

Dehumanization and Oppression of Females in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"

Fahim Cheffat Salman



Abstract: African literature with its great reputation starts as an oral literature to a form of literature that is written in the languages of colonizers. It reveals many powerful cultural and political frameworks that impress to maintain displacement intact. Culture as a complicated social apparatus and regulation. This paper reveals dehumanization and oppression of females in the black continent. The place of women in Igbo cultural practices is depicted by Chinua Achebe in his famous book *Things Fall Apart* by highlighting the significant and vital role Igbo women play in the story. This was achieved by a thorough analysis of the book, depends on the important roles that women play in education, religion, society, and other spheres, as understood from the book. The conclusion of the essay is that women's status in Igbo culture is essential and fundamental to the survival of human civilization.

Keywords: Things fall Apart, socio-cultural, role, Igbo Traditional Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe illustrated the diversity of Igbo cultural values. The issue of gender is obviously underlined even though the story was primarily about the cultural encounter and struggle between the Igbo Africa and the European whites, among other ideals in the Igbo culture. The story's prominent depiction and careful documentation of gender roles calls for serious examination. In fact, the concept of masculinity and femininity was so strongly reinforced that it still exists today as a distinction between particular professions, agricultural products, and social offenses. For example, only men were permitted to work with energy-intensive crops like yam tubers and to do tasks like splitting firewood. Achebe's depictions of the female gender have continued to get a lot of attention because of their widely seen undesirable responsibilities in the traditional Igbo society. The primary goal of this research is to reconsider how women are depicted in traditional Igbo culture by Achebe. Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is presented as a mocking disdain of the neighborhood who is sluggish, downtrodden, and a depressing failure in life. He was not a guy of valor. In reality, he was a coward who could not stand the sight of blood (p. 2). Okonkwo was obviously embarrassed of his father and wanted to be a completely different man as a consequence of the unsatisfactory life of his father, who could hardly provide for his little family.

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Because of his father's unsuccessful experiences, he had a crippling dread of failing. He desired to become a leader whose impact would go beyond the nine villages of the Umuofia community. He is even referred to as having "famous based on strong personal achievements" (p. 3). He is thus shown as being in sharp contrast to Unoka, the father. In stark contrast to his oppositely contrasting character traits, Okonkwo portrayed a fearless and daring guy who "...was not frightened of combat," but rather "a man of action, a man of war. He could bear the sight of blood unlike his father (p.3). In order to maintain and perpetuate the qualities of manliness and assiduity that were conspicuously lacking in his father's demeanor, Okonkwo not only became a rich and brave man, but also a terrifying terror to everyone around him, especially among members of his family. His wives were the constant targets of his uncontrollable, raging fury. His overt contempt for feminine traits and womanly dispositions led to the Igbo traditional religious culture's predominant view of women as being degraded. Igbo women seem to be mostly overlooked in the old order of things, according to Chinua Achebe's portrayal of women in the novel.

II. CHINUA ACHEBE AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

Chinua Achebe is widely regarded as the founding father of contemporary African writing. Since the release of *Things Fall Apart* in the year 1958, he has been recognized as the primary creator of an African literary culture. This recognition dates back to the year the book was released. One of his ardent beliefs, which he expresses in his writings, is that "They did not learn about culture for the first time from Europeans; their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty; they had poetry, and most importantly, they had dignity. African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans" [6]. This commitment permeates all of his studies, and in a pure way, they represent the dignity and importance of African culture. This demonstrates that Achebe is, without a shadow of a doubt, a genuine writer whose works fully reflect the reality of the culture in which he writes. According to [8], despite the fact that this book was not the first African novel ever written, "It was maybe the first piece of writing where the author intentionally sought to portray the African experience in a way that was separate from colonial fiction. "

III. AFRICAN CULTURE

Because of its many different connections, African culture has garnered a lot of attention for being so distinctive. Culture and the depiction of women interact with one another to create a complicated and contrived network of tension that depicts female figures in early African works that are false and incomplete [5].



Dehumanization and Oppression of Females in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"

The early works of African culture have always been controlled by males, and many critics who are females have maintained that women were defined based on their connection to men. This is something that has also been true of African culture. In the past, women have been portrayed as "passive mothers," wives and maids for their husbands, and whores or mistresses for the "great" male-dominated society. [3] mentioned that this is a small sample of the patriarchally created civilizations that exist all over the world and are responsible for the vast majority of the pain that women endure. Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe presents a contrast between the great heroic deeds done by males in a strong, macho way on the one hand, and the "not so" wonderful achievements done by women who are subjected to physical and verbal abuse at the hands of these "great" men. Although this contrast is quite general, it is still quite striking. The only reason why we can perceive how Achebe's portrayal of women in the sad voyage of Okonkwo is nothing more than objectification, oppression, and assault on bodies identified as "women" is that what the "men" in Igbo society cherish and recognize is the heteronormative, heterosemantic standard. If feminism is seen as a hermeneutical tool, which is a means of reading and analyzing texts, then it should be used to unearth the meaning of Things While going through Achebe's work critically from a feminist perspective and utilizing Judith Butler's hypothesis of gender, I saw that Achebe paid considerably less emphasis to the hardships and sufferings of women, despite the fact that he was attempting to elevate cultural pride. [4][13][14][15][15].

IV. SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

[2] Claimed that "Things Fall Apart is widely considered to be one of the most important books of its era, both in terms of its domestic and international impact". It is essential to investigate the background of the book and the features that led up to the publishing of the novel if one want to have a complete comprehension of both the novel and the contents of the novel. When Britain took control of Nigeria and made it a colony in 1906, the whole British political structure and its supporting institutions were promptly imposed onto the country. In 1930, more than 25 years after the British established direct authority in Nigeria, Achebe was born. He was one of the first authors to write about the country. Even though Achebe's parents had just become Christians at the time, his grandparents remained steadfast in their commitment to the cultural practices. [1]. Achebe first learned about Nigerian culture under these conditions, as well as British culture. It may be presumed that there was a lot of friction since neither of them understood the other's culture and neither of them was ready to give up their own views to adopt those of the other. Achebe acknowledged this, stating that "the struggle that existed between these two civilizations generated sparks in his imagination" (Sickels 1). His book Things Fall Apart was born as a consequence. Achebe had a good education and a scholarship to continue his studies as a medical student, but he ultimately decided to switch his concentration to writing. The transition was sparked by his curiosity, that of other young Africans with access to information, about why Westerners had suddenly become interested in their continent and were now more eager than

ever to teach it [9]. In two of his books, Things Fall Apart and The Arrow of God, Achebe seems to be most concerned with the emergence of a new religion and its negative effects on society (Alimi 121). In the novel Things Fall Apart, the residents of Umuofia are split into two groups as soon as white missionaries set foot on their land. Igbo followers make up the first category, while white missionaries' supporters make up the second. Converts to Christianity make the conscious decision to give up their own religion, cultural norms, and social group in favor of adhering to the ways of the white man. The central theme of Things Fall Apart is the traditional Igbo culture's "collapse, breaking into fragments, turbulence, and confusion" (Alimi 121), which is caused by the arrival of the white man and his religion in Umuofia. This takes place after the white man brings his religion with him. There is a significant gap between the perspectives on life held by white males and those held by the Igbo people. In the traditional Igbo culture, some behaviors and attitudes are considered completely proper and acceptable, but the white missionaries do not view things the same way. They are quick to want to change features of traditional Igbo culture that, in their view, are inappropriate and inappropriate. The "bad and unwanted" elements of traditional Igbo culture are exactly what preserve the Igbo people's togetherness and harmony with one another, but by behaving in this way, the white missionaries fail to understand this. For example, in traditional Igbo norm, a "genuine" man is needed to have two or more wives. This is one of the qualifications for leadership in the community. In certain cases, the first wife may even suggest to her husband that he locate a younger woman to marry since the ladies of the clan are aware of this and have come to terms with it. It is expected of the younger wives that they would show respect to the first wife. These ladies and their spouses live together in harmony and provide a hand to one another when it comes to looking after the children and doing other activities around the home. The white missionaries, on the other hand, are opposed to the practice of polygamous marriages because they believe that certain texts in the New Testament (for instance, Malachi 2:16) forbid such behavior among Christians.

V. CULTURAL CLASHES IN THE NOVEL

One of the themes that arises in both Things Fall Apart and The Arrow of God is the clear cultural conflict that takes place between the white missionaries and the Igbo people. An additional concept that is explored in "Internal Division in the Tribe" is one that is presented in "The Arrow of God" (Alimi 121). This results in a very strong feeling of hostility among the inhabitants of Umuaro, and the bond of brotherhood and sisterhood that had previously existed among them is destroyed. Without any outside coercion, the inhabitants of Umuaro separated among themselves on their own. [7]. One of the parallels that can be seen between these two books is the fact that the inhabitants of the villages of Umuofia and Umuaro are both torn apart by the turmoil that is brought on by the presence of missionaries in their respective communities.



The separation that exists among the people of Umuaro is not due to the impact that the white man has had, in contrast to the division that exists among the people of Umuofia. The purpose of this line, according to Achebe, is to show the audience that although the missionaries should bear some of the guilt for the harm that their religion caused to Igbo culture, they should also be held accountable for the potential that tribes may split off on their own.) [7].

In each of his books, Chinua Achebe utilizes language with regional overtones and nuances to depict the way of life of his characters and the environments in which the stories take place, respectively. *Things Fall Apart* and *The Arrow of God* are considered the "books that are stuffed to the brim with Igbo proverbs that Achebe translates into English for the sake of his readers who are not fluent in Igbo," according to the author Chinua Achebe (Alimi 121). Achebe employs Igbo proverbs in an ageless manner throughout these works not just to maintain Igbo culture and language but also to demonstrate the worth of these sayings not only to himself but to the whole Igbo society.

According to the *Advanced English Dictionary*, a proverb is a "condensed yet memorable phrase expressing some essential truth of experience that is regarded as a fact by majority of people." A proverb, according to "Akpobaro," is a concise popular saying that is often embraced by civilizations to convey moral ideas to its citizens in the fewest number of words feasible. He continues by saying that it's a way for thoughts to be powerfully articulated and displayed (Alimi 124).

VI. CHINUA ACHEBE'S AND OTHER COLONIAL NOVELS

Achebe's book differs from other colonial literature in that it studies Igbo society in great detail and presents them in a way that highlights all parts of their culture, not just the positive ones. In addition to this, he provides forecasts about the future of the Igbo people and where they would be located in the event that the white missionaries are successful in capturing authority in Umuofia. Achebe does an excellent job of utilizing the English language to provide a comprehensive account of Okonkwo's life. At the beginning of the book, Okonkwo is a young man who is very well-known across all nine of Umuofia's villages. However, as the narrative develops and white missionaries, along with their respective governments and institutions, begin to arrive in Umuofia, Okonkwo, who tries to oppose the change, is ultimately buried without respect or dignity, and his fame is quickly forgotten because he commits the gravest sin in Igbo religion by taking his own life [3].

Because he was brought up in a Christian home and hence had an insider outsider status, *Things Fall Apart's* author was not permitted to partake in customary Igbo rites despite the fact that he was Igbo, was one of the primary contributors to the novel's success by providing a detailed description of Igbo culture as seen from his perspective. This was one of the primary reasons that *Things Fall Apart* was so popular (Owomoyela 18). Owomoyela goes on to assert that "Achebe has a strong command of narrative structure and style in addition to a great eye for detail and a focus on everyday events. He does it, nevertheless, not through the eyes of an anthropological but rather with the sharp perspective of

someone who was deeply immersed in and felt a sense of oneness with his culture while still instilling western principles." [9].

VII. THE HUNGER OF EUROPEANS FOR AFRICANS RESOURCES

[5] stated that one of the justifications that the Europeans gave for colonizing Africa was their intention to "civilize" the barbaric African mentalities as a kind of altruistic service to those people. Soon after, European authority began to dominate African governments on all fronts, including the economic, political, and social spheres.

The Europeans had a vision of the world that was centered on Europe, and they were adamant in their belief that European civilization was superior to all others. Therefore, according to euro centrism, Europe is both the center of civilization and the center of mankind. The Eurocentric worldview was characterized by discriminatory attitudes that placed non-white people in a subordinate position. *Things Fall Apart* was written by Achebe in an effort to restore the sense of pride that had been lost among his people. The Igbo people place a significant emphasis on their language. They feel a feeling of belonging as a result of it, and they also utilize it as a way to maintain their culture and keep their legacy alive. And despite the significance of language in Igbo culture, it eventually contributes to the downfall of their community [10] [11][12]. The Igbo are a society that gives off the impression of being resistant to change. They do not want their children to have the opportunity to learn how to read and write in the English language, therefore they do not send them to school. The villagers continue to oppose teaching their children despite Mr. Brown's best attempts to convince them that they must do so since they are now subject to the District Commissioner and other white missionaries who can only converse in English. Due to the District Commissioner and the other white missionaries only speaking English, this has occurred [1].

Igbo people rely heavily on their unique language to set them apart from people of other cultures. In addition to this, their social standing in their community is defined by their command of the language. For instance, Okonkwo is seen as being affluent when contrasted to his father Unoka. This is due to his profusion of wives and the quantity of yams his family produces, but it's also because of his strength, which allowed him to overcome one of the village's top wrestlers. Unoka was a wealthy man. Okonkwo's father was a wealthy man (Achebe 6). On the other side, Unoka was a drinker who, at the time of his death, had only one wife, a limited number of yams, and no titles associated with his name (Achebe 6). He was referred to as "agbala" by the locals, which is a term used by the Igbo people to refer to "women as well as to males who have not taken a title." (Achebe iii). As a result, he was seen to be an unrespectable person by society due to the fact that he was not "rich."

Dehumanization and Oppression of Females in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"

VIII. CONCLUSION

African women are ladies who are born in Africa. Their culture and history is connected with the name of the black continent. The novel keeps on to introduce females as objects who are treated to be sold, suffered, and tortured. When considered outside of the usual post-colonial study of "the suffering of blacks under the treatment of the white" and is examined through the perspective of feminism and gender theory, masculinity and patriarchy are shown to repress Chinua's book. This occurs when the text is examined. A text may reveal a "infinite multiplicity" of meaning and the ways in which it can be used, and the touches of African culture can help navigate abundant interpretations. Thus Things Fall Apart represents as a novel where females everywhere are targeted as quivers. They lost their identity and lost the ability to create one. They only create the meaning with males who believe to protect them. The cultural and social situation is introduced in such a way that the actual case of the society in which the male is the 'signifier' and the female is the 'signified' is visibly detected. Consequently, both politically and domestically females are the possessions of males, the 'other' to the subject (males). This social custom is deeply rooted in most of the cultures that is a part of such complex social fabric. Therefore, Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" compiles 'inexhaustible' touches.

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