

A Study of Colonial Confrontation in *The Things Fall Apart*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper critically examines the portrayal of colonial confrontation in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," highlighting the themes of suppression and oppression. It argues that Achebe adeptly reconstructs the historical and political context of the Igbo people's recent past, illustrating their suppression and oppression by European colonizers. Furthermore, the paper explores how Achebe portrays Igbo community life and demonstrates how the arrival of white missionaries and colonial administrators gradually undermined traditional Igbo values. This erosion occurred initially through religious conversions and later through the imposition of colonial political structures, ultimately leading to the dismantling of traditional Igbo society. Thus, the novel addresses various forms of suppression—social, political, religious, cultural, economic, and educational—imposed on the Igbo tribe by the British colonial administration.

INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" stands as a seminal work in African literature, offering a profound exploration of the clash between indigenous culture and colonial intrusion in Nigeria. This research paper critically examines Achebe's portrayal of colonial confrontation, focusing on themes of suppression and oppression as manifested in the novel. Through meticulous attention to historical and cultural detail, Achebe reconstructs the socio-political landscape of Igbo society in the late 19th century, illuminating the profound impact of European colonization on traditional ways of life. By delving into the intricacies of Igbo community dynamics and the gradual erosion of indigenous values in the face of colonial influence, this paper seeks to unpack the complex mechanisms through which colonialism sought to assert dominance over indigenous populations. Drawing on insights from scholars and Achebe's own reflections, we interrogate the rhetorical and ideological implications of Achebe's narrative choices, shedding light on the enduring significance of "Things Fall Apart" as a powerful indictment of colonial exploitation and cultural imperialism. Through this analysis, we aim to deepen our understanding of the enduring legacy of colonialism and the resilience of indigenous cultures in the face of external pressures.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach to examine Chinua Achebe's portrayal of colonial confrontation in "Things Fall Apart." Through close textual analysis, key themes of suppression and oppression are identified, elucidating the intricate dynamics between colonial powers and indigenous societies. Supplementing this analysis are secondary sources including scholarly articles and critical essays, enriching our understanding of the novel's historical and cultural context. Insights from Achebe's own writings, particularly "Morning Yet on Creation Day," provide valuable context for the author's thematic intentions. By integrating these diverse perspectives, we aim to offer a comprehensive examination of colonialism's impact on Igbo society as depicted in Achebe's seminal work. This qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in colonial encounters, shedding light on the enduring significance of "Things Fall Apart" in the canon of postcolonial literature.

DISCUSSION

Chinua Achebe's debut novel, "Things Fall Apart," delves into the clash between native African culture and the encroaching white culture of missionaries and colonial governance in Nigeria. The narrative meticulously reconstructs historical and political events, shedding light on the Igbo people's struggle against European oppression. Set in the 1880s and 1890s in Eastern Nigeria's lower Niger Delta, the novel vividly portrays Igbo proverbs, language, social customs, agricultural practices, and communal rituals, immersing readers in a distinctly Nigerian reality.

Achebe skillfully portrays the life within the Igbo community, highlighting how the introduction of white missionaries and colonial rule

slowly diminishes and destabilizes traditional Igbo values. Through the gradual process of religious conversion and the imposition of colonial political structures, the novel highlights the profound changes and challenges faced by the Igbo people, ultimately leading to the destabilization of their traditional way of life.

"Things Fall Apart" unfolds in three parts, each illuminating different facets of Igbo life and the profound impact of colonialism. The initial section paints a vivid picture of Igbo society, showcasing the contentment derived from their religious practices, socio-political structures, and cultural traditions. In the subsequent part, we witness the exile of the protagonist, Okonkwo, from Umuofia to Mbanta due to a clash with Igbo religious customs, coinciding with the arrival of white missionaries and colonial administrators. Their arrival marks a pivotal turning point as they introduce notions of 'civilization' while covertly aiming to expand the British Empire's dominion over the Igbo people. Upon Okonkwo's return to Umuofia, he encounters the missionaries and colonial administration, whose presence triggers social upheaval, cultural erosion, and religious turmoil, ultimately leading to the collapse of traditional Igbo life. Throughout the narrative, the novel meticulously explores the social, political, religious, cultural, economic, and educational subjugation of the Igbo tribe under British colonial rule, underscoring the dual mechanisms of suppression and oppression wielded by the colonial administration.

The arrival of European white missionaries at Umuofia, situated along the banks of a great river, marked the establishment of a hub for religion, trade, and governance. From there, they embarked on expeditions into the depths of Nigeria, encountering what they deemed to be 'uncivilized' and 'immoral' Igbo tribes. Their mission was to 'civilize' these lower Nigerian tribes and introduce them to Christianity. In doing so, they sought to supplant the ancient religious customs and beliefs of the Igbo people. The imposition of Christianity led to the suppression of the traditional Igbo religion and the oppression of the Igbo tribe. Benedict Njoku, in a dissertation discussing Achebe's writing style, sheds light on why Achebe dedicates a significant portion of his novel to cultural background: it underscores the richness of Igbo religion and culture prior to the arrival of the British colonizers. "Things Fall Apart expresses the author's nostalgia for the traditions and beliefs of Igbo people before European colonialism. It points out that Africans in general had a high level of value system before the advent of Christianity." (P.23) The arrival of the Europeans changed everything and the Europeans created enemies within the tribes by converting village members into Christians. As Achebe says in Morning Yet on Creation Day, these converted people were considered as "the people of the church" or "the association of God" (P.65) and unconverted called as "the people of nothing." (P.65) The newly converted individuals openly rejected old traditions and the traditional Igbo way of life, leaving the Igbo community at a loss for how to navigate this unfamiliar territory. Christianity, being a monotheistic religion, clashed sharply with Igbo ideals, almost appearing to ridicule their traditional beliefs. The church's interpretations of justice were forcefully imposed upon the

Igbo people, including those who did not opt for conversion, exacerbating the tensions between the two belief systems.

The Igbo people adhered to their own ethical code rooted in their traditional religion, which encompassed belief in various deities, including the supreme God Chukwu, creator of the universe. They maintained a practice of making sacrifices to appease these deities, with the understanding that if lesser gods failed to intervene, they would turn to Chukwu for aid. Central to their spiritual life was the "medicine house" or shrine (Obi) in their compounds, where they revered personal gods and ancestral spirits, offering sacrifices of kola nut, food, and palm wine. Decisions were not made without consulting these deities, particularly the oracle Agbala, sought after by people from distant lands to divine the future or communicate with their ancestors. Additionally, they revered Aní, the earth goddess, observing a sacred Week of Peace before the planting season to honor her. Any disturbance during this week was seen as a grave offense against Aní, risking her withholding of blessings and bringing calamity upon the community. Those who passed away during this time were ritually disposed of in the evil forest, as Aní was regarded as the ultimate arbiter of morality and conduct, deeply connected to the ancestral spirits. Transgressions against these deities necessitated sacrifices for atonement, underscoring the importance of moral conduct in their religious worldview.

In "Things Fall Apart," Achebe portrays the rituals and beliefs of the Igbo tribe, which were suppressed by white missionaries intent on spreading Christianity. These missionaries viewed Igbo customs as negative and sought to eradicate them, compelling the tribe to adopt a new religion. Achebe introduces the white man through Obierika, who informs Okonkwo during his second visit to Mbanta: the missionaries had arrived in Umuofia, built a church, gained a few converts, and were already sending evangelists to nearby towns and villages. This caused great sorrow among the clan leaders, though many believed that the new faith and the white man's god would not endure. The converts were not influential or titled men but were considered *efulefu*, or worthless individuals. In the clan's language, an *efulefu* was a man who sold his machete and went to battle wearing only the sheath (p.130). The church missionaries permitted individuals who had not attained any title in Igbo society, often referred to as *agbala*, which was also a term used to denigrate women and signify worthlessness in Umuofia. Furthermore, they exploited certain customs of the Igbo people, deeming them as unfavorable practices.

Nneka, the wife of Amadi, an Igbo woman, found herself pregnant once again, marking her fifth pregnancy. However, her previous four pregnancies had resulted in the birth of twins, a situation that subjected her to immense suffering and social scorn. According to their customs, twins were deemed taboo and were promptly disposed of in the evil forest. Faced with this heartbreaking ordeal and the mistreatment from her husband and his family, Nneka made the bold decision to seek solace in the church, becoming the first woman in Mbanta to do so.

When the Osu outcasts, who were shunned by the Igbo tribe, learned that the newly arrived religion accepted twin children, they approached the

church seeking refuge in this new faith. Initially, the converts were hesitant to accept them, but the Osu eventually gained acceptance after sacrificing their hair, despite the villagers' belief that shaving an Osu's hair would lead to their death. This exchange highlighted the oppression faced by both the converted Igbo people, who were compelled to associate with Osu against their customs, and the Osu themselves, who had to relinquish a significant aspect of their identity in order to be accepted. "Unless you shave off the mark your heathen belief I will not admit you into the church... the heathen speak nothing but a falsehood. Only the word of our God is true." (P.143-144)

One of the Osu, named Okoli, committed a grave transgression against the revered god Idemili by killing the sacred Royal python, known as 'Our Father.' This python held profound significance throughout Mbanta and the surrounding clans and was accorded the utmost respect, allowed to roam freely and unhindered. Killing the python was considered an unforgivable offense; even accidental deaths required elaborate compensatory sacrifices and special burial rites similar to those of a high-ranking individual. Okoli's zealous act of killing the python sparked a deep conflict between the church and the people of Mbanta.

As the church missionaries extended their influence into various clans, they actively promoted Christianity, condemning Igbo religious practices and deities as mere idols of stone and wood. The arrival of six missionaries in Mbanta to spread the gospel of Christianity marked a significant event for the locals, who had never seen white people before. Amidst the curious crowd, one of the missionaries, Mr. Kiaga, who had previously served as an interpreter for the missionaries, emerged as the leader of the nascent congregation in Mbanta. With authority, he addressed the people of Mbanta, heralding the arrival of Christianity to their community. In Chinua Achebe's words:

... The white man was also their brother because they were all son of God. And he told them about this new 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. A deep murmur went through the crowd when he said this. 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 man 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 god and turn to Him so that you may be saved when you die...' (P.131-132)

During the meeting in Mbanta, the Igbo people, who worshipped natural gods and goddesses such as Aní, the earth goddess; Amadiora, the god of thunderbolt; Idemili, the water god and guardian of the sacred royal python; Chukwu, the creator of the universe; and Agbala, the oracle of the hills and caves, questioned the missionaries about their 'true god.' One of the elders of Mbanta directed a question to the missionaries. "Which is this god of yours", he asked "the goddess of earth, the god of sky, Amadiora of the thunderbolt, or what?" (P.32). But the white man who did injustice exercise of Christianity

replied them: "All the gods who have named are not god at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent children. There is only one true God and he has the earth, the sky, you, and me and all of us." (P.132-33)

Gradually, the church missionaries in Mbanta gained more converts, including the Osu and Efulufu. They even accepted the 'Evil Forest' to build their church, assuring the locals that they would not die as a result. This convinced some of the people to start believing in the missionaries. Some of the converts in Mbanta began to openly boast that all the traditional gods were powerless and even planned to defy the community by burning down their places of worship. However, the people of Mbanta captured and beat them. Meanwhile, in Umuofia, not only the low-born and outcasts but also some respected men joined the church, renouncing their clan titles. Mr. Brown's successor, Reverend James Smith, a white missionary in the Umuofia church, encouraged the converts to act against the so-called pagans. Believing that such pagans needed to be eradicated, he incited a significant conflict between the church and the people of Umuofia. Achebe draws his character with Igbo proverb, "... as a man danced so the drums were beaten for him. Mr. Smith danced a furious step and so the drums went mad..." (P.167)

Mr. Smith, who openly condemned Mr. Brown's approach of compromise and accommodation, was harsh toward the Igbo people. He viewed them as an idolatrous crowd and sought only a few converts with a strong commitment to the church.

"He 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." (P.166)

The fervent convert Encho, son of the snake priest suspected of slaying the Royal Python, committed a grave offense against the Egwugwu—an ancestral spirit—by publicly unmasking him and tearing off his mask, symbolizing the killing of an ancestral spirit. This act led to the demolition of the church, signifying the deep-seated conflict between traditional Igbo beliefs and Christianity. While the missionaries were not physically harmed, their presence had a substantial impact. This exemplifies how white missionaries suppressed Igbo religion and customs, coercing them directly or indirectly to adopt Christianity and imposing unjust authority to alter fundamental Igbo beliefs.

In addition to introducing a new religion, European colonizers brought a new system of governance, establishing churches and courts with the aim of expanding the British Empire's borders. British colonial administration replaced traditional Igbo political systems, exploiting the Igbo people's unawareness that colonization aimed to infiltrate their country through religion before assuming control once destabilization had occurred. Previously, Igbo people managed their own political and administrative affairs, with elders, priests, and titled individuals making decisions concerning domestic and social matters. As

depicted in Achebe's novel, elders of the clan determined the course of action following the killing of Umuofia's daughter by a man from Mbaino, negotiating peace or compensation through war or the offering of a young man and a virgin.

The Igbo tribe maintained a unique system of justice during the New Yam Festival at Oli, where Ekwugwu, masked ancestral spirits embodying respected community leaders from various villages, convened to settle disputes between families and address social matters. This traditional system of justice was revered for its promptness and fairness, rooted in local customs and values, facilitating face-to-face interactions where everyone had an opportunity to be heard. Achebe vividly portrays Ekwugwu presiding over a domestic dispute between Mgbafo and her husband Uzowulu, each accompanied by their respective relatives, illustrating the efficacy of this communal form of justice in resolving conflicts within Igbo society. Uzowulu stepped forward and presented his case in front of Ekwugwu,

"That woman standing there is my wife, Mgbafo. I married her with my money and my yams. I do not owe my in-laws anything. I owe them no yams. I owe them no coco-yams. One morning three of them came to my house, beat me up and took my wife and children away. These happened in the rainy season. I have waited in vain for my wife to return. At last I went to my in-laws and said to them, 'You have taken back your sister. I did not send her away. You yourselves took her. The law of the clan is that you should return her bride-price.' But my wife's brothers said they had nothing to tell me. So, I have brought the matter to the fathers of clans. My case is finished. I salute you." (P.82)

Then, in opposition to Uzowulu, Odukwu, the eldest ancestor spirit and one of Mgbafo's brothers, made their case in front of Evil Forest, or Ekwugwu. He painted Uzowulu as a depraved man who often thrashed his wife. In his words:

Last year when my sister was recovering from an illness, he beat her again so that if the neighbours had not gone in to save her she would have been killed. We heard of it, and did as you have been told. The law of Umuofia is that if a woman runs away from her husband her bride-price is return. But in this case she ran away to save her life. (P.83)

Ekwugwu heard both the sides and their witnesses. At last they decided to settle the dispute, told Uzowulu to go to his in-laws with a pot of wine and beg him to return his wife that was how they were maintaining law and order of their clan. Frantz Fanon's comments to sum up event like socio-legal "ceremony" performed by Ekwugwu which is described in the novel: Self-criticism has been much talked about of late, but few people realize that it is an African institution. Whether it is the *djemmas* ("village assemblies") of Northern Africa or in the meeting of Western African tradition demands that the quarrels which occur in a village should be settled in public. It is communal self criticism, of course, and with a note of humour, because everybody is relaxed, and because in the resort we all want the same things. (P.37) Achebe has described through this event legal system or political system of Igbo tribe.

Later on, Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, inadvertently committed a crime within his village, Umuofia. During a funeral ceremony for a warrior, while performing the customary salutations with rounds of gunfire, Okonkwo's gun accidentally discharged, resulting in the tragic death of an innocent child. As a consequence, the village elders decided to exile him to Mbanta, the village of his mother's kinsmen, for a period of seven years. The Igbo people had a well-established judicial system rooted in their culture, traditions, and customs, yet this system was superseded by the British government's court without regard for Igbo values and customs.

During a subsequent encounter between Okonkwo and Obeika in Mbanta, Obeika recounted a harrowing incident that occurred in Abame, one of the Igbo villages, involving a massacre by a troop of white men. When the people of Abame encountered a white man for the first time, their innocence and ignorance led them to fear him and flee. Acting on the guidance of their ancestral spirits, who warned them that white men would bring calamity, they killed the stranger and hung him from a sacred cotton tree out of fear and ignorance. In retaliation, the white men perpetrated a brutal massacre to suppress and subdue them.

"...They have a big market in Abame on every other Afo day and, as you know, the whole clan gathers there. That was the day it happened. The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed except the old and the sick who were at home and handful of men and women whose chi were wide awake and brought them out of that market." (P.126)

Some fugitives sought refuge in Umuofia, reuniting with their kinsmen and friends, while others, with nowhere else to turn, arrived with tales of woe. The British government's agenda extended beyond the propagation of their religion; it concealed a desire to expand their global dominion. This was evident in their political subjugation of the traditional Igbo judiciary, replacing it with a system designed to exploit tribal peoples. In their courts, Igbo individuals faced oppression, with judges often showing little concern for the facts of the case. Many times, judges were entirely ignorant of the details and unwilling to entertain arguments from both sides, rendering decisions based solely on their own interests rather than the pursuit of truth and justice. "...they had built a court where the district commissioner judged cases in ignorance..." (P.158)

"We shall not do you any harm' said district commissioner to them later, 'if only you agree to co-operate with us. We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice as it is done in my own country under a great queen..." (P.175)

In the encounter between the district commissioner and the six elders of the clan, it becomes evident that the commissioner has replaced the traditional Igbo court with his own. Moreover, he endeavors to persuade them of the superiority of his court over the traditional Igbo judicial system. Within the

same dialogue, the essence of the oppression faced by the tribal people is palpable as the commissioner imposes fines on them for mistreating a Christian who had openly ridiculed the Egwugwu by unmasking them in public. The European colonizers established a governmental apparatus that exploited the Igbo tribe, complete with courts and prisons to enforce colonial law and safeguard the interests of their religion. Many Igbo individuals who resisted their religion and authority were subjected to execution and hanging.

"...These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and highhanded. They were called Kotma. And because of their ash coloured shorts, they earned the additional name of 'Ashy Buttocks'. They guarded the prison which was full of men who had offended against the white man's law. Some of these prisoners had thrown away their twins and some had molested the Christians. They were beaten in the prison by the Kotma and made to work every morning clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white commissioner and the court messenger. Some of these prisoners were men of title who should be above such mean occupation..." (P.158)

The oppression of the colonial administration is further depicted in the novel when the District Commissioner, a colonial administrator, returns from his tour and sends a messenger to summon six elders of the clan along with Okonkwo to the headquarters. There, he discusses the destruction of the church and orders his messenger to handcuff them, leading them into the guard room. Despite their status as leaders of Umuofia, the prisoners are subjected to disrespectful treatment as the head messenger, acting as the prisoners' barber, shaves off their hair with a razor as directed by the District Commissioner. This act is carried out in the prison, highlighting the disdain and lack of regard for the dignity of the Igbo leaders under colonial rule.

"The six men ate nothing throughout that day and the next day. They were not even given any water to drink, and they could not go out to urinate or go into the bush when they were pressed. At night the messenger's came into taunt them and to knock shaven heads together." (P.175-176)

Enduring severe mistreatment at the hands of the messenger, each man faced physical assault, as Okonkwo's fury erupted over the killings of white men. The messenger delivered blows to their heads and backs, inflicting bitter beatings upon them. Through his work, Achebe vividly portrays Igbo society and its rich culture, encapsulating rituals, customs, traditional art, language, religion, and way of life. However, the intrusion of white missionaries and British colonial administrators shattered their social harmony and undermined the entirety of Igbo culture. In a critical analysis of "Things Fall Apart," Emanuel Egar illuminates the underlying causes of the decline of African culture.

"By allowing the white man to land on African shores, Africans allowed the white man to impose Christianity...with its craving for right and wrong, its love of truth and beauty -on the African social system." (P.8)

The term "impose" in this context carries negative implications, diverging from the expected perception of a significant offering. To effectively convey how modern concepts can sometimes hinder rather than aid, a thorough

discussion is required for Westerners to grasp the concept. Within the Igbo tribe, a distinct social hierarchy prevailed, where a man's value rested on his standing within society. Priests, elders, and individuals who attained various titles within the clan were revered as the most prominent figures in Igbo culture. With only four titles available within the clan, typically only one or two men achieved the highest rank in each generation, based on merit and accomplishments. Those who did not obtain any titles were designated as Agbala. A central tenet of Igbo society was that a man's status derived from his merit, masculinity, wealth, and number of wives. Those with greater wealth in terms of yams and wives held esteemed positions within Igbo society.

The Igbo society thrived on its rich cultural heritage, as culture is the backbone of any society. Among its cherished traditions was the ritual of the Kola nut, symbolizing hospitality and civility within the Igbo tribe. When presented, the Kola nut was exchanged between host and guest, with both parties insisting that the other crack the nut, although typically it was the host who carried out this gesture. This ritual was believed to invoke blessings of vitality and joy from the gods upon the individual and their family. Additionally, they carried chalk to adorn their toes and mark ceremonial lines on the floor. These sacred rituals and customs were pivotal in fostering and preserving social cohesion within the community.

The Igbo community also observed the Feast of New Yam, an annual event dedicated to expressing gratitude to Ani, the earth goddess, held before the harvest season began. New yams were not consumed until offerings were presented to the gods and ancestral spirits. This festival was a communal affair, with neighboring villagers invited to join in the celebration. Women played a pivotal role, diligently cleaning walls and huts with red earth until they shone, then decorating them with intricate designs in white, yellow, and dark green. They adorned themselves with cam wood paint, adding beautiful black patterns to their stomachs and backs. Children took part by grooming their hair with shaving. The first day of the festival was marked by lavish feasts and camaraderie, while the second day showcased exciting wrestling matches. Additionally, the Igbo people observed various social customs such as marriage ceremonies and Uri, a component of the betrothal process involving the exchange of dowries. These occasions were characterized by feasting, drinking, dancing, and singing, fostering joy and happiness as daughters were married off to neighboring clans and vice versa. Furthermore, funeral ceremonies varied in scale depending on the social status of the deceased individual, with each celebration serving to uphold the social harmony of the Igbo people and strengthen their emotional bonds with one another. No doubt they had a problem and quarrel between two clans, even though they believed in social harmony. Uchendu; Okonkwo's maternal uncle advised their children,

"We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsmen to scratch him." (Achebe 1958, 151)

The ancient Igbo tribe valued unity and worked to preserve their culture, endeavoring to uphold an invisible connection among their kinsfolk. Nevertheless, they harbored profound apprehensions regarding the younger generation, who had been heavily swayed by church missionaries and had started to forsake their social and religious traditions, along with their ancestral deities. The most senior member of the Umunna, a group of kinsmen, paid a visit to Okonkwo as he made preparations to leave Mbanta. In his farewell address to Okonkwo, he expressed his apprehension for the preservation of Igbo cultural traditions and the ancestral legacy, fearing that the younger generation was straying from the path laid out by their ancestors. In his words,

“...A man who call his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. You may ask why I am saying all this. I say it because I fear for the young generation, for you people...As for me, I have only a short while to live, and so have Uchendu and Unachukwu and Emefo. But I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan.” (P.152)

The concerns of the elderly Igbo people were validated by the unfolding reality. The missionaries had successfully indoctrinated many tribe members, resulting in the division of clans into two factions—those swayed by religious conversion and those influenced by colonial authority. Obierika; a friend of Okonkwo; outbursts furiously,

“How can he when does not even speak our tongue? But he says 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 can quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were assumed at his foolishness and allow him to stay. Now he has warned our brothers and our clan no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” (P.160)

British educational system was one of the means to be civilized Igbo people who were not having particular pattern and place for educating their children. They had traditional oral system of education which was suppressed by the white missionaries through establishing schools in various clans. “Orature” (a word coined by Pio Zirimu, as Opposed to “literature”), is deployed to connote “a system of aesthetics, an oral narrative system, for instance, which could be differentiated from the system of visual narratives.” (P.111) Before the introduction of reading and writing to Central, Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa through Muslim states like Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, the

predominant narrative mode in Africa was rooted in "Orature" or an "Oral narrative system," which served the societal needs. In order to ensure the continuity of culture, the Igbo tribe, for instance, relied on an oral education system designed to impart knowledge of their social customs, religious rituals, unique cultural practices, and agricultural techniques to their children. This was achieved through the telling of various stories encompassing cultural legends, fairy tales, folk tales, fables, and mythology. Typically, fathers conveyed tales of the land—stories characterized by masculinity, violence, prowess in wrestling, and warrior spirit—to their children to instill these traits. Conversely, mothers would share fables and folk tales with their younger children, such as those featuring the crafty tortoise or the bird *eneke-nti-oba* who dared the world to a wrestling match but was ultimately defeated by the cat, or the quarrel between earth and sky. In this patriarchal society, the stories told by fathers were deemed crucial for shaping the character of their children, while those told by mothers were sometimes viewed as mere entertainment.

Recognizing the challenge of directly convincing Igbo people to abandon their traditional beliefs, white missionaries devised a strategy to redirect their focus. They began establishing schools and hospitals as part of this plan. In the novel, Mr. Brown gains insight into the Igbo religion of the Umuofia clan through his friend Akunna, who sends his son to learn the knowledge of the white men. By establishing educational and medical institutions, missionaries aimed to introduce Christianity's customs and culture from early in life, thereby increasing the likelihood of converting more individuals to their faith. That is also one of the integral parts of oppression by education as the minds of the people of Igbo tribe got diverted. In Achebe's expressions,

"...[Mr. Brown] came to 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 to 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 leader of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write." (P.163-164)

Mr. Brown warned the people of Umuofia that if they failed to enroll their children in the school, individuals from Umuru or other regions would eventually govern them. Despite their small numbers, the white settlers aimed to establish their colonial government by utilizing the converted and educated Igbo individuals who had been schooled in their language and laws. Through persuasive tactics, Mr. Brown managed to convince more people to enroll in his school, enticing them with gifts like singlets and towels. This development reflects the colonial presence depicted in the novel:

"Mr. Brown's school produced quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers; and from Umuofia labourers went forth into the Lord's vineyard. New churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them from the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand." (P.164)

Achebe's statement clearly indicates the spread of schools across various regions. It also suggests that the oppression and conversion of the Igbo people, which was previously anticipated before the establishment of schools, was now escalating, as indicated by the establishment of new schools in many areas. Through the educational system, the British government gained more control over individuals who were now being educated under their authority. This highlights the oppression inherent in the educational system and its impact on the people. The economy of the Igbo people was primarily agricultural, and cowries, shells used as currency, facilitated the exchange of agricultural produce and goods. Yams held a prominent position as the primary crop, with the wealth of individuals often measured by the size of their yam barns. However white man had disturbed the economic system of Igbo tribe through their trading center, "...the white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel become things of great price, and much money flowed in to Umufia." (P.161) Europeans set up a trading center at the Lower Niger Delta, known as Umuru, in the region of the palm-oil rivers. This area became a major hub for trade, especially in palm oil, which was highly sought after in Europe for industrial uses. Consequently, numerous trading ports were established along both banks of the River Niger to support these trade activities. Through these commercial ventures, the traditional economic system of the Igbo tribe was gradually undermined by the influence of European trade.

CONCLUSION

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" delves into the theme of colonial confrontation, illustrating how the colonial administrators exploited the Igbo tribe. The novel depicts instances where the colonial authorities levied fines against those who opposed their religion and authority. For example, the District Commissioner imposed a penalty of two hundred cowries on six representatives of Umuofia, and his messengers engaged in corrupt and oppressive practices, extorting additional fifty cowries for their own gain. These actions corrupted the administrative system established by the colonizers, leading to economic exploitation and injustice against the innocent Igbo people. For instance, Achebe explains, "...the white man's court has decided that it should belong to Nama's family, who had given much money to the white man's messenger and interpreter." (P.159)

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