

81. The Pen and The Plow: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and The Reimagining of African Culture

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe's magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart*, remains a key work of world literature, shedding powerful light on the complexities of African culture long suppressed by Western narratives. Born and raised in Nigeria, Achebe became not only a celebrated writer, but also a cultural ambassador, working to promote recognition and respect for the rich traditions and history of his homeland. With *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe has not only told a story, but also written a counter-narrative that opposes the Western view that often misinterprets or oversimplifies African civilizations. Central to Achebe's literary philosophy was a belief in the sanctity and power of personal stories. He firmly believed that the stories of those on the margins of society, the marginalized, should be told by people who experienced and felt them directly. These stories, Achebe believed, would be authentic, nuanced, and profound, giving readers a real insight into the African experience. Through the lens of *Things Fall Apart*, one isn't merely reading about African traditions, but rather, immersing in them. Achebe masterfully manages to weave a tapestry of life, love, conflict, and change that forces readers to rethink their perceptions and understanding of Nigerian history and African culture as a whole. Achebe's influence was not limited to his narratives, however. His critique of non-native narrators, who often painted Africa with broad, uninformed strokes, resonated widely in literary circles. Achebe emphasized the dangers of allowing others to define one's own story and underscored the urgency for authentic African voices to reclaim their narrative. Through his works and advocacy, Achebe has not only offered narratives, but revolutionized the discourse on African culture in literature.

Keywords: Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, African culture, Nigerian history, Marginalized voices.

Kalem ve Kürek: Chinua Achebe'nin *Ruhum Yeniden Doğacak* Adlı Eserinde Afrika Kültürünün Yeniden İnşa Edilmesi

Öz

Chinua Achebe'nin başyapıtı olan *Ruhum Yeniden Doğacak* isimli eseri dünya edebiyatında önemli bir romandır ve önemini halen korumaya devam etmektedir. Bu eser Batı anlatıları tarafından uzun süredir bastırılan Afrika kültürünün inceliklerine güçlü bir ışık tutmaktadır. Nijerya kökenli Achebe, sadece tanınmış bir yazar olarak değil, aynı zamanda ülkesinin derin tarihini ve zengin geleneklerini dünya sahnesine taşıma çabasıyla da bilinir. Anavatanının kültürel mirasına olan bağlılığı, onu bu değerleri tanıtmak ve onlara hak ettikleri saygıyı kazandırmak için aralıksız çalışan bir kültür elçisine dönüştürmüştür. Achebe, *Ruhum Yeniden Doğacak* ile yalnızca bir hikaye anlatmakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda Afrika medeniyetlerini sıklıkla yanlış yorumlayan veya aşırı basitleştiren Batı görüşüne

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karşı çıkan bir karşı-anlatı da yazmıştır. Achebe'nin edebi felsefesinin merkezinde, kişisel hikayelerin kutsallığına ve gücüne olan inancı vardı. Toplumun marjinallerinde, marjinalleştirilmiş olanların hikayelerinin, onları doğrudan deneyimleyen ve hisseden insanlar tarafından anlatılması gerektiğine kesinlikle inanıyordu. Achebe, bu hikayelerin özgün, farklı ve derin olacağına ve okuyuculara Afrika deneyimine dair gerçek bir fikir vereceğine inanıyordu. *Ruhum Yeniden Doğacak* eserine analitik bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşıldığında, metin sadece Afrika geleneklerine dair bilgi sunmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda okuyucuyu bu geleneklerin derinliklerine doğru bir keşfe çıkarır. Achebe'nin yazınsal becerisi, okuyucuyu sadece Nijerya'nın tarihine değil, genel olarak Afrika kültürüne dair mevcut kavrayışları ve önyargıları sorgulamaya teşvik eder. Yazar, yaşamın, aşkın, çatışmanın ve değişimin karmaşık örgüsünü, bu kültürü derinlemesine anlamak adına stratejik bir şekilde sunar. Achebe'nin katkıları, sadece yazdığı metinlerle sınırlı kalmamıştır. Afrika'nın sıklıkla yüzeysel ve bilgisiz bir bakış açısıyla betimlendiği, özellikle de kıtanın dışından gelen anlatılarda bu eğilimin belirgin olduğu bir dönemde, onun bu konudaki eleştirileri edebiyat dünyasında dikkat çekmiştir. Achebe, dışarıdan bir gözle, özgün olmayan ve genellemelerle dolu bir perspektifle yazılan hikayelerin tehlikelerini sıklıkla dile getirmiştir. O, Afrika'nın gerçek sesinin ve hikayelerinin, sadece Afrikalılar tarafından adil ve doğru bir şekilde anlatılabileceğini savunmuştur. Ayrıca, Achebe, Afrikalı yazarlara, kendi kültürlerinin ve tarihlerinin hakiki temsilcileri olarak kendi hikayelerini yazma konusunda acil bir çağrıda bulunmuştur. Onun bu yaklaşımı, sadece bireysel hikayelerin değil, aynı zamanda genel olarak Afrika kültürü ve edebiyatının nasıl algılandığı ve temsil edildiği konusunda köklü bir değişiklik yaratmıştır. Achebe'nin eserleri ve onun bu konudaki savunuculuğu, edebiyatın Afrika kültürüne bakış açısında paradigma kaymalarına yol açmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Chinua Achebe, *Ruhum Yeniden Doğacak*, Afrika Kültürü, Nijerya Tarihi, Marjinalize Edilmiş Sesler

Introduction

Colonialism has profoundly shaped the geopolitical and cultural dynamics of the modern world. Among its multifaceted repercussions, the emergence of the “recognition policy” stands out as particularly noteworthy. *Things Fall Apart* stands as an extraordinary literary work that has significantly influenced the discourse surrounding the politics of recognition and the subsequent obliteration of identity. The novel revolves around the complex culture of the Igbo society, as evidenced in Achebe's quote, “Among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe, 2010, p.11). This quote highlights the cultural importance of communication among the Igbo people. This quote celebrates the depth and wisdom of Igbo oral traditions and highlights the value they place on proverbs as a tool to enhance communication, impart wisdom, and connect generations.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe masterfully illuminates the Igbo culture and refutes Western stereotypes and prejudices. While the rich oral traditions of the Igbo community, as cited by Achebe, represent cultural depth and reverence for communication, European colonizers often misjudged and oversimplified these traditions. This misunderstanding goes beyond proverbs and encompasses various aspects of the Igbo way of life, from their system of government to their religious practices. The inability or unwillingness of Europeans to comprehend the complexity of Igbo society led to generalizations and a tendency to view African cultures through the lens of European superiority. Such views inevitably led to cultural impositions and efforts to civilize so-called ‘primitive’ societies. By highlighting the different aspects of Igbo culture, such as their cherished art of conversation, Achebe effectively challenges

Eurocentric narratives and challenges readers to reevaluate and acknowledge the depth and value of indigenous African cultures. "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." This line metaphorically describes the destruction wrought on Igbo society by the European invasion. The "knife" symbolizes the European influence, especially the introduction of Christianity, which significantly disrupted the cohesion and unity of the Igbo community. Echoing Edward Said's criticism of Western depictions of the 'Orient,' Achebe's portrayal of Igbo culture serves as a powerful antidote to the monolithic views often perpetuated by Eurocentric narratives, making readers to confront and dismantle their own prejudices and misconceptions about African societies. The idea of the "East" is influenced by Western politics, integrating it into Western understanding and control. For ages, the East has fascinated many, captivating them with its distinct environment and attributes. Europeans often interpreted the East through their own lens, and as Said mentions, they saw it with a "European eye" (Said, 1978, p. 40). This perspective is, as Said points out, rooted in European-centered thinking. From this, one can deduce that orientalism is essentially a deliberate Western viewpoint on non-Western societies. An Orientalist is essentially a Western scholar who engages in the study of the East, focusing on various topics pertaining to that region. This academic study extends to areas such as Asia and Africa, which lie to the east of Europe. Their research is extensive and covers topics such as history, religion, geography, languages, cultures, and literary texts. For example, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe offers a deep insight into Igbo culture and challenges simplistic Western views of African societies.

Achebe's vivid narrative highlights the richness and depth of Igbo culture and traditions. He counters the Western stereotype of Africa and its peoples as monolithic and primitive by illustrating the complex social structures, practices, and values of the Igbo. Through the tragic story of Okonkwo and the upheaval in his community, Achebe invites readers to understand and appreciate the complexity of African societies before colonial interference. While the novel does not directly address recognition politics or identity loss, it accentuates the role of language, dialogue, and cultural rituals in shaping self-identity and perception of the world. It offers an insightful exploration of the complexities of colonialism and its effects on African society, prompting discussions about recognition, identity, and cultural erosion. Revered as a foundational postcolonial novel, *Things Fall Apart* is lauded for its profound dissection of postcolonial themes. The novel examines the multifarious impacts of colonialism on indigenous cultures, concentrating on the decay of traditional values, conflicts stemming from cultural confluence, and the challenge of sustaining cultural identity amidst external pressures. The novel addresses colonialism head-on, offering readers a broad view of African society before and in the aftermath of this event.

Things Fall Apart is about Iboland, in the eastern region of present-day Nigeria, in the period between 1850-1900; that is, the period just prior to and after the arrival of white men in this part of West Africa. The setting is Umuofia and Mbanta, the two principal villages in a union called the "nine villages". Okonkwo, the hero of the novel, a great wrestler in his youth, is, when we meet him, a renowned warrior, celebrated in songs at religious festivals, and one of the most wealthy, powerful, and influential people in Umuofia. The language of Okonkwo and the other villagers is expressed in the idiom of the Ibo villages as Achebe transmutes it into modern English. The conflict in the novel, vested in Okonkwo, derives from the series of crushing blows which are levelled at traditional values by an alien and more powerful culture, causing, in the end, the traditional society to fall apart [...] (Killam, 1971, p. 514).

The novel vividly depicts the initial ferocious clashes and inescapable conflicts between European colonizers and the indigenous Igbo community. The Igbo people, distinguished for their hard work, communal bonds, and a centuries-old heritage, have considerably influenced Nigerian society and beyond. Their conventional society boasts a sophisticated governance system, abundant artistic

expressions, and profound respect for ancestral customs. Despite the influence of Christianity and other religions, their spiritual bond with their ancestors and gods still plays a significant role in their lives. The Igbo people have exhibited remarkable determination despite historical disadvantages like colonization and the Nigerian Civil War, continually cherishing their cultural heritage within a modern setting. It is essential to highlight the colonizers' view of the Igbo as unsophisticated, requiring an orderly system. This belief in European superiority leads to a contentious conflict with African society, encompassing religious, ideological, and traditional aspects. The incessant imposition of European values on the African populace incites persistent tension, undermining and eroding the pre-existing cultural and social frameworks of African society. The struggle extends beyond territorial control to become a battle for identity and self-rule in the face of colonial interference, revealing the intricate nature of these contrasting perspectives and the long-lasting impacts on the individuals and communities involved. Colonial powers employed various methods to achieve their goals. Among them, culture stands out as a crucial tool for political, social, and economic influence. It is important to recognize that European exploration of distant and unknown territories fostered a persistent Eurocentric bias. Moreover, domination of a population often begins by stripping it of its identity and distancing it from the dominant "white, Christian, European" narrative. According to Edward Said, "neither culture nor imperialism is inert, and so the connections between them as historical experiences are also dynamic and complicated." (1993, p. 13-14)

Edward Said's groundbreaking work, *Orientalism*, sheds light on the West's depiction of the East as the 'Other,' characterized by stereotypes and misconceptions. Applying his theoretical insights to the colonizers' view of the Igbo, the Eurocentric perception of the Igbo as unsophisticated mirrors the orientalist tendencies Said described. By categorizing them as lacking order or sophistication, the colonizers could justify their "civilizing mission," much in the same way the West positioned itself as superior to the 'Orient.' European superiority, as demonstrated with the Igbo, did not solely arise from a vacuum but was deeply rooted in the established narratives that portrayed non-European societies as inferior, primitive, and in need of 'enlightenment' – narratives which Said's *Orientalism* critically unpacks. The tensions and impositions on African society echo the broader issues Said highlighted: the dominance of one culture over another, not just in physical territories, but more critically, in the realms of language, history, and identity. In the face of these cultural impositions and orientalist attitudes, the African resistance, much like other colonized populations, becomes not only a fight for land but also for cultural preservation, identity, and the power to define oneself outside of the constructed lens of the colonizer. The lasting impacts of these clashing perspectives, as emphasized in the narrative about the Igbo, align seamlessly with Said's discourse on the long-term ramifications of orientalist views on colonized societies.

Through the character of Okonkwo, a respected warrior in the Igbo community, Achebe subtly underscores the indigenous perspective on colonial imposition as Okonkwo attempts to preserve his cultural identity in the face of advancing colonial forces. Okonkwo's tragic end can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the initial resistance and eventual erasure of indigenous culture and identity under the crushing influence of colonialism. However, even in the face of such adversity, there is a strong undercurrent of community determination to preserve their cultural heritage and resist complete cultural erasure.

Identity politics in *Things Fall Apart* also unfolds through the characters who convert from the traditional Igbo religion to the new Christian faith, such as Okonkwo's son Nwoye. The struggle of these characters to reconcile their traditional faith with the new faith symbolizes the cultural identity crisis

that many indigenous peoples experienced due to the colonization process. The interactions between the characters of different faiths show how colonial discourse reshaped their identities, affected their perceptions of themselves, and changed their views of their cultural heritage. This fluctuating interplay between the traditional and the foreign forms the core of identity politics in the narrative and highlights the relentless struggle of the indigenous community to maintain their cultural authenticity amidst the overwhelming forces of foreign imposition.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* offers an invaluable perspective on the tensions and conflicts inherent in identity politics during the colonial period. Through its intimate portrayal of Igbo society's struggles and resistance to the overwhelming influence of colonialism, the novel sheds light on the complex dynamics of cultural identity, integrity, and the relentless struggle to preserve one's cultural heritage against the onslaught of forced assimilation and cultural erasure. This exploration of identity politics in the context of postcolonial discourse is still relevant today and offers valuable insights into current debates about cultural identity and recognition politics in postcolonial societies.

A Deep Dive into *Things Fall Apart*

The British Empire's colonization profoundly affected global dynamics, redrawing borders and altering territories for their benefit. Thus, the 'profit' would primarily benefit the colonizers, and racism, which establishes a hierarchy among the peoples of the world, became a means to justify this exploitation. The colonial era witnessed a profound reshaping of perceptions and prejudices, deeply entwined with burgeoning economic interests. The British historian Faulkner criticizes the oppressive behavior of the colonizers towards the subjugated illuminates this matter by stating:

Rapid European colonial expansion and equally rapid growth in the slave trade during the eighteenth century combined to reconfigure racist ideology and magnify its historical significance. The new racism was developed in the context of the triangular trade. Ships carried trade goods to West Africa and were exchanged for black slaves. Local chiefs waged wars of enslavement to supply the market and gain access to imported prestige goods. The slaves were transported across the Atlantic and sold to plantation-owners in the slave markets. The ships returned to Europe with cargoes of sugar, tobacco, and later cotton (2013, p. 113).

This complicated relationship between economic expansion and the institutionalization of racial prejudice highlights how deeply rooted systems of exploitation were deliberately constructed to serve the interests of colonial powers. The establishment of the triangular trade not only devastated the African continent by forcibly displacing millions of people, but also set in motion a racial hierarchy that would perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination for centuries. The commodification of human lives was justified with a fabricated racial ideology, making it one of history's most tragic and profound examples in which economic pursuits dictated social beliefs. Such historical narratives serve as a powerful reminder of the dangers of unchecked economic ambition and the importance of critically examining the origins of long-held societal beliefs and prejudices.

Many nations still grapple with these past impositions. In *Colonial & Postcolonial Literatures*, Elleke Boehmer portrays the British Empire as a dominant force with policies causing irreversible changes. "Britain ... had a destiny and a duty to rule the world". (Boehmer, 2009, p.50) Its success was pivotal for its global dominance. The far-reaching influence of the British Empire, as described in Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial & Postcolonial Literatures*, is reflected in the narratives of Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*, vividly depicts the disruption and consequences of British colonization for African societies, particularly the Igbo community. Both Boehmer and Achebe emphasize the profound and lasting effects of

colonialism, although they approach this subject from different angles: Boehmer from an analytical perspective and Achebe through storytelling, emphasizing the cultural and social upheavals that colonization brought.

In 1958, amidst the burgeoning Third World movement and as former colonies began securing their independence, Achebe released *Things Fall Apart*. Notably, Ghana set a precedent in 1957 by becoming the first African colony to achieve independence in the wave of decolonization (Fage et al., 2023). Achebe's novel, coming on the heels of this significant event, provides an intimate portrayal of pre-colonial African society, with the Igbo community as its focus. Through its narrative, the novel captures the cultural shifts and challenges faced by Africa in light of colonial intrusion, illustrated poignantly by the trials of its protagonist, Okonkwo, particularly following his unintentional act of killing. Achebe presents the Igbo culture as a central theme, narrating the history of the conflict between these cultures. He takes on the mission of restoring cultural identity, damaged by colonial ideologies, by creating a mythical Umuofia in his work, rectifying the misrepresentations of his people. Achebe's goal is to challenge misconceptions, contest the misrepresentation of African political history and culture, and reassess established notions about African identity. Anand Menon's assertion that Africa has been the "worst victim of European colonialism" (2015, p.17) finds a compelling illustration in *Things Fall Apart*. The novel paints a vivid picture of Igbo society in Nigeria and underscores the profound sociocultural changes triggered by European colonization. Achebe describes the thriving, complex society of the Igbo people, which was characterized by highly developed social, political, and spiritual systems before the arrival of the colonizers. The arrival of the European missionaries, however, triggers a profound change that destroys the social equilibrium and triggers a cultural conflict that leads to the erosion of traditional values, social norms, and communal harmony. This cultural dislocation reflects the larger problem addressed by Menon. The consequences of colonization not only disrupted African societies, but also planted the seeds for the systemic challenges, including economic problems and poverty, that many African nations continue to struggle with today. As such, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is an important commentary on the historical legacy of colonialism and reflects Menon's observations about its far-reaching and devastating impact on Africa.

Having been published over half a century ago, *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into fifty languages, and with more than 10 million copies sold, it stands as a global bestseller. Achebe's body of work, which spans essays, short stories, novels, and lectures, consistently advocated for the rights of Africans. Although he wrote in English, he didn't outrightly dismiss European influences. He reasoned that history had compelled writers worldwide to use English. Achebe recognized the wide reach of English, arguing that African authors should exploit its ubiquity to communicate their unique experiences and perspectives. He maintained that they should mold English to suit their experiences and context, without fully emulating Western literature.

Things Fall Apart explores Igbo culture and colonial encounters and acts as a driving force for the reevaluation of African culture in world literature. As Cook notes, "Chinua Achebe prefers to reveal the darker side of both the traditions as well as the better side and leaves us to draw our own conclusions." (1977, p. 142) This observation underscores Achebe's unique approach, which invites the reader to critically examine both the shadows and the lights of African traditions. By choosing to write in English - a decision of practical and symbolic importance in a multilingual nation - Achebe opens a linguistic link between Africa and the rest of the world, increasing the appeal of his works and fostering cross-cultural dialog. Achebe's choice of language is significant. He uses the English language and blends it with Igbo syntax, idioms, and proverbs to create an exclusive linguistic mosaic that both authentically

represents indigenous culture and effectively communicates with a global audience. This strategic use of language allowed him to put into words the cultural conflict and change that has defined Nigeria's socio-political landscape for centuries.

Things Fall Apart goes beyond a mere depiction of pre-colonial Nigeria and the socio-cultural dislocations brought about by the intrusion of the West. *Things Fall Apart* describes the homogenized representation of Africa by presenting a richly textured account of a complex, vibrant society before and during the colonial period. The novel offers insight into the hierarchical social structures, familial roles, religious beliefs, economic practices, and court procedures of Igbo society, creating a solid social framework that transcends the oft-told story of Africa. In this way, Achebe creates a portrayal of African societies and cultures. He upends the discourse on African heritage and subverts perceptions of a continent characterized only by conflict, poverty, and primitiveness. His in-depth exploration of the development of the Igbo community under colonial influence underscores the resilience and dynamism inherent in African cultures.

What is remarkable about his Igbos is the degree to which they have achieved the foundations of what most people seek today – democratic institutions, tolerance of other cultures, a balance of male and female principles, capacity to change for the better or to meet new circumstances, a means of distributing wealth, a viable system of morality, support for industriousness, an effective system of justice, striking and memorable poetry and art. (Rhoads, 1997)

This statement highlights the impressive qualities and achievements of Igbo society that are often overlooked or misunderstood by outsiders, especially from a Western or colonial perspective. With his groundbreaking novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe masterfully reinvents and breathes new life into the language, culture, and identity of Igbo society. His captivating portrayal of the rich, vibrant, and complicated world of Igbo culture has helped to challenge the prevailing image of Africa and its people and to give voice to a society that has been reduced to caricature in the Western imagination. The novel's impact has not only transformed the understanding and appreciation of Igbo society, but has also played a critical role in redefining African literature as a whole. The novel's enduring relevance and profound influence attest to its unique place in African literature and to Achebe's unparalleled talent for portraying the lived experiences and complexities of the Igbo people. As such, Achebe's seminal work *Things Fall Apart* continues to be celebrated as a literary masterpiece that has had a significant impact on the development of African literature.

Through the lens of Okonkwo's life, Achebe crafts a compelling narrative that highlights the tension between age-old African beliefs and the growing presence of Western ideologies. The protagonist, Okonkwo, embodies this cultural dynamism. "It is the tragedy of a people who find their way of life suddenly assailed by forces they do not understand and are not equipped to deal with" (Obiechina, 1975, p.41). Okonkwo's struggle against the wave of change brought about by European missionaries illustrates the clash between traditional values and foreign ideologies. Okonkwo's eventual demise symbolizes the profound sociocultural change triggered by colonialism and reflects the real complexities faced by societies undergoing cultural transformation. By reinterpreting African culture, Achebe not only narrates the African experience, but invites readers to rethink their understanding and perception of Africa. *Things Fall Apart* is an invitation to celebrate the diversity, complexity, and resilience of African cultures and to foster a dialog that bridges cultural differences and promotes mutual respect and understanding. Through his narrative, Achebe challenges the global community to recognize and appreciate the richness of African heritage and to broaden cultural perspectives in the field of world literature.

Things Fall Apart is indeed a classic study of cross-cultural misunderstanding and the consequences to the rest of humanity, when a belligerent culture or civilization, out of sheer arrogance and ethnocentrism, takes it upon itself to invade another culture, another civilization. Seen from this perspective, the lesson of Things Fall Apart comes across clearly as the unique manifestation of human blindness and blissful ignorance at a point in time (Emenyonu, 1991, p. 47).

Emenyonu's 1991 evaluation of *Things Fall Apart* highlights the novel's role in examining the devastating outcomes of cross-cultural miscommunication. The novel demonstrates the disastrous results that ensue when a dominant culture, driven by hubris and ethnocentrism, forcefully imposes itself upon another. It further underscores the universal human issue of failing to respect the diversity and autonomy of different cultures, which can lead to cultural erosion. Consequently, Things Fall Apart critiques the destructive influence of colonization, advocating for mutual respect, and promoting a dialogue to foster peaceful co-existence among diverse civilizations.

Things Fall Apart presents a vivid portrayal of pre-colonial Africa and the responses of Africans to the advent of Europeans. Okonkwo, the main character and renowned wrestler, embodies the strengths and weaknesses of his people. He epitomizes the societal shifts and struggles arising from the advent of colonialism. In the novel, the appearance of a white man symbolizes the onset of foreign intrusion and colonization. This event, marking a significant divergence from their traditional life, triggers curiosity, apprehension, and anxiety within the community. It signals the initiation of a cultural clash, with the traditional beliefs of the Igbo people colliding with the ideologies introduced by the Europeans.

Okonkwo hears about the white men while he is in exile for unintentional manslaughter. His friend Obierika informs him of the destruction of Abame by the white men, who retaliated after a clansman killed one of their own. The arrival of the white men symbolizes the beginning of a complex period where the community confronts an alien presence that threatens their customs and beliefs. Achebe highlights the detrimental impact of colonization on Nigerian society and foreshadows the dramatic transformations and conflicts that permeate the rest of the novel.

The statement, "I have been told that the white man, who speaks through an interpreter, draws his knife when he speaks to protect himself from us" (Achebe, 2010, p.78), offers an interesting perspective. It suggests that the Western world often marginalizes nations perceived as different or "other," driven by a misguided belief in its own superiority. The phrase proposes a thought-provoking twist, implying that the West's actions and intentions could be the most perilous, stemming from an unfounded belief in its supremacy and an obliviousness to its potential for harm. The novel lucidly portrays the influence of colonialism, evident in the responses of the Abame tribe members to the white man's arrival. The tribe's interpretation of a bicycle as an evil artifact, seen as a dark force that has invaded their territory, is rooted in their dread and apprehension towards the unknown.

"What has he spoken?" the white man inquired his translator. Before the translator could answer, another tribesman asked, "Where is the white man's horse?" He was referring to the bicycle. After a discussion, the Ibo evangelists informed the white man, who then replied, smiling genially, "Tell them that I will bring numerous iron horses when we are settled amongst them. Some will even have the chance to ride these iron horses." However, few heard this explanation. The white man's statement about dwelling amongst them stirred great excitement and left them unprepared (Achebe, 2010, p. 125).

The fear and anxiety signify the psychological effects of encountering foreign cultures and practices introduced by colonizers. The arrival of the white man instills a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty in the Nigerian community, disrupting their established lifestyle and causing psychological distress as they grapple with the new reality forced upon them. Achebe adeptly captures the psychological

ramifications of colonization in these instances. The Nigerian community undergoes a spectrum of emotions, including fear, anxiety, and efforts to understand the unfamiliar. These responses illuminate the extensive disruption resulting from colonialism and accentuate the psychological hurdles faced by individuals and communities navigating a changing world.

Okonkwo epitomizes the Umofian people's strengths and shortcomings. As European missionaries and colonizers amass power in Umofia, they challenge the indigenous norms and traditions. Okonkwo's struggle against the colonial government and church is thwarted by a rising tide of converts and the fortification of colonial rule. The advent of white settlers and Christian missionaries eventually leads to Okonkwo's downfall and destabilizes the prevailing social order. Pre-European arrival, African society had its distinct religion, agriculture, and social structure. Achebe showcases the missionaries in a contrasting light to emphasize their historical role. For instance, the Europeans brought components that some communities viewed favorably, like formal education and medical services. Despite these seemingly beneficial additions like formal education and trade, they ultimately eroded and decimated the indigenous culture in *Things Fall Apart*. "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." (Achebe, 2010, p. 78) This quotation underscores the profound impact of the colonizers on Igbo society. The introduction of Christianity and formal education gradually dissolved their traditional belief systems and social cohesion, causing fragmentation and undermining their collective identity. The novel hints that the ostensibly positive facets of colonial influence like development and modernization exacted a heavy toll on the indigenous culture. As the narrative unfolds, the deleterious effects of cultural dissolution far outweigh the ephemeral benefits brought by the colonizers.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe infers that Ezeudu's death, a figure embodying traditional authority and local culture, is a significant event. It hints at the future challenges that the Igbo society will confront due to the increasing European influence. As the white man's influence intensifies, the traditional Igbo lifestyle, encompassing their religious beliefs, social systems, and cultural practices, faces potential extinction. "Ezeudu, being the oldest man in his quarter of Umuofia, was held in high esteem by all. His fearless warrior past and the high title of Ogbuefi Ezeudu bestowed on him made him a respected figure in the clan" (Achebe, 2010, p.45). Ezeudu's death happens during the Feast of the New Yam, a critical annual event. A subsequent tragic incident occurs when Okonkwo's gun accidentally discharges, killing Ezeudu's son. In Igbo culture, accidentally causing a fellow member's death is a grave offense. This causes Okonkwo to be exiled for seven years, a punishment for his actions.

The death of Ezeudu's son bears deep importance because it escalates the conflict for Okonkwo and further magnifies the tension between traditional Igbo culture and the rising impact of European colonialism. The unintended slaying, caused by a foreign weapon, underscores the growing disharmony between established local customs and emerging external influences. This event stands as a powerful symbol of the changing times and the unavoidable disruptions to conventional lifestyles brought about by foreign intervention.

The death of Ezeudu marks a crucial turning point in the story, setting the stage for the forthcoming struggles and confrontations that the Igbo society will have to grapple with, as their indigenous customs clash with the encroaching Western influence. This event underscores the overarching theme of cultural disruption triggered by colonization and its profound implications for native societies. The narrative anticipates the impending trials that the Igbo society must confront in their effort to protect their

cultural heritage against external forces aiming to modify or eliminate it. *Things Fall Apart* effectively challenges the dominant Western conception of historical truth. This novel captivates the reader, compelling them to reconsider their established perceptions about pre-colonial and colonial Africa. As Achebe articulates in an Igbo proverb, "A man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body. The rain that beat Africa began four to five hundred years ago, from the 'discovery' of Africa by Europe" (Achebe, 2013, p.4). This quote underscores the critical role of historical consciousness and comprehension in catalyzing social, cultural, and political evolution, particularly in relation to Africa's encounter with colonialism.

Okonkwo's banishment results from a sequence of tragic incidents culminating in his downfall. A revered warrior in his community, Okonkwo is known for his prowess and abilities. However, his overwhelming fear of appearing weak or failing profoundly impacts his behavior. A major cause of Okonkwo's exile is an unintentional killing during a funeral, an act viewed as a grave offense against the earth goddess. According to the community's customs, such a transgression is intolerable and is considered an affront to the spiritual laws governing their community.

As a consequence of committing a crime against the earth goddess, Okonkwo had no choice but to leave his clan. There were two types of crimes, male and female, and Okonkwo had committed the female kind because it was unintentional. He could return to the clan after seven years (Achebe, 2010, p. 41).

Additionally, Okonkwo's steadfast adherence to his community's customs contributes to his exile. His violent reaction to the arrival of European missionaries, despite the clan leaders' preference for a peaceful approach, further exacerbates his predicament. Okonkwo's impulsive actions, his disregard for the clan's authority, and his violation of sacred customs ultimately culminate in his exile, serving as a cautionary tale about disregarding tradition and the detrimental effects of personal struggles. Umuofia, forms the primary setting for the novel. Situated in pre-colonial Nigeria, Umuofia embodies a traditional African community with its unique customs, rituals, and social structure. The quote, "Umuofia was feared by all its neighbors. It was powerful in war and in magic, and its priests and medicine men were feared in all the surrounding country" (Achebe, 2010, p.7), accentuates Umuofia's military and magical prowess. Umuofia's priests and medicine men, renowned for their supernatural abilities, are integral to the village's societal structure.

Umuofia's social fabric is characterized by a deep sense of collective identity and unity. The villagers are grounded in their cultural heritage, sharing common values and beliefs. However, with the advent of European colonizers and Christian missionaries, Umuofia's equilibrium is disrupted, causing significant upheaval in the lives of its inhabitants, including Okonkwo.

The introduction of Western social institutions and schools to Umuofia fundamentally changes the community's dynamics and triggers a sense of rebellion in Okonkwo. Notably, Okonkwo's identity is profoundly affected by the disruption of these social structures due to colonialism, underlining the pervasive influence of these institutions. Achebe deftly encapsulates the essence of conversation within the Igbo culture, primarily transmitted through ancestral proverbs, myths, and narratives in the absence of a written language. The detailed depiction of agricultural cycles, cultural rituals, and traditional practices such as the ceremonial use of snuff and palm wine highlight the shared elements between Western and Igbo cultures. Through these portrayals, Achebe aims to demonstrate the existence of analogous rituals and traditions between the colonizers and the colonized.

Things Fall Apart refutes colonial misrepresentations of African culture by showing the dynamic Igbo society's legal, religious, and traditional systems. The narrative explores the incursion of Europeans, scrutinizing the stereotype of Africans as backward and portraying the Igbo culture authentically, highlighting its vulnerabilities like superstition and resistance to change. It presents Christian missionaries as self-interested, introducing detrimental concepts while also bringing some benefits like hospitals, schools, and improved farming practices.

Achebe's writing style uniquely incorporates African myths, songs, rituals, beliefs, and proverbs. His active support for the Biafran civil war in the 1960s demonstrates his commitment to Nigeria's reconstruction. Despite his political involvement, Achebe rejected political rhetoric's sufficiency. Achebe also utilizes elements of tragedy to portray the destructive impact of colonialism. Okonkwo, who represents the traditional values of the Igbo people, is unable to adapt to the changing societal norms imposed by the colonizers, leading to his downfall. His tragic end symbolizes the cultural death of the Igbo society, underscoring the catastrophic effects of European colonialism.

The novel also portrays the manipulative tactics used by the colonizers to gain control over the colonized. The missionaries, by strategically positioning themselves as friends and well-wishers, exploit the vulnerabilities of the indigenous people. They manage to establish their authority by offering the promises of wealth, prosperity, and spiritual salvation, thereby luring many into abandoning their traditional beliefs and customs. In contrast, Achebe also highlights the resilient spirit of the Igbo people in the face of such adversity. Despite the disruptive influence of the colonizers, some members of the community continue to uphold their cultural traditions, resisting the imposition of foreign customs and beliefs. This highlights the struggle for cultural survival amidst the onslaught of colonialism, underscoring the complex dynamics between the colonizers and the colonized.

The novel is deeply embedded with cultural, societal, and political critiques of the colonial era. It draws attention to the profound and devastating effects of colonialism, providing a nuanced and poignant exploration of the indigenous culture's struggle to maintain its identity in the face of external domination. By emphasizing the marginalization of characters like Unoka and the gradual erosion of the Igbo culture, Achebe elucidates the broader socio-cultural implications of colonialism. *Things Fall Apart* offers a multi-layered examination of the colonial experience, highlighting the devastating effects of cultural erasure and marginalization brought about by European colonialism. Through the compelling narrative and intricate character development, Achebe successfully illuminates the complexities of the colonial process, providing an invaluable insight into the historical and socio-cultural dynamics of the colonial era.

Conclusion

Chinua Achebe is a transformative figure in the field of English-language African novels and has initiated a significant change in the genre. He is so central to African literature that any discussion of it would be incomplete without mentioning him. Achebe not only paved the way for future African writers, but also challenged and disrupted long-standing narrative traditions by offering a new perspective on storytelling. *Things Fall Apart* presents a captivating story that critically examines the effects of British colonialism on Igbo society. The novel anchors itself around the clash between traditional Igbo customs and the ideologies brought by white missionaries. These missionaries, who perceived the Igbo as a primitive culture in need of European intervention, challenge and dispute the Igbo's practices based on their own moral codes. Achebe crafts a narrative that transcends the specific experiences of the African

people and addresses the situation of colonized populations worldwide. While the novel is set in Nigeria, it suggests that it is broader, painting a vivid picture of an oppressed world through the lens of the colonized Igbo tribe. Achebe illuminates colonialism, an offshoot of imperialism, as a framework that systematically marginalizes and subjugates peoples, relegating them to second-class status and thereby justifying the colonial enterprise. Therefore, *Things Fall Apart* can be seen as a microcosm of the larger, oppressed world. This seminal perspective introduced by Achebe played a crucial role in shaping the views and works of later postcolonial writers in the Anglophone world.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe strives to rejuvenate and celebrate a cultural heritage that had been eclipsed. The novel vividly portrays the tensions and misunderstandings created by the clash of two opposing worlds: indigenous Igbo society and European colonizers. While the main goal of the European missionaries was to dominate and transform Igbo society, Achebe emphasizes that the encounter was not one-sided; both cultures inevitably left their mark on the other. One key aspect that Achebe highlights is the Igbo's historically rich and just legal system. The community prided itself on a legal system based on fairness and equality. But with the arrival of the British, this balance was upset as colonial authorities dismissed indigenous legal traditions as primitive and irrational. This distorted view had dire consequences, especially for the protagonist Okonkwo, culminating in his tragic end. Through this narrative, Achebe not only criticizes the colonial mentality, but also underscores the complexity of cultural exchange. He emphasizes that despite attempts to subjugate the natives, there was an inevitable mutual influence between the colonizers and the colonized.

Things Fall Apart provides vivid descriptions of precolonial Igbo society, revealing a complex civilization that sharply contrasts with the primitive image painted by Western literature. The novel serves as a critique of the dominant narratives of colonialism, using the power of the pen to rewrite history and challenge prevailing stereotypes. This approach places African voices at the center of the narrative, inspiring generations of African writers to reconstruct their cultural narratives. *Things Fall Apart* further explores the transformations that occurred in Igbo society as a result of British colonialism, including the cultural and religious confrontations. For instance, Achebe illustrates the drastic shift from traditional Igbo rituals, such as the sacrificial killing of boys and the extermination of twins, towards the reverence for life promoted by the Christian missionaries.

Through the narrative's strategic juxtaposition of pre-colonial and colonial eras, Achebe revises the historical perception of Igbo culture and traditions, a culture often misunderstood and misrepresented. The novel thereby serves as a powerful rebuttal to the stereotypical British portrayal of Africans. *Things Fall Apart* serves as a testament to the multifaceted impacts of colonialism, advocating for cultural understanding and appreciation. Through a compelling narrative, Achebe revises the historical narrative and underscores the richness and worth of Igbo culture, transforming our perspective on this vibrant African society.

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