



Colonial protest, cultural assertion and generational divide in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian novelist who is regarded as one of the best African writers. His *Things Fall Apart* is regarded as the magnum opus in African literature. The father of African literature Chinua Achebe very assertively protests against the colonisers through his novel *Things Fall Apart*. In contrast to the Africans portrayed in non-African narrative, the genuine Africans he knew and lived with are depicted in this book. The book is jam-packed with several incidents that highlight both the positive and negative aspects of Igbo culture. Conflicts between cultures that arise when colonisers enter an Igbo village are discussed in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. The late 1800s saw the beginning of British colonialism in Nigeria, which was followed by challenges for the native culture. The main themes of this book are the life of Okonkwo, a local "superstar," and the entrance of white missionaries in Umuofia, a fictional hamlet. Chinua Achebe aims to dispel the misconceptions that European works like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* have fostered. In opposition to European narratives that portrayed Africans as uncivilised and barbaric people who required the enlightenment of the Europeans, Achebe published this book. Additionally, the novel makes an effort to criticise European universalism. Because he emphasises both accomplishments and flaws, Achebe portrays his people's history in a manner that is quite balanced. We find two important generational gaps in *Things Fall Apart* between Achebe's father and his eldest son. In this article, I'll try to analyse how Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has elements of colonial protest, cultural assertion and generational divide. Power and discourse will be the main topic of the essay.

Keywords: colonial protest, cultural assertion, power and discourse & *Generational divide*

Introduction

The 1958 book *Things Fall Apart* was authored by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. One of the earliest novels in the trilogy is this book. Okonkwo, the main character in this book, has very well reacted against the colonisers. Before European missionaries arrived in their country, a little fictional hamlet named Umuofia on the fringes of Nigeria served as the book's backdrop. The sudden presence of white missionaries in Umuofia has left the locals unsure on how to respond to the sudden cultural shifts that the missionaries threaten to bring about with their new governmental system and directives.

Many European nations travelled to Africa and other continents at the end of the 19th century to start colonies there. Nigeria was one of the African countries that at the time welcomed travellers on colonising missions. This indicates that the missionaries began treating every Nigerian as a slave or a colony, including the country's governmental, educational, and social infrastructure. This development poses a grave threat to Umuofia's cultural traditions.

Chinua Achebe's major goal in authoring the book was to showcase the vibrant cultural and linguistic traditions of his own country. This book gives readers a glimpse into Igbo civilization just before white missionaries invaded their territory. Almost every aspect of Igbo society is at risk of alteration as a result of the colonising force's invasion, including religion, traditional gender roles and relationships, family structure, and trade. Predator culture (European) has fully absorbed the Igbo prey culture (African).

Chinua Achebe attributes the postcolonial depression of the Igbo culture to white missionaries' colonial control and invasion; this depression is easily observable in terms of the depressed social coherence between the individual and their society.

Before the publication of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, all novels written for African readers and about Africans were produced by European authors. Africans were characterised as being illiterate and uncivilised by European writers who wrote about them. Europeans perceived themselves as being more developed than Africans. They (the Europeans) claimed they had gone there to educate and civilise the people of Africa.

When it was first published in 1899, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was among the most popular books. As a "wild, black, and uncivilised continent," Conrad refers to Africa in his book *Heart of Darkness* (Sickle-1). The novel *Mister Johnson*, written by Joyce Cary in 1952, came after Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. A similarly well-liked book to *Heart of Darkness* was *Mister Johnson*. *Mister Johnson* may have even garnered more positive reviews than *Heart of Darkness*, according to the reviews. "Childish, semi-educated African who feeds colonialism prejudices about Africa," is how Sickles characterises the book's protagonist. (Sickle-1)

Both Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary's writings dehumanised African people in addition to misrepresenting them. *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe's debut book, is what reveals to the world the truth about colonisation of Africa and its people. Through his debut book, Chinua Achebe gave

readers a realistic portrayal of Africa and Africans, and as a result, "the world started to appreciate Africa and its people while at the same time seeing the truth behind the stereotypes that had been held about Africa in a much clearer light." (P-5 Lame Maatla Kenalemang)

Achebe has urged his fellow countrymen to take advantage of the educational system that the missionaries introduced to them in *Things Fall Apart* in order to improve their lives. *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe was released at the same time as several writers from Nigeria, including Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri.

These writers from Nigeria all had a significant impact on contemporary African writing, both domestically and outside. Because he "has been critical of the role of Christianity in Africa, his critique has been largely seen as moderate, and his creative work has garnered nearly universal appreciation for its impartiality and detachment" at the time, Achebe was the most successful Nigerian author (Sharma- 85). Chinua Achebe is actually thought of as "one of the writers of his day with fluency in the English language" (Jiffynotes.com 1.) It does not imply that Nigerian authors Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri were not successful writers.

After penning *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe conveys his displeasure with the Europeans in a very forceful manner. He describes the background of his civilisation here. Achebe explains how their traditions and culture were both pure and impure, setting them apart from European cultures. The power of ancestral gods, the sacrifice of young boys, the killing of twins, and the tyranny of women, to name a few, are beliefs held by the Igbo people, as seen in the novel. The white missionaries' arrival in Umuofia and the Igbo people's responses to it are both mentioned in the book for the readers' knowledge. For Africans, the introduction of the European missionaries was both a blessing and a curse. Igbo's future faced a variety of difficulties despite the fact that the Europeans had given the Africans a lot.

My research intends to analyse colonial protest and cultural assertion as they are shown in the novel, which is set when white missionaries arrive in Umuofia and have an impact on Umuofian culture. Here, I want to analyse *Things Fall Apart* using a single critical theory.

In this essay, I'll talk about postcolonial critique, which is important for understanding *Things Fall Apart* and Chinua Achebe's work in general. For instance, postcolonial criticism focuses mostly on literary criticism from nations that have been colonised by other nations (Tyson, 417). The language and literary style used in Chinua Achebe's writings are affected by the fact that he is from Nigeria, a former British colony.

Post-colonialist reflections

The majority of books define colonialism before defining the meaning of the term "post-colonialism." "The policy or practise of obtaining full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically," is how the OED defines colonialism. As a result, the word "post-colonialism" is occasionally used to refer to "after colonialism" or "after independence," reflecting the broad range of social, cultural, and political events directly resulting from the end of European colonialism that occurred after World War II (McEwan-18).

The term "postcolonial" conveys colonialism's meaning in reverse. Since colonialism is what the term "post-colonialism literature" refers to, with the aid of literature, we are able to understand the fundamental theme of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: it is a novel written by a person who grew up under colonial rule in response to the effects of colonialism on his literature. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe rails against the writings of European authors and their inaccurate portrayals of Africa. All post-colonial authors began discussing how imperialism's influence caused their rich local cultures to be pillaged and destroyed.

The literature also seeks to encourage the colonised to cooperate on a communal level. Because of the authors that created literature that was inspired by those European nations. The writers from Europe said that all Africans were extremely primitive, uncivilised, or savage people. All of them are civilised individuals. They (Europeans) believe that god sent humans to this planet to civilise the colonisers. Even so, the colonised people are not shown in the literature as being the victims of colonialism but as being disoriented in terms of where they belong. Africans who were colonised for the most part are unsure on whether to continue with their own culture or civilisation or with European literature. It demonstrates how the majority of colonised Africans had little understanding of their own civilisation and culture.

Exposition on the Background of the Novel

Things Fall Apart, the first book in Chinua Achebe's trilogy, is one of the best books of its day. This book is significant on both a local and global, and national and international, level. It is vital to dig into the history of the novel that led to its release in order to comprehend the true and profound meaning of the book. Nigeria was exposed to the British political system and its numerous institutions when the British colonised the nation in 1906. In 1930, Chinua Achebe was born. Achebe was born after a quarter of a century of direct British rule over Nigeria. It's interesting to note that although Achebe's grandparents were still ardent adherents of their own culture and religion; his parents at the time had converted to Christianity.

Since, Achebe's parents and grandparents follow both European and African culture separately. It is therefore, Achebe got ideas about both the cultures. Since no one wanted to abandon his own culture and no one liked the other culture. Knowing all this, Achebe said "in an interview that the conflict that existed between these two cultures created sparks in his imagination" (Sickles-1.) Thus, this incident gave the birth of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*.

Like John Keats, Achebe was a medical student in the beginning of his career, even he got success in pursuing a good education and was awarded a scholarship also but later he changed his study courses and started writing and reading literature. This change came not only in Chinua Achebe but other young Africans also. The publication of Achebe's two books *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* gave the birth of a new religion as well as its destructiveness in society (Alimi-121). The Nigerian people have been separated into two parts as it has been shown in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. Both groups of the people are the followers of their own thoughts. The first group of the Nigerian people follows the culture of Igbo society. The second group was the follower of the white missionaries. Those who followed the white missionaries had to leave their own religion,

traditional ways of life and had to accept Christianity as their religion.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is all about the "collapse, breaking into pieces, chaos and confusion" (P-121 Alimi) as it has been shown very clearly in the novels of Chinua Achebe. All the Umuofians had to suffer a lot having accepted the christianity as their own religion. The thoughts of Umuofians were totally different from the thoughts of the white missionaries the white missionaries wanted to change some certain elements of the Nigerian culture that according to the white missionaries were not appropriate and acceptable.

In the novel, *Things Fall Apart* we find that generally a man married two or more wives. All the women knew and accepted happily these rituals. Even, in Nigerian culture, in some cases, the first wife advised her husband to look for the younger wife. The younger wife respected the first wife. If a man had more than two wives, all the younger wives respected the first wife and they all care for all the children of that family. Nevertheless, the white missionaries were against that polygamous marriage which was held in Nigerian tradition. One more thing was there in traditional Nigerian society that the killing of children or persons was a normal thing for those Nigerians. As Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* shows how Ikemefuna, a 14 years boy, is killed by the protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo. We can take an example from "Ideas That Have Helped Mankind" by Burtrand Russell's essay that for their better agriculture growth they shed the blood of their children for Moloch.

In traditional society of Nigeria, it was said that twins must be killed because they are the symbol of the work of demons. There are a lot of misbeliefs in that traditional society. It was said that small boys must be sacrificed to God as it was a symbol of offerings and so forth. Although the fifth commandant teaches believers that it is only God who has power and authority to take decisions or to decide when the life of a man shall end, except or excluding God no one has this authority and power has been given. Because of this reason the brotherhood and sisterhood had been lost in Umuaro in the novel *Arrow of God*.

One similarity between the two books is that the struggle brought on by the arrival of white missionaries in the villages of Umuofia and Umuaro has separated the populations of both. Here, Chinua Achebe aimed to convince the audience that not all Europeans are to blame for wrongdoings because residents of Umuofia and Umuaro have also committed some crimes. They split up among themselves. Therefore, Achebe argues that both parties should share responsibility.

Chinua Achebe, in his both novels uses regionally very inflected language to express the life styles of his characters and he expresses his thought very beautifully about the environment of the novel where the story has been set respectively. Both the novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* "that are rich with Igbo proverbs that Achebe translates into English for the benefit of his readers who are unfamiliar with Igbo" (Alimi P-121). The proverbs which have been used by Achebe is timeless. These proverbs preserve both about Igbo culture and language to show their importance not only to him but the entire Nigerian people.

In his books, Chinua Achebe employs an increasing number of local expressions so that European readers won't be able to decipher the underlying meaning of Nigerian speech. Achebe has also protested the Europeans in this manner.

Even though he claims that his characters only employ proverbs while speaking to one another, Achebe uses his regional proverbs quite skillfully throughout the novels. For Nigerians, using proverbs is an essential practise.

Summary of the Novel

The title of the novel has been adopted from W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming". This poem was published in 1921. This poem expresses the differences between the end of the present and the world's approach to another phase.

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things Fall Apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-deemed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

(Yeats: 1921)

The story of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is basically centred on the life of Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel. Since Okonkwo accidentally assassinates a man and he along with his familiar exiled from his native village Umuofia. The white missionaries reach in Umuofia and they change the socio-political scenario of that very village Umuofia. It happens during the exile of Okonkwo. After returning from the exile, Okonkwo sees a major transformation in his native village Umuofia.

Having seen all this, Okonkwo became very sad. Later Okonkwo along with his other villagers come together to drive the white missionaries out of their land. But their efforts are in vain because the Europeans send their messengers to dismiss their meeting. Okonkwo's temper was out of control. He kills of the messengers. Some of the messengers escape from there and report back to the white missionaries and finally they take off to bring Okonkwo to justice only to find him dead.

Generational Divide

In *Things Fall Apart*, two important generational gaps are highlighted. Between Okonkwo and his father Unoka, there is the first chasm. Unoka hasn't made a name for himself as a man in any other way but as a warrior, unlike his son. Unoka would rather perform music and drink with pals. Unoka's lack of motivation is embarrassing to a hypermasculine man like Okonkwo, and Okonkwo dismisses his father as a coward.

Okonkwo's relationship with his father and his oldest son, Nwoye, are equally strained. Nwoye and his grandfather Unoka have a lot in common, particularly in terms of their disinterest in fighting and adoration for the arts. Nwoye fights against his father's desire for him to develop into a skilled fighter. In addition, he finds himself pulled to his mother's stories, which Okonkwo considers to be a pointless waste of time. Nwoye eventually flees his father's expectations and his anger by becoming a Christian and leaving. The narrative implies that Okonkwo may be more of an abnormality than either Unoka or Nwoye, despite the fact that he feels embarrassed of both his father and his son.

Conclusion

To sum up, their robust belief systems and well ingrained cultural legacy cannot solely be blamed for Nigerian culture in general and Okonkwo in particular declining. Finding both the flaws and the virtues of Nigerian culture is the fundamental objective of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Because they felt they would never need to use it in their daily lives, they were unable and unwilling to acquire English, which contributed significantly to the demise of Nigerian culture. They have no interest in learning European languages because of this.

The white missionaries were more powerful than the Nigerian people, which was the second explanation. We might say that the Europeans had everything because they had power and education. They are capable of breaking the law. They were superior to Nigerians in every way. They possessed influence. They had little trouble swaying the Nigerian. The Europeans believed that Nigerians were extremely primitive and uncivilised.

The Europeans' primary objective was to rule the Africans. They also did. They were unaware of one another's cultural differences. As a result, the Nigerian people were interested in learning about European culture, but European settlers had other goals in Africa, including colonising the Nigerian people.

Because they haven't shown any enthusiasm in learning about the world outside of you Umuofia, the Nigerian may have profited more from the cultural exchange between the European and Nigerian.

Nwoye eventually leaves his father's house and becomes a Christian in order to escape his demands and anger. The novel implies that, despite Okonkwo's feelings of guilt toward both his father and his son, Okonkwo may be more of an abnormality than either Unoka or Nwoye.

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