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Impact of Colonialism in Chinua

Achebe's Things Fall Apart

A Research Project

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes *Things Fall Apart* using an insightful methodology that provides insight into colonialism in Africa, which has gone through several stages in different African countries . it aims to explore the multiple impacts of colonialism on Igbo society as depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

This research is divided into four main sections with an introduction section and a conclusion section. The first section introduces the definition of colonialism and an overview of *things fall apart*. The second section shifts the focus to pre-colonial Igbo society and provides a detailed description of their culture and traditions and a discussion of Okonkwo's role within the community. The third section analyzes the arrival of colonial forces and addresses community reactions and responses to this transformative event. In the fourth section, the paper analyzes the impact of colonialism on Igbo society, highlighting the destruction of religious and cultural norms and new positive outcomes. Lastly, this research paper ends with a conclusion and a reference list.

Key words: colonialism ; Achebe; *Things fall apart* ; Impact; Igbo.

Introduction

The word colonialism which comes from the Greek "colonia" originally describe Describe Greeks who lived abroad but kept close to their home country. A group of foreigners developing a new society in another area while keeping their citizenship from their native country is referred to as colonialism in the Oxford English Dictionary (Loomba 2005). According to Hasan (2020), colonialism can be characterized as the establishment of foreigners in distant regions with the intention of dominating and controlling the entire society. This involves transforming the community to mirror their homeland by gradually disseminating their cultures, customs, and beliefs. The ultimate goal is to further their economic, cultural, and political interests.

In the late Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart" (TFA) from 1958, the author, a Nigerian literary figure born between 1930 and 2013, unfolds a narrative set on the outskirts of Nigeria in the fictional village of Umuofia. The storyline precedes the arrival of white missionaries, causing a sense of unease among the villagers who grapple with unforeseen cultural shifts imposed by the missionaries' introduction of new political structures and institutions(Kenalemang, 2013).

This research dives into Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' to understand how colonialism affects the vibrant Igbo society before colonization. Through the character of Okonkwo, we'll explore his role in the community, focusing on power, tradition, and identity. Additionally, we'll delve into the Igbo culture, looking at how their values shape their response to colonialism. Ultimately, we aim to reveal the societal changes caused by colonialism and the Igbo people's determination to hold onto their heritage.

The aims of this research are to explore:

1. How does the arrival of colonial forces impact the pre-colonial Igbo society?
2. What is Okonkwo's role and position in the community?
3. What are the cultural traditions and values of the Igbo people, and how do they shape their response to colonialism.

Section One

1.1 Definition of Colonialism

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) states that the word colonialism originated from the Roman word “colonia” , which means “farm” or “ settlement” and denoted Roman who relocated to other countries while maintaining their citizenship. Thus, the OED characterizes it as “a settlement in a new country...a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parent state is kept up” (Loomba ,2005, p.1).

According to (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012, p. 46). Colonialism is the direct and total dominance of one nation over another based on the possession of state power by a foreign power (Britain, for example, dominated Nigeria directly and completely between 1900 and 1969). Political dominance is colonialism's primary goal, the secondary goal is to enable the colonized nation to be exploited.

The European Industrial Revolution drove colonialism, fueled by the demand for raw materials and investment opportunities. Industrialization transformed European socio-economics and technology, surpassing agriculture, leading to strained local resources and the exploration of external markets (Ocheni & Nwankwo , 2012, p.47). Moreover, Europe's industrial capitalism significantly increased global resource demands, leading to Europe seizing mineral and agricultural resources worldwide, reorganizing mines and markets to its advantage. Originally operating on an exchange system, Africa later succumbed to the international division of labor, becoming a producer of raw materials for European industry. (Chinweizu, 1978, p. 35).

Europeans used various strategies to subjugate Africans during colonialism, employing methods like the conquest system, compulsory labor, taxation, and offering meager wages. They asserted direct control over African territories, manipulating local leadership to align with their interests. The imposition of oppressive taxes compelled Africans into labor for Europeans, with severe punishments for those unable to pay. This coercive taxation system enforced labor and harsh penalties for non-compliance. (Ocheni & Nwankwo , 2012, p. 50).

In the broader context of African colonialism, European powers, including Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands, used Christianity to justify colonization. This involved disseminating Christian doctrine to both control and reshape African culture, intertwining cultural intervention with economic and political motives. The impact of Christianity forms a crucial aspect of the multifaceted colonial legacy in Africa. “Mid-and late-nineteenth-century Europeans were generally convinced that their Christian, scientific and industrial society was intrinsically far superior to anything that Africa had produced” (Fage, 1978, p. 322)

Similar to a one armed bandit, colonialism brought few advantages, building only only small scale railroads, hospitals, and schools in its early years. After the war significant social services began to appear, indicating a change in policy as opposed to ongoing Africans welfare initiatives. Statistics on underdevelopment today mirror the circumstances at the end of colonialism . In the first ten years African independence, statistics on housing, health, and education frequently outpaced those that subsequent administrations took over. (Rodney, 1973, p. 246).

During colonial period, the distribution scarce social services reflected dominance and exploitation. While people built infrastructure in colonies like Algeria , Kenya, and South Africa that favored their comfort. Moreover, there was an uneven allocation of social benefits in primarily black nations, with a preference for white people. Contrary to predictions, the southern region of Nigeria did not reap the promised benefits. The harsh social services provided by the colonial administration were particularly noticeable in commercially attractive sectors like mining industry. (Rodney, 1973, p.p. 247-248).

The primary goal of colonial education was to prepare students to work as clerks, interpreters, produce inspectors, craft people, Etc., to assist them take use of Africa's Abundant resources. The industrialization of African regions or the advancement of technology inside the continent were not the goals of colonial education. (ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012, p.51).

1.2. Overview Of *Things Fall Apart*

The novel by Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, is set in the 1890s and chronicles the conflict between the European colonial government of Nigeria and the indigenous Igbo culture. The book is divided into three sections: the first covers Okonkwo's family, personal background, and Igbo society; the second and third portions focus on the effects of Christian missionaries and European colonization on Okonkwo and the larger Igbo population. The main character of *Things Fall Apart* is Okonkwo, the main character of the book. Okonkwo and his family are banished from Umuofia as the story progresses when he unintentionally murders a man. After he is banished, Umuofia is altered by the arrival of white missionaries. On Okonkwo's return to his village, he observes Umuofia's significant changes brought about by his banishment. To force the white missionaries off their land, Okonkwo and the other locals band together, unhappy with the development. They send messengers to the missionaries, who cancel the meeting, so their efforts are meaningless. When Okonkwo murders one of the messengers, the villagers let the other messengers go because they are shocked by what he did. After reporting back to the missionaries, the messengers set out to bring Okonkwo to justice, only to discover that he has passed away.

(Kenalemang, 2013. p.11).

Section Two

2.1. pre-colonial Igbo Society

Pre-colonial Igbo society refers to the social, cultural, and political organization of the Igbo people in Nigeria before the advent of European colonial rule. The final decades of the 19th century are shown in the Nigerian Igboland setting of *Things Fall Apart*. It shows how intricately the daily lives of the characters are tied together by their culture; each character has their own set of norms, culture, and set of beliefs. Nigerians of Igbo (Ibo) descent are an ethnic group. In colonial Igboland, having many wives, growing yams, and being powerful were the three characteristics that symbolized dominance. (Praseeba, & Royappa, 2022, p.3051).

2.2. Description Of Igbo Culture And Traditions

Igbo culture encompasses the customs, practices, and traditions of the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria. It combines ancient practices with new elements influenced by cultural evolution or external factors. The cultural richness is expressed through visual art, music, dance, attire, cuisine, and language dialects. The diversity is amplified by various subgroups within the Igbo community. In rural areas, Igbo individuals engage primarily in craftsmanship, farming, and trade, with yam being a crucial crop alongside staples like cassava and taro.

The language of Igbo people belongs to Niger-congo language family. They utilize their language to preserve their culture and traditions and it offer them a sense of belonging. “ Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly., And proverbs are the palmoil with which words are eaten ”.(Achebe, 1958, p.7). The Igbo people rely on their language to specify their social status and set them apart from other groups. Furthermore, one important component of their

culture is the proverbs they use in communication, which capture the pure essence of their way of life.(Kenalemang, 2013,p.13).

In Igbo culture, family is really important. They respect their ancestors, nature Gods, and community rules. Dads are like teachers and protectors, and moms follow cultural beliefs in having kids and raising them. Farming is key for survival, along with crafts and trade, all while making sure to please the nature Gods. The hardworking Igbo people are close to nature, just like “Okonkwo worked on his farm daily during the planting season” (Achebe, 1958, p.13)(Praseeba & Royappa, 2022, pp.3052, 3053). Similarly, the Egbo people in Nigeria are very religious, everything they do reflects their spiritual beliefs. Worship practices differ between Igbo communities, each having its own unique customs and traditions related to places of worship and special objects (Ohajiriogu, 2009, pp.45, 49).

You think you are the greatest sufferer in the world? Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life? Do you know that men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children? I, had six wives once. I have none now except that young girl who knows not her right from her left. Do you know how many children I have buried--children I begot in my youth' and strength Twenty-two . I did not hang myself, and I am still alive. If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has borne and thrown away. Have you not heard the song they sing when a woman dies? (Achebe, 1958,p.135).

In Igbo culture, the Supreme God is known as Chukwu, while the personal God is referred to as Chi. The profound connection to their religion is emphasized, equating any disruption to waging war. The authority of the gods, conveyed by high priests, is absolute, leading to extreme actions such as discarding twins based on the belief that they are creations of the devil (Praseeba & Royappa, 2022, p.3052). Traditional practices like the Peace Week and the Feast of the New Yam, coupled with myths and tales, embody the cultural richness of Umuofia, illustrating

the intricate interplay between spirituality and daily life .(Praseeba it & Royappa, 2022, p.3051).

2.3.Okonkwo's role and position in the community

Okonkwo is the protagonist of the novel, representing the unity of the Igbo society, their culture, norms, traditions, and the supremacy of the male. He embodies the Igbo culture and serves as an influential clan leader in Umuofia. Despite his father's failures, Okonkwo is able to work hard and become a successful farmer. "During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cock-crow until the chickens went to roost (Achebe,1958,p.13). However, *Things Fall Apart* also explores the triumphs and tragic demise of Okonkwo's village, Umuofia, and the constant fear of failure and weakness that Okonkwo lived with, always concerned that he might be seen as resembling his father. He became famous as the best wrestler in nine villages, earned wealth as a successful farmer with two barns full of yams, and recently married his third wife..(ManiinderKaur, 2016, p.1).

Okonkwo's unwavering commitment to cultural norms and societal expectations results in tragic outcomes, such as the killing of Ikemefuna. Despite grappling with internal conflicts and a collapsing belief system, he steadfastly adheres to his rigid understanding of cultural expectations. The introduction of European influences raises the prospect of cultural change; however, Okonkwo's persistent allegiance to tradition brings social prestige but personal discontent, ultimately leading to a tragic conclusion. Moreover, Okonkwo's unwavering dedication to societal norms leads to tragedy as he sacrifices personal connections, exemplified by the murder of Ikemefuna. Despite internal conflict and a crumbling belief system, he clings to rigid convictions, resorting to alcohol. The intrusion of

European influences challenges traditional norms, exposing their drawbacks. Okonkwo's commitment brings social prestige but personal frustration, contributing to his tragic end as he loses status, his primary source of satisfaction.

In the novel's final stages, Okonkwo, a symbol of resistance and traditional values, is overwhelmed by the relentless forces of change brought by colonization. Powerless and grief-stricken, he chooses suicide as a final act of despair. However, his death mirrors the demise of the old Igbo society, refusing to submit to the colonizers' brutality and the destruction of cherished values. Moreover, Okonkwo's suicide represents a profound rejection of the moral collapse he associates with submission to the white man, in stark contrast to the collective surrender of Umuofia's people. The tragedy unfolds as both the individual and the society succumb to the impact of the new religion and colonial administration. (ManiinderKaur, 2016, p.3).

Section Three

3.1. Arrival Of Colonial Forces

During Okonkwo's seven-year exile, white missionaries secretly aim to colonize Umuofia and other Igbo clans, manipulated the people's beliefs through Christianity and introduced elements of civilization such as schools, courts, jails, and churches. Over time, more individuals, including Okonkwo's son Nwoye, convert to Christianity, leading to a shift in perception where Europeans are viewed as superior. Consequently, British influence has become predominant in Nigeria, (Hasan, 2020, p.26).

“Does the white man understand our custom about land? How can he 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” (Achebe, 1958, p.176).

However, Obierika's statement encapsulates Achebe's concerns about colonialism, highlighting how foreigners effortlessly control the land despite lacking knowledge of the people's language and traditions. The subtle techniques employed by colonizers undermine the unity of the Nigerian people, making them vulnerable to control. However, Achebe assigns blame not only to the colonizers but also to Umuofians who forsake their cultural roots for Christianity, thereby facilitating the colonial processes, (Hasan, 2020, p.26).

In the narrative, the transition from Mr. Brown, a white missionary with an understanding approach, to Reverend James Smith, who employs strictness and violence, adds complexity to the impact of Christianity. However, this shift becomes evident when, following the destruction of the church, Smith orders the imprisonment of village leaders, including Okonkwo, and demands a fine for their release, (Kenalemang, 2013).

Upon the arrival of white missionaries in the village, one of their initial actions is to replace Igbo courts with their own, lacking an understanding of Igbo history, culture, and justice. This oversight becomes a crucial mistake in their takeover. The missionaries disregard Igbo laws and customs, imprisoning village leaders for burning a missionary church and, this reveals a lack of concern for Igbo tradition and a forceful imposition of the missionaries' culture. The Igbo view the missionaries as aliens due to their unknown origin and incomprehension of Christianity. The arrival of the white missionaries prompts a clash of cultures, with some Igbo members embracing Christianity to escape certain cultural practices. Notably, Okonkwo disowns his son, Nwoye, for converting, showcasing the Igbo struggle to adapt to change beyond their language. The decision to adopt Christianity is driven by the desire to escape suffering from Igbo practices, yet it unwittingly complicates their future, (Kenalemang, 2013, p.13).

Section four

4.1. Impact Of Colonialism In Things Fall Apart

European colonialism in Africa is viewed as either a positive inheritance or a negative legacy. (Khapoya, 2009.p.135-136) explains some positive aspects, such as the introduction of Western medical technology, which enhances the health and life expectancy of African society, and formal education, contributing to societal advancement. (Piola&Usman. 2019. p.111). While acknowledging some positive aspects of European colonialism in Africa, it is essential to delve into the darker consequences.

In the novel's resolution, after leaders are released, Okonkwo, frustrated by the community's lack of resistance, beheads a messenger. The people's reluctance to support him signals a breakdown in unity. Realizing society has crumbled, Okonkwo's suicide symbolizes the psychological disturbance within Nigerian society. His death reflects the extinction of cultural elements, including traditions, beliefs, and religions, highlighting the profound impact of colonial forces on the community(Hasan, 2020. P. 27).

According to (Hasan. 2020. P.27), the intrusion of the white man and the introduction of a new religion led to a significant breakdown in the traditional rules and values that once guided the Igbo community. The quoted passage suggests that the colonizers disrupted the established norms of Igbo society, impacting various facets of their lives, including culture, social structure, and religion. The very essence of the title, "Things Fall Apart," reflects a shift from order to disorder,

emphasizing the impact of colonialism on the established societal structures and norms. Colonial rule disrupts social stability, causing instability and disintegration .

European colonization wrought a profound transformation in Igbo politics, introducing new rules, altering land ownership structures, and establishing foreign governance. This upheaval disrupted the established political and social order, as European rules and authority directly challenged the community's traditional values and way of life. Consequently, men holding titles in their towns found themselves enslaved for daring to defy these foreign impositions. Notably, when Okonkwo suggested to Obriika that Umofians resist the British, Obriika astutely recognized the futility of such an endeavor, stating, Obierika says that the white man "has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." This insightful remark by Obierika serves as the first explicit acknowledgment of the book's title, *Things Fall Apart*. Moreover, the impact of colonialism extends beyond politics, reshaping the Ibo society from its traditional subsistence farming of yams, deeply connected to the land, to a post-colonial era influenced by Western industrialism. This shift towards surplus production and market-oriented agriculture disrupts not only traditional values but also erodes the cultural significance tied to the land.(El Arbaoui,(n.d), pp.9-10).

Missionaries introduced Christianity to Umuofia, initially facing resistance from villagers. Despite initial rejection, their persistent efforts led to widespread acceptance, with many villagers eventually converting to the new religion. This transformation in religious beliefs marked a significant impact on the community. Simultaneously, European colonialism introduced English to Umuofia, creating a language barrier for the villagers, who struggled to comprehend as communication was facilitated through an interpreter. This linguistic change further highlighted the

complex effects of colonial influence on Umuofia's cultural and social fabric, (Piola & Usman, 2019, pp. 113-116).

Colonial rulers introduced diverse ideologies like individualism and Marxism, which clash with the African philosophy of communal belonging. While African philosophy views a person as fundamentally connected or belonging, Western philosophy views a person as fundamentally connected or belonging, Western philosophy emphasizes individual existence as "a being for itself." This ideological disparity contributes to cultural conflicts during the colonial period. The white man's introduction of individualistic ideologies damaged the unity and relationships in Igbo society. For instance, Okonkwo's relationship with his son Nwoye deteriorated, influenced by the changes brought by Christian colonizers (Hasan, 2020. P. 28).

Conclusion

In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, The effects of colonialism on Igbo society are clearly depicted through Okonkwo and his community of Umuofia. The arrival of white missionaries brings Christianity and Western ideas, drastically altering the cultural scene. Traditional Igbo customs are contested and often **supplanted** by foreign practices, causing significant upheaval in the community's social structure.

As European colonization gains **momentum**, the previously united Igbo society starts to splinter due to external pressures. Okonkwo, representing traditional beliefs and defiance against change, becomes more solitary as his fellow community members embrace Christianity and Western lifestyles. The enforcement of colonial administrative systems intensifies conflicts within the community, resulting in the erosion of traditional leadership and social unity.

Ultimately, "**Things Fall Apart**" acts as a poignant commentary on the lasting effects of colonialism in Africa. Achebe's skillful narrative presents readers with the stark truths of cultural domination and its deep-seated consequences for native societies. The book serves as a compelling tribute to the resilience of the Igbo people against external forces and underscores the significance of safeguarding cultural heritage amidst the quest for advancement and growth.

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