

Rediscovering African Cultural Identity: A Postcolonial and Structural Narratological Analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*

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Abstract: This article critically examines the representation of African cultural identity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*. Drawing on postcolonial theory and structural narratology, the study highlights how these texts portray African traditions, belief systems, language, spiritual practices, and social structures as central components of indigenous identity. Through close textual analysis, the paper explores the resilience of cultural norms in the face of colonial disruption and underscores the role of literature in cultural preservation. The findings reveal that both authors restore dignity to African epistemologies and advocates for cultural continuity across generation as seen in the Igbo tradition in the two novels.

Keywords: African cultural identity; postcolonial literature; Igbo traditions; Chinua Achebe; Buchi Emecheta

1. Introduction

Culture is any aspect of human life that characterizes a group of people living in a specific area. That group of people can be identified through some particular attitudes or practices that show its cultural community life. Hence, cultural identity can be defined as whole and complex rules that include beliefs, values, customs, law, habits, language, religion and practices which characterize any human living group or a society. Chen rather points out in Cultural Identity that "cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to a particular group based on various culture categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, norms, and customs" (Chen1) Regarding Chen definition and the colonial division Africa has gone through, it is clear enough that Africa has got several and a diversity of cultures which are undoubtedly signs of cultural identity. This article is written in the light of the worrying identity crises and the disappearance of some African cultures currently. This alarming crisis of African cultural identity compels a number of scholars to carry out researches on the issue. The purpose of this study is to examine how African cultural identity is portrayed and preserved through literary narratives in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Slave Girl*, using postcolonial and structural narratological frameworks.

In "I am an African": A philosophical Enquiring of Identity and Culture published in *The Journal of Black Studies*, Mokhoathi reveals the issue of African persona and what is meant to be authentically African. He raises the following question: "What makes one an African? Is it the color of their skin? Their citizenship? Or is one merely African because others regard him or her as such?" (Mokhoathi 1). The scholar's research hubs around what makes a person a genuine African who is connected to his culture and tradition. Beckmann rather insists on African language as the key element to stay in a perpetual contact with one's ancestors. She points out in "Language as Cultural Identity

in Achebe, Ihimaera, Laurence and Atwood" that: "...to lose a language is to lose touch with ones' ancestors. Yet, loss of the ancestral tongue is all too often a hallmark of the multicultural situation..." (Beckmann 117). The scholar makes it clear that a person who denies or rejects his or her mother tongue to the detriment of somebody's is disoriented. From another angle, Ojaide, thinks that though colonization has looked down African culture, African literature has distinguished itself. In his work "Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity", he envisions that "African culture provides African literature with allusion, image, symbols, aesthetic and direction" (Ojaide 3). This research work hubs around the different cultural aspects of Africans' life as their identity.

The article employs close textual analysis of key cultural themes such as spiritual beliefs, rites of passage, and ancestral connections within the novels. The analytical approach used is based on the study of the plot, literary devices and the settings in the novels. As theoretical framework, postcolonial theory coined by Edward Said and some other theorists like Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon is employed to study the above-mentioned cultural themes. Tzvetan Todorov's structural narratology brings a clear study on the stories, that is to say the events and characters social life. This study is significant in illuminating how African literary narratives serve as vehicles for cultural preservation, resistance to colonial erasure, and transmission of indigenous values, thereby enriching the broader discourse on decolonizing knowledge and identity.

1) Beliefs and Practices

In Africa, beliefs and practices are divers and are highly regarded as parts of Africans' daily life. In fact, native Africans' religions are centered on ancestors' worship, the belief in a spiritual world with which they have perpetual contacts as far as the past, the present and the future events are concerned. They also practice it for the sake of their community life and for its prosperity. Among native African writers who value African culture, Emecheta does not stay on the side line. In *The Slave Girl* one of her novels, the

female writer points out a belief about a repeated death of a child called Ogbange¹. This happens when a new born baby does not stay in life for long and dies few minutes after it is delivered.

[...] Umedi, 'you'd better get up; remarked Ukabegweu's wife.

Your *ogbange*, this visitor, looks as if she is staying this time. [...] She handed the baby to Ukabegweu's, and ran as fast as her health could allow her to the house of a *didia*², the native doctor, who said: "your child will stay if you tie her with safety charms. [...] It is our duty to make her stay as long as possible, until she is grown enough to reject her friends. Then they will no longer have any effects on her (Emecheta 10).

The woman must consult a traditional medicine practitioner to prevent the new born baby from dying again. So, there is a belief that when a woman repeatedly loses her babies, it may be linked to the death spirit that keeps the baby in the spiritual world. Achebe also deals with a similar issue about Okonkwo's wife Ekwefi who loses her baby girl more than three times. An emergency to visit Okagbue Ujana is impending. It is only when Okonkwo reaches the practitioner's hut that he surprisingly learns that the repeated death of their new born babies is due to an *ogbange*. Though Ezinma grows and reaches her seven, she falls sick and after consulting a local medicine man, the latter reveals that the girl's *iyi-uwa*³ should be found and destroyed. He adds that some rituals must be performed to break the link between the girl and the spirit world.

Ekwefi did as she was asked. As soon as she became pregnant, she went to live with her old mother in another village. It was there that her third child was born and circumcised on the eighth day. [...] Onwumbiko was not given a proper burial when he died. Okonkwo had called in another great medicine-man who was famous in the clan for his great knowledge about *ogbange* children. [...] The medicine-man then ordered that there should be no mourning for the dead child (Achebe 55).

Through an omniscient narrative, one can grasp the children's death is invisibly linked to a spiritual world which must be conjured up so as to give peace to their mother and for the sake and peace of the family. This belief is specific to Igbo people who really value their culture in its various aspects. They respectfully carry on their culture in a way so that it can be transmitted to the future generation.

Unoka's diseases in *Things Fall Apart* is regarded as a curse. According to the Igbo social norms, a man who suffers from such swellings should not die amidst his people. He is carried away into a forest in which he spends his remaining

times before passing away. This cultural aspect of Igbo people is observed in the story and that is the reason why Umuofia people are compelled to carry Unoka away in the evil forest near the village:

Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad *chi*⁴ or personal god, and evil spirit fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave. He died of the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess. When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs, he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die. There was the story of a very stubborn man who staggered back to tree. The sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her first or second burial. Such was Unoka's fate (Achebe 13).

The custom is respected to prevent divine wrath over Unoka's family and even the whole clan. To avoid Unoka's disease which can subsequently lead to a plague, his family has to banish him from the house. His death lets understand that his personal god has betrayed him. Igbo people are strongly attached to their culture and that clearly identifies it as the root of their life. Casting a glance at Ogundimu's *The Insiders*, a story is carried about some minor characters like Moji, Bayo's late father's sister and Iyolade, Kudi's mother. In fact, to prevent Boyo's from marrying Kudi, Moji reveals to Iyolade a secret about Bayo's falling from his mother's back, a thing that is seen as a curse among Yoruba people. Moji relates:

"Well, we all know the terrible repercussion of a child falling from its mother's back".

"Yes, are you suggesting that Bayo once fell from his mother's back?"

"Yes, that was what happened in his babyhood" [...]

"I saw it happened with my naked eyes. Bayo was eleven-month-old at the time. That day, mother Bayo had knelt down grinding pepper on the millstone. [...] Bayo was doomed to have a problematic married life (Ogundimu 66).

After such a misfortune, rituals are immediately performed to conjure up the spell. If not, the involved person will come across rough situation as it is mentioned by Moji a minor character.

Egwugwu masks in *Things Fall Apart* are used to set societal matters among the Igbo people. This practice is to maintain a peaceful and harmonious social life. The *Egwugwu* trial appears as the highest and final trial in Umuofia land. Igbo people resort to *Egwugwu* trial as the supreme court to set matters right. Uzowulu and his wife's case is a perfect illustration:

The nine *Egwugwu*⁵ then went away to consult together in their house. There was silence for a long time. Then the metal gong sounded and the flute was

¹ A child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother to be born. It is almost impossible to bring up an *ogbange* child without it dying, unless its *iyi-uwa* is first found and destroyed

² A traditional medicine maker

³ A special kind of stone which forms the link between an *ogbange* and the spirit world. Only if the *iyi-uwa* is discovered and destroyed the child will not die.

⁴ Personal god in the Igbo society.

⁵ A masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village

blown. The *Egwugwu* had emerged once again from their underground home. They saluted one another and then reappeared on the *ilo*⁶.

“Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman”.

“I am Evil Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the mouth [sic], I am First-that-burn-without faggots. If your in-law brings wine to you let your sister go with him. I salute you” He pulled his staff from the hard earth and thrust it back (Achebe 66).

This practice is performed to avoid humans' mistaken judgments. Evil spirits are feared and respected as they represent the supreme judges. Their pieces of advice are taken into account and followed to avoid being a repeat offender.

2) Announcement of Death and Burial Ceremonies

There is a particular way to announce death in *Things Fall Apart* of Chinua Achebe. And it must be mentioned that, it is not always that people's death is announced. Ezendu's sudden death is a great surprise for the clan though he is very old and respected with important titles. One day at the dawn, sounds begin to tear Umuofia atmosphere like lightening: “Go-di-di-go-go-di. Di-go-go-di-go. It was the ekwe talking to the clan. One of the things men learned was the language of the hollowed-out instruments. Dlim! Dlim! Dlim! Boomed the cannon at interval” (Achebe 85). The sound of gongs is meant to play different roles when beaten in a particular way. They are used to draw villagers' attention to message conveyed by the village crier. When a clan surprisingly hears a cannon's sound, they immediately know that one of them has passed away.

Additionally, a man who during his life in a clan has got many titles has a very special burial ceremony. Ezendu's case is an example. The man has three titles and there are four titles in all. The omniscient narrator explains: “Ezendu had taken three titles in the clan, and only one or two men in any generation ever achieved the fourth and highest. When they did, they became the lords of the land. Because he had taken titles, Ezendu was to be buried after dark with only a glowing brand to light the sacred ceremony” (Achebe 86).

3) Traditional Dance

In Africa, traditional dance is one of the most common cultural aspects people use to value and to promote their cultural. As there is a diversity of tribes, there is equally a variety of traditional dance. In Africa, traditional dance occurs collectively by expressing the values and desires of the community more than that of individuals. It is more than entertainment and is part of many rituals, a form of prayer and a rite of passage from one generation to another one. In Africa, many tribes have a specific person who is well known for his special role to dedicate his time to pass down the tribe's traditional dance. It is also significant for young people who must have titles in their clan. It is doubtlessly

the crucial reason why Okolie sells his sister Obejeta in order to gather huge sums of money to overcome his coming-of-age ceremony. Very baffled by Ma Palagada's harsh words, he calmly says:

You see, I have a coming-of-age dance and I am the chief dancer of the Uloko group. I do not want to look shabbily dressed on the day. I need more scarves than most of the dancers, and the number of my beads and anklets must triple that of the others, because all eyes will be on me. This money is too small to prepare me (Emecheta 65).

Emecheta talks about that precious aspect of African culture through Okolie's coming-of-age ceremony. The latter is announced to be a great dancer by the omniscient narrator: “The day of the big coming-out dance of his age-group was fast approaching [...] As a result, of the loss sustained by his age-group Okolie became not only the chief horn blower but also the leader of the dancers. Awun-nta ‘Mosquito’ previously the natural dance leader because of his long, skinny legs and his lightness” (Emecheta 78). One's coming-of-age group dance is a very important part of a man's life. People can also use traditional dance to address their deceased persons. It is a sort of communication that a person performs order to be directly in contact with a dead person or an ancestor. It is Okolie's desire to show his late father, some steps of his dance so as the latter can protect him against spiteful people who may want to harm him:

Before Okolie set out, he went to perform the first steps of his new dance to his parents. After a few such steps at his father's burial place, he stood like a mighty bird in curtsy and said, ‘father, guide me from the eyes of witches and other evil people. I dance for you to approve of me before any other person because you gave me life. Since his mother had died while still in mourning, custom had demanded that her body be thrown in the ‘bad bush’, and though Okolie could not go there, with tears in his eyes he repeated the same words to his mother (Emecheta 80).

It emerges from the omniscient narrative that to seek for protection against evil people, traditional dance appears as a means to ask for service as Okolie does. He needs his late parents' approval and their protection before his appearance at the village square for he will be the leader of the show.

4) Beads and Colours in Traditional Dressing

Beads, colours and many other items are used in traditional dressing to create beauty, harmony and to show the quality of people's wearing. In African tribes, wearing of beads is highly symbolic and is reserved for some initiated people or to the adepts of gods in convents. It also happens sometimes that people use these items to attract attention to importance some events. Many people use them to distinguish themselves from the others due to their respective titles. Okolie in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* is exactly portrayed in this way when he gets prepared for his coming-of-age dance. The event is very important so, he manages hard to acquire all the necessary items which can create difference between him and his fellows:

⁶ The village square where people gather for many cultural activities

On the day, Okolie came out in style. Round his head he wrapped a red silk scarf with card patterns on it and round his waist; instead of ordinary raffia, were many more scarves of every colour, yellow, black, green, grey. All this topped the kind of george material that had never before been seen in Ibuza, with a brown background with yellow working on it, some resembling birds, some leaves, some snakes. Even for his ankle beads he did not use the shells of nuts as others did but had small copper bells that rang out when danced (Emecheta 80).

The use of the cited items is recurring in West African especially in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. In fact, African continent is home of more than three thousand tribes and the diversity of culture constitutes a richness and social patrimony for the continent. The manifestation of African cultures can be either tangible or purely nonphysical because the level of some manifestations requires the invisible spirits of gods. Interestingly, the use of beads in some African tribes is seen as sign of power.

5) African Folklore

Folktales, proverbs, myths, legends and adages are all parts of the rich African culture. They are much alive when narrated in the modern African literature. The appropriate use of structural narratology and postcolonial theories helps to better understand characters' behaviour, moral values and cultural practices within the novels. Folklore also brings a community together, and eliminates anti-social behaviour among the individuals within a community. Achebe's written story about tortoise in *Things Fall Apart* is to teach lesson and sensitize readers as far as anti-social behaviour is concerned. It is also to bring the community united as one. Ekwefi narrates to her daughter Ezinma:

'Once upon a time,' she began. All the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were happy and began to prepare themselves for the great day. They painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew beautiful patterns on them with *uli*

Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that happened in the world of animal ever escaped his notice; he was full of cunning. As soon as he heard of the great feast in the sky his throat began to itch at the very thought. There was a famine in those days and Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for two moons. His body rattled like piece of dry stick in his empty shell. So, he began to plan how he would go to the sky [...] (Achebe 98).

The tortoise's anti-social behaviour in the short story is significant and is employed to sensitize on social and community life. In fact, African folktales play various roles in African literature. They are used to instill morals and social values in people. Stories are also meant to bring a community together and eliminate anti-social behaviour among the individuals within the community. Young people are considered as the target of the morality taught in proverbs, legends stories. It is important to mention that storytelling often takes place at night in a cool and quiet place as the omniscient narrator declares in *Weep not child*:

"But some nights, the young people wanted to hear stories from Ngotho or from the women. At such times they all would be in the same place" (Thiong'o's 12). Stories and legends are always told by old men or women who have enough life experience.

6) African Mystical life

In African societies, some cultural events and facts cannot be explained because they are beyond human understandings. Africans often tend to personify objects, forces and phenomena of nature to grant them mystical life even where there is no evident biological life. *Egwugwu* in *Things Fall Apart* which impersonates one of the ancestral spirits emits some incantatory words that only initiated can understand the meaning, and that is the characteristics of some African cultures. Firstly, *Egwugwu* is mystically portrayed as an Evil spirit at the Ozowulu and Odukwe's trial: "The crowd roared with laughter. Evil Forest rose to his feet and order was immediately restored. A steady cloud of smoke rose from his head" (Achebe 65). To the uninitiated, the figure of the Evil spirit may appear deeply mystical and unsettling. The way the omniscient narrator describes the *Egwugwu's* coming out is scary: "The *Egwugwu* had emerged once again from their underground home" (Achebe 65). Moreover, before talking to Nzowulu's in-law, Evil spirit pronounces some particular words that can be compared to incantatory ones: "I am Evil Forest, I am Dry meat that fills the mouth, I am first that burns without faggots" (Achebe 66). Only the grandees and the initiated can decipher those words pronounced by the Evil Forest because they carry code and secrets messages which are not addressed to common people. In addition, Chielo the priestess' sudden coming out at night is purely mystical. A stranger who has just come in Okonkwo's compound and knows absolutely nothing about Umuofia people's culture would be intensely frightened. The latter is possessed and starts screaming around the village that very night by prophesying:

It was Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, prophesying. There was nothing new in that. Once in a while Chielo was possessed by the spirit of her god and she began to prophesy. But tonight, she was addressing her prophesy and greetings to Okonkwo, and so everyone in his family listens. The folk stories stopped.

"*Agbala d-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo - o-o-o-o* came her voice like a sharp knife cutting through the night. *Okonkwo! Agbala ekene gio - o - o - o Agbala cholu ifu ya Ezinma - o - o - o*. [...] The priestess bent down on her knee and Ezinma climbed on her back [...] *Agbala d-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo - o-o-o-o* Chielo began once again to chant greeting to her god. [...] Ezinma was crying now; calling her mother. The two voices disappeared into the thick darkness. A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite (Achebe 71-2).

Mystical events in African societies are linked to their beliefs and the connection with their ancestors. There are some facts that cannot be explained because it is established

by ancestors and that must be perpetuated from generation to generation.

7) Land

The vital importance of land issues to social and economic development in Africa is unquestionable. Land continues to have major historical and spiritual significance for Africans. In many African cultures, land is not simply a plot of land or a piece of one's property, but rather a source of sustenance, identity, and ancestral connection. Furthermore, the idea of land as symbol of wealth and power is often intertwined with concepts of communal ownership and responsibility. Because of its importance, problem of land ownership often raises serious problems among families in African communities. In *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika visits his friend Okonkwo in exile at Mbanta and explains to him how things are going from bad to worse in their clan after the white man's arrival. In their conversation, they mention a matter going around a land issue

We must fight these men and drive them from the land [...] "It is already too late" said Obierika sadly. "Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined this religion and they help to uphold his government [...] what happened to that piece of land in dispute? Asked Okonkwo. "The white man's court has decided that it should belong to Nnama's family, who had given much money to the whiteman's messengers and interpreter. "Does the white understand our custom about land? (Achebe 124)

A white man who hardly comes to an African community cannot claim to be wiser to solve a land issue among the indigenous people. Land issues are significant for African people. The land's dispute here can only be set right by the Umuofia's old title men as they are sons of the clan. Also, they know very well their customs and should do justice where it is due and respect social norms. If the land is unjustly given to Nnama because his people have given money to the messengers and the interpreter, that can degenerate and lead to a serious land issue in the clan. In fact, land problems are cautiously handled because it can easily result in death. In Africa, land has some laws that should be rigorously respected through customs as Okonkwo states: "But the law of the land must be obeyed" (Achebe 48). In fact, the protagonist refers to Obierika who has got a title called *ozo*⁷ which does not allow him to carry on his job as a palm-tree tapper, for the land could be desecrated and could have serious overcome on the clan. So, land in Africa is connected to many ancestral spirits.

Besides, for Africans, possessing a plot of land is compared to discovering a treasure. Land is everything a man should have during his lifetime even if he acquires nothing else. With the recurring land matter that goes throughout Thiong'o's *Weep not Child*, the narrator places a special emphasis on acquiring land as a pure treasure: "Nganga was rich. He had land. Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was

better off than the man with money" (Thiong'o's 19). Land means too much for African people and their survival depends on it because agriculture needs vast and extended land.

8) Kola nuts, Palm-wine and Cowries

Kola nuts and cowries are traditional symbols in African society especially in the Igbo's. The inclusion of Kola nuts ritual is an important part of Achebe's description of the Igbo society in the fiction. The Kola nut is broken and eaten when a host welcomes a guest into his home, and it is a powerful symbol of mutual respect and community. It is seen at the beginning of the story that Okoye pays Unoka a visit to ask for his cowries. But when the latter gets there, Unoka receives him as the tradition requires it: "Unoka went into an inner room and soon returned with a small wooden disc containing a kola nut, some alligator pepper and a lump of white chalk. "I have kola," he announced when he sat down, and passed the disc over to his guest. "Thanks, you. He who brings kola brings life" (Achebe 4-5).

Palm wine too plays significant roles on African tradition. It is used as a symbol of peace, respect, and acceptance within a community. To set a matter right between two people, palm-wine is needed. It is described as an important thing people expect in ceremonies. This is perceptible through Ezenwa's eagerness to see Akueke's suitor's arrival in *Things Fall Apart*: "I hope our in-laws will bring many pots of wine [...] Obierika's relatives counted the pots as they came in. Twenty, twenty-five-forty-five. The hosts nodded in approval and seemed to say, 'Now, they are behaving like men. Altogether there were fifty-five pots of wine" (Achebe 81). As said, the suitor's family goes beyond the expected pots of palm wine and people really enjoy it: "The kola was eaten and the drinking of palm-wine began" (Achebe 82). Cowries are used to make everyday purchase as well as to pay expensive bride price as Obierika's eldest brother: "In Umunso, they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop" (Achebe 51).

9) Traditional Marriage

Get traditionally married in Africa needs some cautious and careful steps to undertake toward the bride's family. It first concerns old people though it is the suitor and the bride's business. They are involved and wisely carry out the matter while the bride herself is not present because two families are going to be bond forever. Some steps such as meeting the bride's family to discuss about the bride price.

Obierika then presented to him a small bundle of short broomsticks. Ukegbu counted them. 'They are thirty?' he asked. Obierika nodded in agreement. 'We are at last going somewhere,' Ukegbu said, and then turning to his brother and his son said: Let us go out and whisper together,' The three rose and went outside. When they returned Ukegbu handed the bundle of sticks back to Obierika. He counted them; instead of thirty there were only fifteen. He passed them over to his elder brother, Machi, who also counted them and said: 'We had not thought to go below thirty' [...] He then added ten sticks to the fifteen and gave the bundle to Ukegbu. In this way, Akuke's bride-price

⁷ The name of one of the title or ranks

was finally settled at twenty-five bags of cowries. (Achebe 50-1)

This is a very important step in a traditional marriage because traditional norms and values recommend it. A compromise is found between the two families before they go to the following steps which consist in giving the bride to his suitor as the traditional law requires it as seen in the Igbo fictional society. The second step is carried out through a great celebration where the whole village is present. Everybody knows that Akuke is from now on a young married woman and no more a young girl. It is significant because it not only brings honour and respect to the bride family but also to the one of the suitors. The bride is submitted to some essential rituals which prove that she can be a good wife for her suitor:

The elders sat in a big circle and the singers went around. When they had gone around the circle they settled down in the centre, and girls came from the inner compound to dance. At first the bride was not among them. But when she finally appeared holding a cock in her right hand, a loud cheer rose from the crowd. All the other dancers made way for her. She presented the cock to the musicians and began to dance. Her brass anklets rattled as she danced and her body gleamed with cam wood in the soft yellow light. (Achebe 82)

A young girl who does not go through these significant ceremonies before getting married brings shame to her people, and they will not deserve respect. This practice varies from one tribe to another one. The most important thing for the suitor is to show his financial capacity so as to bring home his future wife. Also, one of the African traditions is polygamy. It is a capital aspect in African marriage and is considered as a symbol of power. Polygamy is somehow linked to men titles in the society. It is thought that warriors or men of titles are well prepared to marry more wives. Okonkwo is portrayed as one of the polygamists in the plot: "Okonkwo was clearly cut for great things. He was still young but had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife" (Achebe 6). All along the novel, other characters like Okoye have three wives. Nwakibie the rich man in Okonkwo's village has nine wives.

10) Consulting Oracle

Consulting oracles in African societies is a matter that people take serious in order to know about their life. In *Things Fall Apart*, people consult Agbala the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves in different circumstances. For example, a person may consult Agbala to know more about his failure in business. People can also go to seek information about a future baby. So, going to Agbala is important for decision making in the context of a sacrifice for the sake of the community. Going to war against another tribe or setting a matter right between people living within the same community needs the Oracle acceptance. Achebe shows that Igbo people are attached to their ancestral practice because they do not do things according to their own will. The

Oracle is consulted to see whether it is good to face Mbaimo for war or not:

And in fairness to Umuofia, it should be recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just accepted as such by its Oracle -the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. And there was indeed occasion when the Oracle had forbidden Umuofia to wage a war. If the clan had disobeyed the Oracle, they would never fight what the Ibo call a fight of blame (Achebe 9).

It is the issue that is heard here and there about Obiako the palm-wine tapper. According to some people, the latter has suddenly abandoned his job and it is said that the Oracle has warned him about a danger that is ahead: "some people say the Oracle warned him that he would fall off a palm tree and kill himself" (Achebe 15).

2. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that African cultural identity is deeply embedded in traditional practices, communal values, and ancestral connections, as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Slave Girl*. Through postcolonial and narratological lenses, the study highlights how literature functions as a medium of cultural community and resistance against colonial narratives. By revisiting these foundational texts, the research reaffirms the significance of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping identity and fostering intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage.

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