

Things Fall Apart: Post-Colonialism & Culture of Igbo People

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About Author:

The novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) written by Chinua Achebe, Christened Albert Chinua Lomugu Achebe by his Igbo parents, Isaiah Okafor Achebe, a Christian churchman, and Janet N. Achebe, was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria. Albert C. Achebe attended a primary school in Ogidi run by the church Missionary Society before he was chosen to attend Government College at Umoufia, where he studied from 1944 to 1947. The school was said to be one of the very best in West Africa and the boy Achebe went there on the merit. He entered University in 1953. He had studied literature, history and theology at the university. While at University College, Albert Chinua Lomugu Achebe dropped the “Tribute to Victorian England”, as Achebe says in his 1987 book of essays *Hopes and Impediments*, and shortened his first name to its present form “Chinua”. In 1966 the massacre of Igbo’s Northern Nigeria forced Achebe to leave Lagos and take his family back to eastern Nigeria. When the eastern Nigeria seceded from the federation and declared itself as Biafra, a separate republic, Achebe became an official spokesman for the Biafra cause and was sent to several political missions to Europe and North America. He returns to Nigeria in 1977. In 1985, he was made emeritus professor at Nsukka and frequently went abroad to teach at institutions like the University of Massachusetts and the University of Connecticut in the U.S. He has been the recipient of various honors from all over the world --- this includes over twenty five honorary doctorates from universities in intellectual achievement, the Nigerian National Merit Award. Chinua Achebe began writing early probably 1950 onwards after he had entered University College, Ibadan. The teaching in Africa missionary school and college was excellent and the teachers spotted and selflessly encourage talent early. Chinua Achebe training in college, in literature, history and theology might have furthered high ambitions to write ‘humanities’ subjects would have served as an additional impetus. Chinua Achebe began, in the first place, to write his First novel, *Things Fall Apart* because he, a modern Anglophone Igbo Nigerian, had felt insulted by the representation of his own people in English Literature. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (which he set along the Congo River, mostly, circa 1890’s) Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (1953) had to correct, through an authentic novel about Nigeria (especially for Igbo land).

In an interview with Lewis Nkosi, Chinua Achebe said:

“I know around 51, 52 I was quite certain that I was going to try my hand at writing, and one of the things that set me thinking was Joyce Cary’s novel set in Nigeria, *Mister Johnson*, which was praised so much, and it was clear to me that it was a most superficial picture of –not only the country – but even of Nigerian character, and so I thought if this was famous, then someone ought to try and look at this is from the inside.”

One of the most famous novel of Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into many languages and has sold over 10 million copies. Achebe was appointed the original editor of Heinemann’s African Writers Series (launched in 1958) and *Things Fall Apart* was the first novel published in this series.

1.0 Introduction of *Things Fall Apart*:

Things Fall Apart is both a “historical” and “political” novel that eschews nostalgia or any self-deceiving sentimentality about the break-up of the old way of life in Igbo land, beginning in the 1880s. As Chinua Achebe he puts it in a lecture delivered in 1964 to the Nigeria Literary Association:

The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self respect. The writer’s duty to help them regains it by showing the human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Igbo that man who can’t tell Where the rains begin to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them...in Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history.

Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* not only in response to the then common bastardization of his native people, but to show his fellow citizen that the Igbo were dignified. His pointing out the people's democratic institution and culture serve to test themselves against the goals of modern liberal democracy and to have set out to show how the Igbo meet those standards.

The bulk of the novel takes place in Umuofia, a cluster of nine villages on the lower Niger. Umuofia is powerful clan, skilled in war and with a great population, with proud tradition and advanced social institutions. Okonkwo has risen from nothing to a high position. Through hard work, he has become a great man among his people. He has taken three wives and his barn is full yams, the staple crops. He rules his family with an iron fist.

One day, a neighboring clan commits an offence against Umuofia. To avoid war, the offending clan gives Umuofia one virgin and one young boy. The girl is to become the offended party's new wife. The boy, whose name is Ikemefuna, is to be sacrificed, but not immediately. He lives in Umuofia for three years, and during that time he lives under Okonkwo's roof. He becomes like a part of Okonkwo's family. In particular, Nowey, Okonkwo's oldest son, loves Ikemefuna like a brother. But eventually the Oracle calls for the boy's death and a group of men take Ikemefuna away to kill him in the forest. Okonkwo, fearful of being perceived as soft-hearted and weak, participates in the boy's death. He does so despite the advice of the clan elders. Nwoye is spiritually broken by the event.

Okonkwo is shaken as well, but he continues with his drive to become a lord of clan. He is constantly disappointed by Nwoye, but he has great love for his daughter Ezinma, his child by his second wife Ekwefi. Ekwefi has born ten children, but only Ezinma has survived. She loves the girl fiercely. Ezinma is sickly, and sometimes Ekwefi fears that Ezinma, too, will die. Late one night, the powerful Oracle of Umuofia brings Ezinma with her for a spiritual encounter with the earth goddess. Terrified, Ekwefi follows the Oracle at a distance; fearing harm might come to her child. Okonkwo follows, too. Later, during a funeral for one of the great men of the clan, Okonkwo's gun explodes, killing a boy. In accordance with Umuofia's law, Okonkwo and his family must be exiled for seven years.

Okonkwo bears the exile bitterly. Central to his beliefs is faith that a man masters his own destiny. But the accident and exile are proof that at times man cannot control his own fate, and Okonkwo is forced to start over again without the strength and energy of his youth. He flees with his family to Mbanto, his mother's homeland. There they are received by his mother's family, who treat them generously. His mother's family is headed by Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, a generous and wise old man.

During Okonkwo's exile, the white man comes to both Umuofia and Mbanto. The missionaries arrive first, preaching a religion that seems mad to the Igbo people. They win converts, but generally the converts are men of low rank or outcasts. However, with times, the new religion gains momentum. Nwoye becomes a convert. When Okonkwo learns of Nwoye's conversion, he beats the boy. Nwoye leaves home.

Okonkwo returns to Umuofia to find the clan sadly changed. The church has won some converts, some of whom are fanatical and disrespectful of clan custom. Worse, the white man's government has come to Umuofia. The clan is no longer free to judge its own; a District Commissioner judges cases in ignorance. He is backed by armed power.

During a religious gathering, a convert unmasks one of the clan spirits. The offense is grave, and in response the clan decides that the church will no longer be allowed in Umuofia. They tear the building down. Soon afterward, the District Commissioner asks the leaders of the clan, Okonkwo among them, to come see him for a peaceful meeting. The leaders arrive, and are quickly seized. In prison, they are humiliated and beaten, and they are held until the clan pays a heavy fine.

After a release of the men, the clan calls a meeting to decide whether they will fight or try to live peacefully with the whites. Okonkwo wants war. During the meeting, court messengers come to order the men to breakup their gathering. The clan meetings are the heart of Umuofia's government; all decisions are reached democratically, and an interference with this institution means the end of the last vestiges of Umuofia's independence. Enraged, Okonkwo kills the court messenger. The other court messengers escape, and because the other people of his clan did not seize them, Okonkwo knows that his people will not choose war. His act of resistance will not be followed by others. Embittered and grieving of the destruction of his people's independence, and fearing the humiliation of dying under while law, Okonkwo returns home and hangs himself.

2.0 Reflection on Post-Colonialism:

Most texts give the definition of colonialism before they define the meaning of the term post-colonialism. Colonialism as defined "the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically." Therefore, post-colonialism is sometimes assumed to refer to 'after colonialism' or 'after-independence', describing the wide range of social, cultural and political events arising specially from the decline and fall of European colonialism that took place after World War II.

Post-colonialism express the opposite idea of colonialism. Hence, post-colonialism literature is a consequence of colonialism. Through literature we understand the primary focus of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: a novel written by an individual

who grew up under colonial rule in response to the effects of colonialism on his culture, Achebe writes back at the writings of European writers and the misrepresentation of Africa in their writings. A colonized individual is usually forced to follow the culture of their colony regardless if they are against it or not. Post-colonialism writers usually write about how their rich native cultures were destroyed under the power of imperialism.

One scholar has suggested that although most countries have gained independence from their colonizer, they are still indirectly subjected in one way or another to the forms of neo-colonial domination. Post-colonialism continues to be a process of hostility and reform. This is seen in the development of new elites in post-colonial nations that are often supported by neo-colonial institutions, as is suggested by the development of divisions within these societies that are based on discriminations as varied as race, language or religion.

In a heterogeneous society (a society consisting of many different ethnic and/or 'racial' groups, social classes, languages and/or dialects, and cultural traditions [Palmer]) post-colonial writers usually try to reassign new ethnic and cultural meanings to the groups of people that are treated as insignificant by their society. The literature also aims at inviting the colonized to work together collectively. If they work together and put their difference aside they are surely bound to overcome the pain of losing their culture. This will enable them to focus on ways that will help preserve the elements of their culture that still exist.

However, the literature does not show the colonized as victims of colonialism, but rather it shows that they are confused about their own culture about their belonging. Most colonised individuals do not know whether to follow their own culture or the culture of the colonizer. Because of this they find themselves combining some of the elements of the two different cultures which make them move back and forth in between their present and past lives, hence their confused sense of belonging. This back and forth movement in most instance leads to a miscommunication that can be meaningful.

3.0 Culture of Igbo People:

These people belongs tribal people. These are the people who live in a group. Their culture is very complex but its range is widely scattered in the community at that time. The law and rules of the community are very strict and had to be obeyed by the Igbo people, if any person dares to break these law then he must be punished by God. The punishment was sin of the clan. The head of the clan was usually a man who was the oldest man in whole clan. There was a personal society of Igbo people, which had the judges named Ekwu. The Igbo people had many talents and are full of arts and music. These people celebrate a number of festivals with the society. There are many harvest festivals which are held time to time according to season and Igbo people celebrate these festivals by heart. They are the people who have their own morals and values. They cannot accept any interfere of out sided in their life. They have very constricted mind and their life has a boundary and limit around which does not allow them to cross it. Every person in the clan has to follow the laws of clan. They have their own god and order of god, who was superior for them; there is not any law over it.

The culture of Igbo people was very wide, these are some aspect which had to accept by them these cultural aspects bound them into boundary and limit. Some person didn't believe in these facts and motifs but then also they have to obey these rules. The son of Okonkwo changes his religion at the end of the novel, but Okonkwo didn't accept this religion and new community of Christianity. At the end of the novel Okonkwo kept by dilemma and has fall.

Masculinity:

In the society man has only power to rule over his woman and the person who beats his wife called a powerful man.

Okonkwo's father was a weak and polite person. He was a lazy man and could not earn enough for his family. He borrowed a lot of money from another villager and was not able to pay it back, because of his soft nature people call him "Agabala" and the person did not get place in men he is placed with women.

Okonkwo thinks slightly different from the clan, he thinks that masculinity is only aggression and feels that only anger is only emotion for men that he should pay for women. Okonkwo beats his wives without any fault frequently. He becomes ready to kill them many times. At this behalf we cannot thinks that all people of clans think like Okonkwo they are very different from him. Unlike him Oberika "was a man who thought about thought". At first Okonkwo was very rude towards women but during his seven years of exile from his village only reinforce his notion that men are stronger than women. While in exile, he lives among the kings men of his motherland but resent the period in it's entirely. The exile is his only opportunity to get in touch with his feminine side.

The Role of women in Igbo Culture:

In the community of Igbo people women do not have a very respectful place. Entire story of Things Fall Apart revolve around only men society. The patriarchal testosterone is supreme and all female have nothingness. The women are not being able to be seen and not be heard in clan. The women works are only farming, caring for children, caring for animals and caring for

foo-foo cola etc. They play a domestic part in clan. About women the clans people thinks that they are a material things and a source of children. They paint the wall of Egwugwu house, but they are not allowed to enter the Egwugwu home. Each woman tells her children folk stories each other so that the mother are the first teacher of their children who educate her children. They do not have a great role in clan; however play an important role of priestess. Priestess are great respected spiritual leader, they are respected like goddess everything told by them have to accepted by the people. One of them was Ani, the goddess of earth and the source of fertility. There is no importance of women in the society however they are worshiped like a goddess, so it is particularly not shown in the novel that women are totally ignorant but they have some valuable place in society.

Achebe describe as,"---- my sister was with him for nine year---- no single day passed--- without him beating--- the women. I don't know why such a trifle should come before the Egwugwu."

Language:

Language of Igbo people is also different from another or colonial people. The language of Igbo is very complex and complicated; it is not so easy to translate it directly. So the people Igbo culture cannot understand within the framework of European colonialist values. In this novel it is also shown by Achebe that the language of different villages is different from other, for example, the people of Umuofia makes the fun of Mr. Brown's translator because he has some different Language from their own. Many other critics also wrote about language of African people but the Achebe was only person who wrote about the native language of Igbo people.

Ritual & Beliefs:

Igbo people are very ridiculous and believe in the rituals which are made by their people and gods. They think that a man who has no title is like an "Agabla" or like a woman. Title in the clan is very important to every people. A person who has here title is a senior person of the clan and who has four titles become the accentors after their death.

There is a trend to borrow cowries with each other and when they borrow some money from another person then they draw some perpendicular line in the Obi (hut). Each line has a value of hundred cowries. If a person borrows from more than one person then he has to draw the lines in different group and each group indicates one person.

The oracles are very usual in the clan. These oracles are told by the gods of hills and mountains. Every person has to obey them destroyed that person. If any of the clan disobeyed the oracle of hills and cave he would surely beaten because their dreaded would never fight what he Igbo called a fight of blame. Chika was the priestess of the clan on those days. Ani was the goddess of the land. Ezeni, was the goddess of the earth. All the gods and goddess were worshiped by the Igbo people very respectfully.

4.0 Conclusion:

In conclusion I would like to note that my aim and focus is to analyze Igbo society as it appears in the novel, which is before and after the arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia; the effects of their arrival concerning Igbo Culture, consequently leading to the clash of cultures between two parties. Post-colonial criticism which is relevant for the analysis of the novel as it is concerned with Achebe's work in Things Fall Apart. Post-colonial criticism, for instance, is mainly concerned with literature critique from countries that are colonies of other countries. Because Achebe originates from Nigeria, a colony, of Britain, some of the writing elements he uses in his novels such as language and style are influenced by that.

Moreover, Achebe teaches us that there is a real balance between what we believe and what Igbo culture teaches. There must be some middle ground where women and men can exist, and excel, as equals. Until we are able to accept our weakness, and treat one another as equal or else we will all end up like Okonkwo.

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