



HIERARCHY OF NEEDS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S "CIVIL PEACE": A MASLOWIAN READING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze the short story "Civil Peace" by the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, in the light of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The story happens in Nigeria, which has a long history of being colonized by English troops till 1960, when the Nigerians eventually gained their independence. Achebe uses English language as a postcolonial tool to defend his people. The story "Civil Peace" opens right after the Civil War, which ends in 1970 after so much blood shedding and brutality. This long-term history of pain and oppression internalizes victims' self devaluation with constant sense of insecurity under which circumstances, according to Abraham Maslow, the difficulty in meeting basic "deficiency needs" creates a constant tension respectively postponing the fulfillment of higher hierarchical needs. This research reveals how the impossibility of basic needs full gratification prevents the subjects to achieve higher needs fulfillment and eventually thwarting self-actualization in such societies.

Key Words: Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow, Civil Peace, Chinua Achebe, Self-actualization

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INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), a Nigerian writer, uses the medium of story to show the depth of agonies and grieves of his oppressed nation. As he says: "...The story is our escort; without it, we are blind..." or "It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters." (Achebe, *Anthills of Savannah* 124)

To many critics, Achebe is supposed as the most significant African writer in his era. He uses his African folkloric culture and traditions as a value added to enrich both form and content of his short stories and novels. He freshens up the narrative structure by using African proverbs, idioms and

sometimes folksongs. Achebe has been a great model for the succeeding writers both in Nigeria and overseas as he writes about the tensions of his people and the insecurity that impedes growth and development of identity.

Achebe, the father of modern African literature, had a groundbreaking role in bringing African writing to international scale of appraisal by affecting the emergence of African writing to international scale of appraisal by affecting the emergence of African canon. Achebe's works are now an indispensable part of the educational syllabus in English departments

and the vast criticism written on the works, keep his masterpieces in circulation. (Eslamieh 6)

Achebe writes in English. He has been given the language as it has been the colonizers' legacy and the country's official language. He uses it in order to carry his message to more audience around the world. By transforming syntax and word usage, he has invented a new form of English, a Nigerian English dialect to show the bicultural heritage of his nation. He uses the foreign vehicle to carry the familiar domestic message.

"Civil Peace" is one of his greatest short stories, which first published in 1972. It starts right after Nigerian Civil War. The protagonist, Jonathan Iwegbu, has survived with his wife and three out of four children. He tries to reconstruct his life. By finding his bicycle and using it as taxi, he can afford some money to travel to Enugu, where he finds out that his house is still standing. They move back home and the family try to make more money. He gets 20 pounds as "egg rasher" by exchange and although he is so discreet, the thieves steal the money. Life goes on as it was.

Along with 'Civil Peace', the tales 'Sugar Baby' and 'Girls in War' form Achebe's masterful trilogy of short stories that is set during and immediately after the Nigerian Civil War...All three probe the experience, roots, and legacy of war, rather than question of who was at fault. (Lynn 73)

British influence in Nigeria began by the excuse of prohibition of slave trade to British subjects in 1807 and increased gradually during the 19th century. The colonial period lasted till 1960. Over 150 years colonization has been enough to internalize low self-esteem in marginal natives.

The colonizers believed that their only Anglo-European culture was civilized, sophisticated, or, as postcolonial critics put it, metropolitan. Therefore, native peoples were defined as savage, backward and undeveloped....This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called othering, and it divides the world between "us" (the "civilized") and "them" (the "others" or "savages") (Tyson 419-20)

This is not the only disaster Nigeria has been through. The Civil War began in 1967 because the Nigerians wanted to be independent from the Republic of Biafra. In 1970, after so much blood shedding and brutality, Nigeria was obliged to surrender eventually.

During Civil Peace in Nigeria, hardly any significant literature was produced as people focused on staying alive but afterward numerous relevant literary works were introduced to the market. At first, Nigerian readers were too traumatized to enjoy such books; so the writers have to wait at least a decade to have the chance to be read, recognized, appreciated and to attract critical attention.

Civil peace is the mirror image of civil war insofar as the human tendencies that push people to war are not completely resolved in its wake, regardless of political settlements. In a post-war civil society, civility is in short supply: people continue to bully, deceive, and overreach in the struggle for a foothold in the peace. (Lynn 73)

Theoretical Framework

Abraham Harold Maslow (1908-1970), an American psychologist, is famous for developing the theory of Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow identifies internal motives in human being. This motivation system drives people to fulfill their needs; nevertheless all these motivators are not at the same level. They are actually arranged in a kind of hierarchical form, which is called Maslow's Motivational Hierarchy:

A hierarchy of human motives, or needs, as described by Abraham Maslow: physiological needs at the base, followed by safety and security; then love, affection, and gregariousness; then prestige, competence, and power; and at the highest level, esthetic needs, the need for knowing, and self-actualization. (Corsini 571)

The order is so that a need should be gratified successfully in order to allow the higher needs to be fulfilled respectively. The satisfaction of the four first groups, help us to surpass the border of selfishness and start to move toward growth. Maslow changes the Freudian term *instinct* to *instinctoid* to show that

the urge to gratify them is not so overpowering and though it is not easy, one can resist fulfilling them.

The gratification of lower needs seems mandatory since they keep us alive but as we progress to the higher levels, we can fully enjoy our life by the actualization of our potentials and capacities. "We're driven to satisfy the lower needs, but we're drawn to meet the higher ones. (Griffin 126)

Another point is that despite the fact that these needs are common in mankind; the means of gratification are different depending on so many factors such as culture. Even society with its traditions, values, conventions, and rules dictate a specific kind of happiness and full gratification through the discourse of domination. Socio-historical events might impede one from developing a true identity of self-actualization.

Analysis

1. Physiological Needs

According to Maslow, the state of being alive depends on the gratification of the very basic needs or physiological level like thirst, hunger, sexual drive & etc. At this state, the entire human's capacities are being focalized to fulfill the very basic needs to keep the organism alive.

The merely surviving man will not worry much over the higher things of life, the study of geometry, the right to vote, the good name of his city, respect; he is primarily concerned with more basic goods. It takes a certain amount of gratification of lower needs to elevate him to the point where he is civilized [civilized] enough to feel frustrated about the larger personal, social, and intellectual issues. (Maslow 70)

The pressure is so high that pushes the higher levels back to lower priority. The physiological needs are the most prepotent and make the organism to use all the capacities and put them into service to gratify hunger and all the other survival needs.

The story opens with:

Jonathan Iwegbu counted himself extraordinary lucky. 'Happy survival!' meant so much more to him than just a current fashion of greeting old friends in the first hazy days of peace. It went deep to his

heart. He had come out of the war with five inestimable blessings-his head, his wife Maria's head and the heads of three out of their four children. As a bonus he also had his old bicycle-a miracle too but naturally not to be compared to the safety of five human heads. (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 511)

From the very beginning of the story, we realize that the protagonist has lost a child. But it does not seem a significant event. Here, everything fades but survival. He is happy that 4 heads out of 5 have survived and that is enough. He counts his wife and children by head, because having head is the minimum state of living and existence. One can live without legs or arms but not without head. So, he is satisfied that they are at least alive! The significance of bicycle and addressing it beside his family, as it is an animated entity, is due to its being a mean of survival. Therefore, after acknowledging that he and most of his family members have been lucky enough to survive the horrible Civil War, the protagonist's main concern is to protect his family and provide them with food to keep them alive at the state of civil peace. He is a natural fighter for life. When other jobless men sit and wait behind the closed doors of the Coal Corporation to be reopened, he starts his business and his family members help him by selling mangos and breakfast cake.

2. Safety and Security Needs

Maslow's second level of Hierarchy of Needs belongs to safety and security. It deals with to be safe and free from dangers that jeopardize life and have a familiar, secure and predictable surrounding. If a person does not find chance to gratify such a need, he probably would not reach the higher levels of belonging, esteem and self-actualization.

In the story, it is revealed that just the shape of war has been changed; although there is no warm war anymore evidently, the force of famine, mass destructiveness, diseases, & insecurity caused by felonious villains and criminals put the victims in the state of hyper vigilance and constant war-like effort to keep alive, safe and secured.

Another indication of the child's need for safety is his preference for some kind of undisrupted routine or rhythm. He seems

to want a predictable, lawful, orderly world. For instance, injustice, unfairness, or inconsistency in the parents seems to make a child feel anxious and unsafe. This attitude may be not so much because of the injustice per se or any particular pains involved but rather because this treatment threatens to make the world look unreliable, or unsafe, or unpredictable. (Maslow 40)

Back to the story of "Civil Peace", one may ask what about different authorities, like God, government or police, who normally provide people with the sense of care and security?

The narrator seems to be religious as he uses some words like "blessing" or "miracle", but he is frustrated at the same time by repeating "Nothing puzzles God", which has a negative connotation and implies that God does not make himself trouble to understand the way the world works; therefore, he has left it in chaos.

Another supportive institution, which could have been helpful, is government, but it turns to be inefficient and incapable. All it can do is giving egggrasher (for exchange of old money with official currency), which is the mispronunciation of ex-gratia; some extra which is given as gift, indicating that the government does not suppose itself responsible for supporting victims. Even the egggrasher is not distributed properly as the narrator describes it "five days of endless scuffles in queues and counter queues". (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 513)

As soon as the pound notes were placed in his palm, Jonathan simply closed it tight over them and buried fist and money inside his trouser pocket. He had to be extra careful because he had seen a man a couple days earlier collapse into near madness in an instant before that oceanic crowd because no sooner had he got his twenty pounds than some heartless ruffian picked it off him. Though it was not right that a man in such an extremity of agony should be blamed yet many in the queues that day were able to remark quietly on the victim's carelessness, especially after he pulled out the innards of his pocket and

revealed a hole in it big enough to pass a thief's head. But of course he had insisted that the money had been in the other pocket, pulling it out too to show its comparative wholeness. So, one had to be careful. (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 513)

Jonathan tries to be discreet in order not to lose his money like that man. He has understood the significance of vigilance and forethought, but is careful enough to bring home the egggrasher safely only to lose it to the thieves, who try to break in late in night. The thieves come for the money and the family members try to get help desperately. Neighbors do not respond and seemingly prefer not to make themselves in trouble as they have already been enough through.

Maria was the first to raise the alarm, then he followed and all their children. "Police-O! Thieves-O! Neighbors-O! Police-O! We are lost! We are dead! Neighbors, are you asleep? Wake up! Police-O!"... "You done finish?" asked the voice outside. "make we help you small. Oya, everybody!" "Police-O! Thief-O! Neighbors-O! we done loss-O! Police-O! (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 514)

The word "alarm" in this part indicates the danger, the jeopardy leading to the lack of security and safety. The thieves highlight the insecure setting. The level of need Maslow maintained as important in identity growth. Even the Police, as the third possible supporting institution is absent and the thieves know it because they mock Jonathan's family when they cry for help and imitate their words.

...it is not so much the desperation that motives the thieves, but rather the collapse of community support for the Iwegbus and the brazen advantage the thieves take of that collapse. (Lynn, 79)

Achebe shows the corruption of the Police institution, who are supposed to save people's life and properties. During war, an army police officer tries to take his bicycle, but because his tone of voice and manners seems not to be firm enough, Jonathan can solve the problem by giving him bribe and take the bicycle back!

The fact that thieves have machine gun reveals that they might be disguised police officers or former soldiers, who have had access to such weapons. The thieves are symbol of death and destruction.

The word "Civil Peace" is used by thieves, who try to take the most advantage of the chaotic situation in the absence of police. They are new rulers of the society and define terms of living. They seem to plunder just by negotiation without force and violence since people are too defenseless to fight. They know that they can get whatever they want easily and their break in would face no legal consequences.

Awrighto. Now make we talk business. We no be bad thief. We no like for make trouble. Trouble done finish. War done finish and all the kataraka wey de for inside. No civil war again. This time na Civil Peace. No be so? (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 514)

And this is Civil Peace. People are threatened and robbed peacefully, not with war and kataraka, which seems to be the imitation of gun shooting sound! This sad event moves the story from situational irony to cosmic irony. He is abandoned to his own fate. Neither authorities, nor community and society help him. The main conflict in the story is defined through the opposition of wild dangerous cruel world and Jonathan's optimism and eagerness to live and rebuild his life; a sugar-coated fictional surface over a tragic catastrophic deep structure. In other words, the main theme is the struggle between disaster and persistence.

The hostile outbursts in its midst suggest that the organized violence so recently directed against a formidable enemy has now, in the post-war devastation, been redirected against itself. (Lynn, 78)

Despite, he is so careful, the result is the same. The money is stolen from him as well. This is the darkest moment of this story, the very moment of total helplessness and hopelessness as well as the climax of the story. The reader may assume that this is Jonathan's breaking point; that his denial as a defense mechanism would be broken down afterward. But he is used to it, so he justifies it:

I count it as nothing" he told his sympathizers, his eyes on the rope he was

trying. "What is egg-rasher? Did I depend on it last week? Or is it greater than other things that went with the war? I say, let egg-rasher perish in the flames! Let it go where everything else has gone. Nothing puzzles God. (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 515)

He does not seem very sad to lose the egg-rasher as he has already lost so many things in life including his son. Losing 20 Pounds is nothing comparing to what he has been through.

3. Love, Affection, and Gregariousness Needs

The third level of Maslow's Hierarchical Needs deals with interpersonal feelings. The issues of family, friendship and intimacy are categorized at this level. In severe situation, from psychoanalytic point of view, people withdraw inwardly and focus all their strength, attention and time economically to rescue themselves and at most their very dearest ones. They should fight against unpleasant hostile environment by all their means and resources. Therefore, the humane feelings toward the others diminish and just one's own suffering becomes significant. People become reluctant to each others' pain and grief, as is expressed beautifully in "Musée des Beaux Arts" by W. H. Auden.

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a
window or just
walking dully along;... (Auden 944)

One example is Jonathan's sense of indifference when he sees that all the houses in the neighborhood are ruined and his happiness that the only survived house is his. Even he uses the neighbors' house remaining to fix his own house.

And there was Jonathan's little zinc house of no regrets built with mud blocks quite intact! Of course the doors and windows were missing and five sheets off the roof. But what was that? And anyhow he had returned to Enugu early enough to pick up bits of old zinc and wood and soggy sheets of cardboard lying around the neighborhood before thousands more came out of their forest holes looking for the same things. (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 512)

Being with his family in the same neighborhood would be just perfect for him. He feels affection toward the members of his family and local community. However, this is not mutual feeling, as the community doesn't care for him or his family; they do not trouble themselves to interfere when thieves broke into his house. This takes away his sense of security which is so remarkably important for identity construction in Maslow's term. When the thieves break in, no neighbor interferes despite the fact that Jonathan's family's life has been jeopardized and there is a logical probability that they may be killed by the thieves.

In severe conditions, people may be depersonified and turn to objects for each other. We see that he uses his late son's grave as a place to bury his bicycle. Human being loses his decency and dignity. "That night he buried it in the little clearing in the bush where the dead of the camp, including his own youngest son, were buried." (Achebe, "Civil Peace" 511)

He has turned to be so self-absorbed and lost his sense of community that he never thinks of the effects of his actions on the others. No one cares for each other and judgment has replaced sympathy. They do not help, just sit and make sarcastic remarks on losers; e.g. in the case of that robbed man at eggcrasher queues, to say that it was his fault. He was robbed because wasn't careful enough...

4. Prestige, Competence, and Power

Prestige, competence and power depend on self-esteem fundamentally. Self-esteem is defined with to be accepted and valued both by oneself and the others. Self-esteem is obtained when the more basic needs have been already gratified. In this story, it is revealed that long history of colonization has had a negative impact on the natives' self-esteem and on the other hand, Civil War has threatened the gratification of the more basic needs. So, in such severe conditions, the historically damaged self-esteem would find hardly any chance to be repaired and balanced.

The physiological needs, when unsatisfied, dominate the organism, pressing all capacities into their service and organizing these capacities so that they may be most

efficient in this service. Relative gratification submerges them and allows the next higher set of needs in the hierarchy to emerge, dominate, and organize the personality, so that instead of being, e.g., hunger obsessed, it now becomes safety obsessed. The principle is the same for the other sets of needs in the hierarchy, i.e., love, esteem, and self-actualization. (Maslow 59)

The surprising point about this story is that despite all these agonies, the narrative tone is optimistic and happy. It draws this question into the mind that why a human being, whose demands have been reduced to just being alive, seems to be content and satisfied. He sees everything not as catastrophic war consequences but as fortune and opportunity. Life seems not something in his control, so he looks for miracles, and whenever he find a piece of his dismantled, torn-apart parts of life; e.g. his wife and three children, bicycle or house; he seems surprised. This ideology does not depend on personal intelligence and efforts but rather on chance and luck. Life's predictability decreases and randomness and haphazardness have taken its place.

Another peculiar characteristic of the human organism when it is dominated by a certain need is that the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change. For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. Freedom, love, community feeling, respect, philosophy, may all be waved aside as fripperies that are useless, since they fail to fill the stomach. Such a man may fairly be said to live by bread alone. (Maslow 37)

In low self esteem, people usually lose their ambition. They do not involve themselves in great goals as they do not know themselves qualified to be capable of fulfilling them. Besides, feelings of

insecurity and constant frustration aggravate the conditions. Therefore, as a natural consequence, in severe situations, the level of expectations falls to the extent that just being alive becomes the first and foremost demand.

Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world. But thwarting of these needs produces feelings of inferiority, of weakness, and of helplessness. These feelings in turn give rise to either basic discouragement or else compensatory or neurotic trends. An appreciation of the necessity of basic self-confidence and an understanding of how helpless people are without it can be easily gained from a study of severe traumatic neurosis. (qtd. in Maslow 45)

The protagonist seems happy despite of low self-esteem and all the catastrophes, which he has been through. We, normally, expect that Jonathan be caught in PTSD in the time of Civil Peace. Why doesn't he show the symptoms? Is it because the war state is not over yet and he hasn't still reached the status of "post trauma"?

Corsini Dictionary of Psychology defines Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as "a mental and emotional condition resulting from exposure to severe stressors whereby a person has experienced or witnessed an event or events involving actual death or threat of death to self or others... Common events evoking the disorder are: military combat, Prisoners-of-war experiences, natural and human-induced disasters, physical assault, hostage-taking and sexual abuse..." (743)

All is seen is the great amount of devastation and ruin. In such a severe situation, the victims usually suffer a great deal of anxiety, insecurity, rage, depression or frustration. But he has suppressed them by the means of denial as a defense mechanism. He feels abandoned. He thinks that he has been left by his own without enough support. He must suppress negative feelings to keep him sane and integrated otherwise being overwhelmed

by grief; he would end in nervous breakdown. He is the only one who should support his family. Denial gives him power and strength and keeps him on track to go on.

5. Esthetic Needs, the Need for Knowing, and Self-Actualization

Self actualization deals with self-exploration and self-realization. It implies that a human being should actualize his/her full potentials and turn to be what he/she can be. This is the summit of pyramid of hierarchical needs. As all the previous needs should be already gratified, reaching this level is rare if not impossible for people like Jonathan.

Even if all these needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what lie, individually, is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately[ultimately] at peace with himself. \What [what] a man can he, he iust [must] be. He must be true to his own nature. This need we may call self-actualization. (Maslow 46)

The major character, Jonathan, is content with what he has already achieved. He himself has survived; besides he has rescued members of his family. This is repeated and emphasized throughout the story indicating how happy and satisfied he is. He sees himself up the ladder of Maslow's hierarchy. In his own terms and ideology, he has reached that level of self-actualization, which can be defined differently in various cultures and at different junctures in life.

Conclusion

In Civil Peace, Achebe writes about disintegrated people, who are trying hard to rebuild their lives after the Nigerian Civil War. This concept is shown metaphorically, when Jonathan tries to reconstruct the ruined parts of his house out of remedies of the devastated neighbors' houses. They have been through a lot of disasters, grieves and agonies and have lost so many beloved ones and precious things during the war. As the story goes on, the initial happiness turns to disappointment. Civil Peace is nothing to do with peace; just the direction

of violation has turned inside. Jonathan, the protagonist in Chinua Achebe's short story, *Civil Peace*, is a small example of millions of people, who live in the third and fourth world, where war never ends, just transforms from one form to another. Under these circumstances, they may never find *Civil Peace* truly.

Application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in this story reveals that these people are stuck in the lower levels of the pyramid and have a constant painful struggle for survival. As their main concern is to provide food and shelter for their families against all the existing difficulties, they hardly have any chance to reach the upper levels such as self-actualization.

Acknowledgement

The researcher hereby extends her sincere gratitude to Dr. Farzaneh Haratyan, assistant professor at IAU who encouraged and supported the creation of this research in the academic course of "Writing Articles."

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