



# Cultural Values Orientation of African Traditional Society in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*

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**Abstract.** This research paper analyzes cultural values orientation of African traditional society in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*. The objective of this research paper is to analyze the kinds of cultural values orientation reflected in two Anglophone literary works. The research approach used in this research paper is literary anthropology endorsed with Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Cultural Values Orientation Theory to analyze the implied cultural values of the African traditional community reflected in the two literary works. The results of the research indicate that African traditional society has several kinds of cultural values orientations such as, time, human and natural environment, and motive for behaving-related cultural values orientation.

**Keywords:** Time, Human and Natural Environment, Motive for Behaving-Related Cultural Values Orientation

## 1 Introduction

Every culture has specific forms and elements of cultural universals distinguishing from any other cultures. Culture can be well-recognized with certain features and typical colors of the culture itself. Nonetheless, they have not yet described the basic thought and the behavior orientation of the people as the owners of the culture. To understand people's mindset and orientation in a certain culture, cultural values orientation must be learned. The reason is that all people's behaviors and actions are always influenced by cultural values orientation revolving their life which is different from any people with a different background of culture [10].

Cultural values orientation is the highest level and the most intangible matter of a tradition because cultural values are the concepts living in mind of most people within a group of society in relation to something they consider valuable, precious, and important in life. Therefore, it can be a pivotal guidance that gives a direction and an orientation to the people's life. Value can be understood as conception, either explicit or implicit, distinctive of a person or a characteristic of a group, of the desirable that affects on the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action (Kluckhohn,

1961:395). Even though cultural values have a function as life guidance of people in a certain community, as an invisible and intangible concept, a cultural value in general has a very broad scope and a difficult thing to explain rationally. As a result of it, cultural values of a certain culture are living within an emotional area of humans' mind as the owners of the culture.

Culture has many reflective products, one of which is in the form of literature. Literary work as a product of people's culture also reveals cultural values orientation of a certain society. Two literary works that indicate cultural values orientation phenomena are two African Anglophone short stories of Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*. Both literary works are, indeed, identical with people's life in African traditional society and their reaction towards the massive influence of the foreign culture.

## **2 Methods**

### **2.1 Research Approach**

Referring to the background of the research that reveals cultural values orientation phenomena of two African Anglophone short stories in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*, the writer applies anthropological approach in literature to analyze such related phenomena in both literary works. Anthropological approach in literature is a research perspective that emphasizes on ethnography to analyze cultural aspects in a certain society reflected in literary works [2]. It is also stated that anthropological approach in literature is a study of literary work in relation to the conceptual, interactional, and physical cultures that people produce in a certain community, such as belief, religion, law, myth, custom, language, etc. [11]. In connection with this anthropological approach in literature, the writer uses Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Cultural Values Orientation theory to analyze cultural values orientation which is reflected in both literary works.

### **2.2 Method of Data Collection**

Method of data collection is conducted by using library research to analyze two literary works of Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*. Library research is research which is conducted in a working room or a library of a researcher to obtain data and information related to the object of the research through books, or any other audio-visual appliances [13]. The writer uses a literary work of Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path* as primary data of the research, while secondary data are taken from any other related written sources functioned as supporting data, such as reference textbooks, journals, articles, and so forth.

### 3 Result and Discussion

In relation to the analysis of cultural values orientation in this research paper, the writer has only found two cultural values orientations in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark*, those are human-and-time relationship orientation and human-and-natural environment relationship orientation. Meanwhile, in analyzing cultural values orientation in Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*, the writer has only obtained two cultural values orientations, namely human-and-time relationship orientation and motive-for-behaving-related orientation.

#### 3.1 Cultural Values Orientation In Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's A Meeting in The Dark

##### 3.1.1 Human-and-Time Relationship Orientation

Cultural values orientation of the elder people reflected in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* in connection with human-and-time relationship can be analyzed that they are past time oriented. Such a tendency is reflected in the elder's perception of Limuru village in Kenya that holds the old tradition of the ancestors so strongly inherited from time to time and from generation to generation. They make it as a reference or a main guidance in deciding something for the existence of the tribe and the village. This persistent stance can clearly be viewed when one of the elder people, Wamuhu's father, rejects a new tradition spread by the white men which is not well-suited with the tribe's old tradition. Wamuhu's father thinks that a new culture shown by many young villagers, boys, and girls, as the result of the bad influence of the white men, is not compatible with the tribe's culture. The white men are taking along with a new, peculiar belief, a free life style, and strange ways that lead to the destruction of the glorious values of the existing tradition. It begins with the new belief of the white men that goes against with traditional belief of the tribe. They want the local people to follow the way their religion says, such as, not to circumcise a woman. A circumcised woman cannot get married with a modern, educated man since women's circumcision is the symbol of the backward traditional people. This is going against the long-time traditional values of the local traditional society that consider circumcision is a sacred thing for women because it is the symbol of a holy tribal affiliation and a protection against sexual activity before marriage. The coming of white men as colonizers is also badly affecting on the youngsters with a free life style between boys and girls which for local tribe people such a behavior is strictly forbidden. Many young girls are pregnant without marriage and giving birth without having a husband or a real husband. Some of the young women get married with another man who should not take a responsibility for the woman's pregnancy. Youngsters are not living a life like people used to be in the local community as quoted:

*The tribe's code of behaviour was broken. The new faith could not keep the tribe together. How could it? The men who followed the new faith would not let the girls be circumcised. And they would not let their sons marry circumcised girls. They made unmarried girls their wives and then left them with fatherless children. Those coated with the white clay of the white men's ways are the worst. He trembled. And he feared. He feared for the tribe. For now, he saw it was not only the educated men who were coated with strange ways, but the whole tribe. The old man trembled and cried inside mourning for a tribe that crumbled.*  
(Thiong'o, 1975:62)

Referring to the quotation, it can be analyzed that the old man, Wamuhu's father, cannot accept the influence of the white men's new culture and feels so upset that he cannot see a bitter reality of the crumbling tribe in his homeland in Limuru. It can be inferred that because Wamuhu's father as the old man of the tribe has been instilled with such a cultural values orientation since childhood by his ancestors and society, those values are well-rooted in his mind and soul. Therefore, such a cultural values orientation cannot be replaced with another in a relatively-short time by indoctrinating it rationally.

### **3.1.2 Human-and-Natural Environment Relationship Orientation**

Cultural values orientation of the local people reflected in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* in terms of human-and-natural environment relationship can be analyzed that they are oriented to have a harmonious relationship with nature. Traditional society in Limuru is whole-heartedly committed to keep a life balance with the nature around including vegetations, animals, forests, rivers, and so on. This friendly life concept is giving advantages between humans and nature and becomes the underlying reason to do something for Limuru people in relation to treating, protecting, and caring natural environment.

As described in the text, the main character of the story, John, is amazed with the land of Limuru in July in which the hills, ridges, valleys, and plains surrounding the village are missing in the heavy mist. He expresses his friendly manner and enjoys happiness with the greenish natural scenery so spiritedly that he is willing to touch the land, embrace it, and lay on the grass. John reveals his feeling of excitement and awareness to live with family till death and to be buried in Limuru village. The land of Limuru attracts many people including the white people to live since a green natural environment is well maintained by the local community. The local people live in their traditional huts with laughter, heated talks, and pure contentedness around little fires when darkness and heavenly stars start twinkling in the sky. Nature gives a lot of happiness to the local community especially John who loves the homeland of Limuru with no doubt to leave away to another place as described in the following quotation:

*It was perfect July weather in Limuru.*

*Limuru was a land of contrasts and evoked differing emotions at different times. Once John would be fascinated and would yearn to touch the land, embrace it or just be on the grass.*

*Content to live here. At least he thought he would never like to die and be buried anywhere else but at Limuru.*

*(Thiong'o, 1975:66)*

It can be analyzed, based on the quotation, that it is impossible for local folk to have the feeling of love and happiness without having a good intention and ability to preserve the greenish natural environment. Unprotected, neglected, exploited nature will lead to the damage of environment and misery for the local society. Taking a responsibility to take care of the nature around is the key to live a happy, harmonious life. Living in balance with nature becomes a cultural values orientation of the local people in Limuru.

### **3.2 Cultural Values Orientation In Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path***

#### **3.2.1 Human-and-Time Relationship Orientation**

Cultural values orientation of the common elder people in Ndume village reflected in Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path* in terms of human-and-time relationship can be analyzed that they are past time oriented. This mindset can be viewed as represented by the slight-stoop old man, the respected village priest, while reminding Mr Obi as the headmaster of the modern school affiliated with the white people, of the importance of respecting the village old tradition. Dead men's path for local villagers is the sacred path that cannot be replaced, closed, even ruined by the authoritative policy of any institutions including the modern school where the path is passing through the school compound. The path emerges to be very meaningful for the local villagers since it connects the village shrine and the village grave.

Time-related values to the past tradition by giving the best honor to the sacred ancestral footpath is something inevitable and unbannable for local folks. This is because the path has been existing long time ago before the building of the modern school is established, even before the new headmaster of the white men school is born. In local villagers' belief, the ancestral footpath is not merely footpath to step on, but also the dead path of their ancestors and the lifepath of all children of the local folks coming in to be born. This belief seems extremely illogical for modern people like Mr Obi, yet belief is beyond the logic of humans for other people. The way to understand for such a belief of the local community is by just believing what they have been doing with the intention of giving a high dignity to the dead or their ancestors. The argument to give a respect to the old tradition is depicted as follows:

*“What you say may be true,” replied the priest, “but we follow the practices of our fathers. If you reopen the path, we shall have nothing to quarrel about. What I always say is: let the hawk perch and let the eagle perch” he rose to go. [1]*

The quotation mentioned implies, that the village community represented by the old man, have a win-win solution advice and a local wisdom in taking a measure against another different stance to reopen the ancestral path for local people. The quotation also indicates that cultural values orientation of the Ndume villagers refer to the old-time tradition as manifestation of recognition and respect to their dead ancestors. They think wisely that old-time tradition and modern culture can stand side by side harmoniously without humiliating one another.

### **3.2.2 Motive-For-Behaving-Related Orientation**

In every behavior and action that people have chosen, there must be a motive. Motive becomes the underlying reason for people to take an action. Motive is internal driving power as well as external driving force which can be in the form of pride, respect, appreciation, love, hatred, revenge, curiosity, goal, and so forth. In Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*, cultural values orientation of the village people is generating from themselves to do something that they think is right.

The things that can be discerned in the story are, for example, when someday an old woman walks through the path from the village by crossing the school compound to the bushes. The old woman spontaneously has an internal driving power with her stepping on through the footpath in the back of the school because that does not matter anyway to do for the local villager. The big problem also emerges someday when the modern white school tries to close the footpath crossing the school compound. The local folks boost their internal driving power to demonstrate in resisting the idea of closing the path as described in the following quotation:

*“The path,” said the teacher apologetically, ...”*

*“And what has that got to do with the school?” asked the headmaster.*

*“Well, I don't know,” replied the other with a shrug of the shoulders.*

*“But I remember there was a big row some time ago when we attempted to close it.”*

[1]

Referring to the quotation, it can also be inferred that local folks' motive for behaving to do something is internally due to defending their ancestral tradition to exist. Such a cultural values orientation is also viewed when the local people destroy the lovely hedges, trample the school flowers to death, and shatter down one of the school buildings. They have a strong motive to do, that is, keeping and preserving the old-time tradition with all their heart. The ancestral footpath, however, becomes an extraordinarily strong belief which belongs to the local community. It implies that any

other parties cannot do as they wish with the existence of the footpath including modern school headmaster.

## 4 Conclusion

The cultural values orientation of African traditional society is reflected in Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's *A Meeting in The Dark* and Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*. By using Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's cultural values orientation theory, it can be analyzed that the implied cultural values orientation of the African traditional community is revealed in the two literary works. It can be concluded that African traditional society has several kinds of cultural values orientations such as, time, human and natural environment, and motive for behaving-related cultural values orientation.

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