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Cultural Clash and Colonial  
Consequences: A Comprehensive  
Analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall  
Apart*

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) within the context of postcolonial theory, focusing on the clash between traditional Igbo culture and the forces of European imperialism. Achebe's work serves as a response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and challenges the stereotypical portrayal of Africans. This thesis delves into the impact of missionaries and Christianity on Igbo society, analyzing the mechanisms through which they established influence and sparked conflicts with traditional beliefs. Employing a postcolonial framework, the study scrutinizes power dynamics, colonial strategies, and the consequences of cultural clashes.

The study's findings critically assess European colonialism by highlighting how missionaries utilized Christianity for colonization, revealing conflicts between African and European cultures and prompting reflection on the repercussions of cultural interactions in pre- and postcolonial Africa. The research reveals the multifaceted impact of missionaries and Christianity on Igbo society, employing tactics such as education-driven conversion, economic dependence, cultural stigmatization, exploitation of social divisions, and legal/political influence. These strategies were designed to subvert traditional beliefs, reshape cultural values, and establish Christianity as a dominant force, resulting in significant cultural conflicts within the Igbo community.

***Keywords: European missionaries, Christianity, Postcolonialism, Igbo culture, Cultural clash, Christian missionaries, ancestral spirits, British colonialists.***

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# 1. Introduction

*Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a novel written by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe that explores the effects of colonialism and the clash between traditional African cultures and the forces of European imperialism. The story is set in pre-colonial Nigeria, specifically among the Igbo people, and it follows the life of Okonkwo, a proud and ambitious warrior. Catherine Lynette Innes explores Chinua Achebe's unique status as the most widely read novelist in Africa and how he is acknowledged as the first writer to attract significant interest from both African and European audiences (1). His literary works and insightful critiques left an indelible mark on readers' perceptions of African life, sparking numerous discussions about 'the African novel'. Moreover, according to Innes, Achebe's literary contributions set a precedent and served as a guiding model for subsequent African novelists. His impact resonated in their works, prompting them to grapple with the challenges he addressed, such as the implications of colonialism and literary representation of Africa (1).

Chinua Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* in response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which depicted Africans as uncivilized, and lacking culture, government, organization, and language. Achebe criticized the fact that *Heart of Darkness* was the most taught novel at the University of Massachusetts. He argued that, despite being well-written, a book that unfairly portrayed Africans as less than human couldn't be considered great literature. Achebe believed it didn't deserve the high praise it received from English professors. He scrutinized the portrayal of Africa in Western literature, especially within the framework of colonialist or Eurocentric viewpoints. In his essay titled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," Achebe contends that Conrad's work perpetuates racist stereotypes and dehumanizes Africans by reducing them to mere objects and symbols of darkness and savagery ("An Image of Africa"). At the core of Achebe's argument is the question of whether a novel that glorifies or perpetuates the dehumanization of Africans can be considered a great work of art. He firmly rejects this idea, asserting that literature should not contribute to the devaluation of any group of people. According to Achebe, true artistic greatness involves a more nuanced and respectful portrayal of humanity, recognizing the dignity and complexity inherent in all cultures and individuals ("An Image of Africa"). Achebe argues that Conrad's narrative reinforces the colonial perspective of viewing Africa and

its people through a Eurocentric lens, perpetuating harmful stereotypes with enduring consequences (“An Image of Africa”).

As a writer, Achebe’s core theme revolves around the assertion that African people were not introduced to the concept of culture by Europeans. Many critics have discerned that the fundamental theme in *Things Fall Apart* is a demonstration of the dignity and validity of Igbo culture (Innes 1-2). The novel seeks to present a nuanced portrayal, aiming to go beyond a superficial depiction, not only of the country but also of the Nigerian character. It highlights the dramatization of conflicts involving intuitive feeling versus rigid social codes, liberalism versus conservatism, and creativity versus sterility. Significantly, these conflicts unfold within the African community, with British characters casting shadows, altering the dynamics. The Africans, in this context, transcend mere symbols, evolving into more than representations of qualities subordinate to the European psyche. Innes indicates how Achebe's characters are complex individuals, not mere stereotypes, and how the resolution of their conflicts plays a central role in the plot (22). Achebe's portrayal of Europeans, including the more liberal ones like Mr. Brown, underscores the inherent belief that they will never consider learning anything from Africans—whom they may study but never emulate. This contributes to the tragedy for the Africans as they grapple with the profound and far-reaching consequences of the white man's arrogance (Innes 22).

This thesis aims to explore how the missionaries employed Christianity as a means of colonizing Igbo society in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The primary objective is to analyze the mechanisms through which these missionaries successfully established their influence, sparking a clash between traditional Igbo beliefs and the tenets of Christianity. An in-depth scrutiny of the text will be undertaken to discern nuances related to the representation of colonialism, the interplay of diverse cultures, and the impact of Christianity. Drawing on existing scholarship and prior research, the study aims to unravel the layers of Achebe's narrative and provide a deeper understanding grounded in precedent scholarly inquiries.

## 2. Theory/Theoretical approach

### 2.1 Postcolonial theory

This study will adopt a postcolonial framework to examine the actions of the missionaries. Postcolonial theory helps us understand how the world changed after countries gained independence from colonial powers. In her work *Postcolonialism*,

*Decoloniality, and Development* (2019), Cheryl Mcewan clarifies that postcolonialism is not characterized by a singular origin; rather, it encompasses a diverse spectrum of approaches and strategies (46). The genesis of postcolonialism is frequently attributed to the emergence of postcolonial literary and cultural criticism and theory during the 1980s and 1990s. Postcolonial theory revolves around unveiling the contextual nature of knowledge, with a specific emphasis on critiquing the universalizing knowledge produced in imperial Europe and the broader Western milieu. A concept that has a longstanding presence in postcolonial scholarship is *situated knowledge*. Mcewan delves deeply into the idea that knowledge, inherently devoid of neutrality and objectivity, is consistently situated and molded by individuals influenced by cultural and various contextual factors (46-47). The classification, creators, origin, generation process, and audience of knowledge are determined by this shaping process. This recognition of the situated nature of knowledge highlights not only the politics inherent in knowledge but also acknowledges its perpetual incompleteness. Mcewan explains that postcolonialism, as a critical perspective, seeks to unveil and analyze power dynamics dictating what qualifies as knowledge and how knowledge production is framed within the Western context (56-57). Moreover, the tendency to consider Western knowledge forms as universally applicable is critiqued, emphasizing the importance of understanding knowledge within its specific cultural and contextual frameworks.

Furthermore, Mcewan highlights Fanon, a prominent early postcolonial writer, who skillfully portrayed the complex dynamics of mimicry stemming from the inherent contradictions embedded in colonialism (58). This contradiction rested on the dual premise that, while the colonized remained fundamentally distinct from the colonizers, they could, in the pursuit of civilization, assimilate into the cultural norms of the colonizers. Grounded in the notion of universal humanism, this perspective justified European colonial expansion. However, Fanon revealed the fallacy of this colonial logic, demonstrating that the colonized struggled to fully internalize European cultural codes and were denied access to universal humanism and its associated rights (58). Despite efforts to emulate the colonizers, the colonized remained inherently different. This paradox served to uphold the power and privilege of the colonizer by perpetuating a boundary of difference between the colonized and the colonizer, all the while validating colonial conquest and the paternalistic duty of the 'white man's burden' to civilize the Other (Mcewan 59).

In Peter Barry's publication, he also makes mention of Fanon's work, *The Wretched of Earth* (1961) which explores the concept of 'cultural resistance' against France's African empire. He posited that for colonized populations to establish a voice and identity, reclaiming their historical heritage is essential. European colonizers historically devalued the precolonial era, considering it a primitive state. Fanon emphasized the need to challenge the colonialist ideology that disparaged the indigenous past, asserting that reclaiming one's history is the initial step towards a postcolonial perspective (Barry 195).

## 2.2 Power Structures

Postcolonial theory seeks to unveil the power structures inherent in colonial relationships. In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (1995), by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, Chinua Achebe explains that his first book, *Things Fall Apart*, served as a form of reconciliation with his past—a symbolic return and homage reminiscent of a prodigal son ("Colonial Criticism" 58). Within the context of colonialism, Achebe delves into the intricate dynamics and specifically examines the colonialists' perception of the native population. He asserts that the pivotal assertion among colonialists, "I know my natives," carried significant weight ("Colonial Criticism 58). Implied in this statement was the notion that the natives were inherently simple, and the mastery of them relied on both understanding and control. In this context, comprehension was deemed a prerequisite for asserting control, with control itself serving as evidence of understanding.

Thus, during the peak of colonialism, any sign of native unrest not only triggered soldier pacification but also led to royal commissions of inquiry—a guise for perfunctory studies of native psychology and institutions. Concurrently, a few educated natives started challenging Europe's influence in their homeland using European intellectual tools. To counter this presumption, Achebe explained that the colonialists crafted two conflicting arguments. They introduced the 'man of two worlds' theory, claiming that despite exposure to European influences, natives could never fully absorb them (58). However, this did not mean educated natives were the same as those in the bush; they were considered worse. Despite their failed attempts at education and culture, they were alienated from their people, misunderstood them, and were unwanted in their dissatisfaction. Colonialists often asserted, "I know my natives; they are delighted with the way things are. It's only these half-educated ruffians who don't even know their own

people" ("Colonial Criticism" 58). Such sentiments persist in today's colonialist criticism of literature which aims to challenge educated African perspectives by appealing to unsophisticated individuals grateful for Europe's intervention in Africa. This is reflected in the reliance on the accounts of 'simple natives' in modern European travel stories—houseboys, cooks, drivers, schoolchildren—deemed more trustworthy than sophisticated individuals.

In *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (2006) by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, Fernando F. Segovia discusses how colonialists employed strategies to establish and rationalize their dominance by imposing religious ideologies on marginalized populations, seeking to control and justify their actions through the imposition of religious beliefs (39). He posits that the fundamental structure of an empire exhibits a strong socio-religious aspect, wherein the central locus of authority, comprising political, economic, and cultural spheres, functions concurrently as a religious center. This means that the beliefs and practices of the central authority are deeply rooted in a specific set of religious ideas. Consequently, the relationship between the central authority and the marginalized creates a religious divide, leading to various distinctions like believers/unbelievers/pagans and godly/ungodly. As a result, the subordinate areas must conform to the religious norms of the center, correcting and uplifting their beliefs, critiquing, and destroying their gods, and replacing their practices (Sugirtharajah, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies" 39).

However, as Segovia outlines, resistance against colonialism and imperialism was a continual occurrence, happening consistently in various forms, both major and minor, and expressed explicitly or implicitly ("Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies" 39). This resistance originated from the margins that were politically, economically, culturally, and religiously subordinated. This resistance, in turn, prompted the center to implement additional control measures aimed at instilling fear among the marginalized communities. Undoubtedly, these measures played a role in unraveling the established binomial reality, as the supposedly civilized, advanced, cultured, progressive, developed, and believing center increasingly resorted to uncivilized, primitive, barbarian, backward, undeveloped, and unbelieving tactics against the marginalized groups. Over time, this resistance from the margins might escalate to a climax, manifesting in various outcomes such as open challenge and defiance, widespread rebellion, and anomie, or even the actual overthrow and reorientation of existing power dynamics (Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial

Studies” 39). This shows the intricate relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, shedding light on how power is wielded, justified, and resisted in the postcolonial context.

### 2.3 Igbo culture

The Igbo society is used as a means to delve into the cultural richness and historical backdrop of African people in *Things Fall Apart*. Chibueze Udeani elaborates in *Inculturation as Dialogue: Igbo Culture and the Message of Christ* (2007), that the word Igbo means “the community of people” (7). The Igbos are mostly found in the southeastern region of Nigeria, which has a contiguous geographical expanse known as Igbo land. Ethnologically, the Igbos are regarded as an ancient people. Notably, myths and legends have had a significant influence on Igbo cultural history and continue to hold significance in contemporary traditional Igbo society. These myths and legends have an important part in defining areas of people’s lives such as political social, artistic, economic, and religious among the Igbos (Udeani 7).

Chinwe Nwoye explains that within the Igbo, human realm is perceived as a reflection of the spirit world. It is seen as a dynamic universe inhabited by various spiritual entities, including malevolent human spirits, guardian spirits linked to professions, animal spirits, evil spirits, and the Earth Goddess (306). A filial connection is believed to exist between the Earth Goddess and water spirits known as Mami Water. The Igbo worldview organizes deities into four levels, highlighting the prevalence of male deities in the first and fourth levels, and female deities in the second and third levels. This structural hierarchy reflects a gendered distribution, with male deities associated with celestial elements, and female deities governing earth and water. Despite female ancestral rituals, the dominance of male rituals implies a societal belief that females may lose their identity after death (Nwoye 306).

Within the framework of post-colonialism and the notion of situated knowledge, Chinwe Nwoye's examination of Igbo cosmology illustrates a perspective deeply grounded in indigenous worldviews. Situated knowledge, as discussed in post-colonial discourse, underscores the significance of comprehending knowledge within its cultural, historical, and social milieu (Mcewan 46-47). Nwoye's portrayal of Igbo cosmology brings to light the distinctive ways in which the Igbo community interprets and engages with their surroundings, shedding light on an intricate spiritual ecosystem. This form of situated knowledge challenges Eurocentric viewpoints and encourages a

more nuanced comprehension of the intricate cultural fabric that existed both before and alongside colonial influences. It serves as a reminder of the multitude of knowledge systems and emphasizes the importance of acknowledging local perspectives within the broader framework of post-colonial studies.

Among the Igbo, ancestral spirits carry considerable significance, and family elders uphold a profound connection with them through prayers and offerings (Nwoye 310). Upholding moral conduct is deemed essential for preserving cosmic balance. Strict adherence to cultural norms, including taboos, is expected, and diviners are consulted to address any uncertainties about potential violations. In this cultural framework, death is viewed as an opportunity for reuniting with loved ones, bringing a sense of enthusiasm and optimism to elderly individuals in the Igbo community, rather than instilling fear and anxiety. In the Igbo belief system, it is seen as crucial to bid a respectful farewell to those who have passed away (Nwoye 310). Some individuals who follow Igbo traditional beliefs, when faced with the prospect of baptism and potential separation from their ancestors, choose to face the consequences in hellfire alongside their ancestors (Nwoye 310). In his introduction, Don C. Ohadike emphasizes that the Igbo also held the belief that living in harmony with one's ancestors was essential to receiving blessings such as good health, good fortune, and a thriving family (xxxii). Disharmony with higher beings, on the other hand, was believed to lead to misfortune and untimely death. Consequently, suicide was perceived as a disturbance of this sacred connection, and individuals who engaged in such an act might encounter spiritual repercussions that could not only affect their own afterlife but also potentially bring misfortune to their families and communities (Ohadike xxxii).

Ohadike discusses the social and political frameworks in Igbo society, highlighting the absence of centralized political structures. Instead, autonomous villages are governed by elders (xxii). The organization of their society involves the formation of patrilineages, determined by descent. People are affiliated with a house (uno) and a lineage (Umunna), with these lineages collectively shaping towns or villages (obodo). Each unit had a headman (onyisi) based on age. Town meetings occurred in the square, while important lineage meetings were held in the obi (meeting shed) of senior elders. Interactions between towns relied on goodwill, respect, and diplomacy, with wars arising when these failed (Ohadike xxii-xxiii).

In Igbo culture, the primary focus on childrearing is evident within the relationships between women and their mothers (Nwoye 311). Specific gender roles,

behavioral boundaries, and preferences become pronounced during puberty. The cultural mindset deeply ingrains the nurturing role of females. After weaning, mothers often return to farming, and the supervision of children falls to girls undergoing puberty rites or older siblings of both genders. In Igbo sibling relationships, influenced by polygyny, since men having multiple wives was common, children from the same mother form stronger bonds than half-siblings. Limited economic opportunities and education contribute to sibling rivalry among children of the same father but different mothers. Despite this, as Nwoye explains, children from the same mother are encouraged to present a united front (Nwoye 311). Historically, wealth and children were intertwined in Igbo culture, valuing children even more than money. The Igbo name Nwakaego, meaning "Child is more precious than money," embodies this sentiment. Igbo customary life is rooted in Omenani/Omenala, ancestral rules based on the laws of the earth goddess, Ani/Ala. Having children, especially male ones, is crucial, and a barren woman is pitied and considered a failure. While childless women aren't ostracized, they may not be as appreciated as mothers, as children are viewed as life insurance and the focal point of one's life (Nwoye 311).

However, in the early ethnographic literature centered on twinship, the act of giving birth to twins was deemed an abomination, accompanied by a superstition associating them with being demonic (Bastian 13). The Igbo have been characterized as a prime example among West African societies, particularly in the immediate precolonial era, where there was active disdain for twins and other multiple births, leading to deliberate attempts to eliminate them through twin murder (Bastian 18). Despite many praying to God (Chukwu) for numerous children, when twins or triplets were born, they were often abandoned to die. The Igbo perceived twins as possessing something abnormal and mystical. From the Igbo perspective, multiple births were viewed as an abomination against Ala/Ani, the earth deity, resulting in severe sanctions on parents, especially mothers, and their children (Bastian 13).

Catherine Lynette Innes touches on how Part 1 of *Things Fall Apart* focuses on two things: the portrayal of Okonkwo and his psychology, and the portrayal of the social, political, and religious life of Umuofia, the Igbo village to which Okonkwo belongs. The Igbos maintain a careful, if occasionally unsettling, balance between values centered on individual achievement and those interwoven with community, as well as between materialism and spirituality. These sets of ideals are frequently identified as masculine and feminine, as represented by the proverbs 'Yam is

King' and 'Mother is Supreme,' which dominate the narrative's early sections (Innes 25). Okonkwo places a high value on 'manliness,' judging acts, and discourse on this standard. Everything he admires is labeled "manly," while everything he despises is labeled "womanly." In the use of these opposing categories of male and female, Okonkwo shares the thinking of his people. The reader is assured early on that Okonkwo is one of the esteemed individuals in the village, and the fabric of his mind is woven with the proverbs, sayings, imagery, rituals, and language that encapsulate the societal system. Okonkwo serves as a representative of his society in the way Achebe illustrates how he has emerged through a blend of social influence and familial circumstances (Innes 26).

## 2.4 Missionary Work

When we examine the motivation behind the mission to propagate Christianity among Europeans and engage in missionary activities it is often attributed to Jesus' directive to his disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Udeani 67-68). This underscores that Christianity, from its inception, envisioned itself as a universally applicable faith. Mission, as the active expression of this universal identity, has been and continues to be a central endeavor for the Christian faith. Missionary activities are closely linked to human nature, aspirations, and circumstances. This idea of universalism is not just a far-off concept or a dream; it's meant to unfold in the real world, becoming not only part of the environment but also a fundamental aspect of the people engaged in it.

However, the cause for concern arises when there is an overemphasis on ecclesiocentrism within missionary activities, particularly when it manifests in the establishment of indigenous communities and churches modeled after the home Church of the missionaries (Udeani 78). This explains the imposition of institutional frameworks from Western Christianity on non-Western peoples. This elucidates why Christianity was often perceived as a foreign religion among many people, shedding light on the challenges encountered in the Church's pursuit of the principle of accommodation. The same is true today for inculturation (Udeani 78). Non-Europeans learned Christianity nearly entirely through the authority and cultural form of the Western civilization. They could not find any references to their own problems, worldview, history, or art in the Christian message. Western Christianity was imposed on those people, with its fully developed systems of doctrines and institutions based on

Eurocentric historical circumstances. According to Udeani, the command for the mission "Go make disciples of all nations..." came from Christ, and the injunction was taken to imply "Go make Europeans of all nations" (Udeani, 77-78).

Africa was essentially synonymous with non-Europe, leading to the characterization of African traditional religions as inherently non-Christian and, by extension, anti-Christendom (Udeani 82). Consequently, European culture became conflated with Christianity, framing anything non-European as non-Christian. Western theological standards served as the yardstick for evaluating African religiosity and cultural norms. This perspective resulted in Africans being perceived as devoid of spirituality, labeled as godless heathens, and positioned as the antithesis of genuine humanity, measured by their proximity to European culture. Adjectives assigned to Africans were predominantly derogatory, depicting African life as primitive and categorizing Africans as cannibals. Their religious practices were denigrated as superstition, idolatry, devilry, magic, fetishism, animism, polytheism, ancestor worship, and products of unenlightened imagination. The African thought pattern was disparaged as "pre-logical" (Udeani 82). This perception of Africans not only set the stage for intense missionary activities but also served as a rationale for the subsequent colonial imperialism.

Thus, the novel portrays two distinct yet interconnected powers that exert influence and governance over various facets of existence, encompassing the realms of politics, economics, and society. Part 1 of *Things Fall Apart* examines the Igbo way of life, while Part 2 examines missionary endeavors and what ensues in the Christian lifestyle. Achebe provides exhaustive detail to illustrate Okonkwo's emergence, emphasizing the interplay of societal forces and familial situations in creating his character. This can be ascribed to Achebe's childhood encounters, where, reflecting on his upbringing, he explained it as living at the crossroads of cultures. Chinua Achebe describes how, on one side, hymns filled the air, and nightly Bible readings immersed both himself and those around him in spiritual practice ("Named for Victoria, Queen of England" 191). On the other hand, certain people, such as his father's brother and family, participated in offering food to idols and were considered by some as practitioners of heathenism. This dual existence seemed to be the accepted norm, where two distinct cultures and faiths coexisted side by side. Surprisingly, despite Achebe's steadfast Christian devotion, he occasionally joined in the heathen festival meals without experiencing any spiritual turmoil ("Named for Victoria, Queen of England"

191). This was driven by his deep fascination with the rituals and lifestyle unfolding on the opposite side of the cultural crossroads.

## 2.5 Previous Research

Several scholarly inquiries and studies have delved into the strategies employed by colonialists to maintain control and justify their actions, drawing insights from the novel *Things Fall Apart*. Shaymaa Neamah Mohammad Almkhelif explores the concept of cultural hegemony providing a condensed overview of its manifestation through the collaborative interplay of ideology and culture (186). Cultural hegemony ensues when a specific power successfully permeates the cultural fabric of a society. This phenomenon assumes paramount significance within the domain of Postcolonial studies, as articulated by Antonio Gramsci's ideas. The colonial enterprise, according to Gramsci's framework, engenders cultural dominance, wherein colonized nations invariably contend with hegemonic control, whereby the cultural heritage of the colonized is subjugated to serve the interests of the colonizer. A notable example is depicted in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, illustrating British cultural hegemony in Nigeria and the cultural penetration of the Igbo society by the colonizers. Ultimately, the Igbos succumb, and their culture disintegrates under the influence of cultural hegemony.

In the article "Portrayal of The Igbo Society in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" Manisha Roy explores Chinua Achebe's critical perspective on the representation of Africa in literature, particularly condemning the superficial portrayals in novels like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (29). Achebe, drawing on his insider knowledge of Igbo life, documents the cultural, religious, political, and economic aspects of pre-colonized Igbo culture in the fictional village of Umuofia. The text delves into the patriarchal structure of Igbo society, its legal systems, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions, emphasizing both strengths and weaknesses. The impact of colonialism on Igbo governance, religion, and law is explored, highlighting the disruption of traditional practices. Roy suggests that Achebe's use of Igbo words in the narrative captures the essence of pre-colonial society (30). The article also covers the origin and expansion of the Igbo kingdom, the societal categorization of crops and crimes based on gender, and the imperfections of the Igbo value system. The conclusion of the article reflects on the slow loss of Igbo cultural heritage due to colonial influence and internal weaknesses, portraying Achebe's depiction as truthful and unsentimental (Roy 30).

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 The Coming of European Missionaries

The novel *Things Fall Apart* comprises three parts. The initial section acquaints readers with the Igbo society in Nigeria and the central character, Okonkwo. The second and third parts talk about the British colonialists and Christian missionaries. The missionaries arrived in the village with the intent of spreading Christianity and converting the local population. Christian missionaries played an underestimated role in Africa's conquest, being the initial foreigners to venture inland in significant numbers (Ohadike xli). Their accounts fueled imperial ambitions and contributed significantly to British dominance over the Igbo people. Okonkwo first encounters the white men during his exile in Mbanta, his maternal homeland. Obierika, his confidant, brings distressing news of the destruction of Abame, a neighboring village. Anticipating a foretold calamity, the villagers, guided by oracular traditions, kill a white man arriving on an "iron horse," which was a bicycle, during the planting season (Achebe 130). Weeks later, a group of white individuals, who discovered the bicycle with their dead comrade, attacked Abame's marketplace, causing extensive destruction.

The initial occurrences in Abame at the beginning of the novel served as a precursor, providing insight into the potential consequences and setting the stage for the subsequent arrival of missionaries in Mbanta. They had heard of the white men's stories about powerful guns and strong drinks. Yet, the entrance of European missionaries in Mbanta played out differently than the previous occurrence in Abame. Contrary to the village of Abame, the people of Mbanta do not perceive the missionaries as an immediate threat, despite the missionaries openly calling their gods "false". The Europeans perceive Africans as godless heathens leading a primitive existence, denigrating their religious practices as superstition, idolatry, and more. The missionaries thought the tribes' practices were like witchcraft, devil worship, and a thousand other foolish things (Udeani 82). But ancestral spirits hold significant importance among the Igbo, and elders in families maintain a strong connection with them through prayers and offerings (Nwoye 310). Hence, when the missionaries requested a piece of land to build a church, the village chiefs allocated them a plot in the Evil Forest, anticipating that their gods and spirits would drive away the missionaries. However, this did not happen.

Despite Okonkwo's urging to arm themselves against the perceived threat, the people of Mbanta refrained from taking immediate defensive actions. This hesitancy

may be due to a fear of a fate akin to Abame, where white men launched a catastrophic attack. Or as, Ohadike explained, that the Igbo were initially friendly to missionaries because their religion was peaceful, and the Igbo respected others' religious views (xliii). The Igbo often listened patiently to Christians and expected the missionaries to do the same for their own beliefs. Mr. Brown, unlike the other missionaries, respected the Igbo beliefs, engaged in dialogue, and sought common ground. However, when he left due to health reasons, Reverend James Smith took over with a strict and uncompromising attitude. He demanded converts to reject their native beliefs, showing no respect for their customs. Achebe portrays Reverend Smith as a stereotypical white colonist, highlighting the problems of colonialism through his behavior.

Knowledge production framed within a Western context is inherently biased, prompting Achebe to emphasize the necessity of understanding knowledge within specific cultural and contextual frameworks. The novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, with its derogatory portrayal of Africans, underscores the biased perspective inherent in Western knowledge paradigms that Achebe seeks to contest. He suggests that we should consider various perspectives and avoid assuming that one culture's knowledge is superior or applies to everyone, especially when it comes from a non-African author. In his novel, he depicts a pre-colonial Igbo village with its unique religion, customs, administration, and beliefs, illustrating how information and values are deeply rooted in specific cultural settings. The novel explores how different cultures have distinct ways of acquiring, interpreting, and passing on knowledge.

### 3.2 Igbo Culture Unraveled

At the beginning the primary converts to Christianity came from the lower tiers of the clan's hierarchy: "None of his converts was a man whose words was heeded in the assembly of people. there was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men" (Achebe 135). Nneka, a woman motivated to convert by cultural and familial challenges, is the first Christian convert in the village of Mbanta. She had four previous pregnancies, each resulting in the birth of twins, which was a situation that went against the traditional beliefs of the Igbo society as it was viewed as an abomination against *Ala/Ani*, the earth deity (Bastian 13). Consequently, Nneka had to part with her twins, exposing them to the possibility of death or abandonment. Her family and husband, indifferent to her conversion to Christianity, viewed it as "a good riddance" rather than a cause for concern (Achebe

143). In contrast, the missionaries perceived the killing of twins as a sacrilege against the Christian God (Bastian 14). Missionaries, whether European or African, Catholic or Protestant, male or female, held a steadfast position advocating that children were a manifestation of God's grace and should be treasured regardless of their **number**. Thus, they offered Nneka an alternative that promised equality, community, and a departure from such evil practices of killing twins.

Nwoye, Okonkwo's eldest son, was another character who was among the first to convert. He felt drawn after hearing a Christian song described as resonating with the “silent and dusty chords in the heart of an Ibo man” (Achebe 138). His fascination, however, did not stem from an understanding of the religion itself but rather from the hymn recounting the hardships of brothers sitting in darkness. This narrative seemed to address a vague and persistent question that troubled his young soul—related to the memories of twins crying in the bush and the fate of Ikemefuna, who met a tragic end. “He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul” (Achebe 139). As Nwoye becomes increasingly fascinated by the missionaries and their religion over time, a growing divide emerges in his relationship with Okonkwo, ultimately prompting Nwoye to run away. He seeks refuge in the missionaries' church with the intention of later converting his mother, sisters, and brothers to this newfound belief. Nwoye is one of the first converts to Christianity and is interested in it because it seems to provide answers to his doubts about his native religion, especially the practice of abandoning newborn twins and the death of Ikemefuna. This infuriates Okonkwo, as he perceives his son to be as feeble as his own father. In Igbo society, children held greater value than money, and their significance was paramount (Nwoye 311). Okonkwo's distress over losing his eldest son to European men illustrates their influence and efforts to disrupt Igbo culture.

Another thing that the white colonists' arrival affected was that it weakened the close family ties that were so important in Igbo culture. Ancestral worship is a big part of the Igbo religion, and converting to Christianity means partly giving up the Igbo way of family. The Christians told the Igbo that they were all brothers and sons of God, replacing the actual family ties with a kind of family through God. Several villagers joined the European missionaries' ways of living, and some went as far as changing their religion and names. For example, Nwoye adopted the name Isaac and began training as a teacher in Umuru. As Obierika pointed out, the white man was clever – he came peacefully with a religion, but later, he took control of them

(Achebe 168). This shift towards European customs had a negative impact on the cultural heritage of the community. The unity of the Igbo society started breaking down as people embraced the colonizers' ways over their own cultural traditions.

The lack of empowerment within the community becomes the driving factor behind Okonkwo's decision to take the life of the District Commissioner's messenger. Ultimately, he chooses suicide as a preferred alternative to confronting legal repercussions under colonial law. Okonkwo refuses to change his ways for the duration of the tale. He is adamantly opposed to the arrival of white missionaries and their transforming impact on Umuofia. Okonkwo aggressively opposes the missionaries' changes because he sees them as a direct danger to the traditional Igbo way of life. His terrible death might be seen as a poignant result of his unwavering opposition to the societal and cultural shifts taking place in his village. Achebe portrays a notable Umuofia leader who breaks tradition by choosing to take his own life when he realizes that the village is not going to war. Obierika argues with the District Commissioner, stating, "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself..." (Achebe 197). Okonkwo's suicide symbolizes the breakdown of Igbo values, customs, religions, and traditions, marking the final step in the loss of control over the village by external forces.

However, his loss of hope and faith in the sustainability of his traditional way of life is also evident. By taking his own life, an act considered taboo and disruptive to the sacred connection with higher beings, Okonkwo demonstrates his profound disillusionment. Engaging in such an act might lead to spiritual repercussions affecting not only the individual's afterlife but potentially bring misfortune to their families and communities (Ohadike xxxii). As a result, the community opts not to grant Okonkwo the customary rites (Achebe 196). This denial of a proper burial adds a tragic layer to Okonkwo's fate, particularly considering the significant importance attached to ancestral spirits, and the belief that death provides an opportunity for reuniting with loved ones (Nwoye 310). Violating these cultural norms by denying the customary burial rites risks disharmony with the ancestors, potentially bringing misfortune to those in the vicinity.

### 3.3 Societal Shifts

Another strategy adopted by the Europeans to enhance their infiltration was the introduction of new ideas and changes. In the novel, education functioned as an instrument of subjugation and a conduit for the establishment of cultural hegemony. As

an illustration, in this excerpt, Mr. Brown endeavors to persuade the villagers to enroll their children in his school:

In this way Mr. Brown learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He went from family to family begging people to send their children to his school. But at first they only sent their slaves or sometimes their lazy children. Mr. Brown begged and argued and prophesied. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them. They could already see that happening in the native Court, where the DC was surrounded by strangers who spoke his tongue. Most of these strangers came from the distant town of Umuru on the bank of the Great River where the white man first went. In the end Mr. Brown's arguments began to have an effect. More people came to learn in his school, and he encouraged them with gifts of singlets and towels. (Achebe 170-171).

Mr. Brown's approach to education is a strategic response to the perceived threat of outsiders and is embedded in the power dynamics of colonialism. Mr. Brown's efforts to establish a school reflect a form of education imposed by the colonial power, with the belief that literacy is a key to future leadership. Mr. Brown's ironic logic emphasizes the negative repercussions of religious intervention. There would be no need to preserve the Igbo people from following cultural disruptions if Christian missionaries had not first intervened. Prior to the introduction of missionaries, the Igbo society did not see the need for schools to improve work prospects. The Igbo society did not feel the need for schools to give better jobs.

Furthermore, it was noted that "the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government" (Achebe 146). Before the arrival of the missionaries, the Igbo community had established its own judicial systems, based on ancestral wisdom passed down through generations. The courts were presided over by the village elders, who relied on their revered wisdom and the guidance of ancestral gods to make unbiased and just decisions. These elders, known as *egwugwu*, functioned like a jury, and served as ultimate judges in village conflicts. When addressing disputes, both sides, the accusers, and the defenders, are welcome to present their arguments. Subsequently, the *egwugwu* (elders) withdraw to a sacred hut for discussions and to reach a solution

(Achebe 88). In Igbo culture, justice centers around making amends and finding resolutions rather than imposing punishment. Yet, when the white missionaries came to the Ibos, what they saw made them think the community was entirely without laws and disorganized. They claimed that they brought a peaceful administration to the people so that they may be happy (Achebe 183). The European missionaries believed that their legal system and judgment were well-suited for the Igbo people, thinking they were providing a service to help them. Consequently, upon residing among the Igbo tribes, the white men introduced a justice system distinct from the traditional practices of the Igbos. For example, in the novel, the District Commissioner ordered six leaders, including Okonkwo, to come to court, claiming he wanted to “hear grievances and give warning” (Achebe 183). However, instead, they handcuffed Okonkwo and his companions, and when the men resisted and refused to cooperate, the court officials resorted to beating and whipping them. The imprisonment served as a means of asserting dominance and extracting payment from the Umuofia village, demanding 250 bags of cowries for the release of the leaders (Achebe 185). The money was not a requirement by the District Commissioner, but it highlights how the missionaries introduced a system that encouraged bribery and corruption instead of progress.

Afterward, a significant change took place in the legal system, marking a contrast with the traditional practices of the Igbo people. This shift revealed another dimension of attempts to dismantle the Igbo's customs and culture. Over time, the dominance of the white men over Igbo villages escalated to the point where adhering to Igbo law resulted in punishment. Villagers were compelled to endure extended periods of incarceration, and, in some cases, faced fatal consequences. Cases that were traditionally handled by family and village elders, like Okonkwo's manslaughter punishment, were now dealt with by unfamiliar outsiders, leading to harsher outcomes compared to Igbo traditional judicial practices. Moreover, the district officers in charge lacked understanding of native laws and customs, resulting in decisions that clashed with Igbo notions of justice. This caused the Igbo people to reject the English justice system, often leading to their imprisonment. As a result, the villagers were forced to accept the new legal system, resulting in a substantial split from their forefathers and traditions, ultimately destroying clan solidarity. The white people's judicial system differed from the tribes' justice system, which focused on conflict resolution and reconciliation rather than punishment. In contrast, the white men incarcerated those who didn't conform.

After seven years of exile, Okonkwo could see that the village had changed, much like his motherland. The church had gained more influence, and the white men were now enforcing their judicial system and government rules on the villagers. A significant number of clansmen now supported the white man because he introduced various things. “There were many men and women in Umuofia who did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation. The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first-time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia” (Achebe p. 169). This indicates that the white men introduced trading stores, goods, and money to the village. As the text implies that these items attained significant value for the first time, it suggests that larger-scale trading opportunities were absent in the community before. The growing European demand for palm oil and the rising African interest in imported European goods motivated the British to set up trading posts (Ohadike xl). Fueled by the flourishing trade, some Igbo communities welcomed European traders and missionaries to reside among them. This led the villagers to develop a more positive opinion of the Europeans, who were initially merely tolerated during their unwelcome visit without substantial interaction. Consequently, the new trading system was another representation of British colonialism that only strengthened the missionaries' influence over the Igbo people. The novel consistently explores the tension between traditional cultural values and the newer system introduced by colonial influence.

#### 4. Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) intricately examines the repercussions of European colonialism on pre-colonial Igbo society in Nigeria. The novel challenges Western misconceptions by providing a nuanced and authentic portrayal of Igbo culture, navigating the clash between traditional African values and the influences of European imperialism. Unlike Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which perpetuated stereotypes of Africans as ruthless and primitive, Achebe delves into the complexities of Igbo society. The narrative candidly exposes the strict social hierarchy, the harsh treatment of lower-status individuals, and the severe consequences of transgressions within the Igbo community. In countering oversimplified and dehumanizing Western representations, Achebe offers a more balanced and realistic perspective, highlighting African societies' complexity, organization, strengths, and shortcomings. This approach

aligns with the postcolonial theory concept of situated knowledge, emphasizing the contextual nature of understanding and its perpetual incompleteness shaped by cultural influences. Achebe, as a post-colonial critic, consciously wrote to challenge Western situated knowledge, asserting the significance of interpreting African experiences through the lens of indigenous authors rather than relying on works written by outsiders like Conrad.

In the second part of the novel, the arrival of European missionaries and colonizers is depicted, exploring the initial interactions between the Igbo people and the newcomers. This section emphasizes the clash of cultures and the challenges arising from the intrusion of foreign influences. The clash between native and foreign values is not a straightforward narrative of good versus evil; rather, it's a complex interplay that also shows flaws within Igbo society. For example, the introduction of Christianity and the missionaries prompts a reevaluation of certain Igbo customs, such as the treatment of twins, which is a manifestation of society's viciousness. However, a more concrete example of detriment to the Igbo people is the tragic destruction of the village of Abame. The misunderstanding and killing of a white man by the villagers, whom they perceived as a harbinger of evil, led to a retaliatory military expedition by the colonial authorities, resulting in the massacre of the entire Abame community. This complexity deepens Achebe's critique of colonialism, compelling readers to grapple with the intricacies of cultural clashes.

The European missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* utilized various tactics to introduce Christianity, thereby contributing to the colonization of Igbo society. Their methods included religious conversion, where they branded indigenous beliefs as heathen and sought to convert the Igbo people to Christianity. Additionally, missionaries established schools to impart Western education. They challenged traditional Igbo hierarchies, promoting the adoption of Christian values, leading at times to a restructuring of power dynamics within the community. Economic dependency, cultural stigmatization, and legal/political influences were also leveraged as tools. These strategies were strategically employed to undermine traditional beliefs, reshape cultural values, and establish Christianity as a predominant force, resulting in profound cultural conflicts within the Igbo community.

Achebe's examination of internal issues within Igbo society enhances the comprehension of cultural dynamics. Instead of presenting an idealized version of the culture, he acknowledges its imperfections, including flaws in the social structure and

the stringent enforcement of customs. Nevertheless, he demonstrates that the Igbo people had a functional society that did not require the intervention and assistance of the European missionaries and their Christianity. Despite debates suggesting that their ideas and way of life could be perceived as outdated, the novel illustrates that these people were self-sufficient and thriving independently.

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