

The Conflict of Indigenous and European Cultures in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract:

Cultural conflict is one of the legacies of colonialism and, therefore, is one of the principal themes in post-colonial literature. Christian missions and the colonising campaigns that accompanied them threatened the complex, traditional lifestyle that is deeply rooted in Africa. Nigeria is one of the colonised African countries whose native culture was drastically transformed by the British colonisers. Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) is a prominent African post-colonial novelist who devoted his novels to exploring the deadly ordeal between indigenous and European cultures and its effect on Nigerian people's life.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in particular, established one and for all a counter post-colonial discourse aimed to challenge and resist the policy of colonial othering and stereotyping practised by the colonisers on the African soil. This is largely demonstrated by emphasising the indigenous Igbo culture and making it known to the world as well as the way this culture is modified by the encroaching European culture. The present paper is devoted to exploring this tension between the European and indigenous cultures in Achebe's aforementioned novel and the way it affects the characters' life as well as the moral lesson Achebe wanted to convey in this novel to both African and European people.

Key words: Conflict, colonisation, post-colonial theory, Igbo Culture, Christianity.

1. Chinua Achebe

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe is a Nigerian novelist, poet, teacher, social transformer, essayist, short-story writer, and critic.¹ He was born on the 16th of

November, 1930 in Ogidi, Nigeria.² He was able to recognise the vast gap between his present Igbo society and that of Igbo village dwellers many years ago, during which the Igbo society witnessed significant changes in its structure and texture. He was also capable of looking objectively at the forces which tried hard to overwhelmingly and unavoidably obliterate traditional social ties and the value of Igbo life.³

With regard to his post-colonial writing, Achebe maintains that the matter is not what authors anticipate from their society but what society anticipates from its authors, particularly in the post-colonial societies where people struggle very much to affirm their equality and lost identity under the presence of unstable socio-political circumstances created by the colonisers. In his opinion, writing should be used as a weapon to lift the writer's society from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. Therefore, he expects the novelist to be a teacher in addition to his status as a writer in order to help his own society get back its belief in itself and get rid of self-degradation. It is so important to know that Achebe strictly rejects "the theory of art for art's sake."⁴ For him, the sole role of art is to serve man. He also says that any good story or novel should be intended to convey a message and should have an aim to achieve.⁵

Achebe views himself as a teacher whose novels are employed to teach the Africans, especially the Nigerians, to identify the root of their trouble so that they can reject their European stereotypical image as inferiors. He states that his own society was of an independent and valid culture and that his people were of dignity prior to the arrival of the European colonisers. In his opinion, it is a must for his people to get their lost dignity back because losing self-esteem and dignity is the worst thing ever. This pedagogic employment of his novels caused him to carve out a clear audience for them. His audiences were the Nigerian schoolboys, who chose to write on winter instead of the harmattan, one of the seasons in Nigeria, in order not to be called 'bushmen.'⁶ More explicitly, harmattan is a dry, dusty wind on the Atlantic coast of Africa, occurring from December to February. The bushmen are indigenous Africans who are nomads and hunter-gatherers living in the African deserts, particularly the Kalahari Desert.

In view of the above, Achebe wonders how a person can feel that there is anything disgraceful about his weather. In consequence, he sees that his

obligation as a teacher is to eliminate the blasphemy that African objects are disgraceful and to encourage the Africans to be proud of their indigenous culture and objects. Many critics criticise Achebe for his employment of his novels to educate instead of focusing his attention on the aesthetic value of literature. For example, the Nigerian critic Kolawole Ogungbesan believes that writers should separate between literature and politics and considers Achebe as the betrayer of art. Thus, as a reminder for these critics, Achebe argues that what he did is “part of the traditional African concept of the artist’s role in the society.”⁷

Achebe passed away in 2013 in a hospital in Boston. The heart-breaking news of his death caused a shock to the entire world not only the Nigerians or the Africans. He served as the spokesperson of the marginalised and victimised Africans. His voice is still as vibrant and as powerful as ever.⁸

2. Post-colonialism

Post-colonial theory had been existent for a long time before such a term was adopted to label it. It emerged from the moment the colonised had reason to ponder on and articulate the conflict which resulted from such challenging and disputed but vital and strong combination of colonial and indigenous cultures.⁹

Post-colonialism is similar to post-modernism and post-structuralism in that a single, conclusive definition is contentious. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define the so-called theory as a “discussion about . . . migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe.” None of such matters is basically post-colonial, but together they form this theory.¹⁰

What has made post-colonial theory difficult to define is the term ‘post-colonial’ itself: It is sometimes inscribed with a hyphen and sometimes without a hyphen.¹¹ The hyphenated term had been first used by political scientists and historians after the Second World War to denote the period after independence, but by the late seventies, it was used by literary critics to denote the cultural impacts of colonialism.¹²

However, the term ‘post-colonial’ is precisely defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin:

We use the term ‘post-colonial’ . . . to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. . . .¹³

The above definition has been in opposition to those who call for limiting the term through choosing particular periods as sincerely post-colonial like the period following independence. Moreover, there is no consensus on the validity of applying the term to certain bands of people such as settlers and indigenous people in settler communities.¹⁴

Post-colonial literature is mainly that of Africa, Australia, Canada, India, the Caribbean, New Zealand, and South-East Asia. Though it should be called post-colonial literature, American literature is excluded from this category because of the neo-colonising role America played and its present position as the strongest and the most dominant country. Post-colonial literature arose from the experiences resulted from colonisation and asserted itself by foregrounding the conflict with the colonial power, and also by underscoring its difference from the suppositions of the colonial centre.¹⁵ Post-colonial African literature arose as a response to colonialism. It appeared under the flag of the so-called “postcolonialism—a theory of oppositionality that encapsulates the totality of practices which characterize the third world nations, especially in Africa, from the inception of colonialism to the present day. . . .”¹⁶

In one of the conversations with Achebe, he explains how the times of the colonial regime were of an “amnesic” impact on Africa:

They [The European colonisers] swept its peoples ‘out of the current of their history into somebody else’s history,’ transformed them from major into minor players in their own lands, turned their saga into the saga of alien races in Africa, and obliterated ‘the real history that had been going on since the millenia . . . especially because it was not written down.’¹⁷

Here, Achebe refers to their oral literature which is composed of songs, proverbs, folk stories, and legends. It existed before colonisation and has persisted to exist up to now.¹⁸

The Christian missionaries and their systems of education resulted in the rise of African literature penned in the colonisers' languages. From early to mid-twentieth century, African literature developed to include fiction, drama, poetry, essays, and memoirs. Regarding its function, it is a means of expression whose aim is to work for the Africans: “[I]t has taken on the challenge of coming to grips with what happened to them under and after colonization, of creating stories whose intention is to aid people in the daily struggle of life.” For example, talking about his novels, Achebe says that the various literary productions all relate just one story which is the story of the African continent, of its relation to the European continent, and of the matters that face its citizens today, which cannot be understood unless their past is examined. The latter is passed on through literature from generation to generation.¹⁹

Finally, Post-colonial African literature is characterised by its ambivalence. In other words, it is a mixture of imitation and protest and of rebellion and conciliation. As a result of colonisation, it rejects the European norms of aesthetics. This opposition is supported by the feeling that Africa is in need for developing a literature which will never be a copy of the European standards of literature. In sum, post-colonial African writers hanker after originality — the condition for authentic post-colonial African literature, which will delve into the past of Africa, strengthen its present, and encourage a promising future. It is observed that the protagonist of the post-colonial African novel is almost always of black skin, and if he is intended to be of white skin, then the action is set in Africa and the story of the novel deals with the African mind.²⁰

3. Things Fall Apart

Things Fall Apart serves as a mirror to reflect Igboland, which lies in eastern Nigeria, and how Igbo life was between 1850 and 1900, the period before and after the advent of the British colonisers. Achebe tries to convey in a realistic way the tensions of Igbo people's experiences under the influence of colonisation. It is, in fact, his feelings for these people's dilemma and troubles that bequeath the novel its potency.²¹

The reader of *Things Fall Apart* is supposed to know the source of its title and what the significance of this title is in relation to the whole novel. Obviously, the title is taken from “The Second Coming” (1921), a poem by the

Irish poet, W. B. Yeats.²² Even the epigraph of the novel is taken from this poem:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.²³

Yeats uses the metaphor of the spiralling flying of a free “falcon” as representative of his view of “the cyclical movements of Western history, which are subject to periodic convulsions as one epoch ends and another begins.” Because of his belief that incidents like World War I and the Russian Revolution were representatives of the fierce end of the latest epoch of the civilisation of the West, his poem depicts an earlier split in the history of Europe, i.e. the downfall of “Graeco-Roman civilization and the rise of Christianity,” so as to divine the signals of a contemporary split that pinpoint the coming of another epoch.²⁴ Additionally, the title is taken in the context of Yeats’s poem to connote collapse, chaos, disintegration, looseness, mess, etc.

Alternatively, Yeats’ Eurocentric notion is appropriated and undermined by Achebe with the aim of portraying the “overwhelmed” and “convulsed” civilisation of Africa which is only the result of the advent of European colonisers and their Christian religion.²⁵ *Things Fall Apart* focuses on the protagonist Okonkwo to the extent that his own accomplishments, washouts, and demise clarify the distinctive spirit and key historical problems of his own time.²⁶ Okonkwo is described by Harold Bloom as a man of success. Nevertheless, he is a man of anger, victimised by his impatience, and by his feeling that he has a bad father. He is always haunted by his father’s shameful actions. In view of the above, he is brutal not because of his own nature, but merely because of his own compulsion not to reiterate his father’s failure.²⁷

As the novel progresses, Okonkwo is given the first important mission as representative of Umuofia. A Mbaino man kills an Umuofia lady and in a settlement with the Mbaino tribe, the Umuofia tribe is given a virgin and a boy called Ikemefuna. Okonkwo takes responsibility of Ikemefuna and lets him live with his household. After three years, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a highly respected elder, tells Okonkwo about the Oracle’s decision that Ikemefuna must be murdered.²⁸ Because Ikemefuna calls Okonkwo ‘father,’ Ezeudu advises Okonkwo not to

take part in the boy's murder. However, afraid of looking weak in the presence of his tribesmen, Okonkwo himself kills the boy with his knife.²⁹

Then, Umuofia is informed of Ezeudu's death. If the dead is a great man like Ezeudu, so the funeral has a part called "the gun salute part." Unfortunately, during this part, Okonkwo's gun goes wrong and shoots one of Ezeudu's children. In Igbo tradition, murdering a tribesman is a crime against the goddess of the earth even if it is not deliberate. For this reason, Okonkwo and his family are exiled for seven years. These seven years are spent in Mbanta, Okonkwo's mother's natal place, where he and his household are welcomed by his uncle and other relatives and given land to cultivate. After a period of time, he hears unpleasant news about Umuofia: There are cultural and political vicissitudes, which are of a drastic effect. Building a church is a sign of the cultural vicissitudes which also reach Mbanta. In opposition to his father's demurral, Nwoye joins this church and then declares that Okonkwo is not his father.³⁰

The British invaders' advent is accompanied with the introduction of the British government and law system and with evangelists whose job is to convert Igbo people to Christianity. Upon his return to Umuofia, Okonkwo is disappointed by the new transformations. In view of this, he encourages Igbo people to resist the new arrivals with arms. In a fit of anger and resentment, he kills a court emissary so that he can explode violent armed uprising. Realising that his tribesmen will never join him and never rebel against their occupiers, he desperately commits suicide by hanging himself.³¹

Since committing suicide causes offence to the goddess of the earth, Okonkwo's corpse is cut down. Eventually, the District Commissioner gets more material benefits from Okonkwo's demise for his book about Africa. The Commissioner believes that Okonkwo's memorable life can be reduced to one interesting paragraph about the Igbo man who killed an emissary and hanged himself.³²

4. Discussion

Incontrovertibly, colonialism is always a process full of pain. Africa, particularly Nigeria, was one of the colonies which suffered the fierce trauma of the colonial process. *Things Fall Apart* tells the story of Igbo villagers in the

1890s, during which Nigeria witnessed the first introduction of the British colonial process by the evangelists and the military and civil administrations. In this novel, the colonial invasion is declared by means of terrifying rumours coming from the neighbouring Abame village proving the white man's power: The villagers of Abame see a white evangelist riding a bicycle. Therefore, the elders seek advice from the oracle. They are told that the foreign man will break their tribe and disseminate devastation among them. For this reason, they kill him and tie his bicycle to a holy tree.³³ The following lines, said by Obierika to Okonkwo, give more clarification to the above lines:

‘ . . . He [the white evangelist] was quite different.’ . . . ‘And he was riding an iron horse. The first people who saw him ran a way, but he stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones went near and even touched him. The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.’ . . . ‘And so they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man's friends. I forgot to tell you another thing which the Oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. And so they killed him.’³⁴

Throughout the novel, the influences of the British colonisation are highly evident. When the white colonisers enter the Igbo land, the Igbo cultural values change. This change is obvious in all aspects of the Igbos' lifestyle

Religiously, the indigenous Igbo people have faith in “polytheism.” That is, they worship multiple gods. Chukwu is the creator of the universe. “Egwugwu” is a cluster of “nine ancestral spirits,” which the Igbo people have. These people are the worshippers of all deities and believe that each deity assists or hurts them.³⁵ Achebe conveys the religiosity of his people through a conversation between Okonkwo's father, Unoka, and the priestess, Chika, about his bad crop, thinking he has offended the deities and his dead fathers. Unoka says,

‘Every year’ . . . ‘before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land. It is the law of our fathers. I also kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejioku, the god of yams. . . .

‘Hold your peace!’ screamed the priestess . . . ‘You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his

gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe. . . .’ (TFA: 21)

The white newcomer first comes peacefully as an evangelist, bringing a new religion. He exercises Christianity unjustly. This church evangelist attempts to demonstrate that the Igbo deities are untrue and made of woods and stones. One of the sent evangelists is Mr. Kiaga who preaches to the villagers of Mbanta.³⁶ Achebe’s following words express Mr. Kiaga’s attempt to convert the Igbo people to Christianity:

. . . The white man was also their brother because they were all sons of God, the Creator of all the world and all the men and women. He told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone. . . . He told them that the true God lived on high and that all men when they died went before Him for judgment. Evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm-oil. But good men who worshipped the true God lived forever in His happy kingdom. ‘We have been sent by this great God to ask you to leave your wicked ways and false gods and turn to Him so that you may be saved when you die. . . .’ (TFA: 133-134)

The Igbo villagers’ heathenism and the new Christian religion are different from each other in some ways. It is not that easy for these villagers to merge the dissimilarities of Christianity with their own traditional doctrines. The sent evangelists often pen about “conversion and backsliding.” These two conflicting Christian dogmas are difficult to be accepted by the Igbo man who worships many deities. In fact, “[t]he doctrines of Incarnation, Atonement and Trinity” are particularly hard to merge, specifically the first two which seem to be in contrast with God’s spiritual nature.³⁷ Achebe proves this in the incident when Okonkwo, after listening to Mr. Kiaga’s talk about the Holy Trinity, becomes completely convinced that Mr. Kiaga is mad. (TFA: 135)

Unlike Okonkwo, Nwoye is captivated by Mr. Kiaga’s sermon. Actually, “[i]t was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow.” (TFA: 135-136) The captivating words of the Christian hymns make his immature mind “greatly puzzled.” (TFA: 136) This introduction of the new

religion causes the Igbo individuals to be in a great conflict between what is traditional and what is new.

The idea that the newcomer is also the Igbos' brother, simply because all of them are God's sons, causes the Igbos to ask, "how could they be brothers yet have religions that were so disparate?" This also leads them to ask about what is really true. These ambivalent feelings are worsened when the invader tells them that their traditions are bad and that their deities are untrue. This initiates the starting point for a permanent conflict between the individuals and their kinsmen who are now different from them in terms of religious beliefs. This is evident in Nneka's case: She is the first woman to choose to be converted to a Christian. She becomes in a conflict with her husband and his own family, who criticise her each time she gives birth to twins. These twins are disposed of at once because they are regarded as a disgrace to the Igbo culture. So, she runs away to join the missionaries, who will agree to receive her current pregnancy:³⁸

. . . And for the first time they [the white missionaries] had a woman. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. She was very heavy with child.

Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and child-births. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance. (TFA: 139)

Seeing that the Christian church welcomes all what their tribe considers to be abominable, like the twin babies and other issues, "the outcasts" or "the *osu* [emphasis original]" also join the Christians. It is clear now that the first followers of the church are those Igbos who are not completely incorporated into the life of their tribe.³⁹

The indigenous Igbo system of administration is marked by its democracy. When there is a need to make an important decision, the elders amass all of the Umuofia tribe. The tribe "rules all, and the collective will of the clan can be established only by the group."⁴⁰ When it is about social judgment, the Igbo man, represented by Okonkwo, is

judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. . . . Age was respected among his [Okonkwo's] people, but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders. (TFA: 12)

The Igbo democratic system reveals that the Igbo people are “more tolerant of other cultures than the Europeans, who merely see the Igbos as uncivilized.” That is to say, the Igbos are, to some extent, superior to the new arrivals. One can find this aspect in Achebe's character, Uchendu, whose cultural view is different from that of the coloniser.⁴¹ For him, “. . . The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others. . . .” (TFA: 129) Thus, while the Europeans look down to the Igbo people and consider them as savages, the Igbo people are more flexible and more ready to assimilate the European culture.

In accordance with the Indigenous Igbo ethics, life is sacred and that anything that results in the ruin of life is given utmost contempt. For example, at Ezeudu's funeral, Okonkwo unintentionally murders the dead man's son. Consequently, he is compelled to be exiled for seven years. All his belongings are destroyed. Even Obierika, his close companion, participates in the fulfillment of revenge in an attempt to purify their land from his sin.⁴² In Achebe's words,

. . . It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. . . .

. . . a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter . . . set fire to his [Okonkwo's] houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. (TFA: 115-116)

Nevertheless, the above lines reveal the ambivalence of the Igbo ethics: Not all forms of murder are forbidden. The Igbo people are given the permission to defensibly murder an alien. This illustrates why it is Okonkwo's onus to murder the guiltless lad, Ikemefuna, while he is damned when he unintentionally murders a clansman.⁴³

Among the dissimilarities between the conflicting British and Igbo cultures is the extent to which man is permitted to murder. In Achebe's work, the entire tribe of Abame is murdered by the British colonisers in their attempt to avenge the murder of one of their men. The European tradition allowed people to engage in religious wars as in 'the Crusades.' Unlike the European tradition, the Igbo one prohibits the murder of any tribesman, regarding it as an abomination and war can occur between two tribes only if it is fair.⁴⁴

It is also important to know that the Igbo people's indigenous religion is, indeed, not 'inferior' to that of the colonisers. This is emphasised by the author Diana Akers Rhoads who argues that the indigenous Igbos are of a well-developed religious system which is as effective as Christianity. Both the Igbo and Christian religions advocate morality and humbleness and are "equally irrational." On one hand, the Christians see that it is irrational to worship idols made of wood; on the other hand, the Igbo people see that it is irrational to say that Christ is God's son when God does not have a wife. Both religions have just one greatest god, God for the Christians and Chukwu for the Igbo people. Rhoads states that "[b]oth supreme gods have messengers on earth, Christ for the British and the wooden idols for the Igbos. . . . [T]he Igbos speak to Chukwu through messengers because they do not want to worry the master, but they deal with Chukwu directly if all else fails. Both gods are vengeful only when disregarded. . . ." ⁴⁵

Indeed, the white evangelists, like Mr. Brown, are aware of the fact that it is impossible to convert the Igbo individuals. Accordingly, they see that they must alter their present tactic. Instead, they plan to let these individuals know directly that their gods are untrue and their faith is built on falsity. Their new plan is to build hospitals and schools to fulfil their aim of converting the Igbo mind: ⁴⁶ In Achebe's expression,

. . . Mr. Brown learned a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He went from family to family begging people to send their children to his school. But at first they only sent their slaves or sometimes their lazy children. Mr. Brown begged and argued and prophesied. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learned to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her

children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them. . . . (TFA: 164-165)

Little by little, this tactic succeeds in converting a large number of the Igbos and the colonial aim is achieved.

Generally, the Christian mission is an onslaught on the Igbo culture. The political system of the Igbo tribe is unfamiliar to the white evangelists, who think “that all civilizations progressed as theirs had from tribes through monarchy and finally to parliamentary government.” For instance, when the evangelists arrive in Mbanta, they anticipate encountering the King of Mbanta: ⁴⁷ “The missionaries . . . asked who the king of the village was, but the villagers told them that there was no king. ‘We have men of high title and the chief priests and the elders,’ they said.” (TFA: 137)

Now that the British men do not find any king to work with, they bring government of their own and build a court administered by the District Commissioner who judges every case in “ignorance.” He is accompanied by his court emissaries whose job is to bring the Umuofians for trial. Umuofia hates these emissaries greatly because they are alien, “high-handed,” and “arrogant.” The emissaries guard the jail, which is full of indigenous men who have disobeyed the coloniser’s law, got rid of their twin babies, or ill-treated the Christian Umuofians. The prisoners are beaten, obliged to clear the government building every morning and fetch wood to the Commissioner and his emissaries. Some of them are “men of title who should be above such mean occupation.” Losing their dignity and farms upset them very much and they keep mourning for them (TFA: 159).

Thus, the dissimilarity between the colonial and the Igbo justice systems is quite evident. Whereas the colonial justice system judges cases in ‘ignorance,’ the Igbo one judges them carefully, aiming at making everything settled.

The Igbo justice system is firmly established and efficient. In view of that, contentions among the tribesmen which are impossible to be settled in other means are displayed in front of the ancestral spirits. An example of this is Uzowulu’s case with his wife and his in-laws: Uzowulu is accused of beating his

wife, and consequently, his in-laws have taken his household away. After listening to both sides, the court of justice says to Uzowulu,⁴⁸

‘. . . Our duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute. . . .’

‘Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman.’(TFA: 88-89)

Then, Uzowulu’s brother-in-law, Odukwe, is told to let his sister go with her husband if he brings wine to him.⁴⁹

Achebe’s Okonkwo is among the greatest gentlemen of his period. He embodies the Igbo traditional values. He is also the one who best symbolises his own Igbo ethnic group. He is a man of a ‘heroic’ standing.⁵⁰In his talk exchange with Obierika about the white invaders, Okonkwo shows a form of resistance to their invasion by saying that they and their people must combat these invaders and distance them from their own territory (TFA: 160). Unfortunately, Obierika says,

‘It is already too late’ . . . ‘Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame. . . .’(TFA: 160)

More significantly, Okonkwo and Obierika stand for Homi Bhabha’s “the double consciousness,” a term which Bhabha uses to indicate “the in-between position.” The writer Hans Bertens believes that this term is related to the colonised people and settlers “who, because they are by definition between cultures, are granted an awareness of relativity and an insight into their own and others’ positions that may not come as naturally or be experienced as positively as Bhabha would seem to think.”⁵¹ This dual awareness is viewed as a conflict-ridden and devastating force in Achebe’s novel which is best observed in Obierika’s reply to Okonkwo’s question of whether the invader understands their customs or not:

‘How can he [the invader] when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.’(TFA: 161)

The disintegration of the Igbo culture in Achebe’s novel is caused by two main evangelists: Mr. Brown, already mentioned, and Reverend James Smith.⁵² Mr. Brown’s sickness results in appointing the Rev. Smith. The latter rebuffs the former’s “policy of mutual accommodation.” He interprets his complicated status quo into radical and unsuitable Biblical imageries.⁵³ In this respect, Achebe portrays him as the man who

. . . saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal. (TFA: 167)

Being the opposite of Mr. Brown, Rev. Smith emphasises that Christianity must be exclusive to “the baffled villagers.” Such a hostile challenge to the Igbo culture paves the way for a battle and all that is required for the conflict to begin is the suitable occasion. Unfortunately, Enoch, “the son of the snake-priest and a recent convert,” makes this occasion available.⁵⁴ He commits an abominable crime: “One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* [emphasis original] in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did.” (TFA: 169)

In fact, the disguise of the ancestral spirits symbolises “the duality of roles by which the inscrutable world of the gods and the human world are uneasily accommodated.” Enoch’s crime opposes such a strategy and the result is that he throws Umuofia into bewilderment. After this unique crime, the ancestral spirits punish the Christian invaders and Enoch by destroying the church of Umuofia

and Enoch's buildings. Now, Umuofia is pacified. Then, six of the old Umuofians, including Okonkwo, are imprisoned and maltreated by the court emissaries. Yet, they are released after forcing the tribe to pay a fine. Enraged by the maltreatment, Okonkwo decides to fight back and sees that Umuofia must react against the invaders.⁵⁵ Okika is one of the six prisoners who, like Okonkwo, tries to oblige the Umuofians to fight back:

‘ . . . If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman. But we must do it. Our fathers never dreamed of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done. . . . We must root out this evil. And if our brothers take the side of evil we must root them out too. And we must do it *now* [emphasis original]. . . .’ (TFA: 184)

Okonkwo and his friends do not succeed in their mission. Unluckily, their tribe is not willing to resist the invaders. When the emissaries of the white court arrive, Okonkwo discovers “that the conflict is his alone.” The chief emissary informs the Umuofians that their master commands them to stop this assembly. Meanwhile, Okonkwo decapitates the emissary and realises at once that he will not be supported by his own tribesmen, simply because they let the other emissaries run away. Completely desperate, he commits suicide, the last ‘abomination’ in this novel. Ironically, “the embodiment of traditional law has become the outcast of the tribe.” The Commissioner is accused by Obierika of Okonkwo’s demise: ⁵⁶ ‘ . . . That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog. . . .’ (TFA: 188)

The well-known end of *Things Fall Apart* depicts the British District Commissioner’s craving to pen his colonised Nigerians’ story “as a challenging ethnographic project in a moment of the colonial encounter in Africa.” Okonkwo’s demise motivates him to invent a colonial story and his own colonial fantasy predicts that⁵⁷

. . . [t]he story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one

must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (TFA: 188)

In sum, the title really fits the content of Achebe's novel through and through. This is evident in the fact that the centre of the Igbo culture has the sufficient strength to hold the Igbos. But suddenly, 'mere anarchy'— to borrow W. B. Yeats' phrase— is set free upon the Igbo world by the British colonisers, which affects it and causes it to loosen its hold. Now, it is obvious that with Okonkwo's demise, the falling apart of the indigenous Igbo culture is fully complete.

5. Conclusion

As a post-colonial novelist, Achebe presents a realistic image of how the British colonisers destroyed the Igbo culture. In the study, it is noticed that the Igbo culture, represented by Okonkwo—the leader of the fight against the colonisers, strives hard to protect its values, customs, religion, and political system. However, unfortunately, the introduction of Christianity does succeed in creating some doubts in the Igbo villagers' minds. The young generation, represented by Nwoye, feel attracted towards the new religion and the Churches quickly begin converting the Igbos to Christianity.

Colonial education also plays an important role in destroying the Villagers' culture by teaching the Nigerian students that their culture and religion are things to be ashamed of. It, along with Christian missions, causes everything to be upside down in the Igbo society. Regardless of all the flaws and irrationalities in the Igbo culture and its people's beliefs, Achebe implores his people to live with dignity without feeling any shame for their pre-colonial past.

Notes

1. MSC Okolo, *African Literature as Political Philosophy* (Dakar: CODESRIA Books, 2007), 35.

2. Roland Barksdale-Hall, "Chinua Achebe: A Bio-Bibliographic Review," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 1, no.8 (June 2007): 9, http://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol1no8/ChinuaAchebeABioBibliographicReview_JPASvol1no8.pdf (accessed June 12, 2017).

3. G. D. Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 14.
4. K. Sivasankar and Dr. V. Ganesan, "Chinua Achebe: An Exemplar in the Postcolonial Epoch," *International Journal of Science and Research* 4, no. 12 (December 2015): 491, <http://www.ijsr.net/archive/v4i12/NOV152001.pdf> (accessed June 20, 2017).
5. John Chua, *Cliffs Notes on Achebe's Things Fall Apart*, eds. Gary Carey and James L. Roberts (Nebraska: Cliffs Notes, 1999), 7.
6. Chinwe Christiana Okechukwu, *Achebe the Orator: The Art of Persuasion in Chinua Achebe's Novels* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 7.
7. *Ibid.*, 8.
8. Anand Menon, *A Post-colonial Insight to Chinua Achebe's African Trilogy* (Buzau: Bridge Center, 2015), 22.
9. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., introduction to *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.
10. *Ibid.*, 2.
11. Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 1.
12. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 197.
13. *Ibid.*, 2.
14. *Ibid.*, 194.
15. *Ibid.*, 2.
16. Sunday Agboola Olatunji, "Thematic Changes in Postcolonial African Literature: From Colonialism to Neocolonialism," abstract, *Sino-US English Teaching* 7, no. 10 (October 2010): 125, <http://www.davidpublishing.com/Upfile/9/19/2011/2011091971417249.pdf> (accessed May 28, 2017).
17. Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Conversations with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 157, quoted in Joyce Moss and Lorraine Valestuk, *African Literature and Its Times*, vol. 2 of *World Literature and Its Times: Profiles of Notable Literary Works and the Historical Events That Influenced Them* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2000), xiii.
18. Moss and Valestuk, xiii.

19. Ibid., xiv.

20. Kwaku Asante-Darko, "Language and Culture in African Postcolonial Literature," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2, no. 1 (March 2000): 2, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1062&context=clcweb> (accessed May 31, 2017).

21. Killam, 13-14.

22. David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Misiska, *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (London: Routledge, 2007), 21.

23. W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), 185, lines 1-4.

24. Whittaker and Misiska, 21.

25. Ibid.

26. Moss and Valestuk, 424.

27. Harold Bloom, ed., introduction to the new edition of *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*, new ed. (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 1-2.

28. Moss and Valestuk, 425.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Whittaker and Misiska, 6.

32. Moss and Valestuk, 427.

33. Kamallesh Kumar Bhatt, "African Culture and Traditions in the Novels of Chinua Achebe: Response to Colonialism," *An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations* 2, no. 1 (February 2014): 88, <http://www.researchscholar.co.in/downloads/12-dr.-kamallesh-kumar-bhatt.pdf> (accessed August 2, 2017).

34. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 127. All the subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition. The title of the novel and page numbers are indicated within the text parenthetically as (TFA: page no.).

35. Mohamed Fawzy El-Dessouky, "The Cultural Impact upon Human Struggle for Social Existence in Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'," *English Language Teaching* 3, no. 3 (September 2010): 100, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081820.pdf> (accessed August 1, 2017).

36. Banik Aparna and Dawar Shobharam, "The Impact of Colonization and Cultural Change on the Igbo People: A Study of Chinua Achebe's Novel *Things Fall Apart*," *International Journal of Science and Research* 6, no. 5 (May 2017): 831, <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v6i5/ART20173216.pdf> (accessed August 5, 2017).

37. El-Dessouky, 104.

38. Ibid.

39. Diana Akers Rhoads, "Culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *African Studies Review* 36, no. 2 (September 1993): 69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/524733> (accessed August 1, 2017).

40. Ibid., 63.

41. Ibid.

42. Columbus Ogbujah, "Ethics, Law and Justice in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 12 (December 2014): 45, <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol19-issue12/Version-1/F0191214249.pdf> (accessed July 29, 2017).

43. Ibid.

44. El-Dessouky, 104.

45. Rhoads, 64-65.

46. Aparna and Shobharam, 831.

47. El-Dessouky, 104.

48. Rhoads, 65.

49. Ibid.

50. Killam, 17.

51. Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 183-184.

52. El-Dessouky, 105.

53. David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1990), 55.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 56-57.

56. Ibid., 57-58.

57. Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, "Chinua Achebe Writing Culture: Representations of Gender and Tradition in *Things Fall Apart*," in Bloom, 6-7.

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Note

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م / قبول نشر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

نود أن نعلمكم بقبول نشر بحثكم الموسوم:

The Conflict of Indigenous and European Cultures in
Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

في مجلتنا ،

الاستاذ الدكتور

هادي عبد النبي التميمي
رئيس التحرير

نسخة منه إلى //
إدارة المجلة ، مع الأوليات



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