

Reclaiming The Past in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Ngalari Mbutakto *
Department of English,
University of Jos,
Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper examines Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart through the lens of postcolonial theory, focusing on the novel's engagement with historical reclamation and the politics of representation. Positioned as a seminal work in the postcolonial literary canon, Things Fall Apart challenges Eurocentric narratives that depict pre-colonial African societies as primitive and chaotic. Achebe reclaims the Igbo past by reconstructing a richly detailed indigenous world that foregrounds its own systems of knowledge, governance, spirituality, and cultural coherence. Drawing on the theoretical insights of thinkers such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, the paper explores how Achebe subverts colonial discourse and re-centres African subjectivity. Okonkwo's tragic arc is read not only as a personal downfall but also as a metaphor for the cultural dislocation wrought by colonial incursion. Through its strategic use of language, narrative form, and cultural specificity, the novel asserts the legitimacy of African epistemologies and resists the erasures of imperial historiography. Ultimately, this article concludes that Things Fall Apart functions as a postcolonial intervention that reclaims historical agency and affirms the vitality of African identity in the face of colonial domination.

Keywords: Reclamation, Past, Precolonial, Indigenous, Historical, Postcolonial, Cultural Identity, Imperial.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is considered one of the greatest classics to be published in Africa and especially in Nigeria. He is described by many critics and scholars as one of the significant voices in Postcolonial Literature. Prior to the publication of the novel in 1958, most of the novels that had been written about the African continent or Africa was done by Europeans and replete with Eurocentric views. According to Peter Childs and Roger Fowler, "Eurocentrism is a way of thinking that privileges Europe (or "the west") as the centre of historical development and posits European culture as superior to all others (Childs and Fowler 75). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) vividly describes the continent of Africa as

* Corresponding Author: Ngalari Mbutakto

Email: mngalariq@gmail.com

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wild, dark and particularly uncivilized. The African and Nigerian character Mr. Johnson in Joyce Cary's 1939 novel *Mister Johnson* is described as naïve, foolish and unsophisticated. In Achebe's words:

My problem with Joyce Cary's book was not simply his infuriating principal character, Johnson. More importantly, there is a certain undertow of uncharitableness just below the surface on which his narrative moves and from where, at the slightest chance, a contagion of disaster, hatred and mockery breaks through to poison his tale (Achebe 23).

The depiction of Africa and African characters by these authors birthed the impetus and dire need to give Africa a voice by telling her story from the African perspective and of course by an African. For Achebe, the primary purpose of writing *Things Fall Apart* is to readily educate and inform his readers at home and abroad on the value of his culture and heritage as an African and especially as an Igbo man. He became increasingly critical of the canons of literature written in the English Language projecting Africa in a negative light as well as in narratives. Achebe therefore accepted his writing to bring about change on how stories about West Africa are being narrated. He displayed an audacious move to present Africa as it is to the entire world.

This paper discusses Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a clarion call by the author to reclaim the past of the African people. More than sixty years after its publication, *Things Fall Apart* is considered as one of the most widely read book written by an African and has been translated into more than fifty languages. It has also been set as a recommended text in many schools across the globe especially in English speaking countries. This move has given a perspective to everyone who cares to know that Africa has her story narrated in the English Language and particularly by an African. His various works cover the themes of culture, colonialism, politics, masculinity, femininity and history. He is a critic of colonialism having been born in the 1930s and witnessed first-hand the coming of white missionaries to his hometown. Achebe's work has been analyzed extensively by numerous body of scholars and critics. Interpretations and analyses have been done on the Igbo traditional culture, the use of proverbs, the treatment of women, the state and practice of communal living of the Igbos, the tragic end of the protagonist and several other thematic pre-occupations. For Achebe, it is disheartening for the history, culture and heritage of a particular people or race to be presented through the eyes of a foreigner who knows nothing about it. The best way to correct the way in which Africa is viewed or perceived by the Europeans is to read the stories of Africans through their very own lenses. The novel provides a voice and insights of Africans and their

unique way of life. The failure of the Europeans to study these people and understand their perspectives to their way of life is considered an outright injustice to them.

Adopting the postcolonial theory, this study investigates and provides insight on the need to reclaim our past as Africans through a reading of *Things Fall Apart*. Africa as a continent was and is not perfect but however, it “is proud, dignified, and stable, because it is governed by a complicated system of customs and traditions extending from birth, through marriage to death (Palmer 49). The study adopts the postcolonial theory to fill the gap by revealing and establishing the need to reclaim our past as Africans and to touch on the cultural and social realities that make the African continent a unique one. The canon of Achebe and other African writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo, Camara Laye, Elechi Amadi, and Mongo Beti is bringing to the fore a powerful narrative expressing the need for Africa to reclaim and accept its beautiful and unique past.

Theoretical Framework

This discussion is hinged on the postcolonial theory. Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978) is considered the founding work of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial writers are identified for writing about how their unique culture and heritage has been destroyed under imperial powers. It deals with literary works written by countries that were before, or are now, colonies of other countries. Postcolonial theory also deals with literature written by citizens of colonizing that takes their people as subject matter. The theory is generally centered on the concepts of otherness and resistance. The advocates of this theory examine the ways in which writers from countries that are colonized attempt to accept, understand and celebrate their cultural heritage, identities and reclaim them from the colonizers. The focus of the theory is to examine the reading and interpretation of the ways in which literature by colonizing culture misrepresents the realities and experience of the colonized people depicting and making them inferior. For Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, “Achebe’s novel recounts the rise and fall of a man called Okonkwo and tells how Christian white men come to colonize and largely destroy the culture and identity of the Igbo tribe to which he belongs” (Bennett and Royle 216). Postcolonial theory requests the reader to carefully analyze and explain the effects that colonization has had on people and various nations. “Postcolonial studies is profoundly involved in a project of historical revisionism that makes possible the representation of historical subjects and conditions of existence that had been ignored or suppressed by European historians” (Castle 141).

It is generally believed that literature reflects society. Postcolonial literary theory exposes the author's perceptions about his culture, heritage and above all his identity as he writes back to reclaim his past through the characters and events in his text.

Reclaiming the Past

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is set in the typical fictional Igbo village of Umuofia towards the end of the nineteenth century. The protagonist in the novel is presented to the reader as a man who has worked diligently and tenaciously to be where he is. Where Okonkwo comes from, a man is respected and accorded reverence and prestige in the community when he toils hard to acquire a barn full of yam tubers, a large compound with huts to shelter his family and traditional titles to his name. Okonkwo has therefore seen to it that he emerges great in his endeavours. He has also vehemently refused to follow in the footsteps of his father, Unoka. Unoka, his father has died with no traditional title to his name and "was heavily in debt" (Achebe 7). The people of Umuofia and other surrounding villages believed in prosperity and revered achievements as well. People hold on to their beliefs in communal living and a man's age is highly respected. Men are also revered by their show of incredible prowess in wars and the number of human heads they bring home.

Achebe gives insight and knowledge of a Nigerian society as it once was. The people of Umuofia and especially Okonkwo's clan are very religious in nature and have very strong beliefs and customs. There are traditional justice courts that are spearheaded by the oldest men from the clan. These men who exhibit wisdom and knowledge in the affairs of the clan are trusted to proclaim the power of the ancestral gods as they bestow on the people fairness, equity and justice.

He is also quick to point out that before the coming of the Christian missionaries; the people of Umuofia settled their disputes through these revered elders and members of the clan. A well-effective and established system of justice is run by the elderly. This simply means that every necessary process is followed to avoid confrontation or war. So, when the people of Mbaino killed the wife of Ogbuefi Udo on her way from the market, the people of Umuofia followed every due process laid out by their traditional justice system. This is because "in fairness to Umuofia it should be recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted as such by its oracle-the oracle of the Hills and the Caves (Achebe 10). Umuofia sends emissaries to Mbaino led by Okonkwo to register their displeasure over the killing of

Ogbuefi Udo's wife, "he was treated with great honour and respect, and two days later he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin" (Achebe 10).

Disputes that could not be resolved by the tribe following the normal processes come before the greatest masked spirits in the clan known as the egwugwu. These are elders and title holders in the village. They unanimously take a decision on the case of Uzowulu, who constantly beats his wife, and his displeased in-laws take her and the children away from him. The egwugwu do not take sides as they listen attentively to both parties narrate what has transpired. The egwugwu dispel judgement fairly to both parties involved and say, "our duty is not to blame this man or praise that, but to settle the dispute" (Achebe 74). They caution Uzowulu as they inform him that "it is not bravery when a man fights with a woman" (Achebe 75) and further instruct him to "go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you" (Achebe 75). For Uzowulu's in-laws, "if your in-law brings wine to you, let your sister go with him" (Achebe 75). With their wisdom and wealth of experience in the matters of tradition, the egwugwu settles the dispute amicably.

In the words of Eustace Palmer

Those who open this novel hoping to find a description of noble savagery where the tensions of modern Western society do not exist are likely to be disappointed. Umuofia society is proud, dignified, and stable, because it is governed by a complicated system of customs and traditions extending from birth, through marriage to death. It has its own legal, educational, religious, and hierarchical systems, and the conventions governing relations between the various generations are as elaborate as any to be found in a Jane Austen novel (Palmer 49).

Achebe assigns significant roles to women in his narrative. The women are responsible for keeping and tending to the home front. The men marry more than one wife, and the first wives are accorded more respect than the other wives. During a ceremony in Nwakibie's house, the first wife is summoned first to drink palm wine before her co-wives are called. The women are also assigned the task of painting the houses of the mask spirits, egwugwu. Chielo, a woman is also the priestess of Agbala, the god of the Hills and the Caves. After Okonkwo is exiled from his fatherland of Umuofia, he is forced to sojourn in Mbanta, his motherland for seven years. His maternal uncle, Uchendu will explain to him why a female child is named Nneka, meaning "Mother is Supreme". Uchendu informs him that: "A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you" (Achebe 107). One's mother is constantly

there to give succour and comfort when things go awry. The women are portrayed as soft and weak, and the men are not expected to exhibit these traits. For Okonkwo, to show weakness is to appear effeminate.

However, the missionaries on arrival question the system of governance of the people, their beliefs in their gods and spirits of their fathers. The missionaries believe that men should fight their brothers over religion, but the Igbo tradition prohibits them to kill one another. It is considered an abomination to kill a member of the clan. During the festivities marking the death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man in his clan, Okonkwo accidentally fires his gun and kills the dead man's son. It is a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clan's man, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime is of two kinds: male and female. Okonkwo commits the female because it has been inadvertent. "He could return to the clan after seven years" (Achebe 99). Okonkwo's traditional society has stipulated rules and punishments for every crime committed and therefore is highly organized. When the people of Mbame kill a white man and tie his white horse to their sacred tree, some white men return and "everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose chi were wide awake and brought them out of the market". Achebe depicts a well-structured and organized African society. This is a society that is quite complex and displays a self-sufficient way of life. Achebe is of the resolve that the Igbo traditional culture is completely distorted by the coming of the Europeans.

Achebe also captures and displays the rich culture of the people of Umuofia in songs and dances. There is a wrestling festival where Okonkwo defeats Amalinze the cat to bring honour to his village.

Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old man agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights (Achebe 3).

He showcases the pomp and pageantry associated with the annual yam festival heralding the good harvest by the gods to the people. The yam is considered the king of crops and so the festival of the new yam is considered sacrosanct. According to Achebe:

The Feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umuofia was in a festive mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct...the Feast of the

New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan (Achebe 29).

The author depicts consistently the practices the people of Umuofia share collectively. Their culture plays a significant role in the production of social order. This social order brings stability to the people based on the collective agreement to rules and norms that allow the people to co-operate function and live together in peace and harmony. In Umuofia, there is a holy week of peace where everyone is expected to foster peace and this week is considered highly sacred. "... and that was also the year Okonkwo broke the peace and was punished, as was the custom by Ezeani, the priest of the earth's goddess" (Achebe 23). The priest of the earth goddess visits Okonkwo at home and informs him of the crime he has committed. He violates the week of peace by beating his youngest wife Ojiugo. Okonkwo's punishment for his crime is laid out for him by Ezeani. He is expected to "bring to the shrine of Ani one she goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries" (Achebe 24). In her analysis of culture in *Things Fall Apart*, Diana Akers Rhoads states that:

Revealing the Igbo ability in precolonial times to incorporate the variety of humans in a well-functioning culture, Achebe refers his Igbo society to a series of standards which both Africans and Americans can seek as goals-a degree of redistribution of wealth, a combining of male and female principles, compelling art and poetry and music, tolerance, democracy, morality, a sound system of justice and perhaps most importantly, the capacity for meaningful change. Lending veracity to his depiction of Igbo history by remaining clear-sighted about cultural weaknesses which need correction, Achebe depicts a worthy precursor of a healthy and just modern civilization (Rhoads 71).

Achebe displays how conversations among his people are highly respected. An individual must choose his words carefully in order not to offend his listener. The use of proverbs in conversations is considered significant as it indicates wisdom and respect. The author uses the characters to showcase the rich proverbs of the Igbos whenever they engage in conversations. According to him "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten (Achebe 6). When Okoye visits Unoka to ask for his two hundred cowries he had borrowed, Unoka will politely tell him that: "our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them. I shall pay my big debts first'. On another occasion, Okonkwo informs his benefactor, Nwakibie how hardworking he is and will return the yams borrowed to him. He states that: "The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did" (Achebe 17).

Achebe does not however portray his Igbo culture as a perfect one. He also captures some traditional practices that may or are considered barbaric by other cultures. The white missionaries will find as inappropriate and unacceptable the traditional Igbo culture. In Umuofia, the delivery of twins is an abomination and so the children are thrown into the evil forest and left to die. Even Nwoye, Okonkwo's oldest son "had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had yet come across them" (Achebe 49). Obierika will ponder on why a culture makes certain rules because he vividly "remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed" (Achebe 100). According to Patrick C. Nnoromele:

What we have in this novel is a vivid picture of the Igbo society at the end of the nineteenth century. Achebe described for the world the positive as well as the negative aspects of the Igbo people. He discussed the Igbos' social customs, their political structures, religions, even seasonal festivals and ceremonies. He provided the picture without any attempt to romanticize or sentimentalize it (Nnoromele 40).

The author describes the myth behind 'ogbanje' children, "who when they died, entered their mothers' womb to be born again" (Achebe 62). Upon their death, these children's bodies are mutilated and thrown into the evil forest. No proper burial is given to them. When Okonkwo's second wife Ekwefi lost her third child in such circumstance, Okagbue the medicine man "brought out a sharp razor from the goatskin bag slung from his left shoulder and began to mutilate the child. Then he took it away to bury in the Evil Forest, holding it by the ankle and dragging it on the ground behind him" (Achebe 63).

The white missionaries will therefore find some of these traditional practices as barbaric and therefore openly condemn it. The coming of these Europeans will open the floodgate in the clash of two religions: the traditional religion already existing among the Igbos and the Christian religion brought by the missionaries. It was easy for the missionaries to win new converts who have been hit hard by cultural tenets. It does not take long for the church in Mbanta to win Nneka as their first female convert. This is because: "Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and childbirth. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away". (Achebe 121). Nneka, who is a prosperous farmer, is now heavy with child. The new religion will protect her children from being thrown away as they decreed by the Earth Goddess. Members of the clan who are considered as 'osu' or outcasts are welcomed into the church in Mbanta even though it came with some opposition. This is because

“an ‘osu’ could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest” (Achebe 126). Mr. Kiaga, who oversees the church convinced the people to accept the outcasts into the church. According to him, “before God, he said, there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers” (Achebe 125).

Achebe presents his people as peaceful and tolerant. When an ‘osu’ is accused of killing the sacred python worshipped by the people and addressed as ‘our father’, the elders and rulers assembled to take a decision on the matter. They decide that it is not their custom to fight for their gods. They believe that “if a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and the god” (Achebe 127). Okonkwo completely disagrees with this decision and think his mother’s clan reason like women and not men. In his fatherland Umuofia, such thing will never happen. The author depicts the traditional and Christian religions to work and operate along similar lines in terms of dignity and morality. He gives his people a high sense of dignity as well. For the missionaries, it is absurd to worship wooden items as gods. For the Igbos, it is crazy to say that God has a son when he has no wife (Achebe 118). Both religions acknowledge one supreme God and have messengers on earth. The two religions are shown to encourage humility and kindness to one another. The order of the culture in Umuofia is disrupted with the coming of the British Christian missionaries. A person like Okonkwo who is an ardent believer in his tradition feels the white man is taking away native values such as reverence for the gods, the elders and communal harmony among the people. The British administration destroyed all the aspects of the people that they found disturbing and unchristian. The people are suddenly forced to change the way of life they have been accustomed to. The missionaries will take over Umuofia and the neighbouring villages introducing hospitals, courthouses, and jails. Schools are established to teach the locals how to read and write in the language of the white man.

Achebe considers himself a teacher and therefore feels obligated to educate the world about his people and their culture. In his essay, “The Novelist as a Teacher”, he states that:

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done... I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past-with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them (Olaniyan and Quayson 105).

Achebe is perhaps calling on his African brothers and sisters to revisit the past and reclaim all it stands for. He encourages African writers to acknowledge their culture and its past. For him, every culture and society in the world has its uniqueness and is not perfect as well. A writer must use the power of his pen to educate people through his writing and dedicate himself to his society. According to Ngugi wa Thiongo who is Achebe's contemporary, "what the African novelist has attempted to do is restore the African character to his history...He has given back to the African character the will to act and change the scheme of things" (Ngugi 44). Many African writers are accused of being obsessed with the past, but Achebe argues that when a society is confronted with colonial disparagement and completely denied the opportunity to reason, it is imperative that as a writer, you give your narrative from your perspective to redeem yourself.

Achebe uses his protagonist Okonkwo to capture the disillusionment the people of Umuofia are experiencing with the coming of the Europeans. Things will continue to fall apart for him after his exile and sojourn for seven years in his mother land Mbanta. "Umuofia had indeed changed during the seven years Okonkwo had been in exile. The church had come and led many astray" (Achebe 139). Okonkwo is quite aware of the changes the missionaries have brought to his fatherland, but he sincerely hopes and believes that his people can regain their past glory. According to him, "the clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail, it soon grew another" (Achebe 137). He is also aware that he has lost his place among the *egwugwu*; the nine masked spirits who are the administrators of justice in the clan. He is certain he may as well have lost the chance to lead his clan to fight the missionaries and their new religion. He will work tenaciously to regain his place in the clan. The first tragedy will however strike Okonkwo as his eldest son, Nwoye joins the new religion. He is devastated and will call his five sons to admonish them to be men and not women. He will do all that is expected to bring them up in the ways of the clan.

Apart from the new religion, the missionaries have come with a new government. They build a court "where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance" (Achebe 139). The missionaries show lack of consideration regarding the Igbo laws and customs as they completely take over the affairs of the court in Umuofia showing a total disregard. The people of Umuofia are coming face to face with colonialism. The traditional values of the people receive a severe and crushing blow by the new and alien religion. In the words of Frantz Fanon:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts,

disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (Fanon 169).

The missionaries have arrived with their court messengers as well, who are foreigners and are considered arrogant and high-handed. They build prisons manned by these men referred to as 'kotma'. Those imprisoned are men who go against these white men laws, others have thrown away their twins and some are guilty of molesting Christians. The prisoners receive constant beating from the court messengers and are made to work on the government's compound, fetching firewood and water for the white commissioner. Some of the men in the custody of the commissioner are men with titles in the land and were one time respected and revered in the land. These men "were grieved by the indignity and mourned for their neglected farms" (Achebe 140).

The first white missionary, Mr. Brown is friendly and interacts with the tribe and one of the elders, Akunna to acquaint himself with their culture and tradition. Both men will sit and discuss at length about their gods and why they worship them. "Mr. Brown learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan, and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it will not succeed" (Achebe 144). He builds a school and a small hospital in Umuofia. He visits the people from house to house, persuading them to send their children to his school. His method yields results as people came to learn from him. The people work on their farms in the morning and attend school in the afternoon. His administration is quite successful as more schools and churches are established in the surrounding villages. Mr. Brown visits Okonkwo on hearing about his return from exile. Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son has been sent to the new training college in Umuru and the white man is optimistic that his father will be pleased with the news. Okonkwo will drive Mr. Brown away from his compound with the threat that if he returns, he will be carried away. Okonkwo is deeply troubled with the happenings in his beloved Umuofia. "And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women" (Achebe 146). Mr. Brown eventually retires back home and he is succeeded by Reverend James Smith who openly condemns and disagrees with the policies of his predecessor.

He condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation. 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 wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal” (Achebe 147).

The climax of the colonial denigration by the new religion will come from one of the new overzealous converts, Enoch. “It was Enoch who touched off the great conflict between the church and the clan in Umuofia which had been gathering since Mr. Brown left” (Achebe 148). The incident occurs during the annual ceremony that is held in honour of the earth deity. The ancestors of the clan who have passed away and are buried to Mother Earth emerge again as egwugwu through tiny ant-holes. Enoch will commit one of the greatest crimes considered by the people when he unmasks an egwugwu in public. Enoch has killed an ancestral spirit and the whole village is thrown into confusion. The band of egwugwu carries out a revenge mission by destroying and bringing down Enoch’s house and the church to rubble.

Mr. Smith reports to the District Commissioner and the titled men involved including Okonkwo, are summoned, arrested, locked up, their hair shaved and denied food for days. They are asked to pay two hundred bags of cowries as fine before they are released. Okonkwo and his fellow titled chiefs are released after the fine is paid. The clan is in a complete state of disillusionment and is a summons for a meeting in the market square as it is customary to discuss the next line of action. Okonkwo is unable to accept and adapt to the changes that accompany colonialism. In his usual anger he decapitates one of the white man’s messengers sent to end the meeting held in the market square. But the men let the other messenger’s escape. Okonkwo automatically realizes that Umuofia will not go to war. He sees it written all over their faces and therefore, he quietly walks away from the scene. His disillusionment leads him to commit suicide, a grievous crime considered in the land. Okonkwo knows he will be hanged by the white man’s nose and decides to take his own life despite the implications. His best friend Obierika will bear his thoughts angrily to the District Commissioner as they watch Okonkwo’s body dangling from a tree. “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog” (Achebe 165). For indeed the white man has been nothing but clever, as he came “quietly and peacefully with his religion, 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 141). Achebe sees the best of his culture even though he is quick to point out that it has some flaws as well. He gives his people a true sense of pride and dignity and vividly describes the falling apart of their culture because of colonialism. Umuofia’s structured and organized culture becomes fractured, and their customs shattered. For Rhoads, “Achebe presents the past as admirable, but not without

flaws which can be eliminated. He does so both because he holds his own art to a standard of truth and because he sees that the history he is trying to re-create to give his people dignity will be credible only if it includes faults (Rhoads 68). But despite the flaws, the African and especially the Igbo culture is highly sophisticated, robust and is self-sufficient.

Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* stands as a powerful act of cultural and historical reclamation, challenging the distortions of colonial narratives and asserting the legitimacy of African voices in the construction of history. Through a richly textured portrayal of Igbo society and a critical engagement with colonial intrusion, Achebe repositions African identity at the center of its own story. By employing narrative strategies that foreground indigenous knowledge systems, language, and worldviews, the novel subverts colonial representations and reclaims the historical agency for a people whose past was once marginalized or silenced. For Achebe, the ideas of the Europeans about the African continent are misconstrued and the Igbo traditional religion is not inferior to the white man's religion. He reveals that the present state of political and economic affairs in Africa is due to the interference of the white missionaries and not the outdated culture of Africa as portrayed by the West. The African culture possesses systems that work and institutions that strongly advocate that every member of the tribe or clan embraces hard work, show respect to elders, eschew violence and practice moderation and morality. The title of the book clearly describes the falling apart of the Igbo traditional culture. Subtly and without being so critical of the white man's religion, he describes the methods used by the white man to undermine the African culture. Achebe clearly shows that the Igbo as a people did not require the white man to take them into the new and modern world. He accepts the dual mission to educate both the African and European readers on this issue. Ultimately, Achebe's work continues to resonate as a foundational text in postcolonial literature, reminding readers of the enduring power of storytelling in the struggle for cultural survival and intellectual sovereignty.

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