories where women started to work to make a living and establish the Socialist Union committee in the village. Badr wonders about the reason that makes al-Sharqawi keen on choosing 1965 as the time of *al-Fallah*'s events after choosing the period of Sidky for *al-Ard*. He argues as follows:

The period chosen by the author witnessed the incident of Kamshish, which ended up with the death of the revolutionist Salah Hussein¹⁶ in May 1966. 1965 was a year of heated confrontations between the peasants of Kamshish and their enemies in this village. This incident has become a public opinion case which has been politically and socially analysed [...] After the incident took place, al-Sharqawi records and embodies it in a work of art. (158)

Nasser's security forces entered the village of Kamshish after the killing of Salah Hussein, a Socialist Union member in the village. The family of al-Fiki, the most prominent agricultural landowner in the village, were charged with the murder. Nasser issued orders to arrest all al-Fiki family members and some suspects from the people of Kamshish. In an interview with Shahenda Maklad, Salah Hussein's wife, expresses how her husband's assassination on the 30th of April 1966 was a turning point in Egyptian history. She mentions that her husband was "the local leader for farmers' struggle in Kamshish and led them through various battles against feudalism" (Maklad 160). Thus, Kamshish symbolised the peasants' struggle against corruption and inspired many intellectuals and political activists in Egypt. One of these intellectuals is al-Sharqawi, who

¹⁶ A Marxist revolutionist member in the Socialist Union, who led a group in his village, Kamshish, in the 1960s.

wrote *al-Fallah* one year after this incident and was one among the intellectuals who attended the “first commemoration for Salah on 30 April 1968” (Maklad 162).

3.4 Signs of Class: Titles, Clothing, and Language

According to Weber, while people’s class situation is purely determined by their economic condition, status, or social order, is identified by their wealth or “lifestyle”. In *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi presents many characters from different status and classes, whose lifestyle is manifested through their appearance, the names by which they are known, and their style of language. This section identifies some of these features, which reflect questions of social stratification in the novel. I explore how clothing, titles, and language signpost a character’s social class or status. This section also shows how the language of the narration and dialogue reflects al-Sharqawi’s socialist leanings.

As in *al-Ard*, clothing in *al-Fallah* is used as a signifier of class stratification. The officials’ clothing in the city reflects their high class, such as the Socialist Union secretary, Rizk, who wears a silk collar, a luxurious French tie, and strong-smelling perfume (*Al-Fallah* 12). The dialogue below between the narrator and Abdel Azim demonstrates the latter’s discontent towards people in the city and their clothing:

“Why do you hate Cairo, Abdel Azim?”

He stopped talking and burst into laughter, so much that some passers-by in the street looked at us. An elegant girl stopped, staring at his extended height, his garment flowing in grandeur, and the hat on his head.

“I hate Cairo? Maybe I love Paris, brother!” said Abdel Azim.

“Did you see the girl staring at me? She is, no doubt, pretty, but isn’t it shameful that she wears an above-knee dress like that? If she worked in the field or a factory-like one of ours, would you see her nude like that? Does this disgraceful girl have a family who cares

about her? Why is she walking around in that dress? Why isn't she modest? Does she want to look like a foreigner? Moreover, she is wiggling too. Every place has its customs, brother. I dare her to step into our village with this disgraceful clothing, and you would see what will happen. If she had more than her body to think about, would she wear this? Are we at the beach? Why is she moving her body like actors in foreign films? What a pity, Cairo!" exclaimed Abdel Azim.

"Such women do not produce, and they waste the time of production too. They copy the foreigners who export such clothing and the wiggling walk also. Hence, how would we produce!" said Abdel Azim.

"Do not produce? Waste the time of production? Where did you learn all this, my cousin Abdel Azim? This is very sophisticated. Where did you learn all this?" (*Al-Fallah* 7-8)

The above illustrative exchange highlights the difference between clothing customs and traditions in the village and those in the city. We have seen how Abdel Azim shows more tremendous respect to the women in the village than those in the city, who waste time copying foreign fashions, time that could be spent on production. Abdel Azim thinks that bareness (how one looks) relates to lack of production (what one does). It seems that conservative social values merge with new socialist rhetoric and Arab nationalism in Abdel Azim's criticism of the young woman. The village becomes the place of sound values and production, while Cairo is cast as a decadent, foreign influence, a place of consumption rather than production.

Furthermore, the use of titles in the novel reflects class and status order. Such titles include *Bey*, *Sheikh*, *Effendi*, *Hanim*, *Ustaz* (Mister), and others that demonstrate the status or class to which the characters who bear them belong. It is noteworthy that some titles in *al-Ard*, such as *Pasha*, *Omda* and *Mayor*, disappear in *al-Fallah*, which reflects the changes that happened in Egyptian society after the 1952 revolution. However, Rizk still adheres to his position and the title of *Bey*; indeed, he punishes Salem for not calling him by this title: "Rizk tied Salem into a tree,

and the representative of the government ordered that he should be arrested. Salem was nailed because he rejected the supervisor's fraud, and he refused to call Rizk 'Bey', the title that has been cancelled by the Revolution" (*Al-Fallah* 149). Rizk's adherence to this title stems from his ancestry: he is the son of a *Pasha*, who used to rule the village, which, for him, entails inherited prestige. From a Weberian perspective, Rizk would be correct, but the revolution has changed status dynamics. His inherited nobility and honour do not secure his power after his political loss in the election.

On the other hand, a character such as Abdel Maqsud acquires the title Effendi (Mister) due to his education. Although he belongs to the peasantry, he is called by this title due to his role as a school headmaster and a Socialist Union member and the Cooperative Association. Abdel Maqsud did not inherit land from his father, a landless peasant, and he has not acquired land because the laws of agrarian reform distributed the land of the feudalists to the poor peasants. However, it is essential to note that there is a difference between Abdel Maqsud Effendi and his father, who used to work on the *Bey's* land. For his part, Abdel Maqsud fights against Rizk Bey, who wants to violate the agrarian reform laws, in cooperation with some officials. He leads all the events in the village to correct the socialist path and endures imprisonment for the sake of the village's struggle.

Another example that demonstrates how the use of titles implies social class and status in the novel can be seen when a woman collides with Abdel Azim in front of a bar, and looks down on him. He says ironically: "Come in, Hanim. I am a farmer, and I am not allowed to come to places like these. Do you all still think like that? Oh, Cairo!" (*Al-Fallah* 11). *Hanim* is a Turkish royal and aristocratic title for women, sometimes used to show respect for women. Abdel Azim's use of this title in the above dialogue is sarcastic because the woman's dress does not appeal to him, and he does not respect her because she adheres to outdated social norms.

Interestingly, al-Sharqawi combines both the colloquial rural and urban Egyptian Arabic in the dramatic passages in *al-Fallah*. This makes the dialogue more natural because it is the ordinary people's language in both Egyptian contexts. Al-Sharqawi uses Modern Standard Arabic in narrative and descriptive passages, which imply didactic purpose to teach the reader about the essence of socialism and freedom. Highly elevated Modern Standard Arabic is also employed in the passages that speak about the suffering of peasants around the world and in long speeches explicitly or implicitly calling for socialist principles. Such lengthy speeches have a repetitive tone and look like sermons. For instance, at the beginning of Chapter Ten in *al-Fallah*, we read a lengthy four-page speech about the struggle between right and wrong, containing examples of historical martyrs, such as Christ, Al-Hussein, and Lumumba (185). Figurative language is used throughout much of this speech, including in the following line: "I did not know that the truth needs all this trouble, and all this struggle, to stand against falsehood, with its head held up high" (178).

Furthermore, we can notice al-Sharqawi's employment of long descriptive narrative passages, which provide the reader with many details about characters, places and events in such a way that captures the reader's mind and makes the story vivid and realistic. Al-Usayli points out that "among excellent essential features in the narration of this novel is that al-Sharqawi's narrative passages are vital and truthful" (284). In other words, al-Sharqawi manages to convince the reader that the narrator is describing what has happened to real people and that he is doing nothing but conveying events he has witnessed and talking about people whom he may see or live with.

As for the dialogues in *al-Fallah*, most of them are introduced in the vernacular Egyptian Arabic, which makes them more realistic and appealing to the readers. Speaking about the language of the socialist realist works, Robin Ostle observes that most of the socialist realist works "leaned heavily on the vernacular, which was taken as a sacrosanct hallmark of the working

people, not only in rendering dialogue but also in the fabric of narration” (185). However, other dialogues are presented in the Modern Standard Arabic to reflect their interlocutors’ high educational status. For example, most dramatic speeches uttered by Ammar al-Shibini are in formal Standard Arabic so as to present an example of a well-educated worker defending socialist principles. The narrator is also highly educated, and his use of Modern Standard Arabic language shows his sophistication. He is well-travelled, including to France. Abdel Azim tells him: “you are one of those who are busy with reading books” (*Al-Fallah* 3). On the other hand, Abdel Azim’s limited literacy is demonstrated by the narrator, his cousin, who expresses the contradiction between Abdel-Azim’s speech and his use of sophisticated language:

What is all of that, Abdel Azim? I have not had the chance to speak with you for years. We went to the elementary school in the village together, but you did not have the chance to go to the primary school in the governorate’s capital city, for your father did not have enough money to let you continue your education. And now it has been a long time since you were reading. You can hardly read what you had memorised from the Qur’an when you were a child and you were struggling to read the headings of some newspaper. You cannot write anything either except your signature. You hardly read the names of Cairo streets. (*Al-Fallah* 5)

The narrator’s comment shows that the use of Modern Standard Arabic, especially bombastic language, is a feature of educated people.

Al-Sharqawi’s narration and dialogues in *al-Fallah* are also full of direct propaganda and highly political in voice, to the extent that some of them may be considered lacking in artistry. His language is alive with political slogans and the desire to articulate the principles of the revolution. According to Morson, the language and style of socialist realist novels are characterised by “the inclusion of political sermons, often in high-flown rhetorical language, even in fiction about apparently apolitical themes” (122). The political speeches in *al-Fallah* are abundant, and they are

delivered by most of the novel's characters. Most of these speeches tackle political topics focusing on aspects of Nasser's socialism. The tone of this political propaganda is manifested when the director of the Security Directorate says: "the man who uses his power and authority to insult the dignity of others is a man who lacks dignity, and the man who threatens the freedom of others is a slave in his inner self" (*Al-Fallah* 245). It is also evident when Adli Abdel Wahid, one of the leading students, emphasises the value of freedom to his colleagues: "Freedom is the fortress of socialism. The triumph of socialism can be only attained through freedom. Socialism cannot manifest itself or fly high except by means of the two wings of freedom and justice. Go and read the speech of Gamal Abdel Nasser" (*Al-Fallah* 220). This quote is influenced by Nasser's *The Charter*: "social freedom cannot be realised except through an equal opportunity for every citizen to obtain a fair share of national wealth" (57). Along with Abdel Azim, Abdel Maqsud, and others, these two characters are represented as skilled propagandists of Nasser's socialism.

3.5 Conclusion

Al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah* describes the social stratification in an Egyptian village in the 1960s in order to present a new form of socialist realism in support of the Nasserite government. The novel can also be regarded as an extension of *al-Ard*'s story set in the pre-revolutionary period. While *al-Ard* is meant to show the social gap between the aristocratic feudalists and the peasants, and the government's politically motivated actions against the peasants, *al-Fallah* gives another version of *al-Ard*'s story, this time with a different Egyptian social order and socialist, pro-peasant actions. I argue that through his socialist ideology, al-Sharqawi implicitly invites the reader of these two novels to compare the regimes in which the two novels are set. In *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi's bias towards socialism and Nasserite rule is manifested through his characterisation, themes, and language. He highlights the corruption of the anti-socialist officials and the feudal system's remnants, which goes against Nasser's socialist agenda. The novel reflects how class stratification

in the village creates conflict among the feudal system remnants and the peasantry, the latter of whom adhere to socialist principles. According to Nasser's *The Charter*, these principles include the struggle between the socialist peasants and the feudal system, revolutionary action, the empowerment of women in political life, and the peasants' social and political consciousness. From a Weberian perspective, the distribution of power among the characters in the novel is based on the class, status, and party to which they belong. Class stratification, which is presented in *al-Ard*, has been minimised after Nasser's era. Moreover, the parameters according to which a person's status is judged are economically conditioned and now include other aspects, such as education and political affiliation. Being a socialist realist writer, al-Sharqawi promotes socialist values through historically accurate representations of Nasser's Socialist Union Party during the 1960s.

Al-Sharqawi succeeds in introducing two opposing forces and creating collective heroism by presenting more than one revolutionary hero. This collective heroism indicates the extent of the roll-out of Nasser's *The Charter*. It is also important to note that the language of these characters shows their class stratum and educational status. Al-Sharqawi's choice of the peasants' local vernacular Arabic adds to the novel's realistic writing style. Using formal Standard Arabic for the novel's narration makes the text convincing, mainly when used to articulate profound concepts such as nationalism, socialism, and freedom.

Al-Sharqawi is a distinguished intellectual who contributed significantly to Arabic literature but has not received much attention. His "rural novels created a generous stream that looks like a river in the time of the flood that influenced to some degree many writers of the sixties, such as Muhammad Yusef Al-Qaid, Khairy Shalabi and others" (Abdullah 102). The influence of his literary works extends to the present time: being selected as the character of the Cairo International Book Fair in 2018, the most significant and vital book fair in the Arab world, attests to such profound influence and proves his recognition.

Chapter 4. Social Stratification of Pre-Colonial Igbo Society in Chinua

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Following the previous Weberian analysis of Egyptian social stratification as represented in al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* in Chapter Two, and *al-Fallah* in Chapter Three, Chapter Four moves to offer a critical analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in light of the same critical approach to social stratification. While people in mainly class-oriented societies such as Egypt are stratified based on their relationship to the means of production, in status groups, or *Stände*, in Igbo society they are categorised according to their prestige or (social status), which is gained through other criteria such as personal achievements and skills, economic monopolies, and by birth. Parties, for Weber, represent communal groups with specific goals that can arise in both class-oriented or status-oriented societies, and they can have members from different classes or status. This chapter sheds light on Igbo social practices and highlights how it establishes social stratification among its people. It discusses how traditional Igbo society is based according to *Stände*: individuals are ranked socially according to their personal qualities, honours, and wealth. It also demonstrates how social mobility is available among the traditional Igbos, represented by the case of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. I address how this traditional social order is influenced by the arrival of the missionaries with their new religion and government, which attempts to reestablish the Igbos' traditional social order to serve colonial needs. Accordingly, I examine how colonialism reshapes the Igbo social structure. I argue that the arrival of the colonisers changes the parameters of social stratification in the traditional Igbo society.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the representation of social stratification in Igboland before and during colonisation. Two points motivate the choice of Achebe's novel as the corpus for this analysis. Firstly, *Things Fall Apart* remains a cornerstone of modern African literature due to its historical

and literary value, and secondly, although there is lots of critical literature on Achebe, there are still not many literary works that address social stratification. As its title suggests, *Things Fall Apart* covers the collapse and end of a social, political, and economic system during a specific period and the emergence of a new system. The novel is divided into three parts, the first of which portrays traditional Igbo society before the colonisers' arrival, while the second and third cover the period of colonialism. Achebe depicts different cultural aspects in the novel, especially in Part One, which highlights Igbo culture, notably its social structure, ceremonies, laws, religious beliefs, customs, and cultural practices. Achebe dedicates Part Two to presenting the life of Okonkwo, the protagonist, his exile, and the arrival of the missionaries. Part Three is mainly about Okonkwo's return to his village and the clash with the colonisers. The narrative takes place in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a few years before Nigeria formally became part of the British Empire. Unlike the traditional European novel, the first part of *Things Fall Apart* is non-linear. This is because some chapters or parts of chapters in this section provide an ethnographic account of traditional Igbo society in the pre-colonial era.

There is neither a definite beginning to the events nor an end in Part One (Chapters One through Thirteen): These chapters narrate isolated ethnographic episodes showing readers aspects of Igbo culture. For example, Chapter Five highlights the distribution of men and women's social roles in the Igbo family. Chapter Six introduces the Igbos' traditional social practice of wrestling matches. Chapters Eight and Twelve present bride-pricing and marriage customs, respectively. While part of Chapter Nine moves the narrative forward, another part breaks off the story to describe Igbo social beliefs and rituals regarding dead infants. Although most of the chapters in Parts Two and Three follow a traditional plot structure, at various points the text breaks off to discuss the ethnographic features of the myths, legends, idioms and proverbs that explain Igbo social life. Achebe moves between this ethnography and a narrative closer in kind to the traditional European novel. The reader may wonder why Achebe offers a detailed description of

this society from the inside, showing its various components. The ethnographical elements serve as a background for the main events in the narrative. In this way, Achebe can be considered not only a novelist but also a “native informant” (Istomina 58). In the foreword of *The Encyclopedia of Chinua Achebe*, Simon Gikandi explains the significance of *Things Fall Apart* as not only a work of fiction but also as a historical and anthropological source. He explains that this novel (*Things Fall Apart*) and Achebe’s *Arrow of God* (1964) can be “read as exemplary representations of African traditional cultures at the moment of the colonial encounter” (qtd. in Booker xiii). In the next section, I introduce the traditional Igbo social structure in Umuofia before colonisation.

4.2 Social Structure in Pre-colonial Umuofia

According to Weber, “a class is any group of persons occupying the same class status” (*The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* 424). For him, classes are categorised according to “the relations to production and acquisition of goods”, and their situation is determined only by the “economy” (“The Distribution of Power” 148). However, *Stände* are stratified according to “the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by specific ‘lifestyles’” (Weber “The Distribution of Power” 148) – that is, how individuals live, behave socially, and how they view themselves can define their status group. Weber adds that *Stände* are communities that are often “amorphous” (142). In other words, they lack a definite social structure. He notes that in such communities, the “status situation” of individuals is determined by a “positive or negative social assessment of honor” (142). By honour, Weber means the social respect, prestige, or distinction given to an individual. This status can be positive or negative as individuals can be granted high-status or low-status based on different social assessments or evaluations. Where the social assessment of honour is “predominantly expressed by the imposition of a specific lifestyle” (143), there are other indicators or characteristics that can define honorific statuses, such as personal qualifications, birth, or occupation. In this section, I shed light on the traditional Igbo familial and

societal structure in *Things Fall Apart*, explaining how the Igbos form different *Stände*, with characters in the novel having different statuses. I discuss social mobility within these status groups and how the arrival of the British influences this status-based stratification and social order.

The novel's setting is a fictional village called Umuofia, which is sometimes considered the centre of the story. Chinekpebi Anyanwu, for example, claims that "the protagonist in *Things Fall Apart* is not Okonkwo but Umuofia" (153). Achebe presents a detailed description of the village: "Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in war and in magic, and its priests and medicine men were feared in all the surrounding country. Its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself" (*Things Fall Apart* 11). This description shows the stature and reputation this village enjoyed among the surrounding villages.

Achebe's description of the Igbos' social structure in Umuofia, organised through kinships, is an ethnographic one. The importance of this kinship for the Igbo man is demonstrated when Okonkwo's uncle, Uchendu, prays to have "health and children" (156) during one of the Igbo feasts:

We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him. (156)

It seems that the social status represented by kinship and expanding one's family is more critical for the Igbos than their economic status. Thus, the Igbo village comprises families, and each of these families consists of a husband and wife or wives in a polygamous household. Igbo polygamous families are regarded as ones with high standing, where the father's role is the head, and the wives are responsible for most of the household chores. In pre-colonial Igbo society, "having multiple wives is a marker of masculinity and *prestige*" (Powell 171). These markers

stem, however, from the high economic status that polygamy confers. The number of wives tells how wealthy the man is and how strong he is in wrestling, as Igbo families prefer their daughters to marry physically strong men. So, to abandon this marriage custom, for an Igbo man, is to abandon his identity and social stature. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's family is polygamous: "a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding" (125). Okonkwo is the head of his family, and his three wives are responsible for cleaning and cooking. Tasks perceived as masculine, such as working in the field, are done by the male members in the family: Okonkwo usually plants yams with the help of his sons, Nwoye and Ikemefuna. Women are responsible for bearing and raising their children, cooking food, and serving their husbands. While they do not farm yams (which is considered a male crop), they farm other crops and sell their crops in the marketplace. They are storytellers to children and have a variety of functions in the culture of the community. One of the women, Chielo (close friend of Ekwefi, Okonkwo's second wife), is also the priestess of the oracle.

However, this social practice reveals a form of social and gender inequality between the men themselves. While rich Igbo men marry more than one woman, other men may not find a wife because all the women are taken. However, for the Igbo people, some reasons justify this practice, such as the desire to extend patrilineal descent and to gain honour. In the novel, Obierika bargains over his daughter's bride-price with his would-be son-in-law's family and "finally settled at twenty bags of cowries" (68). Their discussion afterwards about the different marriage customs in the Igbo villages unravels the objectification of the Igbo women:

"It was only this morning," said Obierika, "that Okonkwo and I were talking about Abame and Aninta, where titled men climb trees and pound foo-foo for their wives."

"All their customs are upside-down. They do not decide bride-price as we do, with sticks. They haggle and bargain as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market."

“That is very bad,” said Obierika’s eldest brother. “But what is good in one place is bad in another place. In Umunso they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It is a bad custom because it always leads to a quarrel.” (69)

The above quote demonstrates that a closer look at Igbo polygamous marriages shows how Igbo women are regarded as a commodity, for which only rich, preferably titled, men must pay bags of cowries to possess. The relationship between the Igbo man and his wife is not based on domestic partnerships where both sides participate in financial and family decision-making. Instead, the wife is subordinated to her husband; she must serve him, kneel before him and are only allowed to eat and drink after him. This can be seen in Nwakibie’s household when Okonkwo visits to offer palm wine and ask for help:

The first cup went to Okonkwo, who must taste his wine before anyone else. Then the group drank, beginning with the eldest man. When everyone had drunk two or three horns, Nwakibie sent for his wives. Some of them were not at home and only four came in.

“Is Anasi not in?” he asked them. They said she was coming. Anasi was the first wife and the others could not drink before her, and so they stood waiting.

Anasi was a middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built. There was authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the ruler of the womenfolk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her husband’s titles, which the first wife alone could wear. She walked up to her husband and accepted the horn from him. She then went down on one knee, drank a little and handed back the horn. She rose, called him by his name and went back to her hut. The other wives drank in the same way, in their proper order, and went away. (19-20)

Having noticed that women rank second after men and that there is social stratification among male groups in Igbo society, we can also see another sort of social stratification in the female

groups, namely the wives. The “proper order” of the Igbo wife is not based on the number of children she has, her age, or even the husband’s preference; instead, in a polygamous family, wives are ranked according to the sequence of marriages, with the first wife in the top position. The extra privileges that the first wife enjoys, such as the right to drink first and to wear an anklet symbolising her husband’s titles, demonstrate that Igbo wives are not treated equally and that many are deprived of social rights.

The practice of infanticide in the case of the birth of twins shows another kind of social inequality and stratification. Socially and religiously, twins are demonised to the extent that if Igbo women give birth to them, the babies are “put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest” (*Things Fall Apart* 58), even “mutilated” (175). These practices are depicted realistically in the novel. Misty L. Bastian explains that some traditional Igbo villages, such as Onitsha, consider twinship “an abomination against the Earth” (14) and that twin births “should be eradicated before the pollution reached out to touch other members of the offending lineage” (14). In the novel, Obierika says that this practice stems from a belief that:

the Earth had decreed that they [twins] were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. 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. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others. (118)

In this way, in Igboland, those with twins “are the greatest sufferer in the world” (*Things Fall Apart* 126). Igbo people therefore reject dead infants, or *ogbanje*, and consider them “wicked children who, when they died, entered their mothers’ wombs to be born again” (*Things Fall Apart*

73). The description of such social conventions attests to a critical distance from Igbo culture on the part of Achebe, who grew up in a convert family that, despite practising Christianity, respected its ancestors' traditions. Achebe's presentation of these often-disconcerting aspects of Igbo society is in line with his broader approach to the novel, which can be defined as ethnographic realism¹⁷.

At the societal level, Umuofia has neither a queen nor a king. When the missionaries, who are governed by a monarchy, ask people in Umuofia "who the king of the village was" (*Things Fall Apart* 49), the people reply that they do not have a king, but they "have men of high title and the chief priests and the elders" (49). It is known as an acephalous society, which is governed not by one individual but by a group of titled men. These *egwugwu* (masked men) occupy a high place in this hierarchy, along with the Oracles, priests and elders.

Weber explains that social rank can be attained through the "appropriation of political or hierocratic ruling powers as monopolies" (*Economy and Society* 456). Typically, the political and religious authority that the *egwugwu* have in Igbo society gives them high social status. In Weber's schema, the *egwugwu* correspond to a political party. By parties, Weber not only means the political groups of modern societies but "the ancient and medieval parties we also can designate as parties, despite the fact that their structure differs substantially from that of modern parties" ("The Distribution of Power" 149). In other words, while many modern political parties now have a more complex structure and function as well as memberships and draw from different social classes and status, the structure and tasks performed by parties in older communities are much more straightforward. Members are selected based on specific personal, social, or economic standards. However, given the Weberian general concept of parties as "bodies which always

¹⁷ For more information, see Chapter One in this thesis.

struggle for dominion and they are very frequently organised in a rigorous ‘authoritarian’ fashion” (149), the *egwugwu*, apart from being a *Stände* as the highest-status individuals in the village, can also be seen as a primitive form of a political party. According to Igbo tradition, the *egwugwu* are a group of masked men who exercise control over political and legal issues in Igbo villages. David Carroll comments on the presence of *egwugwu* in Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, stating that “the fears and hopes of the villagers are both expressed and contained by their rituals” (32). The ceremonial meetings that the *egwugwu* hold to make decisions show how the Igbo public are in awe of their presence:

An iron gong sounded, setting up a wave of expectation in the crowd. Everyone looked in the direction of the *egwugwu* house. Gome, gome, gome, gome went the gong, and a powerful flute blew a high-pitched blast. Then came the voices of the *egwugwu*, guttural and awesome. The wave struck the women and children and there was a backward stampede. But it was momentary. They were already far enough where they stood and there was room for running away if any of them should go towards them. The drum sounded again and the flute blew. The house was now a pandemonium of quavering voices: Am oyim de de de de! filled the air as the spirits of the ancestors, just emerged from the earth, greeted themselves in their esoteric language. (*Things Fall Apart* 84)

The above quote shows the influence that this group, with their “guttural and awesome” voices and exclusive language, has over everyone. Achebe’s description of the house where they hold their secret meetings, and the fact that women never see it support the consecrated image made about the *egwugwu*:

The *egwugwu* house into which they emerged faced the forest, away from the crowd, who saw only its back with the many-coloured patterns and drawings done by specially chosen women at regular intervals. These women never saw the inside of the hut. No woman ever did. They scrubbed and painted the outside walls under the supervision of men. If they

imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan. (84)

This secret cult is the richest, as they have many wives and yams. Women and children may not look at them or go near them, which shows the extent of their ruling power.

However, the *egwugwu* represent a divine power that the Igbos feared and a legal, judicial, and social power that fulfilled the hopes of the Igbos for a democratic and stable society. The *egwugwu* act as the political regime and run the legal system in Umuofia. Charles E. Nnolim argues that Igbo society's masked spirit "was a vehicle of much more than manners – it was the repository of all that was held sacred, mythical, mysterious, magical and supernatural in Igbo culture" (*Issues in African Literature* 138). However, they also "exercised social control in a way that was not only unchallenged but unassailable" (138). The *egwugwu* legitimate the power of their leaders and maintain stability in their traditional society. The legal cases and social problems in the village are resolved through them. Clement Okafor explains that in Igbo villages, "marital amity and social problems are resolved on the basis of the consensus emanating from open public debate in a manner that protects not only the rights of the individual concerned but also the corporate interests of the community" (89). In *Things Fall Apart*, the *egwugwu* resolve the case between Uzowulu and his wife Mgbafo. In a society where there is no king, the *egwugwu* serve as what Nnolim calls "the Primal Father" (*Approaches to the African Novel* 139). They are the dominant males to whom all societal matters should be referred and by whom these matters are judged.

In one of the festivals, although Okonkwo is not among the men of title and seniors who sit behind the *egwugwu*, Okonkwo's wives and the other women observe that "the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo" (*Things Fall Apart* 85). Okonkwo, given his personal qualities and lofty standing, is one of the *egwugwu*. The incorporeal appearance of the *egwugwu*, along with their spirituality, offers us a dual representation of the *egwugwu*.

Interestingly, the Igbo people waver between seeing the *egwugwu* as spirits and recognising them as men. This is not a matter of doubt; rather, as Okafor contends, “duality or the phenomenology of paring is another very important aspect of Igbo cosmology” (87). In other words, the Igbo people move between the world of spirits and the world of reality: “in Igbo thought, nothing can exist by itself, since wherever something exists, something else exists beside it. As the proverb says: “*ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* (When one thing stands, something else stands beside it)” (Okafor 87). In this sense, the physical and material presence of the *egwugwu* is spiritualised by the secrecy that their masks impart to this group. Carroll expresses the same idea when he states that “the mask of the *egwugwu* epitomises the duality of roles by which the inscrutable world of the gods and the human world are uneasily accommodated” (56). Achebe himself highlights “the central place in Igbo thought of the notion of duality. Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it” (“Chi in Igbo Cosmology” 133). Achebe reflects this aspect of the Igbo culture not only in *Things Fall Apart* but also in his other novels. For instance, the half-spiritual and half-human representation of the *egwugwu*, of whom Okonkwo might be one of, is similar to the representation of Ezeulu in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, who is half “a man and the other half spirit” (*Arrow of God* 133). So, although Okonkwo and the *egwugwu* are revered, they live peacefully, and like all Igbo are subject to their clan laws, which everyone respects. Even Okonkwo, who is considered one of the clan leaders, is exiled when he unintentionally violates the laws.

Moreover, the presence of the *egwugwu* in many ceremonies and occasions in the novel stresses the importance of religious beliefs. The *egwugwu*’s leader is called Evil Forest, and he, along with the other eight members, holds a sacred position among the people. This is evident in the way they address ordinary people and in the way people glorify them:

When all the *egwugwu* had sat down and the sound of the many tiny bells and rattles on their bodies had subsided, Evil Forest addressed the two groups of people facing them.

“Uzowulu’s body, I salute you,” he said. Spirits always addressed humans as “bodies.”

Uzowulu bent down and touched the earth with his right hand as a sign of submission.

“Our father, my hand has touched the ground,” he said.

“Uzowulu’s body, do you know me?” asked the spirit.

“How can I know you, father? You are beyond our knowledge.”

Evil Forest then turned to the other group and addressed the eldest of the three brothers.

“The body of Odukwe, I greet you,” he said, and Odukwe bent down and touched the earth. (*Things Fall Apart* 86)

This sacred position stems from the *egwugwu*’ ability to connect dead ancestors to their society, in which capacity they prevent chaos and maintain balance by securing the social status of those who have high-status and titles. This group is so revered that “one of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated” (*Things Fall Apart* 176).

I contend that the acts of unmasking one of the *egwugwu* and Okonkwo’s suicide at the end of the novel are symbolic of the “falling apart” of the traditional social structure of Igbo. Since the *egwugwu* represent the Igbo’s supreme spiritual and political authority, Enoch’s unmasking of one of them is considered a crime. As a result, the Igbo take revenge for this violation of their religious beliefs by destroying Enoch’s house and burning down the church: “The band of *egwugwu* moved like a furious whirlwind to Enoch’s compound and with machete and fire reduced it to a desolate heap. And from there they made for the church, intoxicated with destruction” (178). The severity of the people’s reaction to this unmasking shows the sacred status of the group. In the same vein, the suicide of Okonkwo, a leading figure in the village and presumably one of the *egwugwu*, at the end of the novel symbolises the decline and end of the Igbo social system. Patrick C Nnoromele comments that Okonkwo’s eagerness and desire for high-status and power makes him indifferent to any forces around him: “he was so overwhelmed

by the cumulative effects of his experiences on the road to heroism that he felt the only thing left to do was to commit suicide” (155). He wants to keep his social rank and “maintain his integrity as a hero” (155). He would rather die than be humiliated by the British colonisers. Although Okonkwo does not give the colonisers the chance to punish him and chooses to die with his honour, it seems for the Igbo people that “there had been an irreversible break with the past” (155) and “Umuofia would never again be what it was” (155). The fact that the corpse of Okonkwo, who “was one of the greatest men in Umuofia” (*Things Fall Apart* 197) is buried not by his kinsmen but by the white man “like a dog” (197) is a powerful sign of the end of an era.

The Oracles in Igbo society also have a high legal and social status due to their spiritual power. In *Things Fall Apart*, the Oracles judge that Ikemefuna, Okonkwo’s adoptive son, should be killed as a sacrifice “to the village of Umuofia by their neighbours to avoid war and bloodshed” (8). When Okonkwo asks Obierika to participate in the execution of the Oracle’s order, Obierika declines. Okonkwo responds as follows: “You [Obierika] sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die” (62). This demonstrates the absolute power of the Oracle. The Oracle of the Hills and Caves is another example. The people always consult her before taking action, especially regarding war: “the Oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it” (16). Okonkwo’s father used to go “to consult the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves to find out why he always had a miserable harvest” (16). This shows how sincerely the Igbo people revered Agbala, who is a key part of their religion. The Oracles have such great religious and supernatural power that the Igbo must blindly follow its orders, and if they should fail to do so, “they would surely have been beaten because their dreaded *agadi-nwayi* would never fight what the Ibo call a fight of blame” (12). In general, Igbo religious beliefs are respected, and those who violate them receive punishment. This is what happens to Okonkwo when he beats one of his wives during the sacred week of peace. The priest punishes him for threatening the whole community by forcing him to make a sacrifice to the Earth goddess

in repentance for his awful act: “your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her” (29).

Achebe presents a village with a social structure not only governed by religion but also by traditions. Any decision made in the village is collective. The elders and respected men have regular meetings about any issue in the village. The elders, or *ndichie*, decide the fate of the “lad of fifteen and a young virgin” (12) whom Okonkwo brings from Mbaino to Umuofia. The elders’ decision that the 15-year-old boy, who now belongs to the whole clan, stay with Okonkwo, and that the young virgin be given to the man whose wife is killed, is respected by the whole village. The legal authority enjoyed by the *ndichie* is unimpeachable, even by titled men such as Okonkwo, who does not want his senior wife to question the elders’ order when she asks about the boy: “Do what you are told, woman [...] When did you become one of the *ndichie* of Umuofia?” (14).

The social equality that Weber believes exists among the status groups is evident in the egalitarian socio-political system that continues to govern Igbo society during colonialism. Webster et al. point out that in this democratic and individualistic society, everyone is “considering himself as good as everyone else and demanding a voice in his local affairs” (99). For Webster et al., under this classless system, all individuals are equally responsible for the prosperity of their society and have equal rights, such as the freedom of speech and opposition. This is indicated by Nnolim, who believes that the egalitarian system rules the Igbo people and makes them equal in the rights they acquire. He adds that no limitations are imposed on them as “there are more wives to acquire, more titles to take, higher and higher positions of social importance to aspire to” (*Issues in African Literature* 138). In *Things Fall Apart*, political issues are debated in the elders’ meetings, where we can see a diversity of opinions, including those about whether to fight their enemies. However, I cannot entirely agree with the fact that the Igbo people are egalitarian. Only men enjoy this equality, and women have no freedom of speech or

choice. The Igbo society is a deeply patriarchal one where egalitarianism operates only among men.

On the one hand, men like Egonwanne call for peace, warning against starting a “war of blame” (190) with the white man while, on the other hand, Okonkwo thinks that this is “womanish wisdom” (190) and that the Igbo should defend their land. This confirms that the legal power in traditional Igbo society is collective, but only wealthy men are part of the decision-making process. There is no one leader, but a group of leaders. The choice of leaders is not based only on economic conditions but also on personal achievements.

In Weber’s schema, within a status group, the acquisition of honour is not only based on the “lifestyle” of the individuals but also other features, including “martial, physical, and psychological eligibility” (“The Distribution of Power” 145). This creates a democratic society, as it allows social mobility: “everyone had a right to rise in society” (Webster et al. 99). Consequently, Igbo culture emphasised competition to gain prestige. In Weberian terms, Okonkwo is regarded as the epitome of a high-status person who has managed to ascend the Igbo social ladder. It is significant to note that *Things Fall Apart* points out that Okonkwo is exceptional: “anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky. If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo” (25). Therefore, this kind of social mobility is not the norm among Igbo people.

Achebe introduces this character by asserting his high status at the very beginning of the novel: “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond” (3). Achebe refers directly to the fact that Okonkwo’s reputation is attributed to his martial and physical qualities. He gains a high status because he is “the greatest wrestler in the nine villages” (8), and he also has shown “incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars” (8). Okonkwo’s physique is also highlighted, including his height and “bushy eyebrows and wide nose” (3). Even his breathing is powerful, so much so that while he is asleep, “his wives and children in their houses could hear

him breathe” (3). The way that he walks gives the impression that “he was going to pounce on somebody” (3). In addition to this bodily power, Achebe also stresses Okonkwo’s “solid personal achievements” (3). Although this description depicts Okonkwo as severe, it also shows him as strong and sturdy, a master of his fate, and someone who embodies a masculine and social ideal in contemporary Igbo society. In other words, he clearly and powerfully embodies the social values of the village: he does everything in the traditionally prescribed, socially accepted way. As a result, when he encounters British modernity, Okonkwo comes to a tragic end.

Okonkwo’s personality is shown to be as strong as his physical appearance. His reliability is such that the elders send him to heal the rifts between their village and another village after people in the latter killed a woman from the former. He is deemed the best choice “to carry a message of war to their enemies unless they agreed to give up a young man and a virgin to atone for the murder of Udo’s wife” (26). Okonkwo’s high status is further demonstrated when he is treated “like a king” (26) when he visits the offending village. This status is so crucial for Okonkwo that he participates in killing his adoptive son, Ikemefuna, as the Oracle orders, in order to avoid war between Umuofia and a nearby village: “an ultimatum was immediately dispatched to Mbaino asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation” (11). Despite being warned by one of the villagers against participating in such a dreadful practice, his fear of being seen as a coward and his desire to adhere to social norms outweigh the feelings of guilt that he experiences sending the boy to his death. Indeed, this decision causes much distress to Okonkwo, who “did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna” (59). He does not fall asleep for three nights until he resolves his inner conflict in the following exchange with his conscience: “you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed” (61). This dialogue reveals Okonkwo’s inner psyche. He never shows emotions in public, “unless

it be the emotion of anger” (27), because being emotional “was a sign of weakness” (27). This is why, despite his love for Ikemefuna, he treats him as he does others, “with a heavy hand” (27).

The episode of Ikemefuna’s death sheds light on one of the most extensively critiqued of the Igbos’ cultural beliefs, which stipulates that

when the gods or goddesses demanded anyone for sacrifice, the family must be excluded because the Umuofia people believed that the emotional attachment the family might have for that individual would interfere with the process or the obligation to execute the demands of the Oracle. (Nnoromele 153)

So, for the Igbos, religious obligations are prioritised over human nature. Okonkwo was like a father to Ikemefuna and felt a parental duty of care towards him. Okonkwo is therefore portrayed as inhumane because he not only accepts the murder of his adoptive son as payment for a debt, but he also takes part in this murder. This perception of inhumanity grows once the reader understands that the Oracle’s order is not obligatory for Okonkwo. Ezeudu, the oldest man in the village, advises Okonkwo not to take part in this act: “That boy calls you father [...] Bear no hand in his death” (114). Although Okonkwo justifies his involvement in terms of religious obedience, this does not seem to be the real motive. Obierika’s reason for not participating in this act confirms that Okonkwo had chosen to participate. His main motive is to prove his manhood. In the novel, however, this comes across as an instance of severe cruelty:

“I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy,” [Okonkwo] asked Obierika.

“Because I did not want to,” Obierika replied sharply. “I had something better to do.”

“You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die.”

“I do not. Why should I? But the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision.”

“But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?”

“You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.”

“The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger,” Okonkwo said. (62-63)

George Shea regards the first line in this excerpt as “the book’s cruellest and saddest line” (79). He comments that Okonkwo even “refuses to give Ikemefuna who came to regard him as a father, the respect of even having had a name. It is as though Okonkwo wants to blot out any memory of him, as though Ikemefuna never existed” (79). Okonkwo is a traditionalist in everything he does, and he seems to be speaking in religious terms in this incident. In his essay, Kalu Ogbaa comments on Okonkwo’s explanation to Obierika, citing it as “an example of how people can use religious practices as a pretext that enables them to pursue private and individual ambitions” (128). Obierika, despite being one of the titled men in the society, has a different perspective on what it means to prove one’s manhood. Okonkwo believes that a true man is the one who is capable of suppressing all his emotions except those of anger and violence: “not only did anger and violent strength become, for him, the hallmarks of manliness; they also had to be repeatedly enacted as its own proof and assurance” (Okpewho 205). On the other hand, Obierika’s natural emotions do not contradict his feeling of manliness: “I am not afraid of blood and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie” (*Things Fall Apart* 62). However, as he says, “if the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it” (63).

While some critics refute Okonkwo’s religious excuse for his involvement, others blame Okonkwo’s rigidity on Igbo social values, which do not discourage such practices and beliefs. Isidore Okpewho contends that “the shows of manliness which characterise Okonkwo’s actions

are only one shade of a general streak in the beliefs and customs of his clansman as a group” (202). In other words, Okonkwo is a traditionalist in everything he does – which can shift the blame onto the Igbo traditions and values. Okpewho’s opinion is endorsed by Damian U Opata, who is reluctant to condemn Okonkwo’s violent nature. Opata believes that “Okonkwo’s killing of Ikemefuna is instinctive” (75). He explains that Okonkwo’s instinct is controlled by fate and by his inner fears of the divine forces. He concludes that Ikemefuna’s death is “already a fait accompli” (75). Opata also questions Obierika’s parental duty of care and morality and accuses his rejection of participating in killing Ikemefuna as “sheer conventional sentimentality and hypocrisy” (76). For him, if Obierika had been honest in his feelings and if he had genuinely found it easy to go against the cultural limitations and beliefs of his society, he would not have thrown his twin children away; indeed, “the tradition which sees twin children as abominable does not state that it is the father of the twin children that must throw them away” (Opata 76). Thus, Obierika can also be seen to be controlled by the traditions and beliefs of his society, and he “commits the same offense (if offense it may be called) for which he holds Okonkwo guilty” (Opata 76).

It is my contention here that, as Opata argues, Okonkwo’s violence is not inherent but that it is socially oriented. Okonkwo may not be as cruel as he seems because he is bound to the common standards of masculinity in his clan. His recurrent feeling of remorse indicates that he is not violent by nature: “His mind went back to Ikemefuna and he shivered. If only he could find some work to do he would be able to forget” (*Things Fall Apart* 60). In addition, he suffers from an inferiority complex due to his father’s weakness: “whenever the thought of his father’s weakness and failure troubled him he expelled it by thinking about his own strength and success” (62). This happens when Okonkwo thinks about killing Ikemefuna as a “show of manliness” (62): it is something that his father would never have dared to do if he had been in his place. He is ready to sacrifice anything to show that he is not like his father. And since he is subservient to the rigid

values of his society, he tries to nurture his own son to be the same, that is, emotionless. After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo returns home. It is then that Nwoye, his eldest son, discovers that his brother Ikemefuna has been killed, at which point “something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow” (58). However, Okonkwo cannot cry because crying, for the Igbo, is considered to be “unmanly”. Personal characteristics such as courage, strength and emotional self-control hold a man in high esteem and accord him social respect. To maintain his high social status, Okonkwo tries to conquer his feelings of sympathy and regret. When struck by such feeling, he endeavours to talk himself out of it: “When did you become a shivering old woman” (60).

However, Okonkwo is discredited for his inability to control his anger. This could make us judge that he lacks the “psychological eligibility” (“The Distribution of Power” 145) that Weber speaks about regarding the characteristics of the highly ranked men within *Stände*. On the other hand, this psychological eligibility can be attributed to other characters, such as Obierika and Ezeudu. Okonkwo is shown to be irrational and rash, incapable of controlling his emotions. At one point in the novel, Okonkwo’s lack of psychological stability jeopardises his social status. Polycarp Ikuenobe contends that “in spite of Okonkwo’s strengths and achievements, he did reprehensible things as a result of his psychological flaws, which then mitigated his social recognition and status in the community” (126). Such flaws include beating his youngest wife during the Week of Peace out of anger: he “was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess” (*Things Fall Apart* 28); killing the white man’s messenger, and committing suicide at the end of the novel out of fear of humiliation. For their part, Obierika and Ezeudu are presented as rational and judicious. Their positions on the killing of Ikemefuna can be interpreted as a sign of shrewdness and wisdom. Also, while Okonkwo’s insistence on fighting the white missionaries demonstrates his impetuosity, Obierika’s advice not to fight so shows his political astuteness and ability to judge situations reasonably:

“It is already too late,” said Obierika sadly. “Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame.” He paused for a long time and then said: “I told you on my last visit to Mbanta how they hanged Aneto.” (165-166)

Okonkwo does not learn from past lessons. He does not consider what happened before in Abame, and he is not aware of the ramifications of fighting a much more powerful force than his village. Such flaws in Okonkwo’s personality are what brings him down at the end of the novel.

However, Weber maintains that personal characteristics are not the only way to achieve a high-status; the position afforded by social rank can be reflected by “the monopolistic appropriation of privileged Chancen [chances] for gain, or the abomination of particular forms of gain” (*Economy and Society* 455). The economic status of Igbo men is indicated by the number of yams and wives the person has: the more wives a man has, the more children he is likely to have, and the more labour he can do, as women work side by side with their husbands. This makes Okonkwo, with his “two barns full of yams” (*Things Fall Apart* 8), “a wealthy farmer” (8).

Okonkwo works very hard to be wealthy. His wealthy status is evident in the description of his house and his material possessions:

He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or obi, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats, and each wife built a small attachment to her hut

for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the “medicine house” or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. (13-14)

Although Weber maintains that material “monopolies are rarely sufficient” (“The Distribution of Power” 146), they can make for an exclusive rank, as “it would even be possible for the added honor created through economic acquisition to bring greater honor to the members of the Stände than they could establish through their lifestyle” (147). This is why in the past, despite the bravery and personal characteristics Okonkwo has shown since he was young, his low economic status prevented him from marrying more than one woman. His inability to polygamise because he was “too poor to pay [his second wife’s] bride-price” (*Things Fall Apart* 38) shows how economic status affects a person’s social standing, and how wealth and material possessions matter in attaining social privileges. According to such standards, Okonkwo’s father, Unoka, appears as a failure: he has no yam yields and is unwilling to work. Achebe writes:

When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and he had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. (*Things Fall Apart* 7-8)

This passage shows that social mobility is possible in Igbo society. Okonkwo manages to ascend the Igbo social ladder by avoiding his father’s path. With his achievements and titles, he becomes a successful man at the top of that social system. Being one of the strongest warriors in Umuofia, Okonkwo succeeds in gaining a title superior to those of the other men in the village, and he has three wives. Unlike his father, he works hard to get more titles. However, getting this high standing is no easy task for Okonkwo. Unlike his lazy father, Okonkwo forces his way towards

wealth, and endeavours to befriend wealthy men, asking them for loans. Carroll underlines that Okonkwo's main aim in life is "to succeed – and to succeed in terms of warfare, wrestling, wealth and status" (41). He exerts strenuous efforts, so much so that he is not ready to sacrifice it all; indeed, all his character flaws can be explained by his extreme fear of losing his power and status.

Weber's assumption that prestige can be gained by birth does not aid Okonkwo, as unlike his peers, he "did not inherit a barn from his father" (*Things Fall Apart* 16). Unoka's cowardice – he "could not bear the sight of blood" (6) – is contrasted with Okonkwo's bravery. Okonkwo's father represents unproductive people in society: he was "lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. If any money came his way, and it seldom did, he immediately bought gourds of palm-wine, called round his neighbours and made merry" (4).

On the contrary, Okonkwo's pronounced physical and personal qualities have been rooted in him since he was a young boy. His past proves a reliable predictor of his future. He manages to rise "so suddenly from great poverty and misfortune to be one of the lords of the clan" (25). Since the Igbo social system stratifies people based on their achievements and judges "a man by the work of his hands" (26), Okonkwo deserves the high standing he is placed in: it "was not luck" (26). Compared to his father, who was used to be called *agbala*, "a man who had taken no title" (13), "at an early age [Okonkwo] had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land" (25-26). He is a resilient person who can meet and overcome problems. The fact that Okonkwo hates everything his father loved, such as "gentleness" and "idleness" (13), shows him to be exemplary of an Igbo man who should be "judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (8).

The triumph that Okonkwo achieves over his previously undefeated opponent, Amalinze, in a wrestling match raises his social status, not only in his village but in all the nearby villages as well. This is precisely what Okonkwo has aspired for all his life. If society considers a man inferior because he has no titles, Okonkwo cannot legitimately be blamed because of his father.

While Okonkwo holds a superior status in the village due to his hard work and outstanding achievements, his first son shows disturbing signs of following in the footsteps of his paternal grandfather: “Nwoye [...] was then twelve years old but was already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness” (13).

Okonkwo’s economic status protects his high social rank after his exile to his mother’s village: to this end, Okonkwo’s uncle gives him a piece of land to build his house and two or three land plots to cultivate. With the help of five cousins, he builds an *obi* for himself and three huts for his women, each of whom “contributed three hundred seed-yams to enable [him] to plant a farm” (122). When Obierika visits Okonkwo in his exile to update him with news of the village, he brings him two heavy bags which are full of “the money from [his] yams” (133). Obierika tells Okonkwo that he has “sold some of the seed-yams and [given] out others to sharecroppers” (133). Okonkwo’s eagerness to maintain and even elevate this economic power during his exile shows how wealth can add to the honour and the esteem the person has:

The first thing he would do would be to rebuild his compound on a more magnificent scale. He would build a bigger barn than he had had before and he would build huts for two new wives. Then he would show his wealth by initiating his sons into the ozo society. Only the really great men in the clan were able to do this. Okonkwo saw clearly the high esteem in which he would be held, and he saw himself taking the highest title in the land. (161)

This extract explains Okonkwo’s flaws. He cannot view himself as anything but a great man and a highly esteemed person. This self-image urges him to work hard to maintain and keep this social status even after returning from exile. He cannot foresee his future as anything but “taking the highest title in the land” (161).

Achebe presents other characters who attain high status through wealth or achievements; these include Okoye, Egonwanne, Nwakibie and Obierika. Weber maintains that those who have

honour through wealth attain greater honour to those of the *Stand* than they could get through their lifestyle. He adds that “if simple economic acquisition and power by themselves gave any honor at all, the wealth would result in the agent attaining more honor than those who successfully claim honor simply by virtue of lifestyle” (“The Distribution of Power” 147). In this sense, Okoye’s prosperous economic status “he had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives” (*Things Fall Apart* 6), his musical talent of playing on the *ogene*, and oratory skills as “a great talker” (7) bring him greater honour, so much so indeed that he receives “the Idemili title, the third highest in the land” (6). Likewise, Egonwanne has a “sweet tongue [that] can change fire into cold ash” (190); his opinions usually gain respect and approval, which accords him a high standing like that of Okonkwo, who is aware of Egonwanne’s power of persuasion: “Tomorrow [Egonwanne] will tell them that our fathers never fought a ‘war of blame.’ If they listen to him, I shall leave them and plan my own revenge” (190). Achebe also presents Nwakibie as an example of a man with a high social status because he “had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children” (18). As a result, Nwakibie manages to earn “the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan” (18). Oberika, too, belongs to a higher stratum as a result of his yam crops.

It should be noted that the Igbo people’s social system groups people by age and achievement, with precedence given to personal achievements: “age was respected [...], but achievement was revered” (8). An example of the significant ranking that seniors enjoy in Igbo society is seen with Ezeudu, “the oldest man in his village” (115). We learn that the seniority of age is not the only reason for Ezeudu’s great social position among his people. Following Weber’s standards of ranking within a status group, Ezeudu is held high for his martial and psychological qualities: “Ezeudu had been a great and fearless warrior in his time, and was now accorded great respect in all the clan” (53). Indeed, he “had taken three titles in his life” (115), which is said to be a “rare achievement” (115). As a result, the honour and respect he receives while alive are matched at the time of his death: “It was a great funeral, such as befitted a noble warrior” (115).

Achebe describes in detail the rituals on display at Ezeudu's funeral: "As the evening drew near, the shouting and the firing of guns, the beating of drums and the brandishing and clanging of machetes increased" (115).

According to Weber, the positively privileged groups (high-status groups) "only accept their descendants who were raised [from birth] in the conventions of their *Stände*" ("The Distribution of Power" 147), and would never degrade their social status by doing any physical labour. However, the negatively privileged groups with low status are only entitled to rights and privileges granted by the higher status groups. In *Things Fall Apart*, the *osu* is considered a negatively privileged group whom the Igbo people regard as "an outcast" who does not belong to the high-status groups. Achebe describes the *osu* as follows:

He was a person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart – a taboo for ever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste--long, tangled and dirty hair. A razor was taboo to him. An *osu* could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest. (148)

According to the religious tradition of the Igbos, the *osu* is regarded as a degraded person. The Igbos use religion to justify that the *osu* and their offspring are socially despised. Therefore, the *osu* are placed at the lowest social stratum in Igbo society based on their appearance: "long, tangled and dirty hair" (148). As a result, they live in remote areas and have no social status. Under this religion, the outcast is doomed to be without shelter or titles of the clan. In the novel, questions are raised when two *osu* are seen in the church: "What will the heathen say of us when they hear that we receive *osu* into our midst? They will laugh" (148). This social stratification deprives the *osu* of any social and political rights: an *osu* can "neither marry nor be married by the

free-born,” nor “attend an assembly of the free-born” (148). Unlike high-ranking titled Igbo men, an *osu* is not respected while alive, and he is not honoured when dead, for “when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest” (148).

Despite such social stratification among the Igbo people, there was still a profound unity in various aspects of their life, whether political, social, spiritual, or religious, until the colonisers’ arrival. The members of the community believed in, respected, and defended traditional principles. Social harmonies among individuals and respect for social values were the cornerstone of the community in traditional milieux. During a feast given by Okonkwo in gratitude for his mother’s people who had supported him while he was in exile, one of the senior members, in a speech made to the village youth, expresses his regret for their inability to see “how strong is the bond of kinship” (157) and the importance of “speak[ing] with one voice” (157). He adds bitterly: “I fear for you, I fear for the clan” (157). These are prescient words indeed, given the harmful consequences of the collapse of the social values on which the traditional social system was based.

Given the problems in the traditional Igbo society that Achebe highlights throughout the novel, it may appear unsurprising that Igboland fell so quickly to colonialism. Aptly named, the novel not only presents what fell apart in the Igboland but also why that happened. Its negative ethnographic account of Igbo socio-political life – the social and gender inequalities, the social hierarchy, the cruel social practices, the disrupted kinships ties – cast doubt on traditional values and customs. Although most of these flaws are represented by Okonkwo, Achebe understands that they are not Okonkwo’s alone; they are social flaws in the Igbo’s traditional culture itself, and they cause its downfall. The nature of Achebe’s ethnographic account is that he presents the good and bad mixed together without passing judgment or taking sides. In his article, “An Interview with Chinua Achebe”, Ogbaa asked Achebe about the white man’s influence on the dismantling of Igbo culture, Achebe states:

A culture can be damaged, can be turned from its course, not only by foreigners [...] [A] culture can be mutilated, can be destroyed by its own people, under certain situations [...] The Igbo culture was not destroyed by Europe. It was disturbed. It was disturbed very seriously. But as I said initially, a culture which is healthy will often survive. It will not survive exactly in the form in which it was met by the invading culture, but it will modify itself and move on. And this is the great thing about culture if it is alive. The people who own it will ensure that they make adjustments: they drop what can no longer be carried in transition [...] So I think what has happened is that we still have the fundamental principles of the Igbo culture. Its emphasis is on the worth of every man and woman. (qtd. in Ogbaa 3-4)

For Achebe, traditional Igbo culture was not sufficiently healthy to resist colonisation. Its shaken values and loosened kinship ties made it easy for the European colonisers to penetrate and break it down. The Igbo themselves proved unready to defend their traditions against British colonisation. Instead, rather than seeking to accommodate their traditions within the new colonial system, they yielded to it and conformed.

I argue that Achebe's presentation of the interactions between the Igbo and the British in the novel is empathetic. Although Achebe reflects the destructive impact of colonisation, he is not blind to the cruel and problematic aspects of his own culture. He is aware that although traditional Igbo society is falling apart, the influence of the colonisers "fill in the parts". In other words, Thus, as an insider, Achebe wants to correct the distorted image of Africans as described in European novels, but he is also interested in the transition from a culture in balance to a culture off-kilter – hence the title.

4.3 The Influence of Colonialism on Igbo Social Stratification

Weber states that “destabilisation by technical and economic change, and upheaval, ... can threaten the Stände stratification by pushing the ‘class situation’ into the foreground” (“The Distribution of Power” 148). That is to say that any incoming change influences how the status groups can be stratified. In pre-colonial Umuofia, people depended mainly on agriculture, but during colonialism, white colonisers “built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia” (*Things Fall Apart* 168). The social structure that Achebe presents in *Things Fall Apart* is reconfigured under the influence of such colonial changes. The white missionaries are represented by Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith, whose ways of dealing with the Igbo issues differ. Mr. Brown represents the passionate part of the colonisers. He is seen to be “very firm in restraining his flock from provoking the wrath of the clan” (168). He uses peaceful techniques to win the approval of the Igbo people. His weapons are educational, religious, and economic. He builds schools and churches so that “religion and education went hand in hand” (171). Mr. Brown’s persistent character and persuasive arguments pay dividends at the end. Instead of fighting the Igbos and forcing them to accept Christianity, Mr. Brown “learned a good deal about the religion of the clan, and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed” (170). His respect for the Igbos’ social traditions and religion gains him the respect of the Igbo families he begs “to send their children to his school” (171). Thus, instead of using violence, Mr. Brown “begged and argued and prophesied” (171).

Mr. Brown distributes further incentives for the Igbo people to engage with the white missionaries include “gifts of singlets and towels” (59) as well as educational opportunities that would allow them to gain access to professions in teaching or in the court system (59). The impact of colonialism on changing the Igbos’ social system is peaceful, hegemonic, and gradual; thus, it is arguably more influential than more violent forms. As we learn in the novel, “Mr. Brown’s

mission grew from strength to strength, and because of its link with the new administration it earned a new social prestige” (171-172).

However, this is not typical of all missionaries. Mr. Smith, the successor to Mr. Brown, is stricter and “condemned openly Mr. Brown’s policy of compromise and accommodation” (174). He shows no respect for the Igbo’s religious beliefs. For instance, he disparages the story of *ogbanje* (a dead child who enters his mother’s womb again to be born) and thinks that such stories are spread “by the Devil to lead men astray” (175). Achebe shows this violence acted by the missionaries on the Igbo people when the British troops retaliate revenge on an Igbo attack on a white man on the bicycle at Abame by shooting men, women, and children on a market day. Robert Wren states that this incident is based on a true event in 1905 after the Englishman J. F. Stewart was killed by the Igbo villagers of Ahiara while riding his bicycle from Owerri, which resulted in the “Bende-Onitsha punitive expedition” where the British troops caused many destructions, including “the destruction of the Agabala Oracle at Awaka” (qtd. in Booker 245)

The reference to the District Commissioner’s book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* at the end of the novel indicates the British view of the African people, in this case, the Igbos. The reference sheds light on one of the political ethnographic realities of colonial Igbo society: the new British system of “pacification” or “indirect rule”. In the novel, the District Commissioner, as many of the other colonisers, considers the actions of Okonkwo, like the actions of all the Igbo people, as savage. This system of pacification or indirect rule, which is referred to directly in *Arrow of God*, is among the factors that cause things to fall apart in Igboland.

The colonisers see religion as the key to changing the core social values upon which the whole of Igbo society is based. To this end, the Christian missionaries approach the Igbo people through various religious arguments, including devaluing their gods as “pieces of wood and stone” (137). To expand the church’s influence upon the village people, the colonisers build schools and a hospital, which attracts many Igbos. An example is a school built by Mr. Brown: “more people

came to learn in his school [...] They worked on their farms in the morning and went to school in the afternoon” (171). Similarly, the new health service attracts more people, who “began to say that the white man’s medicine was quick in working” (171).

The impact of the church on the social order of the clan is pervasive. Okonkwo’s son, Nwoye, is so enchanted with the “the poetry of the new religion” (139) that he decides to cut off the ties of his kinship and join the missionaries: “he seeks a refuge in the new religion from what terrifies him in his own” (Samatar 64). This example reveals how the new religion breaks down social bonds and dissolves the existing social order. The very parameters of social stratification in Igbo society are affected by the arrival of the colonisers. Before colonisation, Okonkwo succeeds in getting a high status and moves from being born poor to becoming one of the titled men in his society. Afterwards, however, these parameters are no longer in force. The missionaries’ influence is stronger still on those whose ties to their traditional values are less deeply rooted, as is the case with Okonkwo’s son, Nwoye. Being indifferent to his clan’s traditions of polygamy and gaining titles, Nwoye turns away from such beliefs and goes to the church to learn about Christianity. Consequently, people in the village are divided into two groups: those who are fascinated by the new religion and the materialistic privileges it grants, and those who are ready to defend their religion even by fighting, such as Okonkwo.

Achebe’s subtle presentation of the clash between traditions and the new religion is evident throughout the novel. Some of those who are left underprivileged under the traditional Igbo regime are attracted to Christianity because this new religion does not view them as outcasts, and it provides them with spiritual rewards. As Achebe shows through the character of Nwoye, Igbo practices of socialising young men can be brutal and are not without their victims. Nwoye is one of the first people captivated by the missionaries and renames himself “Isaac”. Nwoye’s traditional religious ideology is destabilised by his best friend and adopted brother, Ikemefuna, who was killed in the name of such beliefs. However, his beliefs had already been shaken when

he was younger and more impressionable. His father insisted that he be “masculine and [...] violent” (50) and that he listen to stories of “tribal wars” (51) and bloodshed. Despite this, he was always fond of his mother’s stories, which depicted animals and nature in a playful manner. Unsurprisingly then, it is not the logic of the new religion but the singing of hymns that makes him feel “a relief within”; indeed, “the words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth” (139). It is here that Nwoye’s “callow mind” is said to be “greatly puzzled” (139). Nwoye’s self-detachment from traditional religious norms is considered a “great abomination” (162) and results in being disowned and cursed by his people. Okonkwo tells his children:

Now he [Nwoye] is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so that I can curse him. (162)

Nwoye’s choice to give up not only his traditional religion but also all that attaches him to these traditions, even his kinship, reflects the depth of his unease with the Igbo social system. Like Nwoye, the outcasts of Igbo society are against traditional and religious norms. The church can exploit their social exclusion to convert them to the new religion. For the outcasts, the church is the last resort from their deplorable social conditions, an answer to their material needs as much as their spiritual ones.

In this way, Achebe’s novel is complex in its critique and problematises the argument that Christianity acts to disunify the social bonds of Igbo society. From an imperialistic perspective, Christianity has a constructive and positive role in Igboland. The church supports certain oppressed groups against their oppressors. The Christian missionaries, we learn, “had brought not only a religion but also a government [...] they had built a place of judgment in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion” (146-147). Some of these followers, as mentioned above, are the *osu*, who trust the church after “seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such

abominations” (147). Social stratification is challenged by the principle that “there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers” (147). With its values and rules, Christianity offers salvation to stigmatised groups like the *osu*. In his speech to two unshaven outcasts, Mr. Kiaga explains the falsehood of the traditional religion:

How are you different from other men who shave their hair? The same God created you and them. But they have cast you out like lepers. It is against the will of God, who has promised everlasting life to all who believe in His holy name. The heathen say you will die if you do this or that, and you are afraid. They also said I would die if I built my church on this ground. Am I dead? They said I would die if I took care of twins. I am still alive. The heathen speak nothing but falsehood. Only the word of our God is true. (149)

By speaking out against the practice of killing twin babies, the Christian missionaries redefine the traditional Igbo social order; indeed, as Bastian comments, on this issue they stand “firmly on the opposite pole, saying that children were a sign of God’s grace and must be cherished in whatever number they arrive” (14). The social injustice and oppression faced in Igbo society by women who give birth to twins force many to seek refuge in Christianity. In the novel, one of the first converts is Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer and whose twins “had been immediately thrown away” (143). The fact that her husband’s family are “not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians” (143) and view her flight as “a good riddance” (143) shows the extent of feeling among traditional Igbos on this issue. This can be regarded as one of the reasons why the Igbo tradition easily collapses. Being a religion of the oppressed, Christianity can redefine the social stratification of the Igbos by changing the traditional parameters of the social hierarchy in favour of the socially distressed.

The missionaries neither seek to exploit the oppressed groups economically nor aspire to fulfil the interests of the high-status group. They stand by the oppressed, and even those with high social status and titles are not saved from legal punishment when they offend. Their prisons are

“full of men who had offended against the white man’s law. Some of these prisoners had thrown away their twins and some had molested the Christians” (164). As punishment, these prisoners are forced “to work every morning clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white Commissioner and the court messengers,” although some of these prisoners were “men of title who should be above such mean occupation” (164).

Among those who reject the influence of colonialism is Okonkwo. When his son converts to Christianity, he disowns him. He is against the arrival of the white people despite the educational and health privileges they provide. Furthermore, despite the secure life he leads among his mother’s clan during his exile, he always aspires to return to his village to fight against the missionaries. For Okonkwo, traditional rules should not be violated – not even by himself. This is why any transgression by the colonisers should be challenged, if necessary with wars and bloodshed. The extent of the disruption of the Igbo’s social order and values can be seen in the grief that Okonkwo experiences on his return from exile. Before the white man’s arrival, people in the village shared common values and rules that shaped their social, political, and economic structures. They enjoyed a coherent and stable life, obeyed their gods and showed respect to “the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan” (179). After the arrival of the white man, although many of the Igbo people view the impact of the white man’s “new institutions as evil” (172), some believe that the new religion is more responsive to their needs. People from different social strata join the new religion, including those at the bottom of the social system, “the low-born and the outcast” (163), and worthy men of titles who were not able to adapt to the rules and beliefs of the clan. Such people decide to give up their traditional high-status and enter the new religion based on what might be called a new social consciousness. Examples include Ogbuefi Ugonna, “who had taken two titles, and who like a madman had cut the anklet of his titles and cast it away to join the Christians” (163). In this way, the long-held social unity begins to disintegrate, by which Okonkwo “was deeply grieved” (172). The fact that Okonkwo’s return is “barely

recognisable” (172) and is “not as memorable as he had wished” (172) implies that the standards upon which the Igbos’ system is based have changed. This explains why Okonkwo does not take the matter personally, but regards it as a societal issue, and does not lament his fate, but the death of his clan’s social tradition “which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women” (173).

The colonisers’ interference in the life of the Igbo people is not only religious but also legal. The colonisers’ introduction of a new system overturns the Igbo legal system controlled by the elders. The elders are no longer responsible for any legal decisions; instead, the colonisers have established “a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance” (164). The colonisers also arrogate the Igbos’ legal authority by deciding when the elders’ assemblies are to be held or cancelled: “The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop” (194). The Igbo men of title receive a humiliating treatment in prison at the hands of the *kotma*, court messengers who are “greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed” (164). Achebe writes:

They were beaten in the prison by the *kotma* and made to work every morning clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white Commissioner and the court messengers. Some of these prisoners were men of title who should be above such mean occupation. They were grieved by the indignity and mourned for their neglected farms.
(164)

The *kotma*’s treatment of the prisoners clearly shows that the titles of the traditional Igbo system no longer have any value. It also shows that the class-stratified system of the British colonisers affects the way they treat the Igbos. For the British, the Igbos, whether ordinary or titled men, are inferior and belong to a lower social class.

4.4 Conclusion

The Weberian approach to social stratification has proven to apply to pre-capitalist social orders, in this case, the Igbo society. Achebe critiques the social stratification of the traditional Igbo society through his use of ethnographic realism in *Things Fall Apart*. Many episodes in the novel do not appear directly linked to the story's narrative development; instead, they serve to provide an ethnographic account of Igbo society. Achebe introduces these people's lives with all their flaws, highlighting certain questionable social practices and a discriminatory social hierarchy. At the same time, however, he remains aware that while the Igbo tradition is not perfect, it does provide a certain coherence to society. In this way, the novel is a realistic account, tempering fiction with a vivid ethnography. In terms of a Weberian approach to social stratification, Igbo society is status-oriented. In other words, it consists of *Stände* in which their members are socially connected by kinship and hierarchised according to the honour and titles they can acquire. Social status has its own unique signifiers in Umuofia. That is to say, social standing is determined by a person's economic status, which in this particular society is generated by yam harvesting, hard work, and polygamy; in addition to these factors, other personal achievements are also significant.

Unlike his father, Okonkwo is a titled man who holds a high social status among his people. This high status comes from his prosperous economic conditions and his personal achievements as a warrior. Okonkwo's story reflects how social mobility operates in the Igbo society in which one can ascend to a higher social stratum; by hard work and personal achievements, he manages to change his life from poverty to prosperity, and in so doing, he becomes one of the most respected and influential men in Umuofia. In much the same way, other characters enjoy great stature among the Igbos, such as Okoye, Egonwanne, Nwakibie, and Oberika. The Igbos' status-oriented society places such men of title at the top of the social hierarchy while a low-born group, the *osu*, occupy the lowest position, primarily as a matter of birth and disgraceful physical appearance. This low-ranked group is deprived of life chances and preferences, such as the possibility of marriage with a free-born member of society. Such social

injustice and double standards are abhorred by the socially underprivileged groups and later disqualified by the introduction of Christianity. The clash between this new religion and the traditional Igbo religion divides the Igbo people into two social groups: pro-colonial and anti-colonial. This social division shatters the Igbos' social unity and ushers in the decline of their socio-political system. Achebe uses Okonkwo's suicide at the end of the novel as a symbol of this decline.

I contend here that the ethnographic presentation of this cross-cultural collision of the Igbo and British social systems is a crucial part of *Things Fall Apart*'s critical complexity. According to the novel, the impact of the colonisers and Christianity in Igboland was negative in terms of its effects on the disintegration of the Igbo family, which was maintained by traditional Igbo culture. Also, not only does external sources but also internal manifestations such as the prevalent sexism in the Igboland contribute to the fall of this culture. Hence, a close analysis of the traditional Igbo socio-political order before colonialism suggests that this society, although it forms a social unity, is flawed.

Chapter 5. Social Stratification of Colonial Igbo Society in Chinua

Achebe's Arrow of God

While the previous chapter analyses the social stratification of the Igbo society before the arrival of the colonial missionaries as represented in Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), this chapter critically explores the colonial Igbo's social hierarchy as portrayed in Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* (1964). In this chapter, I argue that Achebe effectively compares two different social stratifications: the traditional Igbo society and the British one, in *Arrow of God*. I analyse how Achebe's representation of the status-oriented Igbo society is contrasted with the class-oriented social structure of British society. I also discuss the effect of colonisation on the Igbo's culture, which, although was based on violence and coercion as occurred in *Things Fall Apart* but resulted in some positive respects through the British promotion of new hierarchies, new legal structures, new forms of education, and a new religion as seen in many parts of *Arrow of God*. These new forms of social organisation are what makes things fall apart in *Arrow of God*. This chapter will, in other words, look at the opposition of the status stratification of the colonised *versus* the class stratification of the coloniser.

5.1 Introduction

While *Things Fall Apart* focuses on Nigeria in the late 1800s, *Arrow of God* (1964) looks to the 1920s and traces the communal and social changes that occur in Igbo society. The novel's primary setting is Umuaro, a cluster of six fictional Igbo villages located in eastern Nigeria, the most ancient of which is Umunneora. People in these villages share the same religion, culture and traditions. Their chief deity is Ulu, for whom Ezeulu, the main character in the novel, is the chief priest. In Umuaro, the divine power of Ulu and the traditions of village life start to decline with the arrival of the British. Further, Achebe introduces a second important setting in the novel: the colonial outpost in Okperi, where colonial officials such as Winterbottom, the District Officer, and

his assistant, Mr Tony Clarke, use a system of indirect rule to control the Igbo villages. The two settings provide a sharp contrast between two different societies: the traditional Igbo society and the modern British one.

As in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe makes ethnographic observations in *Arrow of God* about Igbo society and the people's interrelated social structure. The narrative concerns how British colonialism leads to the downfall of a religious leader, Ezeulu, and the traditional norms and belief system he represents. Achebe divides the novel's chapters between ones designed primarily to drive the narrative forward and others whose focus appears ethnographical. These ethnographic chapters include vivid observations about the social life of the Igbo society (their social customs, traditions, religious beliefs, etc.). For instance, Chapter Seven sheds light on the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, a cleansing ceremony that the Igbo people practice at the end of the year before the Feast of the New Yam, which purges the village of the sins that the Igbo clans have committed. Chapter Eleven describes Igbo marriage customs; and Chapter Seventeen depicts the religious rituals of the mask. Other chapters highlight the influence of the education provided by the missionaries in Nigeria, and specifically in Igbo society. One of the aims of this chapter is to question why Achebe gives so much attention to this insider view of Igbo society and investigates how this novel can be regarded as an example of ethnographic realism through a critical analysis of its setting, characters, and themes.

In this chapter, I examine how the Igbo's social structure is influenced by colonisation. To this end, I discuss the Igbo social structure before and during colonisation. I argue that traditional Igbo society is not divided into classes determined only by the ownership of the means of production as in classic Marxist thought. Instead, it is organised in what Weber referred to as "status groups" or, in German, *Stände*. In comparison, British society is shown in the novel to be strictly and comprehensively class-based. I discuss both the Igbo and British societies in the following two sections.

5.2 The classless society of the pre-colonial Igbo

As seen in Chapter Four, the Weberian approach hierarchises classes based on the ownership of goods or the means of production, while how the individual lives and acts socially, and how they view themselves, can define their status groups (*Stände*). Within *Stände*, individuals can be granted high-status or low-status based on different social assessments or evaluations. According to Weber's definitions, traditional Igbo society consists of different *Stände* in which the people are status-stratified. In *Arrow of God*, the arrival of the class-oriented British colonisers influences the Igbo's social order and leads to the reorganisation of their social ranks. The novel describes how British interventions endanger the social, political, and religious structures of the Igbo people in these domains.

Igbo society is organised through relations of kinship. Igbo families form independent social entities such as the villages in the novel. The Igbo villages are historically and culturally connected because they "occupy a common territory... speak a common language though with many dialectical variations" (Green 5). The family is the smallest social segment in the social structure of the Igbo. The traditional Igbo family consists of a husband and wife or wives in a polygamous household. The father's role in the family is essential, as he is considered the head of the family. However, wives are responsible for most of the household chores. This ethnographic cultural aspect of the Igbo traditional family structure is best represented in *Arrow of God* through the character of Ezeulu. Ezeulu has three wives, and they live together in a "compound" where each has her own *obi*, or hut. Ezeulu, as patriarch, controls the household and settles any conflicts that may arise among his many children. The women and female children are responsible for cooking food and fetching water, while Ezeulu and his male children are responsible for farming and building huts. In order to get married, each son builds his own *obi*.

At a broader level, the Igbo society in *Arrow of God* is socially stratified into small social groups, often according to age (at the top of the hierarchy are the *ndichie*, elders, Umuaro, and the priestly officers). Each group has specific tasks and roles to perform. According to divine rule, the priests preside over legal order in Igbo society. For instance, Ezeulu makes decisions, following the will of Ulu, the god of wealth, who is superior to all other deities, and “when he likes a man wealth flows like a river into his house; his yams grow as big as human beings, his goats produce threes and his hens hatch nines” (Achebe *Arrow of God* 9). The elders are also responsible for making significant decisions and resolutions related to their villages. They are the first to be consulted about any problem or issue concerning the village, whether by the Igbo people or at times, the British. For example, when the Igbo people want to stop working on the colonisers’ road, someone suggests that they should consult “the elders of Umuaro” (84). The British, too, approach them to discuss the new road: “Ezeulu had seen him and heard his voice when he spoke to the elders of Umuaro about the new road. When the story had first spread that a white man was coming to talk to the elders, Ezeulu had thought it would be his friend” (88). In this sense, the elders in the traditional Igbo are considered to have political power in the village, which grants them a higher status and honour. Before the arrival of the colonisers, they maintained a firm grip on the administration and decision-making process of the Igbo villages.

Despite the patriarchalism of the Igbo society, there is a sort of social equality among male status groups in the socio-political system that continues to govern the Igbo society during colonialism. This creates a sense of responsibility among the Igbos towards their society. For instance, the two groups who have the duty of working on the new road take turns and share the same amount of work: “It was the turn of the Otakagu age group to work on the new road on the day following the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves” (77). This social system is devoid of nepotism or favouritism as even “Ezeulu’s second son, Obika, and his friend, Ofoedu” (77), belong to one of these groups. However, Ezeulu is eager and ambitious for his son to gain a great “honour” (77).

Freedom of speech among men can be seen in numerous situations, such as the assembly meetings of the *ndichie*, where everyone is given a chance to voice their opinion. In *Arrow of God*, one of the situations that shows the operation of this democratic assembly is the meeting held by Umuaro to discuss the war against Okperi where “speaker after speaker rose and spoke to the assembly until it was clear that all the six villages stood behind Nwaka” (17). Also, “Ezeulu’s neighbour, Anosi, whose opinion had gone unheeded earlier on in the discussion and who had kept quiet since then surfaced again with an opposite view” (165). The opposition among the Igbo men is represented in the novel when there is a conflict over the ownership of the farmland between Umuaro and Okperi: “There were murmurs of approval and of disapproval but more of approval from the assembly of elders and men of title” (16). Ezeulu believes that according to his father’s account, “the land belonged to Okperi” (15); but Nwaka opposes this claim, stating his own father’s opinion that “Okperi people were wanderers” (16).

These different perspectives and opinions in *Arrow of God* suggest that the legal power among the Igbos is pluralist and not centralised. Ambreena Manji speaks about the Igbos’ legal pluralism and compares it to the formal or centralist paradigm, which he defines as an “insistence that the label ‘law’ should be confined to the law of the state” (631), with this unifying legal law being enforced by one source or entity in the society. John Griffiths contends that other lesser sources such as “the church, the family, the voluntary association, and the economic organisation exist, [...] ought to be and in fact are hierarchically subordinate to the law and institutions of the state” (qtd. in Manji 632). However, Manji comments that this is not the case with the traditional Igbo as presented in *Arrow of God* where Ezeulu advises that “the world is like a Mask dancing [...] if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place” (9). In other words, for Manji, in order to understand the nature of the Igbo legal system, it is important not to stay in one fixed centralist place, but instead to view it from different angles, or in other words, to adopt a pluralist paradigm.

Manji also points out that this legal pluralism is supported by Ezeulu's uncertainty of his power when he questions, "what kind of power is it if it would never be used?" (*Arrow of God* 4). We come to know that Ezeulu "is all too aware of other sources, which generate law and that he himself is not always able to determine the outcome of matters the way he might wish" (Manji 633). In this way, it can be seen that legal pluralism and decentralism are at the basis of the egalitarianism of the Igbos' classless society.

The novel also showcases the importance of tradition in the Igbo socio-political system. For instance, the *ndichie* hold their meetings "under the timeless ogbu tree on whose mesh of exposed roots generations of Umuaro elders had sat to take weighty decisions" (*Arrow of God* 141). The social and political unity that characterises this system is evident in the salutation "Umuaro kwenu!" (141) given by the chief priest at the beginning of each meeting, which is "a call to Umuaro to speak with one voice" (141). One of the most critical changes to Igbo politics is the system of Warrant Chiefs. The traditional administrative rule of the elders and chief priests is undermined when the British claim executive authority over the six villages. Chris Kwame Awuyah describes this intervention and its outcome as follows: "the British colonial administration suppressed a war between Umuaro and their neighbours, Okperi, propped up Okperi as the administrative center of the subregion, and established Warrant Chiefs (effectively cronies of the colonisers) in an acephalous society" (216). As a result, the Igbos' autonomous, stateless society, where "age grades, priestly officers, and masked societies exist (as they do in the fictional Umuaro) tended to become centralised states when faced simultaneously with a fracturing of internal politics and a substantial threat from outside" (Booker 32). Awuyah notes further that "the real threat to Umuaro comes from the coloniser's utter disregard and, consequently, his attempt to impose a new order on the local society" (216). This new order is an indirect way to control the villages, hence the term "Indirect Rule". In such a system, "the interrogative power of the office of Ezeulu is no longer needed" (Booker 32).

Hence, under colonialism, some remnants of the traditional Igbo system remain, though just in name, and the British administration represented by Mr. Winterbottom and his new Warrant Chief system take over. In *Arrow of God*, characters such as James Ikedi, the first Warrant Chief in Okperi, are an accurate historical reflection of the system introduced into Nigerian society by the British. For Booker, “by briefly mentioning characters of this ilk [James Ikedi], Achebe invokes the early roots of Nigerian corruption, born of the Warrant Chief system (or certainly exacerbated by it)” (73). Weber maintains that power and social honour can be achieved not only through the economic order but also through the legal order: “The legal order rather is an additional factor that enhances the chance to possess power and create an honourable reputation, but the legal order cannot always secure them” (138). In this sense, Ikedi gets his power and reputation through his legal position as a Warrant Chief. George Padmore mentions that during this policy of the colonial administration in Nigeria, “the Chief is the law, subject only to one higher authority, the white official stationed in his state as advisor” (317). This system enables the British to indirectly control the Igbo people and pacify their revolt, hence why this indirect rule policy is also referred to as “pacification”. Lord Fredrick Lugard was the first to practice this policy as a colonial administrator of Nigeria from 1912 to 1919. Unlike the traditional Igbo system, which does not rely on the judgement of individual rulers but collective councils and assemblies, the British colonial system “sought to secure the cooperation of their colonial subjects indirectly through indigenous institutions” (Booker 218), such as the establishment of Native courts and the employment of local officers or rulers called Warrant Chiefs. These Warrant Chiefs are “responsible for day-to-day local administration but who would ultimately answer to the British” (Booker 218).

The reference to a book of anthropology or ethnography entitled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* at the end of *Things Fall Apart*, and again in Chapter Three of *Arrow of God*, underlines the connection between the events in the two novels. In the final chapter

of *Things Fall Apart*, an unnamed administrative commissioner plans to write a book on his experience civilising the savage African people, to which he gives the abovementioned title. While witnessing Okonkwo's brutal act of killing a British messenger, the administrative commissioner thinks about allocating a chapter to this scene in this book. In *Arrow of God*, this book, now identified as having been written by George Allen, has become an instructional text for colonial officers charged with "lead[ing] the backward races into line" (33). In both novels, the reference to this book highlights how ethnographic knowledge is being used by the British to exercise power and establish dominance, which is to say, by portraying Igbo culture as primitive and savage. As discussed in Chapter Four, the British are not primarily described as violent colonisers in these novels, although there are expectations that they were. Colonisation is instead shown to break down social structures, replacing them with British or Western structures. This process is shown as partly pre-determined or intentional, and partly random due to what the British experience there during their rule.

Indirect rule leads to the social and political disintegration of the Igbo villages, which creates a socio-cultural shift that allows the missionaries to take over. The appointment of Warrant Chiefs facilitates this process. The Warrant Chiefs are selected based on their educational skills and knowledge from the British perspective, giving them a higher social status among their Igbo fellows. For example, as a Warrant Chief for Okperi, Mr Winterbottom has appointed James Ikedi, whom he describes as "an intelligent fellow who had been among the very first people to receive missionary education in these parts" (57). This position gives Ikedi power over his people, which he abuses by setting up "an illegal court and a private prison" (57). He can now also take any woman he admires "without paying the customary bride price" (57). Consequently, Winterbottom has suspended him for six months. It is important to note that Winterbottom's suspension of Ikedi suggests a less cynical view about the nature of the British indirect rule. One might expect this indirect rule to be a means of getting the colonised people to do the coloniser's corrupt work for

them. However, suspending Ikedi appears to be one of the situations that prove the British administration avoided the chaos and wanted to maintain order.

Unlike James Ikedi, who accepts the British's authority over Igboland by acquiescing to be appointed a Warrant Chief, Ezeulu refuses the offer from the British to be appointed Warrant Chief because he is concerned about the beliefs of the Igbos. This refusal "had no parallel anywhere in Igboland. It might be thought foolish for a man to spit out a morsel which fortune had placed in his mouth, but in certain circumstances, such a man compelled respect" (*Arrow of God* 175). Ironically, Ezeulu's enemies in Umuaro mock his refusal, wondering "how could he refuse the very thing he had been planning and scheming for all these years" (176).

Ezeulu's refusal to be appointed as a Warrant Chief can be interpreted in different ways. It may stem from his firm belief that accepting this position will strengthen the British colonial system, taking advantage of his religious status as a chief priest to exercise more influence on the Igbo people who trust and follow him. Increasing the power of the British colonisers in that way would threaten the social and political structure of the Igbos, a consequence that Ezeulu is unwilling to accept or take responsibility for. Ezeulu articulates his position like this: "We have shown the white man the way to our house and given him a stool to sit on. If we now want him to go away again, we must either wait until he is tired of his visit, or we must drive him away" (132). He believes the social and cultural impacts of the British arrival can be avoided. It would be a betrayal to advise his people to defend their own culture and beliefs while at the same time cooperating with the British colonisers by accepting this Chieftaincy.

However, Ezeulu's rejection of the white man's offer may also be due to his concern about losing his religious status among the Igbos. Sending his son to learn from the British missionaries makes the Igbos wonder why their religious leader and role model connect with the white man. Cooperating with the white man would, therefore, threaten his religious and social rank. Another interpretation along similar lines is that Ezeulu declines this position in order to gain a form of

revenge on the white man, whose treatment of him has caused him great offence. Ezeulu refuses to appear in Okperi as summoned by the District Officer: “he [Ezeulu] does not leave his hut. If [Winterbottom] wants to see me [Ezeulu], he must come here” (139). Winterbottom considers this message an insult and acts accordingly: “[He] immediately signed a warrant of arrest in his capacity as magistrate for the apprehension of the priest and gave instructions for two policemen to go to Umuaro first thing in the morning and bring the fellow in” (149). It is worth considering whether this incident is a case of poor intercultural communication. On the one hand, Ezeulu misunderstands Winterbottom’s intention due to the tone in which the message is delivered. The messenger adopts a condescending tone when addressing Ezeulu, deliberately pretending not to know him and dishonestly misrepresenting Winterbottom, thereby provoking Ezeulu into rejecting the order:

“Which one of you is called Ezeulu?” he asked from the book and then looked up and around the hut. No one spoke; they were all too astonished. [...]

“You say you are a man of Umuru?” asked Ezeulu. “Do you have priests and elders there?” [...]

“Do not take my question amiss. The white man has his own way of doing things. Before he does anything to you he will first ask you your name and the answer must come from your own lips.”

“When he sent me here he did not tell me he had a friend in Umuaro.” He smiled in derision. “But if what you say is true we shall know tomorrow when I take you to see him.” [...]

The Court Messenger continued to smile menacingly... “Your friend Wintabota” (he mouthed the name in the ignorant fashion of his hearers) “has ordered you to appear before him tomorrow morning.” (138)

Ezeulu's reply to the messenger is given with as much dignity as he can muster. It indicates that he is a person who cannot act in a way that he deems unworthy of his social status, whatever the personal cost. Similarly, Winterbottom's poor judgement prevents him from giving the priest his due. He cannot understand the cultural and social standing the Igbo Chief Priests hold in their society and the respect that must be shown to them. Instead of requesting that he visit him, therefore, he *demands* that he come before him. The cultural misunderstanding is evident again when Captain Winterbottom, responding to what he perceives to be an "insulting reply", but which is intended as a means of saving face, orders Clarke to lock Ezeulu up in the guardroom until he comes back from Enugu because he will not "have my natives thinking they can treat the Administration with contempt" (149).

As discussed in Chapter Four, according to Weber, within a status group, the acquisition of honour is not only based on an individual's "lifestyle" but also other physical and psychological attributes (145). This creates a democratic society as it enables social mobility. Consequently, Igbo culture emphasised competition as a means of gaining honour and prestige. Men who have certain skills, such as orators, warriors, and leaders, receive various titles. Some of these titles are mentioned in the novel, including *Ozo*, *Ici*, *Ndichie*, *Eze Ulu* (Priest-king). Men with these titles are given much respect and hold power in their society. For example, Obika gains a high status and is admired because of his physical power and appearance, even though he is a drunk. Some titled men are respected for their intellectual capabilities, such as Nawaka, a great orator consulted about the conflict over the possession of claimed land's between Umuaro and Okperi. His intellectual skills, and martial and physical skills place him among "men of high title" (41). Both Nawaka and Ezidimili "were good wrestlers" (40). Still, Nawaka is more physically privileged among the Igbos as he "was tall and of a light skin" (40), while Ezidemili "was very small" (40).

However, Weber adds that personal characteristics are not the only way to high-status: "the stratification by *Stände* goes hand in hand with a monopolisation of ideal and material goods or

opportunities, in a manner which we have come to know as typical” (146). In *Arrow of God*, Nwabueze, who came to work as a servant in the house of a white man who calls him Johnu, aspires to a higher status. However, the way he wants to attain this status does not accord with traditional Igbo standards. While working for the British, Nwabueze is struck by their manifestations of wealth and, crucially, the status that wealth confers upon them in their society. As he tells Ezeulu, “I can tell you that I do not aim to die a servant. My eye is on starting a small trade in tobacco as soon as I have collected a little money. People from other places are gathering much wealth in this trade and in the trade for cloth” (170). Although Weber maintains that material “monopolies are rarely sufficient” (146), it is nonetheless possible “for the added honor created through economic acquisition to bring greater honor to the members of the Stand than they could establish through their lifestyle” (147).

Oduche, Ezeulu’s son, is another character who uses the kinds of attributes cited by Weber in order to gain a high status. Nowhere in the novel do we find a physical description of Oduche, but the text divulges something of his character. Although he is Ezeulu’s second son, Ezeulu selects him to be his “eye and ear” (220) in the Christian camp. This indicates that his father regards him as his most intelligent and reliable son. Thus, Oduche’s intellect earns him a high status among his family and his people: “Ezeulu called him [Oduche] to his obi and spoke to him as a man would speak to his best friend and the boy went forth with pride in his heart. He had never heard his father speak to anyone as an equal” (45). Initially, Oduche is not aware of the dominant status associated with the ability to speak English, but he comes to realise that such a skill would make him “a great man in Umuaro” (46). As Chima Osakwe notes, “the literate Africans of post-colonial era are so proud of the social status arising from their knowledge of the white man’s language that they have consciously or unconsciously impugned or mocked the intellectual capabilities of other literate Africans” (140). This is the case for another character, Moses Unachukwu, whose “reputation in Umuaro rose to unprecedented heights” due to his

familiarity with English (*Arrow of God* 77). Although he is not among the elders of the village, his education wins him the British's trust. Moses also belongs to the religion of the white man, and the "knowledge" that this gives him elevates him further. He is allowed to attend the meetings of different age groups that he does not belong to. Nevertheless, Moses has no titles, making Ezeulu wonder how "a man of Umunneora should have this prestige" (77). What eases Ezeulu's mind is that "his son would earn the same or greater honour" (77).

Weber contends that stratification and privileges in terms of honour and lifestyles are inherent to each *Stände* (147) and can be claimed as a birthright. Ezeulu occupies the top place in the Igbo social order. He inherits his role as the chief priest of Ulu from his father. The source of his power and status is not physical or economic. Unlike Okonkwo's physical and economic power in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu's power is divine. He is the religious leader of the six villages of Umuaro and is responsible for implementing the will of Ulu and performing religious rituals, such as the festivals of the Pumpkin Leaves and the New Yam. His inherited position also causes Winterbottom to consider appointing him as the Warrant Chief of Umuaro. However, because, as Sreejth notes, Ezeulu "is very dedicated to his profession and values the native religion as the backbone of Umuaro" (58), he is loath to involve himself in the activities of the white man lest he should lose this prestige and status.

Ezeulu's decision to send his son to learn from the British missionaries can be interpreted differently. Olakunle George proposes two reasons for Ezeulu's decision. First, Ezeulu's choice may be triggered by his desire to "position himself to the best advantage by having one of his own acquire whatever new power comes with Christian schooling and modern administrative structures" (352), thereby stealing a march on his two rivals Ezidemili and Nwaka. George adds that this choice may be related to Ezeulu's desire to pass the position of the chief priest to his favourite son, Nwafo, by "sacrific[ing] Oduche to the Christian school" (353). However, it is also

possible that by sending his son to the British missionaries, he is simply looking to secure the favour and respect of a power source that might protect his status if he were to lose that status.

Although Ezeulu sends his son to learn at the church, he refuses to act as a Warrant Chief. Ezeulu is eager to be respected not only by his people but also by the white man. When he is asked to act as a witness in the conflict between Umuaro and Okperi, he admits to Umuaro's crimes. Although his confession distresses the people of Umuaro, he gains the trust and respect of the colonisers, who call him "the only witness of truth" (7).

In a status-oriented society like that of the Igbos, an individual's lifestyle is nonetheless, as Weber argues, the primary factor in determining their degree of privilege and honour (143). *Arrow of God's* title symbolises Ezeulu's self-image as a powerful weapon (an arrow in the bow of the god Ulu). In addition to his inherited position, Ezeulu also has qualities that give him prominence over others; indeed, as Awuyah argues, he is "a very impressive and an immensely powerful man, with a sharp intellect, and he is independent minded" (217). The chief priest is no ordinary man: not only does he have high-status as a religious figure, but he also serves his people as a social role model.

Having a high-status also attracts enemies. One is Nwaka, a titled and wealthy man from Umunneora, who is constantly criticising and challenging Ezeulu. Nwaka's lifestyle – his thoughts, behaviour, and his opinion of himself – reveal the social prestige to which he aspires. He is supported by his friend Ezidemili, the priest of Idemili, who, mindful that he does not have the high stature and the personal qualifications of Nwaka, wishes to use Nwaka as a tool to destroy Ezeulu, and, in turn, Ulu. In that event, Idemili would supersede Ulu, and Ezidemili would take Ezeulu's position and his spiritual power as the chief priest of Umuaro.

For this reason, he praises and flatters Nwaka in order to motivate him to defy Ezeulu. Ezidemili asserts that in the days before Ulu, the true leaders of each village "had been men of a high title like Nwaka" (41). Nwaka's high standing among the Igbos can also be attributed to his

personal and intellectual skills, as he is “a great man and a great orator who was called Owner of Words by his friends” (40). This oratory skill is evident in many incidents in the novel, one of which is when he challenges Ezeulu’s public authority during the assembly about launching the war against Okperi.

According to Weber’s model of social stratification, an individual’s rank within a status group can be reflected by other markers of honour, such as “the privilege to wear special costumes or to eat special dishes which are a taboo to others” (146). Others include “the privilege of carrying arms, which is most obvious for others in its consequences [i.e., as an obvious expression of authority and power], and of having the right to exert certain non-professional dilettante artistic practices” (146). A closer look at the structure of Ezeulu’s *obi* reveals its distinctiveness in the village: “there was the usual, long threshold in front but also a shorter one on the right as you entered. The leaves on this additional entrance were cut back so that sitting on the floor Ezeulu could watch that part of the sky where the moon had its door” (*Arrow of God* 1). Not only does his home mark him out as unique, but so does his clothing:

Ezeulu wore his shimmering, yellow loincloth underneath and a thick, coarse, white toga over it; this outer cloth was passed under the right armpit and its two ends thrown across the left shoulder. Over the same shoulder he carried his long-strapped goatskin bag. On his right hand he held his alo – a long, iron, walking-staff with a sharp, spear-like lower end which every titled man carried on important occasions. On his head was a red ozo cap girdled with a leather band from which an eagle feather pointed slightly backwards (181).

Nwaka, too, uses clothing to demonstrate his highly privileged rank: “Nwaka walked forward and back as he spoke; the eagle feather in his red cap and bronze band on his ankle marked him out as one of the lords of the land – a man favoured by Eru, the god of riches” (16). He also has a great mask which he puts on for important occasions. This mask is called “Ogalanya or Man of Riches” (39). Often during festivals, people from the villages come “to Umunneora to see this great Mask

bedecked with mirrors and rich cloths of many colours” (39). The red *ozo* cap with its backward-pointed eagle feather worn by Ezeulu and Nwaka recalls the *tarboosh* worn by the high-class people in al-Sharqawi’s *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The wives of these highly ranked people are often also able to join in such displays. In *al-Ard*, for example, Waseefa is said to aspire to marry a man wearing a *tarboosh*, where the garment stands as a metonym for upward mobility. Similarly, Achebe’s description of the arrival of Nwaka’s five wives to the market reflects his excessive wealth and high position:

They were just in time to see the arrival of the five wives of Nwaka and the big stir they caused. Each of them wore not anklets but two enormous rollers of ivory reaching from the ankle almost to the knee. Their walk was perforce slow and deliberate, like the walk of an Ijele Mask lifting and lowering each foot with weighty ceremony. On top of all this the women were clad in many coloured velvets. Ivory and velvets were not new in Umuaro but never before had they been seen in such profusion from the house of one man. (68)

The luxurious clothes and ornaments worn by Nwaka’s wives are an extension of the high rank he enjoys. Achebe stresses this point: “women wore their finest clothes and ornaments of ivory and beads according to the wealth of their husbands” (66). Clothes here clearly serve more than a decorative purpose. This is an instance where the novel’s ethnographic goal quite literally colours the narrative.

Weber opines that the “social honor (or prestige) can be the basis for power” (138). By power, he means “the chance of a person or a group to enforce their own will even against the resistance of others” (137). Ezeulu’s place in the social order and the prestige that this confers is a source of his power. When his son Oduche tells him that he will not be able to build the homestead because the church has asked him to go to Okperi, Ezeulu’s pride and self-esteem overcome his fear of the British:

Listen to what I shall say now. When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing. It was I who sent you to join the white man, Wintabota. He asked me to send one of my children to learn the ways of his people and I agreed to send you. I did not send you so that you might leave your duty in my household. Do you hear me? Go and tell the people who chose you Togo to Okperi that I said no. Tell them that tomorrow is the day on which my sons and my wives and my son's wife work for me. Your people should know the custom of this land; if they don't you must tell them. Do you hear me? (13-14)

Ezeulu uses imperatives in his household, ordering one of his male children to do his bidding. This is the language of power. Although Oduche is reluctant to join the missionaries, he is forced by his father to learn the ways of the British. He has no option but to listen to his father: "I have sent you to be my eyes there. Do not listen to what people say [...] No man speaks a lie to his son [...] If anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time" (189).

Though Ezeulu has sent Oduche to the colonisers' church, he still asserts the superiority of Igbo religion and traditions and his own high personal status. Ezeulu realises that his status is at risk by sending his son to learn from the British missionaries, but he makes sure that he commands his son's actions. Awuyah contends that "Ezeulu could not have been unaware that he has compromised his position by urging Oduche to join the white man's religion and school" (*Arrow of God* 215). However, it seems that there is an implicit trade-off between this risk of losing his status among the Igbos and the return that his son, and thus he, would gain. Ezeulu is aware that the power of the white man "derives largely from literacy" (216). Hence, by taking their literacy, albeit through the intermediary of his son, Ezeulu shares their power or perhaps undermines it at the source. Ezeulu's admiration of the white man's education and his awareness of its influence is evident:

I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn it until you can write it with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you. (189)

Here Ezeulu's reference to writing with the left hand is significant, all the more so because it is coded. This reference could be indeliberate. Writing with the left hand would have been very difficult in an age of fountain pens and ink. Ezeulu may make a mistake in being comical and speaking to the theme of intercultural communication. In making this mistake, Ezeulu inadvertently addresses the difficulty of assimilating to a different culture – the Igbo-British cultural assimilation is as awkward and unnatural as writing with the left hand.

However, when talking about the ability of one of the colonials to write with his left hand, Ezeulu may not be referring literally to the skill of writing left-handed. One interpretation of this reference is given by the character of Nwoga, who argues that Ezeulu refers to the colonisers' language, which is written from left to right, as the source of their power. Perhaps Ezeulu views this ability as magic or an unnatural power the British practice upon the Igbos to control them. That would resemble the Oduche's role as something of a spy, someone learning another's culture, taking it in and replicating it but not replacing one's own culture with it. Perhaps that is the ultimate display of power: taking the coloniser on at his own game. Nwoga maintains that "Ezeulu saw, not violence, but the acquisition of the white man's power as the answer to the problem his presence posed" (36). Ezeulu believes that the British influence on the Igbo people lies not only in their fear of the colonisers' violence but also in "the opening up of new avenues to wealth and greatness through new knowledge" (37). Many Igbo people submit to the British missionaries because of the education they provide, which brings power and high rank to those who acquire it.

Although Ezeulu's son is reluctant to go to learn at the church in the beginning, he is enchanted by Mr. Beckett's skill later. K. Kaneto Akinsete points out that the ability to write with the left hand "does not mean that one forgets how to hold a pen in the right" (par. 1), but it is related to one's mastery of the coloniser's language that can help change the "power dynamics" (par. 4). It is undoubtedly true that those who learn the British coloniser's language enjoy more privileges and social stature than those who do not. Translators like the character Moses are a good case in point. He begins by translating Wright's commands to the road builders, but in time, and "because of his familiarity with the white man's language the carpenter, Moses Unachukwu, although very much older than the two age groups, had come forward to organise them and to take words out of the white man's mouth for them" (77). His reputation in Umuaro rises because of his ability "to speak the white man's tongue" (77). Here, the power of language means that the colonised can now take over from the colonisers, in this case in the latter's own modernising project. The trick, of course, would be to retain one's culture and not to end up self-colonising.

Ezeulu learns from such examples that power and reputation are to be gained from learning the oppressor's language. Akinsete makes the logical point that the oppressed's acquisition of the oppressor's language closes the communication gap between them and can lower the chances of intercultural misunderstanding. He maintains that "the penalty for the communication gap between the oppressor and the oppressed consistently falls on the oppressed" (par. 6). As discussed before, in *Arrow of God*, the intercultural misunderstanding between Ezeulu and Winterbottom is due to messengers, who are necessary, for the men are unable to speak each other's language. In that case, Ezeulu is arrested.

The reference to the ability to write with the left hand can also be interpreted as a means to preserve one's tradition or culture. The power and influence of any culture depend on its ability to survive. An oral tradition like that of Igbo society is less likely to survive over time than the written tradition of the British colonisers. In this sense, Ezeulu's desire for his son to become

literate and to learn to write in English may be said to signify his ambition for the Igbos' oral tradition to be preserved through writing. There is a reflexive edge here, too, of course, for the immediate proof of the success of such an ambition which lies in the reader's hands: Igbo culture is preserved, among other things, in Achebe's own works of ethnographic realism *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, which are written in English. Furthermore, to allow the reader to access the Igbo language, he provides a list of Igbo words with explanations in English at the beginning of these novels. He also embeds many proverbs, sayings, and idioms¹⁸, translated into English, that either describe the Igbos' social culture and beliefs or imply the devastating ramifications of colonialism. The inclusion of such Igbo proverbs and idioms renders the language didactic, which suggests a role reversal: here, an African author (i.e., Achebe) is using English to teach Anglophone readers, including Nigerians but also English-speakers from the West, about African culture, including the lessons of the colonisers' own, often shameful, past. The role of preserving the tradition of the Igbo people is assumed by Achebe and other African writers whose works "[convey] the oral tradition of the Igbo without impairing its authenticity" (Booker 111), a wish Ezeulu might have wanted his son, Oduche, to fulfil.

Like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, it seems that Ezeulu has pride in his status, which causes a conflict between him and the Umuaro people, and ultimately leads to the collapse of his religious standing by the end of the novel. This collapse starts when he feels the sting of the people's lack of respect, first when they ignore his opinion and go to war with Okperi, and finally when they continue to blame him for the white man's arrival. A dream that Ezeulu has in Okperi,

¹⁸ Examples include: "If a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings" (6); "When a man says yes, his chi says yes also" (19); "when brothers fight to death a stranger inherits the father's estate" (220); "No man however great was greater than his people" (230); and "A man does not talk when masked spirits speak" (129).

in which the people from Umuaro “spat on his face and called him the priest of a dead god” (159), makes him feel that his actual conflict is with his own people, not the British coloniser.

After his release and return to his village, Ezeulu refuses to announce the New Yam festival that permits people to commence the harvest. George maintains that *Arrow of God* does not reveal the actual motivations behind Ezeulu’s refusal to announce the harvest; he proposes the possibility “that the Chief Priest is not in full knowledge and control of his motivation” (352). He suggests that Ezeulu’s control of the agricultural cycle stems from his desire to stress his power in the face of “two worldly factors that Ezeulu perceives as threats: one is the British colonial presence, the other the rivalry of another deity and its devotee” (352). Nevertheless, it remains possible that his refusal is simply born of vindictiveness. Believing that he is Ulu’s arrow of punishment, Ezeulu sets out to take revenge on his people who have reproached him and mocked Ulu. In this sense, Ezeulu is motivated by a desire to avenge Ulu rather than himself, as he believes that his religious power and standing are linked to the deity against whom the people’s mockery is directed. As a result, when he comes back to Umuaro as a man of priestly status – “half of you [Ezeulu] is man and the other half spirit” (133) – Ezeulu believes that his orders must be obeyed whatever the consequences are. However, he fails to keep his status afterwards when the Igbo suffer famine and lose faith in their Ulu. The death of Ezeulu’s son, Obika, is a sign for the Igbo that the god has abandoned his priest.

For this reason, they decide to harvest their yams in the name of Christ, a god who serves their needs. George argues that “the Umuaro people see their choice in simple but revolutionary terms: they have pragmatically accepted the offer of spiritual force to protect them from the wrath of another” (351). It is here where “Ulu’s prestige evaporates, inaugurating what Ezeulu describes in his closing interior monologue as ‘the collapse and ruin of all things’” (Begam and Moses 40). Ironically, Ezeulu’s stubborn attempt to reassert the authority of the Igbo gods and his priesthood leads to the final collapse of that authority.

Arrow of God narrates that many Igbos are influenced by the new religion and receive a high-status by converting to Christianity. Achebe presents Mr. Goodcountry as one of the converts who speaks fluent English. Valued for his intellect, he becomes head of the church in Umuaro. He preaches that the newly converted Igbo should turn from their old beliefs and not fear killing sacred animals like the python:

“If we are Christians, we must be ready to die for the faith,” he said. “You must be ready to kill the python as the people of the rivers killed the iguana. You address the python as Father. It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it do not count yourself a Christian.” (47)

According to Igbo culture, the act of killing the python, which John Goodcountry assigns to Oduche, is a sacrilege. Ezeulu’s reaction to this development is, however, one of wilful blindness in an attempt to avoid any liability in his son’s wrongful act. When Ezidemili sends his messenger to inquire what Ezeulu will do to “purify your house of the abomination that your son committed” (54), Ezeulu insults Ezidemili and threatens his messenger: “Tell Ezidemili that Ezeulu says he should go and fill his mouth with shit. As for you, young man [...] If the world had been what it was I would have given you something to remind you always of the day you put your head into the mouth of a leopard” (54). Here, although Ezeulu intentionally evades responsibility for his son’s religious and social transgression, the violence of his language betrays the insult to his status in the community.

In contrast, in *Things Fall Apart*, the same act allegedly committed by a Christian church member named Okoli infuriates the Igbo people, including Okonkwo, who decides to take revenge for this violation of Igbo religious beliefs and culture by fighting the church. The matter ends with the members of the church being sent out of the village. There is a clear difference between the Chief priest’s reactions towards the violations of Igbo beliefs in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. While Okonkwo’s reaction shows the strength of the Igbo religion and tradition, and the

coloniser's weak influence at their arrival, Ezeulu's reaction stresses the strong influence of colonialism that gradually shakes the roots in Igbo culture and their religious practice. Finally, Goodcountry takes advantage of the conflict between Ezeulu and his people and offers the right to the Umuaro people to harvest their yams. As a result, "his catechumen class [grows] from a mere fourteen to nearly thirty – mostly young men and boys who also went to school" (213). The new church bells that ring in Umuaro on Sunday sound a death knell not only for the Igbo religion but also for their social and political structures.

The threats to Ezeulu's position in his society and the violence of his reaction are a powerful part of the novel's ethnographic realism. As I have argued, Igbo society is not class-oriented; rather, as Nwoga points out, "Umuaro society constitutes a good example of a rank society" (29). In this society, Hunter and Whitten contend, "the differences among adults are differences in influence and prestige rather than the absolute distinctions between the powerful and the powerless typically found in state societies" (qtd. in Nwoga 29). Nwoga adds that the traditional Igbo system was "an open system" (29), making social mobility accessible to all. This environment makes it "a unique, achievement-oriented society with a well-defined, democratically entrenched means of social identification in which there is rank, not class-arrangement" (Nnolim 137-138). A man in such a society is judged not according to his material possessions or economic conditions, but for his achievements and skills. Highly skilled and accomplished men constitute the elite who lead the society: they are superior to the rest of their group or society due to their unique abilities or qualities. As such, Igbo society is a meritocracy or, as Nnolim explains, an "elitist society" (138), where opportunities to join the ranks of the elite are available to all. There is "a place for exalted status" (138) and high-ranking positions, but with no social flattery or exaggerated respect for a high social position, one of the distinctive social features in the class-oriented societies such as the British.

5.3 The British class-oriented society

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe contrasts the Igbo's rank-based stratification with British society's class-based structure as represented by the colonisers' new station in Okperi. According to Weber, a person's situation is determined by their "economic order" or wealth (138). Therefore, for Weber, "property and assets", or conversely the lack of these, are the basic categories of all class situations (139). Weber placed people who have a similar level of wealth or property in the same class. Accordingly, he believed that people could be economically classified into the propertied and the propertyless. "Class situation" can be determined therefore only by wealth, property, or assets (139).

In general, British society is known to be deeply class-oriented. In *Arrow of God*, Winterbottom, Clarke, and Wright represent the British camp, and they belong to different social strata. Mr. Winterbottom, the District Officer, and Clarke, his Assistant District Officer, belong to a class higher than Wright, a British man who works for the Public Works Department. Clarke, the Cambridge-educated son of a "Bank of England clerical" (104), points out to Wright that Winterbottom is "a man of very high principles, something of a missionary" (103) and that he is "a son of a clergyman in the Church of England" (103). It is significant to note that identifying the characters based on their father's profession indicates class stratification.

As discussed previously, Weber argues that people can gain a high rank within classes through professional qualifications or occupation. In this sense, as an Assistant District Officer in Okperi, Clarke enjoys a higher rank than Wright, who does not belong to the British Administration but is just a "Public Works Department man supervising the new road to Umuaro" (32). Members of the higher class, such as Clarke, are not meant to associate with those of lower classes like Wright; nevertheless, Clarke gets along well with Wright "with whom he [Clarke] had struck up a kind of friendship during his recent tour" (101). While Wright sees Winterbottom as a symbol of "administrative red tape" (76) who comes out "with the CMS or some such people"

(104),¹⁹ Winterbottom believes that Wright lowered himself through “his behaviour, especially with native women” (32). Winterbottom decides to bar Wright from the Regimental Mess club because “every European in Nigeria, particularly those in such a lonely outpost as Okperi, should not lower themselves in the eyes of the natives” (32). Booker comments on this by pointing out that “Achebe is using Wright as both a symbol and a plot device for showing how Europeans of various class affiliations relate to each other and relate to the Africans around them” (284). For instance, Wright, “unable to control his anger” (*Arrow of God* 81), beats Obika in front of his age-group as he arrives late to work on the road. Neither Winterbottom and Clarke would have lost control of their emotions in this way or resorted to corporal punishment. They are socially conditioned to keep their composure and dignity and exercise great self-restraint in the face of any hardship or calamity. This is the well-known “stiff upper lip”²⁰ of Victorian gentlemen, especially those involved in colonial and imperialist ventures, and it emphasises the ability to control one’s reaction in any situation. Also, we notice Wright’s use of offensive words and lower-class English register, which is different from the register used by Winterbottom and Clarke. For instance, after the fight between the two groups, Wright commands the workers through Moses Unachukwu, who translates:

Shut up you black monkeys and get down to work! [...] this bloody work must be finished by June [...] The white man says that unless you finish this work on time you will know

¹⁹ Church Missionary Society (CMS) has been active for over 200 years. It was founded in 1799 as a group of the British mission society working around the world with the Anglican and Protestant Communion.

²⁰ However, many British colonialists got underlings to use corporal punishment for them, including when they were angry—as in *Things Fall Apart* when the District Commissioner gets his “court messengers” to beat and shave the heads of Okonkwo and the other leaders of Umuofia instead of having the “palaver” (conversation) that they were told they would have.

the kind of man he is [...] He says everybody must work hard and stop all this shit-eating.
(82)

Unlike Wright who appears impolitic in the above extract, Clarke and Winterbottom are more strategic in their approach. Winterbottom's language and how he deals with Clarke and Wright demonstrate the class stratification among these characters. He is a man who believes in the social hierarchy. He does not see that his society is deeply class-ridden, whereas Igbo society is classless. Coming from a class-oriented society, Winterbottom ranks people according to their economic status. He maintains that Igbos are worthless until they are granted a professional position by the British. He comments that the native "Court Clerks and even messengers" are "a complete nonentity" (107) until the white missionaries officially appoint them, which gives them power and a higher rank over their fellow Igbos. This power is in turn misused, and these new appointees "turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people" (107). As previously mentioned, Winterbottom contends that to keep their political supremacy, the Europeans in Nigeria need to act in a certain way in the eyes of the natives. Winterbottom's racism – he thinks that the British need to "lead the backward races into line" (33) – is ultimately a function of class British society, for the race is one of the parameters that classify people socially.

Arrow of God presents two different views of British colonial policy: empathetic politics and racial politics. Clarke and Winterbottom, respectively, embody these positions. Reading the final chapter of the book by George Allen, which he has borrowed from Winterbottom, Clarke describes Allen as "smug", noting the latter's belief that the British were superior to the Africans. He believes that Allen cannot recognise "anything of value in native institutions" (36). Clarke seems to adopt a more empathetic take on the role of British colonial politics, in which colonialism aims to control weaker people and pacify their disputes. Despite his imperialist tendencies, Clarke believes that the African people's tradition should be respected and that they

should be afforded a right to maintain their cultural institutions. For Clarke, the colonisers' primary role is not to undermine the beliefs or the colonised culture.

On the other hand, Winterbottom believes that Clarke is a "progressive" and that the Igbo people are savages. He criticises the ineffectiveness of the British policy of "indirect rule" because it does not only "secure the old savage tyrants on their thrones – or more likely filthy animal skins," but it also invents "chiefs where there were none before. They make me sick" (36). For Winterbottom, British colonial policy should be mainly focused on civilising savage, backward races, based on the underlying assumption that the British race is superior to others. As previously noted, Winterbottom's racist mindset is seen even in his attitude towards the native warrant chiefs who misuse their power: "It seems to be a trait in the character of the negro" (107). He admires French colonial policy, which he considers decisive; the British, on the other hand, take their time first and send "commission[s] of Inquiry to discover all the facts, which then ham-strung them" (105). Winterbottom is as pragmatic and practical as the French colonials:

We British are a curious bunch, doing everything half-heartedly. Look at the French. They are not ashamed to teach their culture to backward races under their charge. Their attitude to the native ruler is clear. They say to him: "This land has belonged to you because you have been strong enough to hold it. By the same token it now belongs to us. If you are not satisfied come out and fight us." What do we British do? We flounder from one expedient to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure old savage tyrants on their thrones – or more likely filthy animal skins – we not only do that, but we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before. They make me sick. (36)

Winterbottom's comparison between the straightforward, pragmatic, and emotionless colonial policy that strikes a chord with him, and the compassionate pacifying British policy, with which he is dissatisfied, confirms how valueless the coloniser's ideals and traditions are for him. In his

view, there is no advantage to indirect rule, which leads only to the appointment of worthless and useless leaders with no benefit to the British colonies.

In his conversation with Clarke, Winterbottom points out that the Igbo are keen on titles and prestige, and the new paramount chiefs are quick to adopt the behaviours and practices of royalty, such as James Ikedi, who “now calls himself His Highness Obi Ikedi the First of Okperi. The only title I haven’t yet heard him use is Fidei Defensor” (107). Winterbottom wonders whether this is in the character of the “negro”. Clarke, however, thinks that the “love of title was a universal human failing” (107). He believes that the British seek titles to the same extent. Clarke’s opinion is borne out elsewhere in *Arrow of God*, notably when Achebe alludes to the promotion system within the ranks of the British colonisers. Colonial officers are promoted by nepotism, not because of their achievements, and promotion is only granted to those who aspire for it, not to those who deserve it.

An example of this is the character of Watkinson, who is promoted over Winterbottom despite being three years his junior (54). This promotion does not reflect Watkinson’s talents or work ethic, as we learn that Winterbottom has worked hard and had success in his duties. Instead, Watkinson is portrayed simply as a promotion seeker. Winterbottom comments on this and usually mentions to his assistant that “any fool can be promoted [...] provided he does nothing but try. Those of us who have a job to do have no time to try” (54-55). Winterbottom’s point-of-view about the reason for the Lieutenant-governor’s insistence on the “stupid and futile” (56) system of appointing Warrants Chiefs in Africa proves the British propensity for title-gaining: most of the Lieutenant-governor and senior district officers are “afraid of losing their promotion or the OBE” (56). Many officers are forced to accept and implement orders that they may disagree with simply because they do not want to lose military status. Honour, therefore, is pursued at the expense of ideologies, beliefs, principles, and values.

Titles are used among the British officers to show respect. On his way to Winterbottom's bungalow for dinner, Clarke recalls the time when he was invited to dinner at the house of "His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor's" before he came to Okperi (34). The ensuing description of the Lieutenant-Governor's house with its "glittering Reception Hall" (34), and the description of the way an officer like Clarke was treated when he was ignored by the Lieutenant-Governor throughout the dinner and offered a chair by a steward in the dining-room, combine to reveal the class stratification of the British society.

Another question raised in the novel is that of class stratification as it pertains to the appointment of British officers in Africa. Booker mentions that many young officers from Wales, Scotland, and Ireland died of cerebral malaria while others worked for several years until they were "severely debilitated and then shipped back home" (136). He adds that most of these officers are "lower-echelon officers from social classes far below the ranks of nobility" (136). In *Arrow of God*, this practice is represented by the character of John Macmillan, whom Clarke, who is also not from the noble British classes, replaces when the former dies of cerebral malaria (31).

This social structure of the British influences the new Warrant Chiefs, who consider themselves superior to their own people. A good example is a messenger who comes to call Ezeulu for a meeting with Winterbottom in Okperi: he wields his authority over Ezeulu, although the latter has a higher status in traditional Igbo culture than this messenger. Warrant Chiefs and messengers are granted power and a high status due to their connection with the British. Ezeulu disapproves of such authority and reminds his friend, Akuebue, not to forget divine authority.

It can be seen how the influence of the British colonisers on the social life of the Igbo is at the same time harmful and enticing. The British use no military weapons in controlling the Igbo people; their real power is of the soft variety. This power is religious, political, economic, and educational: "The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road – they are all part of the same thing. ... He does not fight with one weapon alone" (*Arrow of God* 85). In other words, the

British are waging war in many ways and on many different fronts. Specifically, they target all the social pillars of traditional Igbo society, namely their religion, language, tradition, and social order. This is what makes things fall apart in *Arrow of God*, for “when the roof and walls of a house fall in, the ceiling is not left standing” (*Arrow of God* 85).

5.4 Conclusion

Through this analysis of social stratification in *Arrow of God*, I have argued that Achebe uses ethnographic realism to give the reader a neutral, realistic image of the Igbo's cultural life, in all its positive and negative aspects. Like *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* is a literary weapon wielded by Achebe in order to defend the African people against misconceptions about them propagated by specific European authors, including Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary.

From a Weberian perspective, the social structure of Igbo society in the novel appears to be status-stratified. It is based on a *Stände*, or a status groups, in which the individual's way of life, personal qualifications, or lineage can confer prestige on them, not only their economic order. This makes the socio-political system of traditional Igbo society an egalitarian one in which chances for social mobility and the acquisition of high status and honour are available to all men. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe makes this social stratification visible in all its detail through his characters, setting, diction, and plot. More importantly, he constructs an extensive comparison of Igbo society with the class stratification of British society based on property and bureaucracy, represented by the White missionaries and colonisers. Certain characters are seen to function as metonyms of their society: Ezeulu's high-status and divinely inherited authority, for example, are contrasted with Mr. Winterbottom's material and pragmatic authority. The class stratification of British society has also been shown to manifest itself in the administrative officers' language. While Ezeulu's differently-constructed house and, linguistically, his official register and use of imperative mood show his rank among the Igbo, Mr. Winterbottom's attitudes and language use

towards his British fellows demonstrate the upper social class to which he belongs. Achebe contrasts traditional Igbo society and the British one with each other, but he also compares traditional Igbo society and its colonial avatar with its new Warrant Chiefs influenced by the class-oriented British system. Consequently, the influence of the British colonisers on the traditional social order of the Igbo people is reflected through the introduction of this new system and the conversion of the Igbos to Christianity. Achebe not only maintains strict neutrality in his ethnographic account of the African people but is equally objective in his depiction of British imperialism, showing that the colonisation of Igboland is partly carried out with physical violence and partly with soft power. However, this brand of colonialism is arguably all the more insidious: not only does it damage lives, but it also destroys whole cultures.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated the way in which al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* represent social stratification in the modern agrarian society of Egypt, and the way in which Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* provide an ethnographic representation of the traditional Igbo social structure in Nigeria. I have argued that the main difference lies in the nature of the society that the novels present. As for al-Sharqawi's novels, *al-Ard* demonstrates the social conflict between aristocratic feudalists and peasants, and the government's politically motivated actions against the peasants, while *al-Fallah* explores the violations of the corrupt officials and the feudal remnants against the peasants, which goes against Nasser's socialist agenda of supporting peasants. As for Achebe's novels, *Things Fall Apart* highlights how the Igbo's traditional social order is influenced by the arrival of the missionaries with their new religion and their government, while *Arrow of God* shows how the Igbo's lose their cohesive social life and how their traditional social structure changes entirely during colonisation.

This thesis has applied a Weberian analysis to these novels, and this lens has revealed how socio-political conditions impacted class and social order in both the Egyptian and Nigerian societies under study. In the former case, the Egyptian ruling regime before and after the 1952 revolution altered Egyptian society's social hierarchy; in the latter case, British colonisation, with its new political system and religion, changed the traditional social stratification of Igbo society. Notwithstanding the negative aspects of these regimes, both the Egyptian peasants and the Igbo's were already facing oppression and injustice, which led them to support the political changes of revolution and colonisation, respectively. As has been discussed, the Egyptian peasants experienced suffering and injustice during the rule of Sidky, whereas the underprivileged Nigerian Igbo's faced oppression due to their traditions, including the traditional allocation of power in their societies.

This thesis has also argued that religious leaders occupy a significant role in both societies, yet in different ways. In Egypt's modern society, the officially appointed Sheikh plays the same role in both novels: he is always on the side of those in power. Al-Sharqawi criticises the clergymen's role in both novels and shows them to be governed by hypocrisy and motivated by a desire for material gain to legitimise those in power. As for traditional Igbo society, men of religion attain a high rank in their society, including the *egwugwu* in *Things Fall Apart* and Ezeulu, the chief priest, in *Arrow of God*. The two novels highlight how the Igbos' religious rituals are part and parcel of their lives and cannot be ignored. Achebe presents the collapse of such spiritual power after the arrival of the Christian missionaries. In this way, the role of religious leaders in traditional Nigerian Igbo society has been shown to be more authoritative than that represented by Sheikhs in modern Egyptian society.

Furthermore, the Weberian analysis that has been applied in this thesis has demonstrated the effects of political intervention on the social and cultural lives of Egyptians and Igbos alike. In *al-Fallah*, al-Sharqawi moves from a portrayal of the peasants' struggle against the injustice of feudalism in a pre-revolution monarchy and a society loyal to British colonialism, like that presented in *al-Ard*, to a depiction of post-revolutionary society, and thus one of socialism and agrarian reform. Nevertheless, the aristocracy's corrupt officials and opportunists, and the remnants of the feudal system, are seen to have assumed leadership roles and are still exploiting the peasants, depriving them of freedom and political rights. As a result, this struggle creates social stratification among two opposing forces: the corrupt officials and feudal remnants on one side, and the peasants on the other. Unlike *al-Ard*, *al-Fallah* ends with the triumph of the peasants, which signifies the significant influence of socialist principles after the 1952 revolution. In this way, al-Sharqawi's *al-Fallah* has been shown to function as propaganda for the Nasserite regime. As for Igbo society, the impact of colonialism appears multifaceted. Although these impacts include the destruction and disintegration of the Igbos' traditional socio-political orders and

values, as seen at the end of *Things Fall Apart*, they are shown in a partially constructive light in *Arrow of God*, with the implied contrast that Achebe draws between uncivilised Igbo rituals (such as degrading the *osu* and the systematic killing of twins) and Christian ones, which included the missionaries' educational reforms and health services. For instance, with its rhetoric of being the religion of the oppressed, Christianity has been able to exploit the existing forms of social stratification in Igbo society and destroy their cohesive social structure. Thus, while the turning point in Egyptian political life during the 1950s is delineated as productive and positive in reforming the social hierarchy, the imperial intervention in Igbo traditional life is depicted as detrimental in its effects on traditional social structures.

Although both authors reflect historical events in their novels, they do this for different purposes. Al-Sharqawi and Achebe use the genre as a tool to present specific agendas. What can be concluded about al-Sharqawi's writing style can be concluded as primarily didactic in tone. His two novels stress the importance of literature and its role in guiding society, determining its future, and raising people's awareness of truth, goodness, freedom, noble human values, and the proper way of organising people in society. Al-Sharqawi also manages to integrate a political discussion of the concept of socialism into the narrative. He presents socialism as a possible means through which people can rid themselves of oppression. In this way, socialism is depicted as a means of restoring people's pride in themselves and making them feel confident about their future. This shows the didactic nature of the genre of the socialist novel.

In comparison, Achebe tends to be descriptive in his novels since he portrays how the cohesive traditional Igbo society, though imperfect, disintegrated under British colonisation. Achebe's novels use literature as a defensive tool to make his English speaking and reading audience and Africans alike aware of the misconceptions propagated about Africans by European writers and brought to life the impact of colonisation upon the Igbo people. The narrators of Achebe's novels do not have the authority to comment on the imperfections of Igbo society;

instead, they adopt a neutral stance. By analysing social stratification in Achebe's two novels, I have argued that Achebe relies on ethnographic realism to present the reader with a neutral representation of the Igbo's cultural life from a dual insider/outsider perspective. Such a perspective is designed to be even-handed: Achebe's objective representation of not only the British coloniser's ruling attitudes and the role of white missionaries but also of Igbo culture places him among the pantheon of modernist realist authors and enables us to categorise these two novels as a kind of realistic ethnographic fiction.

In terms of social hierarchy, the Arabic and Nigerian novels under study highlight how their characters attain their particular positions in their respective societies. Indeed, these novels reiterate similar themes, such as gaining status, social conflict, social mobility, clothes and titles as indicators of status or class, and political parties as sources of power. To this extent, there is a similarity between the characters in both the Egyptian and Nigerian novels. That is to say, the four novels portray how characters such as Abdel Hadi, Abdel Maqsd, Okonkwo, and Ezeulu have been socially stratified in their societies. It is their personal skills and achievements that gave them a high status among their people. Despite the similarity between the characters portrayed in the four novels, al-Sharqawi and Achebe differ in presenting their heroes. While al-Sharqawi inclines towards displays of collective heroism, Achebe opts for individualism. It has been clearly demonstrated that al-Sharqawi has no one hero in his novels; instead, the role is shared, and these heroes are selected from the peasant class and are depicted as revolutionaries. Whether they emerge from the ranks of the propertied or the propertyless, these characters' heroism is presented through their fight against feudalism and official corruption. Such collective heroism is a significant feature in the socialist realist genre. Through his heroes, al-Sharqawi addresses the most critical social issues in Egyptian society at that time, such as poverty, exploitation, and freedom. Moreover, the thesis explains how Egyptian peasants became involved in political life after the 1952 revolution, and how they stood against what had been done in the past. In *al-Fallah*,

al-Sharqawi highlights the role of women through the character of Insaf, who appears as a rebellious figure standing against the violations of Rizk Bey and the agricultural supervisor. This reflects the empowerment of women after the 1952 revolution. Al-Sharqawi highlights that social reform does not come about through silence; instead, it is achieved through other mechanisms, the most important of which are educating the people, working collectively, and standing up to tyrants. As this thesis has demonstrated, this is the most successful aspect of al-Sharqawi's novels. In the socialist realist novels of al-Sharqawi, the hero is not an individual but a collective in a social stratum. Characters are seen as positive to the extent that they align themselves with the interest of that class/stratum.

On the other hand, Achebe's choice of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* as his heroes does not mean that he intends to present heroic individualism, but instead that he wants to highlight how the destruction of traditional social structures causes individuals to fall out of alignment with the collective. This can be regarded as a form of tragic heroism or anti-heroism, and the misalignment of individual to collective is a clear indication of colonisation's impact. In this way, Achebe is careful to show how people climb the social ladder in Igbo society and their subsequent downfall.

The analysis of how al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard* and *al-Fallah* display the features of the genre has enabled us to conclude that they should be included in the canon of socialist realism. More specifically, al-Sharqawi contextualises socialist realism in a rural setting, with the result that his two novels can be said to constitute a model of New Realism in Arabic literature. They introduce a profound representation of class and the socio-political developments in Egypt's modern agrarian society in both the first and second halves of the twentieth century. It also suggests that the socio-political structure of the Igbos in Achebe's novels is narrated in an ethnographical style. At repeated points across both of his novels, the plot integrates detailed descriptions of various aspects of Igbo social life.

There is a strong tendency in academic criticism to consider social stratification as a concept belonging to the Marxist wave of the 1970s. This thesis contends that this concept remains relevant today; indeed, its enduring presence in literature attests to its continued relevance in modern societies characterised by fast-paced political and economic change. In Egypt, the revolutions of 2011 and 2013 have affected the class hierarchy over the last ten years. They have drained the country's economic resources, which has led to an increase in the gap between the higher and lower classes, which has included the collapse of the middle class into the lower class. These revolutions have created two opposing political sides: those who can be categorised as revolutionary and those who can be categorised as anti-revolutionary.

Due to the topicality of revolution in the Egyptian setting, one might expect and hope that al-Sharqawi's works will be the object of renewed critical analysis, including Weberian approaches, in the years to come. There is a new interest in studies of the representation of social classes and social struggle in Egyptian literature. Such an approach might, for example, be applied to examine social stratification in the novels of Sanallah Ibrahim, such as *Zaat* (1992), which reflects the changes that have occurred in the Egyptian middle class from the era of Abdel Nasser, through Sadat until Mubarak. Similarly, Ahmed Khaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008) is a good example that presents a society of two classes: the rich live in gated communities on the north coast of Egypt in *Utopia* the poor are trapped in slum areas in the suburbs of Cairo. There is a sharp dichotomy drawn between the two classes, and the middle class does not exist. The novel has been classified as a social critique, and indeed, the author depends on realistic statistics of poverty in Egypt and draws on research on addiction and violence to paint a picture of Egypt in the future. I contend that the novel is designed to criticise the higher class that lives in *Utopia* and controls the means of production. Critical social analysis of novels like these will help scholars scrutinise the representation of the complex nature of Egypt's social and political order. Investigating the representation of Egyptian social structure before and after the 2011 revolution in

literature may prove crucial to understanding the reasons for this revolution and why the protesters repeat such as the slogan (bread, freedom, social justice).

Likewise, discussing social stratification in Achebe's novels in light of Weber's approach in this study has given new insights into our understanding of the social and political orders of the traditional pre-colonial and colonial societies of West Africa. It can only be hoped that future research will continue to explore representations of the social order of postcolonial or modern African societies as presented in modern African literature. The concept of social stratification is significantly apparent in the literary works of postcolonial African writers such as Camara Laye, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Alex La Guma Sembene Ousmane, and Festus Iyayi. Many novels in modern African literature discuss social stratification and social struggle among classes. For instance, Festus Iyayi's *Violence* (1979) discusses Nigeria's social milieu in the 1970s. The novel presents how the new elite owns the means of production and gets more prosperous at the expense of the class that does not possess anything. The novel attacks the postcolonial Nigerian situation where capitalism is growing terribly in twentieth-century Nigeria.

To conclude, this study has discussed how both al-Sharqawi and Achebe create an excellent medium to express the impact of revolution and colonisation on social stratification. A critical appraisal of the chosen novels in this thesis shows how the socio-political changes have influenced al-Sharqawi and Achebe in their societies. Their novels have introduced a vital representation of specific periods in the history of both Egypt and Nigeria. As for Egyptian society, al-Sharqawi presents how the 1952 revolution brought honour and dignity to the peasants and put an end to the feudal system. Concerning Nigerian society, Achebe shows the insidiousness of colonisation and its destruction of cohesive, traditional social structures.

Works Cited

- Abdel Ghani, Moustafa. *Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: al-dalalah wa al-Shahadah* [Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: Criticism and interpretation]. Cairo: Higher Council of Culture, 2010.
- Abdel Nasser, Gamal. "The Egyptian Revolution". *Foreign Affairs*. Ed, Archibald Cary Coolidge and Hamilton Fish Armstrong. United States: Council on Foreign Relations, Vol 33, no 2, 1955. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20031089
- Abdel Nasser, Gamal. *The Charter*. The United Arab Republic. Information Department, 1962.
- Abdullah, Mohamed Hassan. *Al-reef fi al-riwayah al-A'rabya* [The countryside in the Arabic novel]. Kuwait: Alem Almaa'refa, 1989.
- Abu-Laban, Baha. "The National Character in the Egyptian Revolution." *The Journal of Developing Areas*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1967, pp. 179–198. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4189360.
- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness." New York: Doubleday: *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. 1989. pp.1-20.
- . *Arrow of God*, 2nd ed. London: Heinemann, 1974.
- . "Chi in Igbo Cosmology." *Morning Yet On Creation Day*. New York: Anchor Books, 1975, pp. 131-145
- . "Chinua Achebe: 'Heart of Darkness' Is Inappropriate." Interview by Robert Siegel. *All Things Considered*; Thursday, October 15, 2009. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/113835207>
- . "The Novelist as a Teacher." *The New Statesman*, London, January 29, 1965.
- . *Things Fall Apart*. London: Penguin Red Classics, 2006.
- Afigbo, Adiele. *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. xii, 387, pp. Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria [and] University Press Ltd., 1981

- . "The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule." *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, edited by Obaro Ikime, 410–428. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980.
- Agho, Jude. "Class Conflicts and the Rise of the 'proletarian' novel in Africa." *University of Bucharest Review: Literary & Cultural Studies Series* 1.2 (2011).
- Akash, Amar. "Hussien Murruwa and the Literary Critical Approach" ["Husayn Muruwwa wa Manhagyat al-Nakd al-Adbi"]. *Alhewar Almotamaden*. ed.1374. 2005.
<https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=50136>
- Akinsete, K. Kaneto. "Dancing with the Times: Survival Tactics from Chinua Achebe and Arrow of God." *The Republic*, vol. 4, no. 1, December 3, 2019, December 19/January 20,
<https://republic.com.ng/december-19-january-20/survival-tactics-from-achebe-and-arrow-of-god/>
- Al-Alim, Mahmoud. Amin. *Arba'oon A'man min al-naqd al-taajribi: al-shakl wa al-madmoon fi al-qesa wa al-rewaya al-a'rabya* [Forty Years of Applied Criticism: The Form and Content in the Arabic Story and Novel]. Cairo: Dar Al-Moustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1994.
- Al-Dabaa, Moustafa. *Rewayet Al-Fallah: Fallah Al-Rewya* [The Novel of the peasant: the peasant of the novel]. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, 1998.
- Ali, Kamal Mohammed. *Abd al-Rahmān al-Sharqāwī: al-Fallāḥ al-Thā'ir* [Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: The Rebellious Peasant]. Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Authority, 1990.
- Ali, Sayed Abdullah. "Ard al-Sharqawi: Mohtawa al-Shakl wa (Al-Waqi'iyah al-Ma'zoma)" ["Al-Sharqawi's al-Ard: The Content of the Form and the Realism Crisis"]. *Literature and Criticism*. No. 104. 1994.
- Al-Jayar, Medhat. *Al-Sard al-Rowa'i* [The Arabic narrative]. Cairo: The General Authority of Book. 2008.
- Al-Kas, Mohammad. "Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, al-Mothakaf al-Tha'er wa al-Motamared al-Baheth an al-Adl wa al-Horya" ("Abdel Rahm an al-Sharqawi, the Revolutionary

- Intellectual, the Rebel Seeking Justice and Freedom ”). *Al-Ahram Newspaper*, 2010.
<https://www.almadasupplements.com//view.php?cat=6087>
- Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Al-Ma'addawi, Anwar. “Bidaya wa Nihaya li-Najib Mahfouz” [Najib Mahfouz's A Beginning and an End”]. *Al-Risala* 19.939 (2 July 1951): 757.
- Al-Maraghi, Ahmad. *Al'oom al- Blagah: al- Byan wa al-M'aany wa al B-dy'a* [Rhetoric: eloquence, semantics, and figures of speech]. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al Kalamfor Printing .and Publishing. 2020
- Al-Mousa, Nedal. A Postcolonial Reading of Two Arabic Novels Translated into English: Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's 'Egyptian Earth' and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's 'The Ship'. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, Special Issue on Literature No. 3 October, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2843964>
- Al-Musawi, M. Jassim. *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- El-Saeed , Refaat. *Al-Sahafa al-Yasarya Fi Misr 1925-1948* [Leftist Press in Egypt 1925-1948] 2nd ed. Cairo: Madbouli Library, 1977.
- Al-Sayed, Saleh. “Al-Rawi al-Batal: Qera’a fi rewayatay‘ al-Ard ’wa‘ Shamandoura ” [“The Protagonist Narrator: Readings in‘ al-Ard ’and‘ Shamandoura”]. *Literature and Criticism*. vol. 27, no. 311. 2011.
- Al-Sharqawi, Abdel Rahman. *Al-Ard*. [*The Earth*]. Cairo: Dar al-Shrouk. 2020.
- . *Al-Fallah* [*The Peasant*]. Cairo: Alam Alkotob, 1967.
- . *Egyptian Earth*. Translated by Desmond Stewart. London: Saqi Books. 2005.
- Al-Usayli, Thurayya. *Adab ‘abd Al-Rahman al-Sharqawi* [The literature of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi]. Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Misriyah al-‘Ammah lil-Kitāb, 1995.

- Amuta, Chidi. "Criticism, Ideology and Society: The Instance of Nigerian Literature." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 12.2, 1983.
- . *Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. London: Zed Books, 2017.
- Anis, Abdel Azim. "Fi al-Rewayat al-Masrya al-Hadeetha" [In the modern Egyptian novel]. *Fi al-Thaqafa al-Masrya [In the Egyptian Culture]* edited by Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim and Abdel Azim Anis. Cairo: Dar Althakafa Al Gadida, 1988, PP. 105-142
- Anyadike, Chima. "Duality and Resilience in Chinua Achebe's: *Things Fall Apart*." *Philosophia Africana*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2007, pp. 49–58. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/philafri.10.1.0049 .
- Anyanwu, Chinekebi. "Critical Reflection on Values in Nigerian Literature: Pathways for Igbo Society." *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 11.4 (2018): 139-165.
- Asfour, Gaber. "Literary papers: Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi- Peasant poet and historian of the prophets". *Al-Araby Magazine*, February 1994. <http://www.3rbi.info/Article.asp?ID=3428>
- Attiya, Ahmad Muhammad. "Fi Al-Mohtawa al-Thawri li Adab al-Sharqawi" [The Revolutionary Content in al-Sharqawi's Literary Works] *The General Egyptian Book Organization*. Vol. 14, no. 163. 1970.
- Awad, Luwis. *The Literature of Ideas in Egypt, Part I*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.
- Awuyah, Chris Kwame. "Chinua Achebe's 'AOG': Ezeulu's Response to Change." *College Literature*, 19/20, no. 3/1, 1992, pp. 214–219. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25112005 .
- Ayrout, Henry Habib. *The Egyptian Peasant*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005.
- Azumara, SO. "Marxism and African Literature: Commodification and Ideological Conditioning in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Lagos Papers in English*, 12 (2010): 12-29.
- Badawi, Ahmed Mousa. "The Class Map and the Paths of Social Justice in Egypt." *The Arab Center for Research and Studies*. (2016). Web. 9-12-2017.

- Badr, Abdel Mohsin Taha. *Al-Rewaei wa al-Ard [The Novelist and The Land]*. Cairo: The General Authority of Authorship and Publication. 1971.
- Baiuomy, Mostafa. Derasat fi al-Naqd al-Rewayi: Sorat al-Mara'a fi Rewayat Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi "[Studies in Novel Criticism: The Image of Woman in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's Novel]". *Literature and Criticism*. Volume 5, issue 43, 1989.
- Bakeri, Sawsan. "The Egyptian Writer, Abdel Rahaman al-Sharqawi: His Life and Literature." *Diwan Al-Arab*. 2010. <https://diwanalarab.com/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86>
- Baraka, Magda. *The Egyptian upper class between revolutions, 1919-1952*. United Kingdom: Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1998.
- Bastian, Misty L. "'The Demon Superstition': Abominable Twins and Mission Culture in Onitsha History." *Ethnology*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2001, pp. 13–27. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3773886
- Begam, Richard. Michael Valdez Moses, editors. *Modernism, Postcolonialism, and Globalism: Anglophone Literature, 1950 to the Present*. United States: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Bendix, Reinhard. *Max Weber Classic Monographs Volume II: Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Booker, M. Keith, editor. *Chinua Achebe Encyclopedia*. London: Greenwood Press, 2003.
- . *Encyclopedia of Literature and Politics: H-R*. London: Greenwood Press, 2005.
- Botman, Selma. *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952*. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press. 1991.
- Boulos, Habib. *Mofakroon wa Odabaa Arab Marxoon: Husayn Murruwa Moasses Madrasat al-Nakd al-Wakee al-Ishtaki fi al-Alam al-Araby*" [Marxist Arab Intellectuals and Men-of-

- Letters: Hussien Murruwa, the Founder of the School of Socialist Realism in the Arab World]. *Madarat*, Vol 3, 2010.
- Brennan, Catherine. *Max Weber on Power and Social Stratification: An Interpretation and Critique*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1997.
- Cachia, Pierre. *Arabic Literature: An Overview*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002.
- Carroll, David. *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990.
- “Chinua Achebe of Bard College.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 33, 2001, pp. 28–29. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2678893.
- “Chinua Achebe: The Art of Fiction CXXXVIV.” Interview by Jerome Brooks. *Paris Review*; Winter94, Issue133,p142-166.
- Chuku, Gloria. *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960*. NY: Routledge, 2005.
- Cigar, Norman. “Arab Socialism Revisited: The Yugoslav Roots of Its Ideology”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1983, pp. 152–187. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4282934.
- Clark, Katerina. “Socialist Realism in Soviet Literature.” *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, edited by Neil Cornwell. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer*. New York: New American Library, 1963.
- Crabbs, Jack. “Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser’s Egypt”. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1975, pp. 386–420, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/162751
- Damian U. Opata. “Eternal Sacred Order Versus Conventional Wisdom: A Consideration of Moral Culpability in the Killing of Ikemefuna in ‘Things Fall Apart.’” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1987, pp. 71–79. www.jstor.org/stable/4618155
- Ekechukwu, Alexander. “Igbo Traditional Thought as represented by Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.” *BETH*, 12:2000, pp. 117-128.

- El-Aswad, El-Sayed. *Religion and Folk Cosmology: Scenarios of the Visible and Invisible in Rural Egypt*. London: Greenwood publishing group, 2002.
- Engels, Friedrich. "Engels to Margaret Harkness in London." Letters: Marx-Engels Correspondence, April 1888, Retrieved From http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/letters/88_04_15.htm
- Fahmy, Ninette S. *The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2012.
- Fouda, Abdel Rahman. "Shakhsayat al-Motadayen fi al-Rewaya al-Masrya: Al-Namat al-Salbi Namothajan" ("The Character of the Religious Man in the Egyptian Novel: The case of the Negative Pattern"). *Faculty of Arts magazine*, Beni Sueif University, vol. 34, January-March 2015.
- George, Olakunle. "The Narrative of Conversion in Chinua Achebe's 'Arrow of God.'" *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2005, pp. 344–362. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40247508
- Goldschmidt Jr., Arthur., and Robert Johnston. *Historical Dictionary of Egypt*. 3rd ed., Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2003.
- Gordon, Joel. *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution*. Ny: Oxford University Press. 1992.
- Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov and others "Soviet Writers' Congress 1934," Lawrence & Wishart, 1977. Pp. 25-69, First published in 1935; retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gorky-maxim/1934/soviet-literature.htm>
- Green, M. M. *Igbo Village Affairs*, 2nd ed. Great Britain: Frank and Co. Ltd, 1964.
- Griffiths, John. "What is Legal Pluralism? ". *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, vol. 18, no.24. 1986, pp. 1-55.

- Gutkin, Irina. *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934*. United States: Northwestern University Press, 1999.
- Hafez, Sabry. "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties". *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 7, 1976, pp. 68–84. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4182965.
- . "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 57, no. 1, 1994, pp. 93–112. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/619498
- Hakim, Moody. "Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: Fallah Faqeeh.. Sahfi Thaa'er.. wa Shaer Mogadad" [Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi: Sophisticated Peasant, Bold and Revolutionary Journalist, and an Innovative Poet]. *Rosa al- Youssef*: Egypt. Sep. 2020.
- Haring, Lee. "From Formalism to Ideology: Toward a Creole Narrative Grammar." *Research in African Literatures*, 40, 1, 2009: 156-165.
- Hibbard, Scott W. *Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India, and the United States*. United Kingdom: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
- Hopwood, Derek. *Egypt 1945-1990: Politics and Society*. Third edition. London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002.
- Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. *Egypt Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002.
- Idris, Samah. *Intellectuals and Nasserite Authority in the Egyptian Novel*. 1991. Columbia University, PhD thesis.
- Ikuenobe, Polycarp. "The Idea of Personhood in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Philosophia Africana*, vol. 9, no. 2, Aug. 2006, pp. 117–131. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=22850956&site=eds-live
- Innes, Catherine Lynette. *Chinua Achebe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

- Isstaif, Abdul-Nabi. "Going beyond Socialist Realism, Getting Nowhere: Luwīs' Awad's Cross-Cultural Encounter with the Other". Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hassan (eds) *Tradition, Modernity and Post-Modernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honour of Prof. Issa J. Boullata*, Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 2000, pp. 113–41.
- Istomina, Julia. "An Idiomatic Victory: Postmodern Ethnography in Arrow Of God". *West Africa Review*, Issue 18, 2011
- Jad, Ali B. *Form and Technique in the Egyptian Novel 1912-1971*. Essex: Ancor Press Ltd, 1983.
- Jalal, Mohammad. N. *Al-Waqi'iyyah al-jadida fi al-fikr al-arabi: Al-mashrooa al-Ansari namoothajan*. [The New Realism in the Arabic thought: The Ansari intellectual project as a model]. Lebanon: Arab Institution for studies and Publishing, 2004.
- Jekanowski, Rachel. "A Land in Revolt: Eco-criticism and the Roots of Resistance." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 11.3 (2018): 248--73.
- Johnson, Amy J. *Reconstructing Rural Egypt Ahmed Hussein and the History of Egyptian Development*. New York: Syracuse University Press. 2004.
- Karimi, Bayam. "Adab al-Reef fi Misr wa Iran: al-Ard li al-Sharqawi wa Kelidar li Dowlat Abadi Namothajan" [The rural literature in Egypt and Iran: al-Sharqawi's al-Ard and Dowlatabadi's Kelidar as Models]. 2017. Allameh'Tabataba'i University, PhD Dissertation.
- Kelly, Michael. "Gorky, Aragon and Socialist Realism." *The Crane Bag*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1983, pp. 108–111. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30060556
- Kemp-Welch, A. *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-39*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016.
- Khalifah, Omar. *Nasser in the Egyptian Imaginary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2017.

- Kilpatrick, Henry. "The Egyptian Novel from *Zaynab* to 1980". *Modern Arabic Literature*, Volume 3. Edited by Badawi, M. M. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 223-269.
- Langford, Tonya. "Things Fall Apart: State Failure and the Politics of Intervention." *International Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, spring 1999, p. 59. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/1521-9488.00141.
- Langness, L.L., and Gelya Frank. "Fact, Fiction and Ethnographic Novel," *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*. 1978. pp. 18-22.
- Lenin, V. I. "A Great Beginning. Heroism of the Workers in the Rear: "Communist Subbotniks", *Lenin Collected Works* 29. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965.
- Lukács, György. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Translated by John and Necke Mander. London: Merlin Press, 1963.
- Magrath, Douglas. R. "Arabic Fiction: Tradition, Modernism, and Social Change". *The Muslim World*, 80: 190-205. (1990), <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1478-1913.1990.Tb03496.X>
- Mahmoud, Mustafa. *Al-Islam al-Syasi wa al-Maraka al-Kadema* [Political Islam and the coming battle]. Cairo: Akhbar al-Youm Publishing house, 1992.
- Maklad, Shahenda, et al. "Interview with Shahenda Maklad." *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 38, no. 127, 2011, pp. 159–167., www.jstor.org/stable/23055128
- Manji, Ambreena. "'Like a Mask Dancing': Law and Colonialism in Chinua Achebe's 'Arrow of God.'" *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2000, pp. 626–642. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1410433
- Marcus, George E., and Dick Cushman. "Ethnographies as Texts." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 11, 1982, pp. 25–69. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2155775
- Marsot, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid. *A History of Egypt from the Arab Conquest to the Present*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Pluto Press, 2008.

- Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Translated by Saul K. Padover. Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1937.
- Mayer, Adam. *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*. London: Pluto Press, 2016.
- Mazama, Ama, editor. *Africa in the 21st Century: Toward a New Future*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.
- Messiri, Sawsan. *Ibn al-Balad: A Concept of Egyptian Identity*. Netherlands: Brill, 1978.
- Miers, Suzanne, and Richard L. Roberts, editors. *The End of Slavery in Africa*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.
- Mones, Mona H. George' Moore's Muslin and Abdel Rahman Al -'Sharqawi's The Earth: Novels of Social Protest., 1996. ProQuest. Web. 1 Nov. 2020. pp. 252-65 Ireland, Egypt, and the Far East. Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1996. pp. x, 426. (*Irish literary studies*, 47.) [1996: 60], <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.newcastle.edu.au/docview/2152724523?accountid=10499>
- Morson, Gary Saul. "Socialist Realism and Literary Theory." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1979, pp. 121–133. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/430715
- Murray, John. *A Handbook for Travelers in Lower and Upper Egypt*. United Kingdom: J. Murray, 1888.
- Muruwwa, Husayn. *Derasat Naqdia Fi Dawa al-Manhaj al-Wakie* [*Critical Studies in light of the Realistic Approach*]. Beirut: Dar Almaa'ref, 1988.
- Mousa, Fatema. "Al-Fallah fi Kesas Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi" [The peasant in the stories of Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi]. *Al-Kateb*, vol. 7, no. 81 December 1967, pp. 94-105.
- Musa, Salama. *Al-Adab li al-Shaab* [*Literature for the People*]. Cairo: Hindawi, 2012.
- Musa, Salama. *Al-Iishtrakya* [*Socialism*]. Cairo: Hindawi Association for Education and Culture, 2012.

- Naguib, Sameh. "Qeraa Naqdia li Kitab 'Fil-Thaqafah Al-Misriyyah ' li Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim wa Abdel Azim Anis" [Critical Reading of 'In the Egyptian Culture' by Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim and Abdel Azim Anis]. *Communist Papers Magazin*, 1 November 2009. Retrieved from <https://revsoc.me/arts-and-literature/qr-nqdy-lktb-fy-lthqf-lmsry-lmhmw-d-myn-llm-wbd-lzym-nys/>
- Ngara, Emmanuel. *Art and ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing*. London: Heinemann, 1985.
- Njoku, Raphael Chijioke. "Missionary Enterprise and Sociocultural Change in Igboland, Southeastern Nigeria: Realities, Myths, and Continuities, 1900-1960". *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu*, edited by Chima Jacob Korieh, G. Ugo Nwokeji. Maryland: University Press of America, 2005.
- Nnolim, Charles E. *Approaches to the African Novel: Essays in Analysis*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010.
- . *Issues in African Literature*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010.
- Nnoromele, Patrick C. "The Plight of a Hero in Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'". *College Literature*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2000, pp. 146-156. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25112519
- Nwabueze, Emeka. "Theoretical Construction and Constructive Theorising on the Execution of Ikemefuna in Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart': A Study in Critical Dualism." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2000, pp. 163-173. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3821050
- Nwaubani, Ebere. "Igbo Political Systems". *Lagos Notes and Records*, vol. 12, no. 1, May 2006, pp. 1 - 27.
- Nwoga, D. Ibe. "The Igbo World of Achebe's 'Arrow of God.'" *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1981, pp. 14-42. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3818550

- Ogbaa, Kalu, and Chinua Achebe. "An Interview with Chinua Achebe." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1981, pp. 1–13. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3818549.
- . "A cultural note on Okonkwo's suicide". *Kunapipi*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1981. Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol3/iss2/13>
- Ohadike, Don. C. "Igbo Culture and History." *A Norton Critical Edition: Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart*, edited by Francis Abiola Irele. W. W. Norton, 2009, pp. 236-275.
- Ojiaku, Mazi O. *The Igbo People: Culture and Character*. 1st ed. Bradenton, Florida: Booklocker.com, Inc., 2015.
- Okafor, Clement. "Igbo Cosmology and Parameters of Individual Accomplishment in *Things Fall Apart*". *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, edited by Ernest Emenyonu, Africa World Press, 2004, pp. 85-96.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Casebook*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2003
- Okwu, Augustine S.O. *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions 1857-1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.
- Olaniyan, R. (ed.). *Nigerian History and Culture*. The United Kingdom: Longman, 1985.
- Onoge, Omafume F. "The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature: A Survey." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1974, pp. 385–410. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/483773
- Onyibor, M. I. S. "Igbo Cosmology in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God: An Evaluative Analysis." *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 6, 2016, 110-119. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2016.61011>
- Osakwe, Chima. "Literacy and Social Status in Achebe's AOG and Soyinka's Isara". *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 5:1, 2010, 130-143, DOI: 10.1080/21674736.2010.11690150

- Ostle, Robin, editor. *Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East, 1850-1970*. vol. 9. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Oweis, Jiryis Sbetan. *The impact of land reform on Egyptian agriculture, 1952-1965*. United States: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Land Tenure Center, 1975.
- Padmore, George. *How Britain Rules Africa*. London: Whishart Books Ltd., 1936.
- Powell, Andrea. "Problematising Polygyny in the Historical Novels of Chinua Achebe: The Role of the Western Feminist Scholar." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2008, pp. 166–184. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20109565
- Pyakuryal, Kailash. "Weberian Model of Social Stratification-a Viewpoint." *Occasional papers in Sociology and Anthropology* 7 (2001): 14-25.
- Ranger, Terence. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 211–262.
- Reuters. "Abdel Sharkawi, 67, Egyptian Leftist Writer: [Obituary]." *New York Times*, Nov 11, 1987. ProQuest, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.newcastle.edu.au/newspapers/abdel-sharkawi-67-egyptian-leftist-writer/docview/426667579/se-2?accountid=10499>.
- Sakkut, Hamdi. *The Arabic Novel Bibliography and Critical Introduction 1865-1995*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2000.
- Samatar, Sofia. "Charting the Constellation: Past and Present in *Things Fall Apart*." *Research in African Literatures* 42.2 (2011): 60-71.
- Saunders, Peter. *Social Class and Stratification*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Schmidt, Nancy J. "The Nature of Ethnographic Fiction: A Further Inquiry." *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*. March 1981. pp. 8-18.
- Scott, James. "Hegemony and the Peasantry." *Politics & Society*, vol. 7, no. 3, Sept. 1977, pp. 267–296.

- Selim, Samah. *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Shea, George. *A Reader's Guide to Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. The United States, Enslow Publishers, 2008.
- Siddiq, Muhammad. *Arab Culture and the Novel: Genre, Identity and Agency in Egyptian Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Somerset, Richard. "The Naturalist in Balzac: The Relative Influence of Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire." *French Forum*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2002, pp. 81–111. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40552296.
- Staif, A.N. "The Soviet Impact on Modern Arabic Literary Criticism: Husayn Muruwwa's Concept of the 'New Realism.'" *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1984, pp. 156–171. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/194917
- Starkey, Paul. *Modern Arabic Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Sterling, Eric. "Exploration and Colonization in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Exploration and Colonization*. Ed. Harold Bloom & Blake Hobby. US: Infobase Publishing, 2010.
- Stolzman, James, and Herbert Gamberg. "Marxist Class Analysis versus Stratification Analysis as General Approaches to Social Inequality." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 18, 1973, pp. 105–125. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41035241.
- Uchendu, Victor. G. "The Igbo World." *A Norton Critical Edition: Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart*, edited by Francis Abiola Irele. W. W. Norton, 2009, pp. 225-235.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Petals of Blood*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1977.
- Weber, Max. "The Distribution of Power Within the Community: Classes, Stände, Parties." Translated by Dagmar Waters et al., *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 10, no. 2 May 2010, pp. 137–152, DOI:10.1177/1468795X10361546.

- . *Economy and Society: A New Translation*. Edited and translated by Keith Tribe. Harvard University Press, 2019.
- . *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: The Free Press. 1964.
- Webster et al. *The Revolutionary Years: West Africa Since 1800*. Hong Kong: Longman, 1980.
- Wren, Robert M. *Achebe's world: the historical and cultural context of the novels of Chinua Achebe*. Essex: Longman, 1981.
- Yassin, al-Sayed. *Ma Qabl al-Thawra, Misr Bayn al-Azma wa al-Nahd'a: Naqd Ejtimai wa Roaya Mostaqbalya [Before Revolution, Egypt between Crisis and Renaissance: Social Criticism and Future Vision]*. Cairo: Nahdet Misr Publishing House, 2011.
- Zakarriya, Jihan. "Identity, Land and Revolt in *Egyptian Earth*: An Ecofeminist Reading". *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 00.0 (2020), pp. 1–22
- Žekulin, G. Forerunner of Socialist Realism: The Novel "What to Do?" by N. G. Chernyshevsky. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 41, No. 97 (Jun., 1963), pp. 467-483
- ZHU, Tiffany. "Putting the Realism in Socialist Realism: Gorky's Mother as a Bridge between Soviet and Chernyshevskian Literary Aesthetics". *Sandford Undergraduate Research Journal*, vol. 17, Spring 2018, pp. 6-11.