



THE REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL COMPARISON IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

Mahmoona Shahzadi, School of English, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan, mamoonashehzadi@gmail.com

Faisal Irfan, School of Languages, Civilization and Philosophy, University Utara Malaysia, Malaysia, faisal.irfan@gmail.com

Nasim Talib, School of English, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan, nasimtalib8@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper focuses on the cultural variation presented by Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. The European and African sub culture were compared with respect to religion, social institutions and means of earning. The postcolonial theoretical perspective is being used in this paper. That helps to analyze the dehumanization of Ibo's inhabitants from the hands of white European imperialists. The sense of 'Others' is attached with the local Africans. Their religion, way of life, culture and everything is considered as ignorance, futile and non-progressive. Even they were not considered as human being and most of time not treated as humans in the novel. This study highlights such discriminations performed by the European colonizers in the text. The qualitative research methodology is applied on this paper.

Keywords: Colonialism, Ibo (African) Culture, Religion, Cross Culture, Umuofian Economy, Deterioration of Social lives, Imperialism

I. INTRODUCTION:

Things Fall Apart is one of the very first novels written by any African writer. Although most of the events presented in the story are fictional, Chinua Achebe, the author uses it the novel for presenting the spiritual history of the Africans. The life in the Ibo culture was so much civilized before the foreign intervention of the European countries. The missionaries jeopardized the religious climate and badly deteriorated the economy, social life and judicial system of the towns. The foreign culture was that much strong that people felt reluctant to start revolt against it. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the story also fails to embed and augment sentiments of mutiny within his clansmen. This work analyzes the subjugation of 'black men' in Africa presented in the novel and its effect on the local culture and the individuals. This paper intends to argue that *Things Fall Apart* is a severe criticism on the imperialism and cultural fusion caused by the European colonization of the countries, especially in Africa.

The distinct features of Ibo(African) Culture:

Although, the Ibo culture was quite unique in its nature, there are some customs and rituals in Nigeria that were similar to that of Europe. Only some of the social constraints and performance parameters make them comparable. Like Europe, the rights of the women were confined in the Ibo culture. The marriage proposal was always presented by the men. The marriage was a formal ritual (Suleman & Rahman, 2020). They had the tradition for entertaining the stranger by telling the stories and offering the Kola nuts. This was very much like the Europeans receive their guests. These people also believed in the supreme power of the god. They also had the theological beliefs on coming of messengers from God as his servant and the representative (Suleman, Mohamed and Ahmed, 2020). They trusted the personal strength of the man and believed that only a courageous person is worthy to be helped by the God. The Ibo society was conservative, spiritual and less ambitious. The European society was liberal, materialistic and power thirsty.

In the context of disparities, the family culture is a major difference. The Ibo culture promoted the polygamy but the culture never allowed polyandry. Men normally have many wives and, therefore, many children. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the story also scored several wives. On the other hand Europe is convinced about the effectiveness of monogamy. It may be because of Christianity and normative derivation of this practice. In Ibo, men own only their children and not the wives. The converse is true for Europe. Emotions are one of the weakest points of a man in Ibo. Therefore, most of the men were warriors. Lethargic people were always disliked. The bride price was also a unique ritual among Ibo that was always paid by the family of the groom before he marries the daughter of some other clan and he was bound to do so. Many times, the groom had to present a number of gifts to the other clan to make them impressed. According to Achebe, the lives of Ibos were quite simple. They used to do farming for aliving. Planting yams was a normal practice. They had a unique concept of education. They were so much into the story telling. They believed in supernatural things that often cause the illness. Their society was

superstitious due to less education and exposure to the changing world. Moreover, women confronting difficulties for giving the birth to a child was assumed to be cursed (Suleman & Mohamed, 2019). The twin birth was considered as the sign of evil. They often disposed of them such that bad things may not occur. Ibo had very firm perceptions about the sexism. Anything that depicted the vigor or strength was considered as masculine while anything demonstrating the emotions was assumed to be feminine. One can hardly find any instance in the Ibo culture where the supremacy of women will be acknowledged over men (Jeyifo, 1993) (Osei-Nyame, 1999). The novel presents only two particular incidents where the perspective of women is heard. Chielo's opinion was heard for knowing the consent of the tribal gods and the elder of the clan in the novel heard the opinion of his wife before making a decision. The voiceless female were found in Ibo society. Achebe tries to give voice this issue of voiceless women through her novel.

The political and government system of the Ibo was comprised of masked tribal spirits termed as *egwugwu*. Although, the society was quite superstitious, they believed that gods favor those going for anoble cause and punishes the people for their wicked acts through suffering.

Major Conflicts:

Achebe has comprehensively presented all these interesting insights on the Ibo traditions and the intervention of European culture (JanMohamed, 1984). All the above discussion is ample to identify the vulnerability of the African culture. There are a number of loopholes that make the Ibo weak. The weaker culture was eventually replaced by stronger one. In the *Things Fall Apart*, the European intervention in the regions affected the religion, agriculture, social and the judicial system of the Umuofia people.

Religious Conflict:

The people of Umuofia were polytheists and believed in more than one god. The most prominent one include the *Agbala Oracle* who served to settle down the dispute among clans and individuals and *Chi* termed as the personal god who served for judging the accomplishments. The obedience of Umuofia people to their gods was exemplary. For example, they always need the prior consent before being indulged in the war with some other clan. Only the gods were to decide the exact punishments for the offenders. This can be seen when a daughter of Umuofia was murdered and the gods demanded the virgin and Ikemefuna in retribution. Selecting the war by bypassing the gods would have resulted in a sure defeat.

The arrival of 'white men' in the region (started) a conflict between their religion and Christianity. The missionaries told them that their gods were false. The native failed to understand the concept of the trinity as one god. Demeaning and belittling the Umuofian gods augmented negative sentiments among them. The natives were reluctant to abandon their gods. The conflict arises when after some of the natives are converted into Christianity. Mr. Brown, the leader of the missionaries expires fighting with the illness and is replaced by Reverend James Smith who was quite an aggressiveman, unlike Brown. Nwoey, the son of the Okonkwo was also converted to the Christianity on which he got angry.

Effect on Umuofian Economy:

Most of the people living in the Ibo culture were a farmer. The major profession was the planting of yams. They were heavily dependent on the agriculture for meeting their financial needs. Almost every man, woman, and child used to work in the field. There were specific guidelines for planting the yams. It was more than an art acquired by natives through the practice of generations. The arrival of Christian missionaries in the town altered the way farming was done. They forced to take the children out of the field and prescribed to put them in the classrooms. This badly jeopardized the local culture of the Umuofia. The farmlands of the area were eventually devalued. The crops became worthless in monetary terms. This was the sole channel for supporting the local economy that was affected by the 'white men'.

Deterioration of Social lives:

The social culture of the Umuofia was challenged by the European intervention. The existing society was patriarchal in nature where aman was the supreme person in the family with most of the rights. Children and women stood in submission to this courageous person of the family. Children feared the elders and respected their parents else they had to face the punishments. The person with the greater achievements like Okonkwo (who defeated another wrestler at a very young age) was respected. There existed a severe disparity of social class where *Osu's* were outcasts. They were dedicated to the gods only. They were not allowed to marry and were bound to live near the shrines on the village. They were forbidden to mix with the other natives of the town.

The arrival of 'white men' and Christian missionaries made the *Osu* wealthy and social elites. This was a massive social deformation in the Ibo culture. Moreover, the clans that had been wealthy up to this particular juncture became poor. The social structure and hierarchy were deteriorated and destroyed to dust and everyone was now mixed in each other. The children were now no longer showing reverence for their parents. This can be seen when Nwoey disrespected his father by accepting the religion of the 'white

men'. He also abstained talking and visiting Okonkwo. The leaders who were the most respected people in the culture were through into the prison where they were mentally and physically abused. Their heads were shaved and hands were tightened with cuffs (Bloom, 2009). Many people faced humiliating death. Every night "the messenger came in to taunt them and to knock their shaved heads together". Language is considered part and parcel for any society that language may be considered for playing an important role in all the aspects of the lives of human that how they interact with each other and how they are connected to each other. (Irfan, Shahzadi, Talib, & Awan 2020)

Effect on the protagonist:

Okonkwo is depicted as a warrior and fighter with a prestigious position in the society. He struggled to understand the environment being imposed by the white men. This issue also resulted in bringing the protagonist in conflict with the villagers, friends and family. Okonkwo got angry on the restriction imposed on him and his people by foreign intervention. The strength of this intervention can be gauged from the fact that many of Okonkwo's clansmen abandoned the tradition practices of the Ibo culture (Okpewho, 2003). His own blood-related son Nwoye became a proselyte. Despite the Okonkwo's strong attitude, they feared to fight against the subjugation of their tribe. The superior technology of the 'white men' kept Okonkwo and his people to rebel against them. The weakness of the clan, demonstration of least resistance and inaction were the signs of weakness for Okonkwo. He challenged the non-aggressive stance of his tribe by murdering the court messenger. The Okonkwo became too much helpless that he committed the suicide by hanging himself on a tree.

Colonialism:

From the mid of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the era is considered as the zenith of Imperialism. This was the time when Africa showed the great resistance to the colonial rule. This was the way they were not habitual to live in. Very much like rest of the Africa, the native of the Umuofia first tolerated this suppression and influence of foreign intervention. Some of them even successfully managed to adopt the same foreign culture at their own risk. Achebe has tried to embody this ruthless dilemma of the history when people of color arose against the European subjugation. The abuse of the 'white men' against the black was augmented up to a substantial percentage. This was the time when African stood as a rebel against the so-called 'civilized' European colonizers who dealt them like a subhuman. But, the time the African realized the extent to which their local culture was damaged, it was too late. Achebe has tried to show the reluctance of the African to go for a war against them. The European culture was much more advanced than that of African. The stronger one always advances the weaker. The suicide of the protagonist in the novel is a metaphor for the death of African culture. In this way, Achebe has implicitly presented that the fusion of the two cultures has proved to be destructive for the Ibo.

II. CONCLUSION:

There were several similarities between the African and European culture, but there are a number of features like polygamy, male supremacy, and polytheism that make this culture unique and distinct. The foreign intervention in the Umuofia affected local economy by changing the agricultural practices. The missionaries of 'white men' converted several people to Christianity. The social hierarchical structure was badly destroyed. The most prestigious people of the town were humiliated and abused in the prison. The 'white men' treated them like a subhuman. The colonial rule was imposed on them. The suicide of Okonkwo is depicted as a metaphor for the death of African culture. Thus, we conclude that *Things Fall Apart* is a severe criticism on the imperialism and cultural fusion caused by the European colonization of the countries, especially in Africa. It also shows imperialism was a multi-purpose agenda ranging from economic exploitation, land confiscation, dehumanization of locals to spread Christianity.

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