

Modernity, an Indirect Form of Imperialism's Hegemony: Analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract: *The present study is a postcolonial reading that concentrates on the literary novel Things Fall Apart (1958) by the Nigerian writer, Achebe Chinua. In the current study, the decolonizing influence of culture is examined in the novel. The colonized Igbo community is one of Nigeria's major ethnic groups, and the study looks at how it is threatened by British colonialists' arduous efforts as soon as they arrive in the country. In addition, the study will focus on how Modern Europe imposed the idea of itself as rationality with the rise of colonialism. They used technology, science, and religion as tools to implement their crooked political system. The Igbo people have their own identity, native religion, unique traditions, etc., and the study looks at how this community came to be colonized, it also depicts the conflict between the two civilizations. It focuses on the various ways that the Nigerian native population has tried to decolonize their way of life. However, their efforts typically end in failure and, in a very few instances, success. In addition, the study shows the colonized people's self-consciousness and resistance to the profound changes colonialism wrought in their way of life and sense of self, as well as their willingness to stand up to the oppressive hegemonic authority. A conclusion that summarizes the study's key findings comes at the end and explain that the conquerors' modernity had a huge impact on the colonized people, and it affected their attitude toward the colonizers, according to this study. Also, the study portrays the picture of Igbo society in detail to reveal what the colonizers do and their intentions to civilize the natives are not appropriate and just rather they themselves need to be civilized although they are more advanced.*

Keywords: Ambivalence, Colonialism, Decolonization, Hegemony, Modernity

1.Introduction

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) is the most well-known Nigerian novelist of the twentieth century. He is widely regarded as the father of modern African literature, especially since the release of his masterwork *Things Fall Apart* (1958). The novel depicts the power of Igbo culture in two different periods and depicts pre and post-colonial Igbo culture. The first period depicts the cultural values of the Igbo community prior to the arrival of European colonialism, as well as how the writer realistically represented the Igbo culture with its advantages and disadvantages. The second period is concerned with the consequences of colonialism and the people's ongoing struggle to resist colonial power. Since culture is a combination of various perceptions, intellectuals and critics such as Raymond Williams, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and many others have paid great attention to the issues in the colonized countries and emphasized the term. "A system of common beliefs, values, practices, behaviors, and artifacts is what anthropologists refer to as culture" (Kirch, 2008 p.747). As a result, Nigerian culture manifests itself in its beliefs, customs, food, music, religions, and so on.

Nigeria was one of the African countries that received colonizing missionaries who introduced their religion and culture to the Igbo people. The Umuofia (Igbo) people's culture is under jeopardy as a result of this transformation. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a novel written by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and released in 1958. The story is set in a fictional community called Umuofia on the fringes of Nigeria, just as white missionaries are about to arrive. The villagers are unsure how to react to the enormous cultural

changes that the missionaries plan to bring with their new administrative system, prior to the sudden arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia, the dominant ethnic groups were self-governing. The Igbo had a decentralized authority system; its government is known as republican (Deji, 2013).

The Igbo had no kings in general, and their social system was egalitarian. A system like this was based on family groups. Every village was typically made up of several interconnected families. To properly govern the village, the family leaders formed the Okpara council of elders (Adeyemi, 2018). People in pre-colonial Nigeria were capable of shaping their own identities, and religion played an important role in the formation of cultural identity. According to (Eliot, 1976 p.13), "no culture can appear or develop except in relation to a religion." Unless there is an external force, culture and religion are inseparable in society.

As a result, the heritage of Nigerian culture is threatened as soon as colonialism arrives, with the justification that the true source of its existence is simply spreading civilization among the uncivilized people (Adeyemi, 2018). During the nineteenth century, Indirect rule, a system used by Britain to establish its colonies, was meant to imply that Britain was indirectly ruling the populace because the colonizers sought to subjugate the indigenous people by making use of their traditional political structure, customs, and rulers. There are usual suspects: chiefs, kids, and witch doctors. Chiefs and leaders like Okonkwo were powerful and well-liked by the natives.

However, such a system did not work in Igbo land because the people lacked a centralized government system. And, as

part of the decolonization process, Nigerians attempt to dismantle the colonizing power by deconstructing those hidden institutional and cultural forces that once wielded colonial power and try to remain influential even after independence (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2007). More specifically, post-colonialism denotes the process of decolonization that focuses on cultural reclaim and renewal. Postcolonial writers like Achebe yearn to reclaim an identity that has been taken from them because, the desire for cultural revival restores their dignity (Gikandi, 1991).

2. Materials and Methods

The primary material for investigation is *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe, which serves as the central text for examining the intersection of modernity, colonialism, and cultural hegemony. The novel is analyzed not merely as a work of fiction but also as a historical and cultural document that reflects the complexities of pre-colonial Igbo society and the transformative pressures brought about by British imperialism.

The methodological framework is grounded in postcolonial literary criticism, drawing on key theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Concepts including ambivalence, hybridity, cultural hegemony, and decolonization are employed to interpret the themes, characters, and narrative strategies within the text. This theoretical lens enables the study to reveal how Achebe challenges Eurocentric representations of Africa and reclaims Igbo identity through literature.

Data collection is based on a close reading of Achebe's novel, supported by secondary sources including scholarly articles, critical essays, and historical accounts that contextualize the cultural and political realities of Nigeria under colonial rule. The analysis follows a textual-thematic approach: identifying recurring motifs of cultural conflict, resistance, and negotiation, while situating them within broader debates about modernity as an indirect form of imperialism.

By combining literary analysis with postcolonial theory, the methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of how *Things Fall Apart* critiques colonial hegemonic structures and foregrounds the resilience, ambivalence, and identity of the Igbo people in the face of imposed modernity.

Analysis and Discussion

Though it is more pronounced in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe's novel illustrates the cultural tension between traditional Igbo society in Nigeria and colonial power through its characters. It deftly demonstrates how hegemony develops and functions in the Igbo clan structure in Nigeria and how a British colonist defends his superiority over the indigenous people. The missionaries' modernization and the traditional ideals of Igbo society are engaged in a kind of conflict here. The renunciation of ethnic identities and the compelled adoption of new doctrines are the targets of resistance. This study demonstrates how the Igbo clan established its post-colonial identity and made history.

Achebe uses this book as a prime illustration of the "heart and mind" winning strategy. He used this to highlight the superiority of colonialism over indigenous religion, culture, and beliefs. The story takes place just before European missionaries arrive in the Igbo nation, in a tiny fictional community called Umuofia, in the interior of Nigeria. To establish their cultural hegemony over the indigenous culture, the missionaries avoided confrontation. They work from inside and, before arriving in Mbanta, researched the culture and beliefs of the locals. They use the fabric of the current society to rebuild their society. They understand that all it will take to gain control over the natives' culture is for them to establish their cultural hegemony over it.

When the missionaries requested land from the Mbanta chieftain for their church, they made the first move. They spend the day preaching and the evenings sleeping in the market. Achebe appeared to feel compassion for these missionaries. After speaking with other village elders, Uchendu, one of the elders, is heard telling his peers, "Give them some of the devil's forest"

(Achebe, 1958, p.53). The indigenous claimed that no sane individual would accept the elders' offer of property in a section of the "Evil's Forest" for the construction of their churches. All of the Igbo tribesmen who perished from bad ailments were interred in Evil's Forest.

The locals believe there is where the evil energies and the power of darkness live. How the Igbo perceive "Devil's Forest" is described by Achebe: There is an "evil forest" in each tribe and community. There, all the victims of very terrible illnesses like leprosy and smallpox were interred. When the great magicians died, it served as a graveyard for the ferocious cult that worshipped them. As a result, there is still an "evil forest" filled with evil spirits and forces of Darkness (Achebe, 1958, p.105).

It was a deliberate action by the missionaries to undercut the clan's faith and therefore gain control that they accepted land in Evil's Forest as the location of their new church. and reverence for the indigenous people while establishing their dominance over them. The significance of the land in clan culture was clearly understood by the missionaries. They were aware that just existing in this country would reduce the influence of their national religion, which was mere superstition. Achebe showed that instances like these would happen in other villages that were "conquered" by missionaries. This manipulation symbolizes the British colonists' initial grab of power—not through an armed invasion or coup—but rather through the advent of the gentry in the shape of missionaries. Even though this is simply one instance, it serves as a paradigm for the entire philosophy of Nigerian submission. In this fashion, hegemony emerged through the missionaries and eventually gave birth to the formation of the Church, the new religion, and white supremacy over the indigenous people.

Examining the causes of indigenous peoples' submission to and acceptance of white supremacy over their values, way of life, and religion was one of the other objectives

of this study. These factors, according to the study, are due to the cultures, religions, and beliefs of the indigenous peoples. When the missionaries asked the indigenous for a plot of land, they were not immediately aware that they were posing a threat to their faith or culture. Intruders receive treats from them. Furthermore, they are aware that no one of a specific intelligence should reside in or erect a place of worship within a bad forest.

As a result, they believed that the missionaries, with whom no one in the community wished to remain, would go from their village. The missionaries, who practiced a different religion than they did, were being tested by the Mbanta elders to determine if they could resist the forces of evil. The missionaries were "proud of the victory over death," as Uchendu phrased it. Give them a genuine battleground to celebrate their win (Achebe, 1958, p. 55). When the missionaries obtained the land, they were overjoyed and celebrated by dancing and singing. Elders and other villagers in Mbanta were astounded to witness such a response because they had believed the missionaries would perish at the hands of wicked forces.

They were all supposed to die within four days, according to the people of Mbanta. No one died during the first day, or the following days. It was clear to everyone. We afterward discovered the incredible power of white man's worship (Achebe, 1958, pp.105-106) Thus, one of the factors leading to the locals' subjection in Evils Forest was the missionaries' success there. The family recognized their views were only superstition when none of the missionaries perished, and the missionary won their first three converts. The bulk of the villagers, however, believed that the Igbo gods were putting the missionaries through a test to determine how long they would keep doing so. They think that after 28 days; the gods will exact their vengeance. The locals excitedly watched and anticipated the punishment of the priests by the god on the 28th. Villagers who have just converted may do so briefly, which poses no threat to churches or missionaries.

The indigenous people concluded that white people had the power to see and interact with bad spirits. The natives started to surrender to the astounding power and advancing modernity of the white people once they understood how helpless their gods were. Native Africans have been driven away from their traditional attachment to their ancestral beliefs and culture as a result, and they also lose confidence in their previous religion in favor of a more contemporary outlook on life. They voluntarily consented to have their birth legally revoked since they were made to accept the futility and primordialism of the naturalism they had previously sought.

When missionaries questioned the veracity of the legends, they lost faith in their gods and their traditional religion, which is another reason for their surrender and an illustration of their annihilation of nativism. The tribe's beliefs were called "false gods, gods of wood and stone" by the missionaries, who questioned the very basis of the tribe's faith (Achebe, 1958, p. 131). They proclaim that neither slavery nor freedom exists before God "Because

they are our brothers, we must welcome them as such" (Achebe, 1958, pp. 142–143). They reveal that their practice is primitive and uncivilized. Mr. Kiaga said,

"You are terrified because the pagans warn you that if you do this or that, you will perish. They even claimed I would pass away if I constructed my church on this property. Was I killed? If I took care of the twins, they said, I would perish. I still exist. Only lies are spoken by the heathens. Only God's spoken word is reliable." (Achebe, 1958 pp.152-153).

By impressing the primitive minds of the Igbo tribesmen with their distinctive beliefs, the missionaries were able to convert a deplorable indigenous faith into a superior Western one. Churches were constructed by gods, who afterward preached them. Christianity, the white man's religion, is widely accepted in Umuofia society. These converts instantly backed the white government because religion and politics were in accord, which caused the clan's unity to be shattered. Obierika stated that "he [the white man] put a knife in the things that held us together and we broke." The voice of Obierika reveals the effects of white rule on Igbo society:

"Our sons and men have joined the ranks of the aliens. They have embraced his faith and contribute to the sustenance of his administration." (Achebe, 1958, p.125).

As a result, the natives yielded and allowed whites to establish control over tribal beliefs and lay the groundwork for colonization. The Igbo tribe is no longer a tribe. Not only did they abandon their traditions and religion, but they also began to split their people from within. Even those who continue to consider the church and white people as wicked entities cannot dispute the power of his presence.

While in exile, Okonkwo, the novel's protagonist, learns from his companion Obierika that the new religion, Christianity, has made significant inroads into the traditional bastion of Igbo society. "The missionaries arrived at Umuofia. They had established their church there, gained a few adherents, and were already dispatching evangelists to the other cities and villages" (Achebe, 1958 p.130). Okonkwo is shocked to observe the change in the community after returning from exile. Since there are no longer any clans, everything has changed. The impact of the new religion and culture on the natives is amazing. Okonkwo was devastated and upset. He wept for the clan, which he witnessed disintegrating, and he wept for Umuofia's warrior men, who had so unexpectedly softened into women (pp. 21-25).

People started getting close to and accepting white people's religion. Showing them depictions of humanity and camaraderie, it affects their hearts. The son of Okonkwo, Nwoye, was converted after being inspired by poetry. The white man's ideas were well received in

Umuofia, and many people assisted him in keeping power there. According to Abrahams (1978),

Christianity finally turned out to be the most constricting. Christians started using the colonial government's "sword" to subdue obstinacy because they refused to recognize the fundamental truth of another faith. Then, with its idealistic liberal vision of wishing to bring civilization back to the primitive people, European civilization started to show its greatest originality in the exercise of Christian justice. Religion that is nasty and hypocritical. A once-proud people's soul has been ruined thanks to Christianity's hazardous assistance (Abraham, 1978).

As a result, the Igbos are now so mixed with white people that it is challenging to distinguish them from the long-ago invaders. He gave position and wealth to those who joined the white individual. They utilized the authority granted to them against their kin by going the way of the white individual. Even though they were few and easily pushed out, the white religious clans provided protection and helped them to continue ruling. To construct his civilization, he leverages the same foundation as the old one to destroy it.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it was discovered that Europeans had established their domination over the Igbo civilization by dominating indigenous cultures, worldviews, and faiths. To create colonialism and dominion over Africa, they used a planned and methodical procedure. They sent missionaries to the Igbo homeland to broaden their hegemony and control and to lay the foundation for political dominance. The whites were successful in driving the natives away from their traditional loyalties, ancestral beliefs, and culture, leading them to give up their prior faith. The validity of their gods and the basic foundations of tribal society was also questioned by the missionaries. The missionaries were successful in persuading the natives that the deities they worshipped were false gods. As a result, the whites ridiculed the native gods and showed how much better the white man's God was than them. As a result, they established their superiority while being protected by the missionaries, clearing the way for the colonists to do the same.

The study also found that when Indigenous people recognized flaws in their ideas, culture, and religion, they felt submissive and acknowledged the superiority of white men. The whites made the colonial subjects feel uninterested in imperial values, culture, and religion and persuaded them that their beliefs were merely superstitions. The fact that white people display the superiority of white gods over local gods and practice religion makes them feel oppressed, as does the knowledge that they worship false gods such as wood and stone gods, which are seen as savage and uncivilized by white people.

In this study, the effects of white man dominance on indigenous culture, religion, and beliefs are highlighted. These effects are evident in the indigenous people's adoption of British culture, religion, and beliefs. Both their acts and emotions are reflected in Igbo society.

Many became Christians, obtained a British education, and worked as messengers and court clerks in the colonial civil service. Igbo social transformation in terms of beliefs and the prevalence of the new religion in the dominant society. Igbo society's traditional monotheistic religion replaced its polytheistic counterpart. As a result, colonial policies encouraged cultural hegemony, putting the Igbo clan under pressure to accept colonial control. The evident effects of hegemony are also explored in this work, as well as how these effects are represented in the propagation of new ideologies and missionary cultures. It is made clear that the whites are guiding the clans away from their nativism while also attempting to disprove it by destroying their culture, language, and religion. They are also turning the clans against one another to establish long-term dominance in the village.

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