

# Annihilation of Cultural Values in African Continent Reflect in Chinua Achebe's in *Things Fall Apart*

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**Abstract:** The main aim of this Article is to examine African Culture and its values, while discussing African Culture and values, researcher is not able to presupposing that all African societies have the same opinion, it might be changed in Language, customs and Mode of dressing and so on. In this article, try to portrait the relevance of African Culture and values to their present society but the values be critically assessed, and those found to the well-being and Holistic development of the society, be discarded. This article related the Annihilation of culture with Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, this study shows how the African black culture represented by Igbo tribe comes into disagreement with the White one imposed by the British imperialism. The greatness of Achebe lies in the vivid description of place which in Nigeria and people who are the native African and how he was able to show the inner conflict that took place inside the major characters, like Okonkwo in their pursuit of mere existence within a declining culture in the face of a tyrannical with one.

**Keywords:** Culture, Customs, Annihilation, Nigeria, Okonkwo

## I. INTRODUCTION

The culture of people is what marks them out differentiate from other human societies in the family of humanity. In view of Edward B. Taylor is reputed as the scholar who first coined and define the Term Culture in his work *Primitive culture*. He saw culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief art, morals, law, customs, or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of Society. Culture is passed on from generation to generation, the acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process. Fafunwa states culture in his book *Generational Heritage* as

The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. he imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of elder siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funerals, obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relation in the activities. The child in a traditional Society cannot escape his cultural and physical environments.

Culture can be transformed and changed into new one as a result of colonization, new forms of culture and its customs origin, it changed the ancient culture and its life style. It brought out by Chinua Achebe. The conflict has two aspects; an internal which can be traced within the same culture among its members and sometimes inside a specific character, on the other hand an external conflict took place between two cultures the African and the British one. The pursuit of mere existence is the dominant theme within this novel. It may be argued that Okonkwo's pursuit of existence represents the African culture itself in its endeavor for survival in the face of a domineering

British one. Despite the fact that Okonkwo dies at the end, but it is quite evident that the African culture continued its struggle for existence in the hearts and minds of the new generation. All search for existence whether on individual level or cultural level.

## II. AFRICAN WRITERS AND LITERARY THEMES

After World War II, as Africans began demanding their independence, more African literature was published. In west Africa, such writers as, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene, Kofi Awoonor, Agostinho Neto, Tchicaya Uto'ndjo, Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Ben Okri, and Ferdinand Oyono gained appreciative reputation and in east Africa, Ngugi waThiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, and Jacques Rabemananjara produced poetry, short stories, novels, essays, and plays. All were writing in European languages, and often most of them shared the same themes: the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, condemnation of European subjugation, pride in the African past, and hope for the continent's independent future (The Columbia Encyclopedia 2007).

The life of Achebe was full of many incidents and characters that had a great effect not only on him as a person but also on the style of his writing as well. Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi in the eastern region of Nigeria to a father who was an evangelist and church teacher. His maternal grandfather, like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, was a wealthy and distinguished community leader.

## III. ORIGIN AND CONTRIBUTION OF NOVEL

Achebe takes the title of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, from W.B Yeats's 1921 poem *The Second Coming*, which prophesies the end of the present era and the entrance on the world's stage of another that is radically different. *Things Fall Apart* treats the early moments of that transition in an Ibo village. Achebe creates a mythic village whose history stretches back to a legendary past. Chapters are devoted to the daily routines of the people, their family life, their customs, games, and cruelties, their ancient wisdom, their social order, and legal practices. Achebe remains a realist since he identifies also certain flaws in the customs and in the people.

In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents to us a different perspective of life. He accomplishes this by introducing to us an African tribe named Ibo. There are tremendous differences between these people and the Europeans at the time. That is precisely why Achebe wrote this novel. He wrote it so that readers can learn about his beloved African culture. Another reason why he wrote? it is to show how easily a way of life can be destroyed. *Things Fall Apart* is about the fall of the African tribes with the colonization of Europeans. Lastly, Achebe wrote this novel to set a good example for his fellow Africans, so that they can follow his example and receive a good education. Achebe wants to

promote modern African Literature. He wants to impress all of those who may misperceive his native African culture.

Things Fall Apart is Achebe's first novel and was published in 1958, a time often called the Nigerian Renaissance because in that period a large number of very strong Nigerian writers began to create a powerful new literature that drew on the traditional oral literature, European literature, and the changing times in Nigeria and in Africa at large. Writers as varied as Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka developed in the context of the ideas and energy of the Nigerian Renaissance, but Achebe is considered one of the earliest and best novelists to have come out of modern Nigeria, in fact one of the top English-speaking novelists of his time anywhere.

#### IV. CULTURAL CHANGE IN AFRICA AND THEIR CAUSES

It is pertinent to examine some of the changes in culture and the problems of adjustment. Invention, discovery and diffusion are some of the ways by which a culture can change or grow. Ogburn (1922: 200), on this view, maintains that "the rate of invention within a society is a function of the size of the existing culture base". The culture base or the cultural elements, objects, traits and knowledge available in all sections of the thousand six hundred African society were limited in types and variation. Thus, few inventions which could profoundly alter the culture could take place. Most appliances and utensils used then were made of wood, as metal was not a commonly known cultural element of the people.

Building materials were wooden frameworks, sand and leaves knitted into mats for roofing. In spite of the introduction of new inventions from other cultures, most houses are still built in the traditional methods using traditional materials, probably for economic reasons and sheer conservatism. Again, the pre-European contact African pattern of exchange was mainly by barter. The need for currency did not arise and so none was invented. Trade by barter, sale without standardised weights and measures and the general non-contractual pattern of exchange, all went a long way to foster, enhance and sustain social solidarity. The introduction of currency along with imported material artefacts generated or at least acquisitive propensities and profit orientation among the people, thereby gradually articulating social inequality based on purely economic criteria. Inventions may be material or social in nature.

Apart from invention, culture can change and grow through discovery and diffusion. Discovery, unlike invention, does not involve recombination of traits but the sharing of knowledge of an existing but yet unknown thing. The importance of discovery in culture lies in its use and or when it generates certain challenges to the people, which in turn metamorphose into invention for the development and survival of the society. Another process which can bring profound change in the culture of African people is the process of cultural diffusion. Diffusion entails intentional borrowing of cultural traits from other societies with which the beneficiary society comes in contact, or an imposition of cultural traits on one society by a stronger society intending to assimilate the weaker society.

The likelihood of reducing the period of culture lag is very much dependent on the desirability of yielding to change in the non-marital culture, the compatibility of the anticipated change with the existing culture or its flexibility, and the nature and magnitude of force available to exact or induce

compliance. However, the desirability of yielding to change in the non-material culture depends on whether the people perceive the new mode of conduct to be better than what they were used to.

In most instances the attractiveness of yielding to change is often mediated and conditioned by the compatibility of the expected change with existing culture. A change which calls for the replacement or total abandonment of pre-established and originally preferred modes of behaviour is less likely to be accepted than one that is preservative— that is one which either provides other alternatives and or extends the culture by merely adding new things to it.

This is actually where the problem of adjustment to externally induced change has arisen. Most contemporary Africans find it difficult to adjust between their primitive beliefs in certain aspects of their culture and the supposedly modern mode of accepted behaviour. For instance, how does the African explain disasters, deaths, accidents and other misfortunes in the family? A new convert of the Christian church would run to the church for explanation and comfort, but if the church's reaction is not immediate or prompt, the person may turn, in secret, to the native medicine man for immediate remedies. If the relief comes, he finds himself having to hold dual allegiance – one to his new found faith, and the other to his primitive beliefs. This form of dichotomy goes beyond misfortunes and permeates most aspects of the person's life.

#### V. THE MATRIC NOVEL OF CONFLICT AND WEAKNESS

In Things Fall Apart, we see a conflict early in the novel between Okonkwo and his father, Unoka. Okonkwo thought of his father as a failure. Okonkwo did not take anything from his father starting the real world with nothing. Okonkwo's goal in life is to obtain great wealth and to have many wives and children. The people of Okonkwo's village considered this as a great status symbol. His greatest goal is his desire to become one of the powerful elders of the clan. Okonkwo saw his son, Nwoye, as gentle and forgiving. Okonkwo thought of these qualities as weak. Okonkwo also saw his son as lazy and wanted him to be a success like himself. Okonkwo's hard work pays off and helps him become one of the village's most respected members. Okonkwo establishes three out of four titles that are possible in the tribe.

Some of the conflicts contained religion, social life, education, and others. The Ibo people have a very different religious lifestyle than the British people. The Ibo believed in polytheism, the worship of many gods. The Ibo god that created the world and others is Chukwu. The Ibo had a group of nine ancestral spirits, which they called Egwugwu. The women of the Ibo people were monogamous believers. "Every year... before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land" (Achebe 17).

This is how religious the people of the tribe are. They worship all gods and believe that every god helps or harms them. When the Christian religion is introduced, many people of the Ibo became interested in this new religion. The most interested of the tribe were the people with the least titles. The British told the Ibo people that worship of polygamy is senseless and that there is only one god. "Your gods are not alive and cannot do any harm," Replied the white man. "They are pieces of wood and stone" (Achebe 105).

The man of the family has his own hut, which he lives in. The hut is also called an "obi" (Achebe 14). The woman

shares a hut with the children of that same family. The tribe has a group of elders that have achieved a high status and help to keep order in the village. The elders ruled because it was thought that they are filled with knowledge. Women in the novel were depicted as not equal. Okonkwo even told himself once "he could remember when men were men" (Achebe 184). This is the time when the tribe does not choose to fight the missionaries.

The British destroyed many aspects of the Ibo culture. The "ebu" was one of the first to go. The ebu is the government system that the Ibo people incorporated. They also forced the natives to change their lifestyles. The British took over Umuofia, while introducing hospitals, courthouses, and jails. With the introduced court system, the missionaries are protected and only the Ibos are judged. The schools that the British built in Umuofia taught the native people to read and write in the white man's culture (Achebe 181).

Okonkwo's life finally fell completely apart as his body is found dangling from a tree. Okonkwo committed suicide. The reason that he did this is because he was ashamed of what the Ibo society was becoming. The British were taking over the whole culture, from taking the land to creating new beliefs. Some critics find Okonkwo's suicide ironic because suicide in the Ibo society is one of the worst acts a person can commit. Few civilizations were able to withstand the threat of Westernization. The force was too powerful, strong, and sophisticated for such common people to fight. Achebe tells the story with an understanding and personal experiences in both English and Native cultures. Achebe realized that neither of the cultures are bad, but they are simply different.

In the end, Okonkwo mourns "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 129). Even at the end of his life, Okonkwo cannot take responsibility for his own actions. He has driven away and disowned his son, he has alienated his wives and children by beating and berating them, and he has even gone into exile. Yet, he is still desperately afraid of appearing weak like a woman. He does not learn from his experiences, and he does not learn that there are far worse things than appearing womanly.

His son, Nwoye, is happy in his life with the whites, but Okonkwo cannot even accept that happiness. He is a sad figure, and it seems right somehow that he commits the ultimate act of weakness, suicide, because it is clear from the beginning of the story that Okonkwo cannot learn and grow. He cannot adapt to change, even when the old ways no longer work. The only thing that he can understand is violence, and it is the only thing that he thinks solves problems and makes a man a man. Achebe puts it this way, "Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his obi, and he told them stories of the land, masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (Achebe 52). Okonkwo represents all men in society who are so obsessed with their own manliness that they can never allow themselves any emotion, caring, or concern. Sadly, these archaic attitudes are still not uncommon in today's society, and Okonkwo illustrates just how outdated and ridiculous they really are.

## VI. THINGS FALL APART AND SYMBOLIC NOTION

In the novel the religion is very important to the survival of the tribe and the people often work together for the betterment of the tribe. There are also individual aspects in the Ibo society. Each person has his own chi, or personal god. This

personal god is to watch over a person and protect them. Some people have a stronger chi than others do, and they will achieve a higher standing in the society. This is very important to some of the people in the tribe, and Okonkwo is one of those people. He does a lot to help better the Ibo society, but he also wants to have a high standing in the Ibo society for himself.

Things Fall Apart, written by Chinua Achebe in 1958 just before Nigerian independence, demonstrates the violent societal conflict that resulted from British colonialism and arrival of the missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century. The longstanding structure and tradition of the Ibo culture is ripped apart when confronted with the completely disparate followings of the Christian Church. Achebe demonstrates that even a society with as strong a foundation as the Ibo people in Umuofia can have a vulnerability for which it has not prepared. As the natives clearly stated in the novel about the Imperial colonist: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe 162).

the novel Things Fall Apart takes place in a late-1800s Nigerian Ibo village of Umuofia, prior to the arrival of the first Christian missionaries and British officials. The main character, Okonkwo, represents the tragic hero who has status, prestige, bravery, wealth and a strong desire to succeed to make up for his father's failings. However, as a tragic figure, Okonkwo's human flaws contribute to his downfall. More broadly, however, Okonkwo represents every man who must have a strong enough self-image and personal integrity to battle new ways and customs from a competitive culture.

Religious beliefs were deeply engrained in the Ibo culture, including a supreme God, known by various names in Ibo land such as Chukwu (the great God). Because Chukwu was all powerful, prayer and sacrifice was usually made to the lesser and more accessible spirits who continually were part of human affairs. Other divinities came from various areas of the natural world included Amadioha (lightning), Igwe (the sky) and Anyanwu (the sun).

Before the influence of Europeans and Christian missions, most Ibo practiced some form of ancestor worship, which believed to gain success in the day-to-day world. This could be accomplished in a number of ways including participation in the secret men's society, Mmo. The second level of initiates was responsible for carrying out the funeral ceremonies for the deceased and inducting the departed spirits into the after-world, so that they would stop causing mischief in the village. "Now and again an ancestral spirit or egwugwu. Appeared from the underworld, speaking in a tremulous, unearthly voice and completely covered in raffia," Achebe (114) recalls about a funeral rite of the elderly Ezeudu.

The role of the dead was fundamental in the Ibo religion. The principle of living man, his soul is obi or Nkpulobi, the heart, or the kernel of the heart. The muo of a dead man was not only made up of this soul isolated from the body, as Christians tend to believe. Instead, the Ibo spirits had a Para-body. The world of the spirits was a shadowy mirror of the real world, although with continual gloom, where the social hierarchy of the Ibo clan continued to exist.

The Ibo and Christian religions differed in a number of other ways. The differences in the Christian religion were not easy for the Ibo to incorporate into their traditional beliefs. The missionaries often wrote about the alternating waves of conversion and backsliding. To the individual who believed in many spirits, the conflicting creeds of Christianity were difficult to accept. The doctrines of the Incarnation,



Atonement and Trinity were especially difficult to incorporate, especially the first two that appeared to contradict the spiritual nature of God, as noted by in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 137) as the “mad logic of the Trinity.”

On the other hand, “The white man was also their brother, because they were all sons of God” (Achebe 134). The question thus arose, how could they be brothers yet have religions that were so disparate? This made them question what was actually true. Whose religion was right, who's wrong? The mixed feelings were exacerbated by the British who told the Ibo people that their customs were bad and their gods were not true gods at all.

This created the beginning of a lasting rift between fellow clansmen and relatives who now differed in their beliefs. Those who first converted to Christianity were members not fully a part of the clan life. For example, the first woman convert was Nneka, who had to discard four sets of twins. Her husband and his family were becoming critical of her, so she fled to join the Christians where they would accept her present pregnancy. Most of the clan considered this a “good riddance” (Achebe 141). There was also the gentle Nwoye, who had been shunned because of his “less manly” ways and finds answers in the poetry of Christianity (Achebe 137).

The missionaries also forced the Ibo to break with their strong past and not pass on their stories to the next generation. As Achebe writes, “Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe 10). This would be equivalent today of destroying all written and visual communication.

Ironically, one of the main differences between the two cultures was the degree of allowance to kill. In fact, the British almost kill off an entire village in vengeance of the murder of one white man (Achebe 129). The Western tradition condoned people to fight each other over religion, such as in the Crusades, but the Ibo tradition forbade them to kill any present clan member. This was an abomination. Wars against other clans only took place when truly justified.

### SUMMATION

To emphasize the importance of this impact on the Ibo by the European autocracy, at the end of *Things Fall Apart* the narrator reveals the sorriest irony of all: the District Commissioner's mental absorption with a book he is writing, which he hopes to title *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. It was not that the British had pacified the violent primitives. Rather it was that they had been too pacified to cope with the less pacified Western cultures.

In his novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe draws a lively portrait of a Nigerian people, the Ibo, at the end of the nineteenth century, when the British colonization began in Africa. Chinua Achebe's main achievement in the novel is that

of accurately rendering a complex picture of the African cultural tradition and identity from the inside the tradition itself, that is, by telling a story of the Ibo people which speaks for itself and which sees life from the perspective of the Nigerian people and not from the outside. The most important message of the novel is clearly the gradual demise of the Ibo culture, of its traditions, customs and religion under the powerful wave of white European civilization. This message is already enclosed in the title of the novel: Achebe describes in his novel the falling apart of the African culture. The Christian white missionaries in the novel, Mr. Brown and Rev. Smith, are a major cause of the things falling apart. It is obvious that Achebe, without being critical of Christianity as a religion, criticizes the methods that were used by the white colonizers to undermine the African culture.

The conclusion here is simply that those positive dimensions of our culture – our synergetic society, our conservation of nature and even our native arts, dances and games that offer us interesting sources of entertainment and happiness, should be encouraged given the fact that culture ought to be knowledgeably innovative and instrumentally beneficial to people in such a way that the society can move from one level of development to another. Unfortunately, some traditional practices cannot be demonstrated empirically and such go against the spirit of globalisation, science and technology. Therefore, negative and harmful traditional practices that dehumanise people and portray them as unimproved and backward people without future, should as a matter of urgency be discarded since culture is an adaptive system together with values that play a central role in giving the society its uniqueness.

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