

Article

## **Kant, Fabian and Achebe: From the Enlightenment to Colonialism: Time, discourse and the temporal Other**

*Emma O'Shaughnessy*

The following essay closely dissects aspects of Johannes Fabian's book, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology made its Object*<sup>1</sup> to provide a starting point for an interrogation into the integral place that time—as a concept and social mechanism—occupies within 'discourse'. When I refer to discourse, I refer to it in the Foucauldian sense. Stuart Hall's clear definition is helpful:

...Not only is discourse always implicated in power, discourse is one of the 'systems' through which power circulates. The knowledge which it produces constitutes a kind of power, exercised over those who are 'known.' When that knowledge is exercised in practice, those who are 'known' in a particular way will be subject (i.e. subjected) to it. This is always a power relation...those who produce the discourses also have the power to make it true— i.e. to enforce its validity, its scientific status.<sup>2</sup>

In the pages that follow, I will first address the central argument in *Time and the Other*, which is, simply put, the impact of western, enlightenment period notions of time in and on the colonial terrain. I will try to show how Fabian sees conceptions of time as a central device in western discourse and the colonial venture. Secondly, I will make use of Immanuel Kant's ideas in the *Second Section of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements*, since they assist Fabian's argument by demonstrating how human beings essentially emplace themselves temporally in the world. In other words, temporal conceptions can reflect or produce a particular ideological or discursive world-view. Thirdly, I will turn to Chinua Achebe's novel, *Arrow of God*, which will allow me to take the temporal discussion one step further, since the novel is preoccupied with the colonial encounter in Nigeria in the early twentieth century. The novel presents the physical and ideological collisions between western agents and the Igbo people. In this collision, one can track evidence of two alternate, often-antagonistic cultural praxes, bound to which are alternating conceptions of time and differing temporal logics.<sup>3</sup> While Fabian and Kant show how a conception of Time is

bound to how the West began operating ideologically in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Africa, Achebe's novel allows for one to grasp the nuances of these arguments as the author depicts the pervasive effects of colonial ideology in Nigeria during this period. Creating a three way conversation between Achebe, Kant and Fabian allows one to trace the nature and power of the colonial logic as well as the relationship between all three writers, especially the dialogue between Kant and Fabian. This essay is therefore an exercise in creating bridges between schools of thought and forms of representation, so as to emphasize the multiple levels on which discourse, time and ideology are conceived and produced, as well as challenged.

A large number of contemporary social and philosophical theorists are preoccupied with the ways in which we conceive of ourselves within time as a way of understanding more about the different mechanisms people use to form identities and conceive of themselves, as part of a social fabric.<sup>4</sup> Fabian, an anthropologist, argues for more than just understanding humans as products of the social aspects of time and memory, however. He opens up complex, yet clear links between time, discourse, identity and power, in the colonial terrain. This renders his work valuable in the postcolonial climate of thought—especially one that is concerned with interrogating the workings of history in a continent like Africa. In his book, *Time and the Other* Fabian explicitly interrogates the past. The following essay follows suit and casts its glance 'backwards'—to the logic of the past, revealing how his work resonates with the ideas put forward by one of the Enlightenment's greatest thinkers, Immanuel Kant. Through 'looking back,' one can see how understanding Kant allows one to understand the strength of Fabian's argument. Although Fabian critiques the nature of Kant's enlightenment logic, the two thinkers, in conversation, become deeply intertwined and useful to each other, and to us, as we still try to understand the effects of the colonial enterprise in Africa.

In *Time and the Emerging Other* Fabian foregrounds early anthropological discourse, a discipline that, according to the author, provided the scaffolding for

‘modern’ ideas about mankind. Fabian points out quickly that the development of a naturalised, generalised system of time, adopted and developed by western anthropological discourse in the Enlightenment period, provided the intellectual and ‘scientific’ framework for emergent ideas about human history and human subjectivity. He writes that:

Enlightenment thought marks a break with an essentially Medieval, Christian (or Judeo-Christian) vision of Time. In the Medieval paradigm, the Time of Salvation was conceived as inclusive or incorporative...[t]he naturalization of Time which succeeded to that view defines temporal relations as exclusive and expansive...<sup>5</sup>

Fabian emphasizes the link between the West’s new secularized conception of time and its projection and sustenance of an ideological world-view founded on distinctions and othering. This link, he points out, is clear:

‘[I]ittle needs to be said, I assume, about separation and distancing in colonialist praxis which drew its ideological justification from Enlightenment thought and later evolutionism.’<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, understanding this link is central to understanding the insidious power of colonial discursive practice. Through ‘evolutionism,’ time came to be seen as ‘naturalized.’ In other words, the ‘natural’ development of man in nature was tracked along temporal lines: human evolutionary processes were plotted teleologically. This became the accepted (western) means of understanding the passage of mankind’s progress and human development. Fabian explains this:

...the starting point for any attempt to understand evolutionary temporalizing will be achieved with the secularisation of Time. It resulted in a conception which contains two elements of particular importance to further developments in the nineteenth century: 1.) Time is immanent to, hence coextensive with, the world (or nature, or the universe, depending on the argument); 2) relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociological entities) can be understood as temporal relations. Dispersal in space reflects directly, which is not to say simply or in obvious ways, sequence in Time. Given the socio-political context of these axiomatic truths in the industrializing and colonising West, it would seem almost inevitable that social theorists would begin to look for scientific frames in which to place ideas of progress, improvement, and development....<sup>7</sup>

The eighteenth and nineteenth century Western man’s belief that he was more rational, evolved or civilised than the ‘savage’ non-western man was generated

through the idea that he was somehow further along the evolutionary scale than any other peoples. The linear character of [this] conception<sup>8</sup> seemingly provided evidence that mankind can exist in different ‘stages’ simultaneously, and that non-western or ‘uncivilized’ man could occupy retarded space while western man could be more advanced. With Fabian, it becomes evident how this flawed evolutionist logic facilitated the types of dichotomies we see underlying Western and colonial discourse, such as ‘traditional’ vs. ‘modern’, ‘literate’ vs. ‘preliterate,’ ‘savage’ vs. ‘civilized.’ These binaries, produced through a teleological view of human history, became inseparable from dominant conceptions of how the western self fitted into the world, and were used to explain the supposedly ‘natural’ advancement of some societies over others. If one looks, for example, at colonialism’s ‘civilising mission,’ a major theme of the colonial venture, one sees as its premise the notion that western man and his institutions held a kind of naturally superior position on the ‘evolutionary’ scale.

Time, therefore, is one of the channels through which the west depicted and created the colonial Other in Africa. As Fabian emphasises this when he writes that ‘there is no knowledge of the Other which is not also a temporal, historical, a political act.’<sup>9</sup> In many ways then, such a conception of time can be perceived as a conditioning factor as well as a conditioned ‘symptom’ of the western discourse that emerged during the Enlightenment: one that was projected *onto* the globe, notably in the colonial terrain and, simultaneously one that produced a construction of the *temporal* self, always in relation to a temporal Other. And, in this way, the temporal act becomes the discursive act:

A discourse employing terms such as primitive, savage, (but also tribal, traditional, Third World, or whatever euphemism is current) does not think or observe, or critically study, the “primitive”; it thinks, observes, studies in terms of the primitive. Primitive being essentially a temporal concept, is a category, not an object of Western thought.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, one can grasp that a particular temporal ordering of the world both produces and is reinforced by ideology. Time itself can only be seen as the product of the human mind. What proves fascinating about *Time and the Emerging Other* is its explication of the self-perpetuating nature of the process

that human beings embark on as they seek to impose a subjective temporal order on the outside world. Evident from Fabian's argument is that time acts as an implicit 'enabling factor' for this human ordering as well as being an essential function of any discourse and its strategies of power.

At this point, one can turn to Kant, who explains how time produces an understanding of the world. In 'The Transcendental Doctrine of Elements: Of Time,' a section of his now famous work, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes the following:

Time is not an empirical concept deduced from any experience, for neither coexistence nor succession would enter into our perception, if the representation of time were not given a priori. Only when this representation a priori is given, can we imagine that certain things happen at the same time (simultaneously) or at different times (successively).<sup>11</sup>

He explains that without the ability to intuitively represent time before we experience the world, we would have not ability to perceive any facet of life here on earth, like change, simultaneity or succession. Furthermore, 'Time is a necessary representation on which all intuitions depend' and that '[w]e cannot take away time from phenomena in general, though we can well take away phenomena out of time.'<sup>12</sup> Thus Kant observes that it is only through time that we can mediate our external environment as well as our perception of external 'things' or objects— rendering everything as a product of our internal intuitions of it/them.

While Kant develops the criteria of *apriori* temporal intuition, Fabian, as we have seen, radically interrogates the secularized, teleological ordering of this intuition and its assumed universality. Although Kant does not seem to explicitly support this argument, we can see in the following passage an indication of the generalisation of how man supposedly envisions time:

Time is nothing but the form of the internal sense, that is, of our intuition of ourselves, and of our internal state. Time cannot be a determination peculiar to external phenomena. It refers neither to their shape, nor their position, etc. it only determines the relation of representations in our internal state. And exactly because this internal intuition supplies no shape, we try to make good this deficiency by means

of analogies, to represent to ourselves the succession of time by a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series of one dimension only; and we conclude from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with one exception, i.e. that all parts of the former are simultaneous, those of the latter successive.<sup>13</sup>

Here, Kant argues that the human psyche, when faced with what is ultimately an intangible and formless and unfixed intuition, tends to ‘make good this deficiency’ by pinning down the idea of time as an observable system—something linear, with a beginning and end, possessing an identifiable, recognisable ‘shape’ or inherent logic— so that ‘all parts of the former are simultaneous and all parts of the latter successive.’ What Kant does not seem to question, as Fabian does, is the origins or effects of the kind of reasoning that presupposes that a teleological system of Time is somehow universally instinctive.

Indeed, as Fabian points out and as we see in a context like the colonial terrain, this kind of temporal reasoning and the primacy given to this temporal reasoning can in fact be ideologically invasive, especially when it is imposed upon societies that have their own equally valid conceptions of Time, such as cyclical ones.<sup>14</sup> Kant writes that ‘we deny... that time has any claim on absolute reality, so that, without taking into account the form of our sensuous condition, it should by itself be a condition or quality inherent in things...’<sup>15</sup> This articulates Fabian’s point— that, as a function of the subjective mind, time is a function of subjective belief systems only. But, as Fabian demonstrates, a projection of a particular way of thinking into the world shows itself to be so subjectively inherent that this projection is perceived to be natural, normal and universal and becomes inseparable from ideology and discourse. Time becomes a lens through which behaviour, self and structure are mediated and performed.

The turning of this lens onto the colonial terrain was a violent one, as we know. While Fabian demonstrates these relationships in a highly sophisticated way, he sometimes can become, like Kant, inaccessible. For this reason we can look elsewhere for a way of understanding the implications of time and its

constructions within a colonial context. Chinua Achebe's novel, *Arrow of God* is a powerful site in which to do this. It presents a narrative centred on the colonial encounter in Nigeria in the early twentieth century. It is written predominantly from the perspective of the indigenous Igbo people but is juxtaposed with the perspective of colonist protagonists. Achebe's third-person narration allows for changes in perspective and focalisation, which produces a text in which the reader engages with subtle differences in narrative style and content depending on which perspective is being used. What is remarkable is the novel's construction of the colonists' and Igbo's different relationships with the landscape, the alternate ways in which they conceive of their mutual encounter and the different ways in which they interpret events or things. We see in *Arrow of God* how the West's linear conception of time is embedded in the European protagonists' attempts to control and reify the African landscape and the people in it, into an identifiably 'naturalised' and ultimately, fixed system—of thought, being and practice. The colonists' narrative also show how their perspectives are mediated by a world-view limited by an particularly rigid conception of human history. In contrast, the Igbo narrative is thick with metaphor, knowledge systems founded on the transience of the divide between the spirit and the material world, the possibility of multiple and simultaneous times or moment of experience<sup>16</sup>, animistic faith rituals and the cyclical, repetitive nature of oral, customary law. Achebe also offers a suggestion of the future. At the end of his novel, he suggests what was to come as the product of the intersection between the West and the colony, allowing us to take Fabian's argument on step further.

Before I reach that point, let me demonstrate a few key areas in which Achebe depicts the encounter between the Time of the West and the Time of the Igbo. The world-view we access in the Igbo narrative is one that is preoccupied with flexibility and the recurrence of community experience.

Take the following excerpt:

He had a Mask which he assumed in this and other important occasions. The Mask was called Ogolanya or Man of Riches, and at every Idemili festival crowds of people from all the villages and their neighbours came to the ilo of Umunneorato to see this great Mask bedecked with mirrors and rich cloths of many colours. That year the Mask spoke a monologue full

of boast. Some of those who knew the language of ancestral spirits said that Nwaka spoke of his challenge to Ulu.

“Folk assembled, listen hear my words. There is a place, Beyond Knowing, where no man or spirit ventures unless he holds in his right hand his kith and in his left hand his kin. But I, Ogolanya, Evil Dog that Warms His Body through the Head, I took neither kith nor kin and yet went to this place.”<sup>17</sup>

Above, Nwaka, a member of the Umuaro tribe is recounting a story of traversing into the spirit realm of the Igbo ancestors and Gods. If we look at the line ‘ He had a Mask which he assumed in this and other important occasions’ and then move to the second part of the excerpt, to the line that reads ‘ That year the Mask spoke a monologue full of boast. Some of those who knew the language of ancestral spirits said that Nwaka spoke of his challenge to Ulu,’ we see that Achebe portrays the Mask and Nwaka as interchangeable. The ability of the Igbo people to inhabit the space and time of the Mask indicates their belief that the time of death and life are not distinctly separate. Nwaka is able to assume the identity of the Mask because there is no difference between the spaces and time they occupy. In the same sense, it is through the Mask that Nwaka is able to access the place, ‘Beyond knowing’ and yet nowhere does Achebe or Nwaka imply that the place ‘Beyond Knowing’ becomes ‘known’ through this process. The ‘unknowable’ may be accessible but it remains the impermanent domain of the spirit world. Implicit here is the idea that the ancestors, the Gods and the Igbo people co-inhabit the same and yet different time, indicating a ‘synchronous/simultaneous’<sup>18</sup> existence. Each time is distinguishable from the other, yet the passage between the two is open. Fabian identifies the ‘possibility of temporal co-existence’ –or coevalness– as a defining feature of practices that engage with the ‘presence of ancestors and the efficacy of magic’ explaining that ‘relationships between the living and the dead, or relationships between the agent and the object of magic’<sup>19</sup> presuppose cultural conceptions of contemporaneity’<sup>20</sup> In *Arrow of God*, the Masks and the personal, carved deities of each man give access to a realm of spirits and ancestors and indicate a cultural praxis based on notions of temporal fluidity, ones that ‘Western rational belief’<sup>21</sup> would disregard.

This is evident from the following scenario, which Achebe artfully constructs: early on in the novel, a feud breaks out between Okperi and Umuaro, two neighbouring villages. The fight starts because the European colonial officers, when mapping the land, dividing it according to their own administrative specifications, assign a piece of historically neutral Igbo land to the Umuaro village. This sparks off a heated debate about to whom the land belongs (and why), resulting in a man from Umuaro, Otikpo, breaking the *ikenga* or sacred personal deity of a man, Ebo, from Okperi. In the Igbo faith, this is an abomination—sacrilege, inconceivably hostile, the greatest evil—so much so that Ebo, in a rage of disbelief shoots and kills Otikpo. Without his *ikenga*, there is no guarantee that a man can be assured of passing into the ancestor's realm when he dies, nor communing with it while he is alive. The rupture it leaves in the villages' relationship is incredible, and so begins the war.

Later, when Achebe has shifted the narrative to that of the Europeans, we read about the incident, from a different perspective, however. The following excerpt is extremely useful in articulating many aspects of Fabian's argument. Captain Winterbottom, the self-professed veteran District Officer, is acquainting Mr Clarke, the new Assistant District Officer with the incident, along with the African terrain and the colonial administration:

'That's most interesting. How far is this other village, Umuaro?' Clarke knew instinctively that the more ignorant he seemed the better. 'Oh, about six miles or more, but to a native that's a foreign country...'

'This war between Umuaro and Okperi began in a rather interesting way... This war started because a man from Umuaro went to visit a friend in Okperi one fine morning and after he had had two gallons of palm wine—its incredible how much of that dreadful stuff they tuck away—anyhow, this man from Umuaro having drunk his friend's palm wine, reached for his *ikenga* and split it in two. I may explain that *ikenga* is the most powerful fetish in the Ibo man's arsenal, so to speak. It represents his ancestors to whom he must make daily sacrifice. When he dies it is split in two; one half is buried with him and the other half is thrown away. You can see the implication of what our friend from Umuaro did in splitting his host's fetish... the outraged host reached for his gun and blew the other fellows head off. And so a regular war developed... until I stepped in. I went into the question of the ownership of the piece of land which was the remote cause of all the unrest and found without shade of doubt that it belonged to the Okperi...

One thing you must remember in dealing with the natives is that like children they are great liars... I have a theory that the Ibos in the distant past assimilated a small Negroid tribe of the same complexion of Red Indians.'<sup>22</sup>

In Captain Winterbottom's eyes, what is the centre of an Igbo person's faith is relegated to the status of a fetish. Furthermore, he undermines the importance of the *ikenga* by implying that the anger was largely due to drunkenness. He trivialises something of great import to the Igbo, demonstrating his disbelief in the possibility of the kind of spiritual animism that underlies the daily activity of Igbo society. His mocking tone is framed by the comment that natives are like children and the implication is not of innocence but of deception and primitiveness. This is accentuated by the last two lines of the excerpt and it becomes very clear that Captain Winterbottom sees all the Igbo practice, including their faith, as a sign of their lack of civilisation, lacking in progress and development. This strongly echoes Fabian's statement that 'primitive' is not a category but an 'object' of Western thought. Winterbottom's tone is dismissive, especially when he remarks that the neighbouring village of Okperi is six miles from Umuaro- 'but to a native that is a foreign country.' Again, the imposition of Winterbottom's westernised conception of time and space is imposed upon the landscape. The reader might pick up that written into Captain Winterbottom's words is evidence that his perception of distance and time is merely a subjective projection, seeing as he can identify that the 'native' has a different perception of what he refers to as 'six miles.' However, not for a moment does he question that an incremental measuring of the external environment may in fact be only a product of one particular way of seeing and ordering the world: the West's.

Indeed, the colonial administration's response to the African terrain is to refigure it into something identifiable and controllable-something that 'fits' easily into the system of the West. This is further illustrated in *Arrow of God* through the colonists' constructions of roads: in other words, the demarcation of new, fixed boundaries in the landscape. This is repeated in the enforcement of a penal system, which is essentially a way of binding a man or woman to one place and

one time: that within the prison. Ultimately, the West invades the temporal (and spatial) boundaries of the colonial terrain, imposing its own Time on it but simultaneously it protects itself by maintaining distance from this terrain. The emphasis on the savagery of the African people in comparison to the civilised Europeans ensures this distance, maintains the object of the Western gaze, the Other and justifies the methods of colonial rule:

Captain Winterbottom could only put it down to cruelty of a kind which Africa alone produced. It was this elemental cruelty in the psychological make-up of the native that the starry-eyed European found so hard to understand.<sup>23</sup>

Fabian writes that ‘it takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the time of its Other’<sup>24</sup> and indeed what we start to see in *Arrow of God* are the ways in which Europe protects itself from a ‘temporal’ invasion— by maintaining and enforcing its ‘superiority’ in the ‘natural’ passage of human history.

Ironically, in reaction to this regime of power, the Igbo people’s response is to become more fluid, as read in the following:

He had never heard his father speak to anyone as an equal. ‘The world is changing’ he had told him. ‘ I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-to-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: “ Men of today have learned to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching...”’The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place...<sup>25</sup>

Reinforcing this notion of adaptability, the speaker Ezeulu draws attention to one of the main elements of the Igbo narrative in the text- the emphasis on metaphor. The metaphors that the characters and Achebe constantly use are almost all metaphors of nature and animals. This implies not only that the Igbo take their cue from nature, as opposed to enforcing a system onto it, but the power of metaphor is that it displaces signification of one thing and aligns it with another— a simultaneous exchange. This reinforces the notion of the prevalence of spatio-temporal contemporaneity in Igbo society, and also reveals that the time of the Igbo individual is not considered inaccessible by those/things from another. This is emphasised by interactions amongst the Umuaro village that illustrate a

tradition of spoken customary law, inherited from one generation to the next, as in the lines:

‘ A man does not speak a lie to his son,’ he said. ‘ Remember that always. To say my father told me is to swear the greatest oath. You are only a little boy, but I was no older when my father began to confide in me. Do you hear what I am saying?’<sup>26</sup>

Ezeulu’s words show evidence of what is essentially a patriarchal society, structured with particular rules, but the emphasis on father told me speaks of the passing down of knowledge, where the dissemination of information depends entirely on the next generation. Knowledge is tied to familial legacy and collective, communal dialogues. The word of the father and the elder is law and yet, the elders and the fathers are superseded and replaced constantly by new fathers and elders who were once sons and juniors. The ancestors, the long dead, guide the fathers from their positions in the land Beyond Knowing, where the fathers will pass to once they die. In turn, they will form part of the community of ancestors who guide the living- made up of their sons and daughters. The emphasis is on regeneration and a recycling of knowledge through time. The implication the reader receives from this part of the text is that knowledge itself is not ‘sacred’ or fixed. Rather, we get the impression that it is the human element, bound to the process of relaying the knowledge that adds value to the knowledge itself. George Gusdorf writes that societies that favour Mythical Time<sup>27</sup>, are ones where,

...each man and woman...appears as the possessor of a role, already performed by the ancestors and to be performed again by descendants” with the result that “ the community maintains a continuous self identity in spite of constant self- renewals of the individuals who constitute it.”<sup>28</sup>

In the colonists’ narrative, however, the emphasis is on the individual’s knowledge and power, directly linked to the individual’s position within the hierarchy of the administration and thus, to the administration itself. Captain Winterbottom is constantly being reprimanded for overstepping the boundaries of District Officer and is eventually replaced by Mr Clarke. Each man has a role and these roles do not merge with others or change. Rather, men replace each other but the ability to act is limited to rank and title, which never shift. Even when Achebe’s novel indicates that part of colonialism’s rule was to establish

forms of indirect rule—a way of encouraging the local people to govern themselves through their appropriation of European institutional settings and administrative positions—these strategies still testify to the Western assumption that some societies or peoples could (or should) become more civilised and only reiterates the West’s teleological model of man’s progress.

However, Achebe depicts the Igbo people, through their appropriation of Western practices, as undermining this difference and distancing by actually changing these practices. Interestingly enough this appropriation seems to transform the teleological model of man’s progress into something more cyclical. For example, Achebe, after portraying the demise of the Umuaro people’s ‘traditional’ way of life, ends his novel with the following passage:

The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika’s death saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son.<sup>29</sup>

Leading up to this point in the story, the reader has followed Ezeulu, the priest of Umuaro, who, owing to his imprisonment at the hands of Captain Winterbottom, missed the moment and time in which he must declare the beginning of the yam harvest. Only the priest of Umuaro can do such a thing and the entire village, as the novel draws to a close, is on the brink of starvation as Ezeulu stubbornly refuses to take account of the time he spent in gaol and claims that the harvesting season must wait a while longer. Meanwhile, the season is getting hotter and drier and the village, on the brink of disaster turn to the god of Christianity for a solution. Only through the approval of a god (usually the Igbo’s, Ulu) and the correct homage paid to that god can the Igbo people begin a harvest. Eventually the figure of Jesus is invoked in order to do save the village. This is what is implied by the phrase, ‘harvested in the name of the son.’

While in many ways, this signals what many consider to be the ways in which the indigenous peoples of Africa lost their ‘traditional’ heritage (‘in the name of the son’ can be interpreted as undermining the patriarchy of Igbo society), we see

how the strict orthodoxy of Christianity is changed, through the practice of seasonal harvesting, where the Igbo, instead of becoming 'civilised' actually create a new, hybridised version by bringing Christianity into their own domain. The order of the West is altered and undermined, made to fit the cycle of harvest and the recurrence of specific seasons. While the Igbo become changed via their interaction with the West, the colonial terrain is actually where the ideological fortress of the West is invaded.

Although Kant speaks of only being able to understand change through the understanding of time he also predicts that all people make 'formless' temporal intuition into something concrete by means of a linear conception of the passage and nature of time. What is exposed in Achebe's narrative is that a linear conception of time, advocated by Kant, does not always allow for the more 'civilised' societies to embrace change, especially if the change itself threatens to weaken or their so-called superiority. As Stuart Hall writes, cited earlier in this paper, 'those who produce the discourse also have the power to make it true.' Western Time does not easily accommodate the kind of radial progress or reciprocal changes that occur when two different discursive frames meet. The Igbo, on the other hand, seem much more able to perceive or adapt to change.

Hence, *Arrow of God* creates a strong antithesis between the Time of the colonists and the Time of their 'Other,' the Igbo. The clash between the two reveals the rigidity of the colonists- in terms of the ways in which they attempt to order their experiences of and in their immediate environment and the various ways in which they impose a temporal order onto this environment. What the novel also suggests, however, is how this temporal imposition was ultimately undermined in such a space. Fabian only suggests this when he ends his paper with the statement, also cited earlier: 'it takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other.' Achebe provides some sort of answer. He demonstrates the severe limitations of a Western temporal encounter with a people with more flexible relationship to their reality. We see, through Fabian and in the text how

power becomes a way of controlling that reality, by enforcing a particular discursive frame onto others who inhabit a certain space or terrain. The reader perceives that the different perspectives represented in the text portray that what was (is) at stake was (is) not a question of external reality in itself, but of the strategies implemented by subjective perceptions of that reality. *Arrow of God* demonstrates that these perceptions of reality will always eventually be subject to change since subjective reality can never be homogenous.

Yet, as Fabian points out: even if there is ‘little more than technology and sheer economic exploitation seem to be left over for the purposes of ‘explaining’ Western superiority’ there still remains ‘the all-pervading denial of coevalness which ultimately is expressive of a cosmological myth of frightening magnitude and persistence.’<sup>30</sup> If the Igbo’s flexibility comes from their belief that multiple times can exist simultaneously, as their animistic faith demonstrates, as opposed to the idea that time can only occur successively, i.e. teleologically, then we can begin to understand the crux of the difference between the Time of the West and the Time of the Igbo. Perhaps only when the West ceases to deny coevalness will its hegemonic discourse be able to be challenged. Looking back to Kant would not provide this challenge, as we see when he writes, of time, that,

...[o]n this a priori necessity depends also the possibility of apodictic principles of the relations of time, or axioms of time in general. Time has one dimension only; different times are not simultaneous.<sup>31</sup>

Although he maintains that ‘we cannot judge whether the intuitions of other thinking beings are subject to the same conditions which determine our intuition, and which for us are binding,’<sup>32</sup> Kant asserts the notion that time can only really be ordered in one way, in one dimension. His words embody the Western perception that there must exist a ‘right’ or transcendentally absolute way for Time to be ordered or envisioned. Although one cannot deny the debilitating effects of colonialism in the colonised space, where the West’s invasion was not only physical but also ideological, with Fabian’s critique of Time in Western discourse (a critique of history itself and indirectly of Kant) and Achebe’s *Arrow*

of God, we are shown a projection of a past into the present that suggests the passage of contemporary theory that has begun to challenge the perception that one particular ordering of time can ever be absolute.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. Fabian. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 1-35.

<sup>2</sup> S. Hall. "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power." *Formations of Modernity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben. (London: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 275-295. p. 253

<sup>3</sup> It must be said that when we read Kant's 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements' we see the grounds for how space and time are practically inseparable. However, for the purpose of this essay and owing to the polemical nature of Fabian's argument, I would like to focus on time alone, bearing in mind that it is almost impossible. Indeed, when my analysis shifts to 'Arrow of God' what we see is the inextricability of the link between the space and time. I will at times refer to both although the objective of this essay remains a temporal study. The topic of space and spatial analyses of colonial discourse have become popular in recent years. For further reading, see for example, J.B Harley 'Deconstructing the Map' (2002) and Harry Garuba's 'Mapping the Land/Body/ Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative' (2002)

<sup>4</sup> Such as Mark Freeman, Jens Brockmeier, Allesandro Portelli and Paul Ricoeur Specifically, Paul Ricoeur's paper, 'Narrative Time' (1981) introduces what he refers to as 'within-time-ness'-that idea that we humans can only construct our life narratives from the events we remember and how we fit into them. Time is thus inseparable from our understanding of ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> Fabian, p. 26

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.2

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 1983, p.18

<sup>11</sup> E. Kant. 'Critique of Pure Reason' in *Basic Writings of Kant*. Allan Wood (ed). (New York: Modern Library, 2001) p.49

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.49

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.52, Emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> Social theorist and psychologist Mark Freeman presents what he calls 'mythical time' in antithesis to 'historical time'. Mythical time is associated with societies that have a strong socio-centric conception of personhood and whose ideas about the self rely on theories of eternal recurrence, relationships with ancestors and cohesive communal structures. Historical time relates to the introduction of the individualistic, autobiographical subject and a conception of time that focuses more on change and difference than on eternal recurrence of sameness. See 'Mythical Time, Historical Time and the Narrative Fabric of the Self' in *Narrative Inquiry*, 8, 27-50, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, p. 52

<sup>16</sup> Fabian refers to this as *coevalness*.

<sup>17</sup> Chinua. Achebe. *Arrow of God*. (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1985) p. 39

<sup>18</sup> Fabian, p. 31

<sup>19</sup> As we see with Nwaka and the Mask.

<sup>20</sup> Fabian, p.34

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.34

<sup>22</sup> Achebe, 1985, p.38

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.58

<sup>24</sup> Fabian, p.35

---

<sup>25</sup> *Achebe*, pp. 44-45

<sup>26</sup> *Achebe*, p. 93

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 2

<sup>28</sup> Gusdorf in M. Freeman. 'From Substance to story: Narrative, Identity, and the Reconstruction of the self.' in *Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. J. Brockmeier and D. Carbaugh (Eds) (Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001) p.33

<sup>29</sup> *Achebe*, p. 230

<sup>30</sup> *Fabian*, p.35

<sup>31</sup> *Kant*, p.50

<sup>32</sup> *Kant*, p.48