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**Between Change and Tradition: Achebe's Suggestive  
Existentialist Models of Conduct in *Things Fall Apart***

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## ***Dedication***

*This work is dedicated to my beloved parents (NZISABIRA Prudence and NIYIBIZI Pétronie) who have never ceased to provide me with unselfish love and support.*

*Great thanks to:*

- *All my brothers and sisters for their prayers and love.*
- *All my close and distant relatives for their generosity.*
- *All my friends and acquaintances for their help.*
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of change and tradition in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In the novel, Achebe redeems the misleading conceptions of European novels that depict Africans as savages into a whole new light with his portrayal of Igbo society. He presents to the reader his people's history with both strengths and imperfections by describing for example, Igbo festivals, the worship of their gods and the practices in their ritual ceremonies, their rich culture and other social practices, the colonial era that was retarding Igbo culture and also brought in some novelty to their culture. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of change and tradition on Igbo society from both African and European perspectives. The tension about whether change should be dominant over tradition often involves questions of personal status. This has led us to have a look into the existentialist world (from Sartre's point of view) which tackles the issues of questions of personal status, choice, decision, change, existence, freedom. Hence, this investigation leads to the conclusion that the models of conduct between the whites and the Igbo people had both negative and positive consequences on the lifestyle of Igbo society and tradition.

Key words: Change, tradition, Achebe, culture, Igbo society, Europeans, colonial era

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## Introduction

The African continent had history even before colonisation. Each of the African countries is known for its social norms and structures (to follow and to respect). By the coming of the white man, Africa has started changing. Africans who had been living in harmony and idyllic understanding, however, were divided by Europeans into small groups (ethnic, regional, cultural and religious groups) so that they could be well controlled and governed. The notion of unity and continuity within the African groups was completely destroyed owing to denigration of the African individual, his culture and the African history. This, however, germinates certain allegations vis-à-vis Africa: as a dark and uncivilised continent. It is one of the crucial labels attributed to it (African continent) and in spite of this, European endeavour is said to be an adequate way to enhance change.

Many European powers, through Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, met and partitioned Africa in the quest for stealing African resources. The conference was called to reach agreement on imperial boundaries so as to avoid any conflict among European powers. As stated by Falola and Heaton through their book entitled *A History of Nigeria (2008)*, they said:

*The new moves towards imperial expansion into previously uncolonized areas of Africa, both in West Africa and in other regions of the continent, resulted in the famous Berlin Conference of 1884–5. This conference laid out the rules for European territorial acquisition in Africa. The most important rules for declaring control over African lands were the upholding of the long-established practice of signing treaties of “protection” with indigenous rulers for the creation of “protectorates,” and the “effective occupation” with military forces of any full-fledged colonies. The Berlin Conference therefore marks the official beginning of the “Scramble for Africa,” in which the European countries agreed among themselves how to slice up the continent for their own strategic and material gain (92)*



It is in this perspective that Nigeria was set to be under the supervision of the United Kingdom as a colony. Under colonialism, Nigeria had undergone many changes: social, political, economic, religious, traditional and cultural. Again Falola and Heaton clarify:

*Colonial rule by the United Kingdom brought many changes to the societies of Nigeria. Charged with the tasks of governing the territories of Nigeria, expanding the commerce of the country, and promoting “progress” and “civilization” for peoples they considered inferior and backward, British colonial officers went about restructuring Nigerian societies in the years after their colonial conquest. The purpose of colonial rule was, theoretically, to alter only those customs, traditions, and institutions that the British deemed harmful to Nigerian progress, leaving existing political and social institutions intact to the greatest degree possible (Ibid:110)*

Western culture was implemented and Africans who were considered to be cannibals and savages were forced to study under the missionaries’ control. Through missionaries’ teachings, western civilisation and political system began to invade the African socio-cultural milieu albeit the noticed refusal among some natives. Before the arrival of the colonial powers, Africans used to have their political system which was patriarchal. Decisions were made by the elder males in the village and by the husband in the house. However, European dominance devastated traditional African systems and African way of life as argued by Arowolo in his article entitled *The Effects of Western Civilisation and Culture on Africa (2010)*:

*With Africa subjugated and dominated, the Western culture and European mode of civilisation began to thrive and outgrow African cultural heritage... Not only were certain aspects of the material culture in the colonies lost or destroyed, colonial societies also lost the power and sense of cultural continuity, such that it became practically impossible to recover the ability to strive for cultural progress on their own terms (2)*

Europeans did not only defend their oppression upon the African territorial integrity but also were supported by some outstanding writers such as Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary.

Respectively, through their novels *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Mister Johnson* (1936), Africans were depicted as savages, cannibals and uncivilized. Though these novels were praised by most of Europeans for their creative, artistic writing and their aesthetic portrayal, they were, however, highly rejected by some African writers such as Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe for their content, misconduct and disrespect towards the African belief, culture and tradition. The sufferings endured by the African people did not kill their creative spirit; on the contrary, they contribute to the raise of their commitment.

Though there were no writings about the history of Africa, its culture and its tradition, one has to underline that it has a long literary tradition and possesses a rich repertoire of epigrams such as myths, legends, folktales, proverbs and riddles. For instance, throughout the African societies, effective speech and social debate were based on proverbs. These precious sayings and proverbs conveyed the wisdom of ages and served as a reliable authority in arguments and discussions. All of these traditional elements preserved the African culture to stay intact.

To inform the European theoretical allegation and to develop a new way of dealing with the African, his culture, his intellectual efforts and his objectivity, many writers have seen it necessary to produce literary works which answer individual questions over the African self, mind and behaviour. Through literary production, these authors aim at the reconstruction of the African life based on modern philosophy without either denying or denigrating the native cultural heritage. Among these writers, Chinua Achebe who in *Things Fall Apart* (TFA:1958)<sup>1</sup>, portrays the life of the African, his attitude, behaviour before and shortly after the coming of the white man and suggests a new model of conduct through the introduction of some characters which belong to different generations. This seems justifiable

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<sup>1</sup>The acronym TFA stands for *Things Fall Apart*, it will be used throughout this dissertation

because the author himself received both tradition and western education which are the source of his inspiration. Indeed, one would say that the main reason beyond the suggestion of new models of conduct relies on the complexity of the characters representation through Obierika and Nwoye. This urges one to ask why does Achebe choose to convey new thoughts through different characters that do not belong to the same generation? And why does he suggest a new way of conduct in Africa?

To discuss the raised questions, one has first to talk about the author ideology and his orientation. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* cannot be void of existentialist tendency which deals with the existence of human beings and their models of conduct. Due to the significant elements of the work from which the concept of life questioning emerges, and in order to facilitate the systematic exploration and explanation of the phenomenon of the existence of human beings, it is necessary to take into consideration the existentialist theory. Yet this theory is important in the present study for there is no reading of and no thinking about texts without theory.

To deal with this issue, our work is divided into two chapters. The first chapter aims at dealing with traditional challenges and existentialism through the novel *Things Fall Apart* by focusing on tradition and modernity. In addition to that, we are going to shed light on different existentialist literary themes vis-à-vis tradition to understand fully the characters and their ways of thinking from both cultures i.e. Igbo and British cultures.

The second chapter is devoted to social, cultural change and the writer's orientations. Next we are going to examine to what extent the process of cultural change and transformation affects the Igbo society. Later we are going to study the affinities between Sartrism and Achebe's collectivism and individualism in *Things Fall Apart*. Finally, the motives behind Achebe's depiction of characters as models of conduct through the novel will be studied and analysed.

## **Motivation:**

What fascinated me to do this work is the combination of both Igbo language and English language through the novel *Things Fall Apart*. The use of proverbs, stories, myths, legends, folktales and riddles from Igbo language to English language shows me how great and creative Achebe is. The way he managed to recount the series of events and the way he manipulated English language attracted my attention. This combination makes me think of how a rich blend of African literature and English literature can be aesthetic when compiled. I believe that Achebe's use of Igbo expressions was not only to preserve Igbo culture but also to share his heritage. *Things Fall Apart* is a fictional novel which deals with change and tradition of Nigerian society during pre-colonial and colonial period. But what rekindled my eager is the way the different characters are depicted by the writer. I got the impression that each character stood for his/her culture (e.g. Okonkwo stood for Igbo culture whereas Mr Brown and Smith stood for English culture). This research does not claim to be the first work which tackles this issue. Since literature is always the means of giving form and utterance of history, I am not pretending to bring something new and original, but trying to contribute to the existing knowledge.

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## Introduction

In Africa, tradition has been something sacred and has been practiced by generations and generations for many years. Throughout the African continent, each African society is represented by tradition and culture with all its beliefs and practices. In *The Emergence of the African Fiction (1978)* written by Larson, through the theme of the African novel, the writer explains implicitly what shake African models of conduct, tradition and culture. He deals with five major subjects that reflect a series of cultural upheavals that all African societies had to undergo. The first concern is with novels portraying the initial exposure to the west. The second type of novel concerns the problems of adaptation to the western education. The third one concerns the question of urbanization and modernisation. The fourth one is about novels concerned with the problems of politics and national building. The last type is the most significant one in that it deals with novels dealing with a more individualized life style with a growing emphasis on the individual and his relationship towards a group from which he has become estranged. In other words these five types of novels stand for five phases that African world (its tradition and culture) went through for change and transformation.

Achebe appears to have tackled these issues through *Things Fall Apart*. Igbo people are depicted as people with great social institutions. Their culture is rich and respected with customs and laws that place great emphasis on traditional system. The people are ruled not by a king or chief, but by the elders, in which all males gather and make decisions by consensus, a kind of democracy. Ironically, it is the Europeans, who are regarded to bring democratic institutions to the rest of the world, who try to stop and suppress the clan meetings in Umuofia. In Igbo system, men are not judged by the wealth of their fathers, but by their actions and success gained through their strength and handiwork.

Through the novel, when Igbo people with their beliefs and customs are confronted by those of Europeans and white missionaries, Igbo people are caught up between resisting and embracing change and they face the dilemma of trying to determine how best to adapt to the reality of change (i.e. to make a choice between the old and the new). However, the internal weaknesses within the natives (Igbo people) and the effects of European influence with their models of conduct make the Igbo community unable to withstand change and cause the traditional Igbo culture and values to fall apart i.e. they both lead to the eradication of the indigenous culture with their way of life.

Change has infiltrated every area of society, from tradition to education (Schools were built everywhere), religion (Churches were installed) and politics (English governmental system was set by replacing traditional one). Some Igbo people are excited about new opportunities but others for instance those who do have titles like Okonkwo are afraid of losing their social status and esteem, and are against European conduct. White men start introducing Christianity (new faith) to the Igbo society. Then, they try to prove that their local system of beliefs contained harmful things. Igbo people start doubting the old traditions and customs which they have been following without question since birth. Some among Igbo community find that losing their tradition and custom for something new is unacceptable and threatens not only their culture but also the entire population.

The Igbos fought against new ideas to keep their unity. They were strongly bound to their language, religion and culture which formed their identity. And due to such strong ties, they were less able to accept the new Western system, language and religion. However, the emergence of new religion generates certain doubts among the natives to the extent that some were converted to Christianity: those who initially convert to Christianity are members of the clan who have not been fully incorporated into clan life (outcasts), those who lost their relatives: case of Nwoye and woman convert in Mbanta who has had four sets of twins

thrown away due to their tradition. Doubts and questions raise the question over his (Igbo) being and existence in this universe. Panza and Gale in their book entitled *Existentialism for Dummies* (2008) shows that:

*Existentialism is the philosophy of existence, of the nature of human existence, its value, and its meaning. Because questions about existence have very little interest when people exist as rotting corpses, existentialism is really the philosophy that studies what it is to be alive.(1)*

Therefore, this phenomenon puts the entire Igbo community not only in absolute doubts but also individuals start raising awareness in their minds about what is happening around them. *Things Fall Apart* deals with some facets common to the existential viewpoint. Several questions had been put forward as far as this situation is concerned.

### **I.1 Tradition as Self-definition**

As stated by Dr. Devardhi & Dr. Nelson through their article *Modernity in Tradition Represented in African Literature: Achebe's Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease* (2012):

*The definition of "tradition" in Achebe's work hinges upon ideological conflict, it comments also on the varying forms of consciousness that arise within discourses of self-definition within Igbo traditional culture. Moreover, it communicates the idea of complex rather than simple relationships between individuals and groups in the world of Achebe's "fictional" Igbo communities. (1)*

*Things Fall Apart* represents the traditional roots of Igbo people with their universal principles, value and beauty. The Igbo society is a male dominated and polytheistic society which is marked by polygamy and strict traditional norms. From many years, ritual ceremonies have been the focal point of Igbo people especially of Umuofia village. The ritual ceremonies were diverse: traditional wedding ceremony, burial ceremony, religious ceremony and festivals. Igbo traditional society is known for its harmony and its social organisation. In



their traditional courts, for example, if two parties are at conflict with each other both parties are given the chance to tell their story before a ruling. Then, decisions are made by a group of elders called *ndichie* as argued by Kenalemang through his article *Things Fall Apart: An Analysis of Pre and Post-Colonial Igbo Society* (2013):

*Even before the white missionaries arrive in Umuofia, the Igbo already have their own judicial systems that are based on the knowledge that their forefathers have passed onto them about their culture. Their courts are spearheaded by the oldest men of the village, whose wisdom and knowledge is trusted in the power of their ancestral gods to guide them to give fair and unbiased ruling (13)*

Throughout the Igbo nation, a man was given a title based on his individual's achievements and personal success, as a sign of status and rank in his community. Also age was particularly revered and everyone belonged to a system of kinship groups based on their age. In fact, Igbo people are traditionally civilised as stated by Dr. Whittaker and Dr. Msiska through their book entitled *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (2007):

*What was distinctive about the Igbos' social and political organization was that it was traditionally a very egalitarian and democratic society, one that historically had no rulers with autocratic powers, either centrally or at a local level. The democratic nature of Igbo society was coupled with an encouragement of healthy individual and group rivalry and an emphasis on individual accomplishment. It was a society that was delineated by a patriarchal class system with free-born men (27-28)*

Concerning relationship between husband and wife, in Igbo society, the husband is responsible for protecting and taking care of the entire family. He is also in charge of supplying food and all the necessities whereas the wife is the housekeeper who is responsible for taking care of the husband and children and feeding them properly. In addition to that, it is required for a real man to wed two or more wives. By real man they mean a hardworking man who does not owe any debt to anyone. The women of the clan are aware of this and have accepted this ritual; in some cases the first wife can even suggest to her husband to look for a

younger wife. The younger wives are also expected to respect the first wife. These women along with their husbands live together in peace and help each other with taking care of the children and other household chores.

Therefore, Igbo community is known for sticking firmly to its language and religion. They are both indispensable and crucial in the Igbo society because they kept Igbo community unified. This can be clarified through the conversation between Obierika and Okonkwo in the novel about how they can fight to preserve their traditional and cultural heritage:

*Does the white man understand our custom about land? How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Chapter 20, 124)*

## **I.2 Modernity as Self-awareness**

According to Aigbodioh in *Response to Helen Lauer's Critique of the Tradition Versus Modernity Dichotomy (2011)*:

*Modernity is the interrogation of one's culture which ought to provoke the development and application of relevant methodic procedures for investigating and validating a people's cultural beliefs and practices. Modernity is an expression that encapsulates the progress of societies from primitive civilizations to more advanced ones. It is also a system of the ideas, principles and ideals which underpin western life and thought, is itself a tradition (79)*

In *Things Fall Apart* modernity is characterised by the introduction of Christianity (monotheism), building of church, missionaries, court house and prison, imposition of the so-called democratic institutions and governments based on freedom and choice of individual as

viewed by white men. Modernity is also marked by the establishment of school stressing on English language for the Igbo community considered uncivilized. Unlike the Igbo society, new religion (Christianity) allows for a man to marry only one woman i.e. it is monogamy as stated by Kenalemag through his article *Things Fall Apart: An Analysis of Pre and Post-Colonial Igbo Society (2013): the white missionaries are against polygamous marriages, based on some scriptures found in the New Testament that forbid Christians against such an act (8)*. The traditional religion and Christianity are different in their doctrines; while the traditional religion believes in the existence of many gods and goddesses, Christianity insists on the existence of one God.

European, as presented in *Things Fall Apart*, seems to represent a new community of the so-called civilized world. The so-called civilized Europeans did not want to know the history of Igbo, their culture, tradition and their system of justice. However, the first things they did when they arrived in the village were to change by force the Igbo's models of conduct.

*Rather, they appear to be so keen on forcing their own culture on the Igbo that they do not see that they are destroying Igbo culture and that they could learn from the Igbo to better understand them and their way of life (Ibid:14)*

This lack of consideration of the Igbo and their well-being from Europeans creates conflicts and troubles between the two cultures. It also raises the question of

*How could a civilised and educated group of individuals who do not give themselves time to learn Igbo culture turn around and call Igbo uncivilised and uneducated? They certainly appear uncivilised and uneducated even though they claim to be. This is contradictory to the statements that they represent as the enlighteners of the village of Umuofia (Ibid: 14)*

The white missionaries saw Igbo as uncivilised individuals in desperate need of their help. Although the motive of the arrival of missionaries in Umuofia has not been of great

importance to the Igbo community, it is important to recognise both the benefits as well as the challenges that resulted from European culture on Igbo society.

*The Igbo greatly benefited from the introduction of school and education in their society that helped curb the rate of illiteracy in the village. The Europeans also taught Igbo about their own culture, and although the Igbo found it difficult to transition from their own culture to that of a stranger, they learnt something new from it. Nonetheless, there are challenges that face Igbo as a consequence of the arrival of the white missionaries. Igbo lost most of the values that tied them together as one; social coherence between the individual and society was lost, coupled with their traditional values and way of life. Because of the confused state of mind of Igbo not knowing whether to reject or embrace these changes it ultimately led to their fall mainly because of their loyalty to the language (Ibid: 18)*

### **I.3 Tradition Vs Modernity**

Tradition is in struggle with modernity and this is not only a new and reaction against old culture but also an evolution of new values. It is important to discuss the following notions in terms of two of the basic sets of conflicts that are developed throughout the novel *Things Fall Apart*: African vs European, Superstition vs Reason, Sacred vs Profane, Wisdom vs Foolishness, Old vs Young/New and Rural vs Urban.

#### **I.3.1 African vs European**

The notion of African is symbolised by Igbo people who are black people with their thoughts and ways of life: polytheism, harmony, polygamy, traditional religious practices, beliefs, legends, myths, folktale, titles and traditional social norms. In fact, it is related to (African) tradition as it is explained above. Whereas everything related to European tackles the matter of white people with their dominance of secular forms of political power and authority, Christianity, individuality, monotheism, and monogamy. In other words, it is related to modernity as illustrated in the previous points.

This is the distinction between African and European in connection with culture and tradition according to Jenkins through his book entitled *Dealing with Cultural Differences: Contrasting the African and European Worldviews (1991)*:

Contrast of Worldview Philosophies – African and European (18)

| <b>AFRICAN</b>  | <b>EUROPEAN</b>   |
|---|---|
| <b>Religious</b> – God the Creator (though far away). All things are related.   | <b>Secular</b> – A set order in the universe, independent existence, naturalistic view.                                       |
| <b>Spirit-World</b> – Many factors in life cannot be known, controlled or predicted. Humans are at the mercy of the forces of life.<br>Resignation to conditions. | <b>Scientific Approach</b> – Describe, Control, Manipulate; Change your destiny.<br>Aggressive.<br>Frustration with failure.  |
| <b>Dynamic</b> – An active world seen in relational terms.  | <b>Mechanical</b> – Static, Cause-effect. Linear concepts. Productivity; Organization.  |
| <b>Relationship</b> – Truth is in Experience and Relationship.  | <b>Knowledge</b> – Facts are important. Truth is in correlation of statement to observable, testable phenomena.               |
| <b>Focus on Present</b> – The world is uncontrollable. Immediacy. Presence of an individual takes precedence over plans.  | <b>Predictability</b> – Reproducible phenomena, Probability. Planning a high value. Same result from same factors every time. |
| <b>Group Identity</b> – Obligations. Commitment to the Group.   | <b>Individualistic</b> – Rights. Commitment to Principle.   |

### **I.3.2 Superstition vs Reason**

Superstition and reason have been the crucial issue tackled over and over by traditionalists and modernists but in vain. As stated by *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003)* superstition means belief which is not based on human reason or scientific knowledge, but is connected with old ideas about magic. In other words, it is to believe in miracles, prophecies, supernatural in spite of evidence. In *Things Fall Apart* superstition is a product of beliefs, practices linked to traditional custom whereas reason is the cause of an event or situation or something which provides an excuse or explanation. Reason is also the ability of a healthy mind to think and make judgements, especially based on practical facts.

Throughout the novel, these notions are used to stand for both African view and Western view. For example, at the very beginning, parents are seen advising their children not to whistle at night because they can be harmed.

*Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string (Chapter 2, 7)*

The superstitious behaviour of the people of Umuofia is manifested even in the way, in which the people took their decisions. For instance, whatever the people of Umuofia would like to do or whatever enterprise they undertook, it was only with the permission of The Oracle: the Oracle of Hills and Caves. The voice of the Oracle was considered no less than the voice of the God:

*The Oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbors. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers (Chapter 3, 12).*

Also, if a person had a swelling in his stomach as the case of Unoka, Okonkwo's father who was lazy and improvident, his death was considered an abomination to the earth. So, he was not given the first and the second burial as it is illustrated:

*Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad chi or personal god, and evil 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 (Chapter 3, 13)*

Again, superstition can be noticed through the ways Igbo people call each other. For instance, when Nwoye's mother addressed Ekwefi by her name, she replied, "Is that me?" That was the way people answered calls from outside. They never answered yes for fear it might be an evil spirit calling (Chapter 5, 29). In Igbo community if a child dies on the same day that s/he was born, it was an abomination to the earth s/he was cut into pieces and could not be buried as exemplified by Okonkwo's child:

*Onwumbiko was not given proper burial when he died...the first time that the child had died on the same market-day as it had been born. The neighbours and relations also saw the coincidence and said among themselves that it was very significant...The medicine man then ordered that there should be no mourning for the dead child. He brought out a sharp razor from the goatskin bag slung from his left shoulder and began to mutilate the child. Then he took it away to bury in the Evil Forest, holding it by the ankle and dragging it on the ground behind him (Chapter 9, 55)*

It was a sin to commit suicide in Igbo society; after Okonkwo killed one of the messengers who ordered to stop the meeting, and then realized that nobody would protest against the white man's authority because they let the other messengers escape, he hanged himself. He preferred to die, than to accept defeat in the battle of religion. He lost his status and reputation among his own people. No one among Igbo people could touch him and he could not even get proper burial.

*“It is against our custom,” said one of the men. “It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers.” (Chapter 25, 147)*

However, the arrival of white man and the emergence of new religion not only create some doubts in the minds of Igbo community but also open the door to the outcasts i.e. people who have no place in their society or in a particular group because the society or group refuses to accept them. Superstition which harmed the Igbo society was put into question. As the churches started converting the natives especially the outcasts to Christianity, even titled men felt attracted towards Christianity.

*Umuofia had indeed changed during the seven years Okonkwo had been in exile. The church had come and led many astray. Not only the low-born and the outcast but sometimes a worthy man had joined it. Such a man was Ogbuefi Ugonna, who had taken two titles, and who like a madman had cut the anklet of his titles and cast it away to join the Christians. The white missionary was very proud of him and he was one of the first men in Umuofia to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, or Holy Feast as it was called in Ibo. (Chapter 20, 123)*

Because what most of Igbo people have experienced throughout their traditional life, some was converted to Christianity. The young generation in particular, felt attracted towards Christianity: case of Nwoye who had his beloved friend Ikemefuna killed.

*But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul--the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of*



*the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled (Chapter 16, 103-104)*

New religion welcomed twins who were regarded as an abomination and converts were well treated regardless their traditional practices. This urges many people especially those who lost their relatives due to their customs to abandon their traditional religion and practice to Christianity. They got freedom and release from pain caused by their tradition and custom.

*And for the first time they had a woman. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. She was very heavy with child. Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and child-births. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance (Chapter 17, 107)*

### **I.3.3 Sacred vs Profane**

The use of sacred and profane in *Things fall Apart* deals with a number of contrasting components: good and evil, Godly and Godless or diabolical, civilized and uncivilized or savage, worthwhile and worthless, white and black. Sacred and profane are key words which can help the reader to figure out what is going on within both Igbo culture and British culture when it comes to religion and worldview. According to *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003)* sacred is considered to be holy and deserving respect, especially because of a connection with a god or considered too important to be changed whereas profane is showing a lack of respect for a god or a religion, often through a language. Profane also means not connected with religion or spiritual matters. Through our analysis, much focus will be given to the role and significance these two notions play in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. Through the novel we have noticed that sacred and profane stand for two cultures and are in a battle and denial of each other. As stated by Akasoy in her article entitled *Book Review:*

*Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason and Religion (2012): prohibiting the worship of the old gods is one thing, but denying their existence is another thing (224).*

Sacred is manifested through Igbo traditional and religious practices and ritual ceremonies. The Igbo worshipped gods who protect, advise, and punish them and who are represented by priests and priestesses. For example, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves gives knowledge and wisdom to those who are brave enough to consult him. No one has ever seen the Oracle except his priestess, who is an Igbo woman who has special powers of her own. Not only did the gods advise the Igbo on community matters, but also they guided individuals. Each person had a personal god, or chi, that directed his or her actions. A strong chi meant a strong person; people with weak chis suffered a lot. Each man kept a separate hut called Obi, or shrine, where he stored the symbols of his personal god and his ancestral spirits.

The people of Umuofia observed a Week of Peace before sowing seeds in the fields. They believed that if no violence was committed during this sacred week, goddess Ani would get pleased and this will lead the village to prosperity. Week of Peace was really sacred and no work was done during that week. This can be explained by the way Okonkwo was punished after he beat his wife because she did not prepare the food in time. Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess rebuked him and said:

*You have committed a great evil... "Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her"... "The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish." (Chapter 4, 22)*

He commanded Okonkwo to bring *a she- goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries to the Shrine of Ani*, to repent for the sin he had committed (Chapter 4, 22).

Apart from the Week of Peace, there was a sacred feast called the Feast of New Yam. This Feast gave the tribe an opportunity to thank Ani, the earth goddess and source of all fertility. Yams were so important to the Igbo community and each New Year they celebrated the Feast of the New Yam. The Igbo prepared for days for the festival, and the celebration itself lasted for two days. Yams also played a part in determining a man's status in the tribe the more yams a man has, the higher his status. Relatives come from great distances to participate in the feast, to eat and to drink palm-wine.

*It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct....The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival because it began the season of plenty-- the New Year. (Chapter 5, 26)*

In addition to that, big and ancient silk cotton trees were considered sacred and it was believed that the spirits of good children lived in these trees, waiting to be born. "On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade" (Chapter 6, 33). Moreover, there was a sacred snake called python that caused a big problem when one of the converts, the outcast killed it. In fact, this brought the church into serious conflict with the clan:

*The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as "Our Father," and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. It ate rats in the house and sometimes swallowed hens' eggs. If a clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he made sacrifices of atonement and performed an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. No punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen (Chapter18, 112)*

However, the arrival of the white man and his culture suppresses and destroys nearly everything related to the Igbo culture. What was sacred become profane due to the white man's behaviour and his ways of thinking. The white man does not honour the tribe's customs and tries to convince tribesmen that his ways are better. Many of the tribesmen were viewed as evil. For example, Missionaries would convince these tribesmen that their tribe worshipped false gods and those gods could not punish and could not protect them if they chose to join the mission (for missionaries). Before the white man came, tribesmen did not turn their backs on one another and also they would never have thought to kill their own brothers. As stated by Rhoads through her article *entitled Culture in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1993)*:

*While the European tradition allows men to fight their brothers over religion, the Igbo tradition forbids them to kill each other: it is an abomination to kill a member of the clan. Further, the long history of Crusades and holy wars and of religious persecution in Europe occurs because men can fight for gods, but it is not the Igbo "custom to fight for [their] gods." Rather, heresy is a matter only between the man and the god (63)*

The arrival of the white man has forced the clan to act in ways that its ancestors deplore and condemn. Such evil has never before invaded the clan. The white man invasion made the Igbo society to split up. As a result, tribal practices diminish as the bond that ties tribesmen deteriorates. Death eventually comes to the weaker of the clashing cultures.

#### **I.3.4 Wisdom vs Foolishness**

Wisdom and foolishness can be seen through the ways Igbo people and white men behave towards each other. Among both communities, some behave wisely and other foolishly according to their differences and ways of thinking. In the novel these two notions are noticed from the behaviour of one character to another and from the use of proverbs, myths, legends and folk tales.

For instance, proverbs are highly praised in Igbo culture. Their objectives aim to communicate effectively and wisely, to send a message and to offer advice or to be persuasive. They deal with every aspect of Igbo life and Igbo people. As it is expressed inside the novel: “Among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten (chapter 1, 5)”. This proverb is used to show that Igbo people have a great expertise in controlling the art of conversation. They believe that a good speaker is someone who uses language, with skill and wisdom. There is also another example of proverb, when the elders said to Okonkwo that “if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings (Chapter 1, 6)”. It is directed to Okonkwo because of his father’s lifestyle and bad reputation as a way of encouraging him to not look like him or behave in a strange way.

Also when Okonkwo is asking Nwakibie for help looking for yam seeds to sow he said: “The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did (Chapter 3, 15-16)”. This proverb shows that people of Umuofia had a great sense of pride, and if used properly it could result in great accomplishments. Also, Okonkwo’s being ashamed of his father is apparent with the use of the proverb “an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb (Chapter 3, 15)”. He remembered his own father. In Igbo society, there is a proverb which says that when “a man says yes, his Chi (personal God) says yes also (Chapter 4, 19)”. This shows that the natives believe that if you humble yourself to your God he will not say no to you. Furthermore, after Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna who was like his child, Obierika told Okonkwo that “what you have done will not please the Earth”. Then Okonkwo replied: “A child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm (Chapter 8, 47)”. Okonkwo used this proverb to justify himself that the killing of Ikemefuna cannot harm him or anyone from his family because he therefore believed that the Earth like a mother would not punish

him for obeying her. All of these proverbs represent the morals of Igbo society and they also show both wisdom and foolishness of Igbo community.

In addition to proverbs, folk tales, legends and myths play a crucial role in the novel. They can help us to understand fully the notion of wisdom and foolishness. For instance, the use of Achebe's depiction of characters to tell traditional folk tales is to show Europeans that the natives are creative and have a great amount of pride for their (African) continent. The example of the tortoise and the birds recounted by Ekwefi to her daughter, Ezinma can be nearly related to Okonkwo's behaviour. Tortoise persuades the birds to include him in their party and even to provide the feathers for his flight. He also convinces the birds that they must each take a new name for the great feast. Because he was cunning, selfish and greedy, tortoise as the spokesman tricks the birds and getting all of their food.

*When people are invited to a great feast like this, they take new names for the occasion. Our hosts in the sky will expect us to honour this age-old custom.'*  
*"None of the birds had heard of this custom but they knew that Tortoise, in spite of his failings in other directions, was a widely-travelled man who knew the customs of different peoples. And so they each took a new name. When they had all taken, Tortoise also took one. He was to be called All of you.... When everything had been set before the guests, one of the people of the sky came forward and tasted a little from each pot. He then invited the birds to eat. But Tortoise jumped to his feet and asked: For whom have you prepared this feast?"*  
*"For all of you," replied the man." Tortoise turned to the birds and said: 'You remember that my name is All of you. The custom here is to serve the spokesman first and the others later. They will serve you when I have eaten.'*(Chapter11, 68-69)

The story provides the lesson to not be greedy and selfish. This is the moral side of it. Okonkwo is similar to the tortoise because his selfishness and ego brings him into conflict with the clan on several occasions. The fall of the tortoise is also like the fall of Okonkwo in the end of the novel. Because of his foolishness, Okonkwo acts outside the desires of the clan

and as a result he was isolated and punished. In the end, the tortoise has his shell ruined and Okonkwo commits suicide.

The Igbo often use animal tales to emphasize their rituals and beliefs. The presence of animals in their folklore reflects the environment in which they live. One of the main reasons of these stories is to remember and remind at the same time traditional values of the past in order to make sense of the moral changes of the present. The issues discussed are important in order to make sense of the personal and social existence of the people. The second reason is to educate children especially through animal tales what to do, what to abandon and what to take into consideration.

Finally, the story of Abame shows the introduction of European and the foolishness of both white man and Igbo community. The foolishness relies on the killing of a white man who was on his way to Mbaino and had lost his way. People of Abame did not ask him anything:

*“They [Abame] killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man’s friends .I forget to tell you another thing the oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. And so they killed him.”(Chapter 15, 97-98)*

Also the way white men reacted against the killing of their brother was unbelievable. It was silly and dishonest because they did not ask what happened. If they were wise they could have set investigation so that criminals could be tried, arrested and imprisoned. Instead they wiped out the entire village of Abame.

*That was the day it happened. The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose chi were wide awake and brought them out of that market.” He paused. “Their clan is now completely empty. Even the sacred*

*fish in their mysterious lake have fled and the lake has turned the colour of blood. (Chapter 15, 98)*

They killed the missionary who said nothing. It shows the stupidity of the people of Abame. Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle rebuked in saying "Never kill a man who says nothing. Those men of Abame were fools. What did they know about the men?"(Chapter 15, 98) Okonkwo tells Obierika that it is a grave mistake for them and they have paid for their foolishness.

### **I.3.5 Old vs Young/New**

*Things Fall Apart* cannot be studied unless the notions of old and young/new are put aside. Old and young/new are indispensable terms which can help the reader to understand well what is called generational conflict through the Igbo community. These notions can be detected through Achebe's depiction of characters. As the characters do not belong to the same generation, their views are quite different from one character to another. In *Things Fall Apart* the Igbo society is exposed to many changes from within community and from outside. According to Wafula through her article entitled '*Tradition*' Versus '*Modernity*': *Generational Conflict in Vuta N'kuvute, Kufa Kuzikana, Msimu Wa Vipepeo and Tumaini (2011)*:

*When a society changes rapidly and cohorts/generations come of age under different conditions, the members of each generation are likely to develop their own perception on cultural and political establishments. When such perceptions are substantially different from the experiences of others, they may provoke generational conflict. (138)*

Through the novel Okonkwo feels betrayed firstly by his father, Unoka and secondly betrayed by his son, Nwoye. Nwoye continually disappoints his father by following his grandfather's behaviour. Because of the beating of his father, Nwoye grows in fear and detests his father's behaviour. Nwoye is different in thoughts from his father i.e. they act



differently from each other. This can lead to what is called the generational conflict as expressed by Wafula:

*A generational conflict entails a clash between individuals within (intra-generational conflict) a given generation or between generations (intergenerational conflict) due to their varied opinions, ideas, values and beliefs over certain cultural practices. (Ibid: 138)*

In addition to that the European influences have created a conflict within the members of the younger generation and the older:

*The African societies were seen in the face of two generations in opposition where the older generation was faced by a younger generation that refused to take what the older generation have inherited and are to transmit. On the other hand, the younger generation wanted the older generation to recognise and accept the new values they had learnt despite the fact that they were new in their culture. (Ibid: 137)*

The rebellious actions of Nwoye (young) against his father (old) do not necessarily rely on his laziness, effeminacy or weakness but rely on what happened around him i.e. the killing of Ikemefuna and the abandonment of twins in the Evil Forest as stated by Irele in the article entitled *The Crisis of Cultural Memory in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (2000)*:

*The killing of Ikemefuna represents a pivotal episode in the novel not only as a reflection of Okonkwo's disturbed mental state, but in its reverberation through the novel, as a result of its effect upon his son, Nwoye. It marks the beginning of the boy's disaffection toward his father and ultimately his alienation from the community that Okonkwo has come to represent for him. (13)*

### **I.3.6 Rural vs Urban**

Rural people have a different culture and set of beliefs from urban people. Through Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, rural and urban notions play in fact an important role. There are some elements in the novel which stand for rural milieu and others for urban milieu. In the novel, the notion of rural is seen through the Igbo people, peasants who live in villages

and countryside. They are conservative and resistant to changes. The life of the Igbo community is based completely on farming and hunting as it is shown through the following different passages:

*"I have come to you for help," he said. "Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of work (Chapter 3, 15)...Some farmers had not planted their yams yet.... (Chapter 3, 17) Those who were big enough to carry even a few yams in a tiny basket went with grown-ups to the farm. And if they could not help in digging up the yams, they could gather firewood together for roasting the ones that would be eaten there on the farm (Chapter 7, 43)..... Okonkwo was given a plot of ground on which to build his compound, and two or three pieces of land on which to farm during the coming planting season.... Each of Uchendu's five sons contributed three hundred seed-yams to enable their cousin to plant a farm, for as soon as the first rain came farming would begin. (Chapter 14, 91)*

Apart from farming and hunting existed in Igbo community, polygamous marriage is common especially in rural areas. In Igbo society disputes are handled by the elders following traditional court, laws rather than judges. However, Igbo people as people from rural setting find themselves confronted with new things and ideas that they have never experienced before i.e. things brought by Europeans with their models of conduct. By the arrival of white men, infrastructures and manufactures have seen the light. It means that churches for worshipping God have been set, hospitals for treating diseases and illness have been established and also schools were built to help villagers become literate men.

*The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages (Chapter 16, 101)..... In this way Mr. Brown learned 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 (Chapter 21, 128)*

In addition to that, administrations and services were put into place to facilitate villagers dealing with their business and other stuffs they might need. Also judicial system was established to set free innocents and to punish or imprison guilty people and criminals:

*They guarded the prison, which was full of men who had offended against the white man's law. Some of these prisoners had thrown away their twins and some had molested the Christians. They were beaten in the prison by the kotma and made to work every morning clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white Commissioner and the court messengers. Some of these prisoners were men of title who should be above such mean occupation. (Chapter 20, 123)*

#### **I.4 Existentialist Literary Themes**

The following existentialist literary themes are very significant while analysing any literary work. For our case, they will help us to understand and examine the realities of the lives of characters and their models of conduct through *Things Fall Apart*. They will also help us figure out why through man's search and experience, a man's existence and his belonging to the world have meaning. Then to conclude these existentialists literary themes will guide us to answer the raised questions. According to Panza and Gale through their book entitled *Existentialism for Dummies (2008)*:

What unifies the existentialists are the themes and concerns that tend to show up in their work. Here are the top ten themes that recur again and again in existential philosophy, as well as in art, literature and any number of other fields:

**Absurdity:** For the existentialists, life is absurd; it makes no sense and has no meaning or ultimate purpose, but human beings need it to make sense, to have meaning and purpose.

**Rejection of meaning-giving narratives:** It isn't enough to say that life is absurd; the existentialists repeatedly make the point that when philosophy, religion, or science tries to make sense of it, the attempts always fail.

**Alienation:** This is the feeling that you're a stranger in your own life, a stranger in the world.

**Anxiety:** This is the feeling of unease you get when you start to recognize that life is absurd.

**Forlornness:** This is the feeling of loneliness you get when you realize that no one can help you make sense of your existence.

**Responsibility:** Everyone bears responsibility. If no one is going to give you a guidebook to life, you have to bear responsibility for making your way through it and creating some kind of meaning for it.

**Authenticity:** People want authenticity — to live in a way that's in tune with the truth of who they are as human beings and the world they live in.

**Individuality:** An important part of developing an authentic and satisfying life is individuality. Reason, science, and systems that try to cover up the absurdity of life often take individuality from you.

**Passion/engagement:** Being passionate or engaged is another important aspect of living an authentic life, and it's under attack from the same forces that take away your individuality.

**Death:** This is the ultimate context for all human actions and an important source of the absurdity of life (12)

In addition to that, existentialist literary themes of isolation and freedom will be included from Sartre's point of view in order to grasp the motives behind the goodness and badness of the decisions taken by Achebe's characters to act and react differently and strangely.

## Conclusion

This chapter is regarded as a prologue to the African culture and tradition, their superstitions and religious rites through the Igbo society. As mentioned above it shed light on the relationship between tradition and modernity through the novel *Things Fall Apart*. It also tackles the significance of existentialism with its impact on human beings especially on the characters of the novel. In addition to that this chapter stresses on the Igbo traditional values and the intrusion of white men which leads to downfall of the Igbo community.

Through our analysis we have discovered that what seems appropriate and acceptable in traditional Igbo culture does not appear so good to the white men. White men are quick to change certain elements of traditional Igbo culture that according to them are inappropriate and unacceptable. However, in doing so, the white men fail to see that these inappropriate and unacceptable elements of traditional Igbo culture are what keep the Igbo together and at peace with each other. The views about life that the white men have are totally different from the views that the Igbo have. It is without a doubt that the white men believed themselves to be superior in comparison to Igbo. To conclude, the cultural and traditional exchanges between the two could have been beneficial to both sides if they have shown interest in knowing each other (i.e. the world surrounds them)

## **Chapter Two: Both Social, Cultural Change and Achebe's Orientations**

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## Introduction

Colonialism did, in fact, provoke a change among the Africans themselves and thus enhanced changes in prevalent literary themes in post-colonial literature. Cultural change is unavoidable. Indigenous and foreign people had constantly been changed by colonialism and reciprocal influence with other cultural ideals. The colonized people had to struggle with the new culture and all of its beliefs, values and customs that had inevitably become assimilated in their own lives. In reality, it is more than a question of a people adjusting to changes; it involves the relationship between the author of change and the undergoer of this change, the one and the other, for it is a discourse of compositionality which colonialism generates (Ashcroft et al., 1995).

All cultures and societies are inherently predisposed to change and, at the same time, to resist change. There are dynamic processes that encourage the acceptance of new ideas and things while there are others that encourage changeless stability. Every society undergoes changes and no society can escape change. Cultural and social change can either be positive or negative, progressive or backward, useful or harmful. As stated by Haferkamp and Smelser through their book entitled *Social Change and Modernity 1992*:

*Social change is defined in terms of direction and rhythm by that power of unrest for which it is so difficult to find a sufficiently general name, by incompatibility, discord, antagonism, contradiction and resistance, through conflict (8)*

From Haferkamp and Smelser's conception, social change deals with a change in the relationship between the individuals and different societies and a change in the way of behaving, accepted by them. Throughout the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo community has been shaken socially, culturally, educationally, economically and politically by both internal and external factors. This community suffered a lot due to the breakdown of their established

society abruptly to the new social conditions and tendencies brought by white men such as modernity, urbanisation, industrialisation and other new models of conduct shown above. As stated by Montero through his article entitled *Some Elements of a Cultural Theory of Social Change 2011*:

*A cultural change means a radical transformation of the way a society is conceived as a whole, the emergence of a new horizon of values, norms and practices. A change of this magnitude can only occur when the background understanding on which a society is based suffers a complete modification (7)*

Three varieties of cultural change are distinguished according to Haferkamp and Smelser through their book entitled *Social Change and Modernity 1992*. First, there are many instances of cultural change that are part of a specific social movement and seem to do little more than reinforce or challenge a particular idea. An example would be the new emphasis that has been placed on nature in recent years by the environmentalist movement. Second, in some discussions cultural change is depicted primarily as a gradual, incremental process, apparently occurring largely as a result of imperceptible shifts in socialization patterns. An example of this kind of cultural change would be the presumed long-term decline in superstition over the past five hundred years or so. Finally, cultural change sometimes appears to happen fairly abruptly, on a large scale, and as part of a relatively distinct social movement or set of social movements.

Through *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe expresses his inner thoughts and feelings and shows how colonisation affects the life of an African (what he endured during colonial period). His orientations have been motivated and fostered by the way African continent was stereotyped. In Africa, there have been rapid and severe upheavals inflicted by Europeans. However, the concern for traditional, cultural, social and political matters pressed probably African writers to devote more time to their writings. *Things Fall Apart* for instance contained the stereotypical view that many Westerners have on the traditions and culture of the African.



A new picture is painted due to Achebe's endeavours. His novel becomes a tool in which his message of African value is expressed and is one that embodies the true spirit of an African and his beliefs.

True to the mission of the writer in exploitative societies, the African writer responded by producing works that dealt a heavy blow to the ideology, aspiration and life-styles of the new ruling class. For the writer to be able to perform this function well, Achebe goes on to say, he must have 'a proper sense of history'. In Achebe's scheme of things having a proper sense of history means not only being to explain what it is that African societies have lost as a result of the encroachment of colonisation but also presenting a true and realistic picture of the African past (Ngara, 1985)

Colonization had disorganized African societies which used to be coherent. Achebe reflects this view through the title of the book which symbolizes the cultural conflicts and the misunderstanding between the white man and the Igbos or the Africans by extension. Achebe writes to dispel old images in order to create a true sense of his people's dignity.

*Il (l'écrivain) doit reconstituer la culture originelle de son groupe, réhabiliter le passé en substituant à l'image déformée par les colonisateurs une vision africaine de l'histoire du continent, afin de faire prendre conscience à ses lecteurs de la spécificité et de la dignité de la personnalité Africaine et ainsi de combattre l'aliénation née du traumatisme de la colonisation. L'écrivain, comme les autres intellectuels africains, « doit commencer à corriger les préjugés que des générations de détracteurs ont créés au sujet du noir. »*  
(Richard, 1983)

Achebe is a committed writer, one who believes that it is his duty to serve his society. He feels that the fundamental theme with which African writers should concern themselves is "that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity."(Innes et al., 1978)

Achebe's purpose is therefore not primarily to show its values, though this is an undoubtedly significant side line, but rather to show it as a living structure, as an organism animated with the life and movement of its members. *Things Fall Apart*, as the title suggests, is concerned with the dislocation of the African society caused by impact with another way of life. This means that the impact of Western culture undermined the collective solidarity and tradition of the natives (Igbo people) and their way of life that held them together. The introduction of Christianity, for instance, separated the converts from their traditional loyalty to the community and their tribal gods, and with that went the strongest sanction for individual action, social attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, the collective society was split and the community could no longer speak with one voice.

## **II.1 The Process of Cultural Change and Transformation**

Traditional life in *Things Fall Apart* is centred on the collective solidarity of people who shared common customs and beliefs. Igbo people were linked by blood or marriage ties and were deeply involved in one another's lives. The value of society is shown through collective responsibility, the responsibility of the group for the lives and well-being of the individual members. There was a tremendous respect for customs and tradition. Members of the society are controlled by social beliefs and norms. However, transformation started taking place when Igbo social system encountered with Western system (culture) and often altered social relations at the cost of social harmony of the natives (Igbo people). For example, the tribe to which Okonkwo returns after seven years of exile has undergone a complete change and transformation during his absence. The Igbo society which was powerful and respected could not act as one as before. The Igbo values mostly admired such as prowess, courage, warrior, integrity and piety lost their sense and quality to fulfil communal interests. Culture loss is an inevitable result of old cultural patterns being replaced by new ones. Older people, in particular, are often reticent to replace their comfortable, long familiar cultural patterns: the

case of Okonkwo who refuses categorically to uphold European culture and models of conduct.

O'Neil (2006) shows that, all cultures change through time. No culture is static. Yet, most cultures are basically conservative in that they tend to resist change. Some resist more than others by enacting laws for the preservation and protection of traditional cultural patterns while putting up barriers to alien ideas and things. He keeps on explaining that there are three general sources of influence or pressure that are responsible for both change and resistance to culture: forces at work within a society, contact between societies and changes in the natural environment. Within a society, processes leading to change include invention and culture loss. Inventions may be either technological or ideological. Within a society, processes that result in the resistance to change include habit and the integration of culture traits. (Ibid)

The processes leading to change that occur as a result of contact between societies are: *diffusion*, *acculturation* and *transculturation*. Diffusion is the movement of things and ideas from one culture to another. When diffusion occurs, the form of a trait may move from one society to another but not its original cultural meaning. For instance, when McDonald's first brought hamburgers (American style) to Moscow and Beijing, they were accepted as luxury foods for special occasions because they were expensive. But in America, they have a very different meaning: they are ordinary every day fast food items and cheap. Acculturation is what happens to an entire culture when alien traits diffuse in on a large scale and substantially replace traditional cultural patterns. For example, the vast majority of American Indians now speak English instead of their ancestral language and wear European style clothes; this is due to European invasion and influence. Despite great effort to preserve culture, Native American societies experience a loss of their traditional cultures. While acculturation is what happens to an entire culture when alien traits overwhelm it, transculturation is what happens to an individual when he or she moves to another society and

adopts its culture. The case of immigrants who successfully learn the language and accept as their own the cultural patterns of their adopted country have transculturated. (O'Neil, 2006)

Achebe seems to have dealt with some of these processes leading to change through *Things Fall Apart*. In the novel, cultural change is manifested through the white men's models of conduct and through the imposition of their culture on an African tribe (Igbo people). Achebe describes the way of life before the missionaries arrived and then records some of the changes, which occurred due to the changed belief system introduced by these missionaries. Soon after the missionaries began to teach the tribal people about the Christian faith, their tribal customs began to be questioned. This caused a sense of unrest in the village. The missionaries were trying to bring with them new ways of life, and mostly thought to be better ways of life. Achebe tries to show us that the missionaries showed people who were hurt by the beliefs of the tribe that this did not have to go on in their religion. This is one of the main reason people switched to their religion. Achebe also shows us that the tribe had many harmful beliefs before the missionaries came.

Also inequality within the Igbo community, Christianity and some of Igbo superstitions and beliefs play a large role in shaping cultural change. They generate class and group conflicts, which become the basis of the upheaval and unrest that come to constitute the structures of change. Throughout the novel, cultural change and its effect on human experience is seen as the development of a new sense of self, of subjectivity and individuality. This idea distinguishes the modern individual from the traditional one. It is based on changes in the understanding of the relationship between man and his environment. These changes are based on the evolutionary thought, science, new faith (Christianity) and modernity brought by white men and social disintegration (internal conflicts) within the Igbo community.

## II.2 Linguistic Universality

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe through the use of English language and Igbo expressions, wants, to educate two categories of people: the Westerners and the Africans. So, he succeeds in talking in a very meaningful way to the Westerners mostly unaware of his culture and the Africans. As some of African writers preferred to write in their mother tongue, Achebe opted for English language (a foreign language) to make himself and his voice heard around the world. Language in *Things Fall Apart* has got two functions: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Achebe has used language as a technique for cultural inferences which were orally transmitted through generations. He wrote in English first as a response to Europeans who depicted Africans as savages that needed to be enlightened. Achebe presents to them his people's history. Second, the mixture of Igbo expressions to the English language was to foster his people to learn that foreign language as an effective way of combating European views and Western cultural domination. Therefore, African people can indeed think for themselves and are in no wise inferior to the Europeans.

*Achebe's philosophy to language: I have been given the language and I intend to use it....I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit to new African surroundings. (Thiong'o, 1986)*

The writer showed the traumatic consequences of the western behaviour on the traditional values of the African people through his precious novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's use of the sophisticated Igbo language adds flavour to the novel and gives the reader a glimpse into how the Africans interact with each other. Instead of seeing hostile, barbaric, and simple people, the reader watches a sophisticated culture full of tradition and values emerges before his or her eyes. Specifically, the recitation of chants and proverbs throughout the novel, such as those heard at the festivals and religious ceremonies, shows that the African

people have a rich background that is indispensable to the world. Throughout the novel, Achebe makes the readers aware of the importance of tales, proverbs and their use in conversations as believed by Igbo community to be a fountain of wisdom and respect.

The novel itself is an attempt to reach, through self-conscious use of the language of one culture, the culture of another to avoid a self-enclosed system. Each language reflects the concerns, attitudes and assumptions of its speakers and the use of a language carries with it the prejudices and habits of its people. As language is a transmission of cultural values, it is also knowledge shared from one culture to another as stated by NGARA through his book entitled *Art and Ideology in the African Novel 1985*:

*When the language in question is a colonial language like English or French, those who learn it as a second language find themselves sharing the native speaker's world view; they will see themselves and the native speaker through the latter's eyes (42)*

The influence of Igbo orality on the language and prose of the novel is also evident in the way Achebe regularly introduces Igbo expressions, tales, myths and proverbs into the text. Igbo expressions are often used as descriptive devices accounting for cultural and traditional morals. Universality relies not only on the way Achebe manipulates English language by associating Igbo expressions, tales, proverbs, myths and legends but also on the depiction of characters each carrying and standing for his culture and his self-model of conducts.

In real life, in Africa, the tales reflect every day's life and integrate any activity, fact and phenomenon of life, in order to teach and to advise people. They are concerned with every aspect of the culture of the people who elaborate them. The tales allow to register and to transmit the cultural heritage of the group, to preserve and to maintain the harmony between people and their universe. Apart from this function, they entertain people. The tale reinforces the feeling of solidarity and of belonging of the people to the same community. They praise

the respect that should be paid to the elders, the attachment to the land, to the way of life and beliefs of the ancestors. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the tales have a choice place. They are the favourite domain of children and women. The objective sought through the tales is not gratuitous. They represent the African life, the village and its relaxation. Through the use of tales, the meaning of life can be seen and they can explain what happens around the world. Also these tales can have a moral standing:

- Ear and Mosquito: the weak should not be humiliated for one ignores what the future holds for one.

- Vulture and her daughter: when one uses forces, one should also beware of silent victims (or: those who cry when caught are less dangerous than those who remain silent).

Added to that, they have a cultural standing: in every civilization, man wants to understand his milieu and the tale allows to answer questions:

- Ear and mosquito: the tale explains why mosquitoes take it out on the ears of human beings rather than the other parts of their bodies.

- Trick of the tortoise: the vengeance of the parrot explains why the shell of the tortoise is bizarre.

In sum, through the novel, the tales represent the richness of African tradition and culture. In the case of *Things Fall apart*, there is an interdependence of two cultures which is created by the fact that the novel does not exist without the tales and that the tales are included in the novel to which they give sense and form. Achebe seems to signal the interdependence between African literary expression and European one.

Next to the tales, the proverbs are one of important aspects of culture. The proverbs depict universal truths and some habits commanded by human experience in front of reality

and daily life. They represent social life and are closely linked to the African languages, customs and religious beliefs. They inform readers (from both sides i.e. African and European) about the sense of observation and the knowledge of the human nature of Africans.

The use of proverbs is part of Achebe's realistic project to write about Africans and about authentic African experiences. These, doubtless, give an African flavour to the story. Most of the time, the proverbs visualize a lesson extracted from the wisdom of the ancestors and stand for a reflection of the clan. They reflect the thoughts and values of the African community. However, beyond the reflection of the Igbo clan, the proverbs represent also the wisdom of every people. They stand for a universal wisdom and most of the proverbs have their equivalents in other civilizations. For instance, some equivalents may be found in English:

- When a man says yes, his chi also says (Igbo) (TFA Chapter 4, 19)

= God helps those who help themselves (English)

- The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under it (Igbo)  
(TFA Chapter 1, 6)

= Reputations shape reactions (English)

- A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness (Igbo) (TFA Chapter 3, 14)

= As you sow, so shall you reap (English)

Finally, a whole world of traditional culture, its rituals, ceremony, and superstition is painted and Achebe creates a complete picture of a rich but complex human society. This picture, on the one hand, fulfils Achebe's aim consisting in teaching his fellow African people and readers that their past was not of savagery and that there is nothing shameful in African



culture and tradition. On the other hand, it has the same effect on the non-African readers (western readers).

### **II.3 Affinities between Sartre and Achebe's Collectivism and Individualism in Things Fall Apart**

Sartre and Achebe's collectivism and individualism in Things Fall Apart rely on the characters from both sides and their ways of conduct towards each other i.e. Igbo towards Europeans. Achebe presents not only the portrait of an individual but also the portrait of a village a whole community. He achieves this communal portrait in part by including description of a full range of social activities for many reasons. For storytelling, as it appears in the novel, is itself a kind of ritual, fully integrated into the communal life of the Nigerians.

Collectivism is an ideology that trumps the supremacy of a group over an individual. It is the lack of a strong or coherent identity of the individual self whereas individualism is the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual (from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). An individual is someone who defines himself or herself away from a crowd or the more universal mass of humanity in general. Individualism is no friend to the community; it lacks respect towards each other and lacks pride in service. The only bonds it creates with others are those of self-interest.

The individual and community are inseparable. The community participation on occasions of death, birth, and marriage is strong. When Okonkwo has to leave clan as a punishment, his mother's kinsmen in Mbanta receive him well and support him. The interdependence of the individual and community is strong and the novel derives its force from collective articulation.

### **II.3.1 Anxiety**

Sartre explains that anxiety reveals that people are individual, that a kind of nothingness lies at the heart of themselves and the world, and that they're ultimately free as a consequence (Panza & Gale, 2008). In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, this explanation can be noticed through Okonkwo's loneliness and his actions. Sartre goes on by saying that many people often try to escape from anxiety by losing themselves within the everyday participation with things in the world. They try to flee from what anxiety shows them. Anxiety may make our lives unsettled and insecure, but it also makes our lives free (Ibid.) Though Okonkwo was free to do whatever he wants, his life was insecure because he feared to look like his father, Unoka.

In regard to Sartre's notion of anxiety, Achebe's use of anxiety is centred and focused through Okonkwo's models of conduct, his ignorance, arrogance and the ways his father, Unoka behaves towards his family and Igbo community. Throughout his lifetime, Unoka did not succeed or attempt to make his life better like other men of his village Umuofia. He was lazy, improvident and debtor and had no title. He likes spending most of his time drinking and playing music. His way of life affects not only his son Okonkwo but also his grandson Nwoye. Because of this, Okonkwo did not have a start like other children who own barns and other belongings from their parents. The lifestyle of Okonkwo's father was a failure and this urge Okonkwo to detest everything that his father likes to do or was afraid to do. This is the reason why he was anxious and was impatient for unsuccessful men.

Although Okonkwo is revered as a great man and warrior, he also is noted for his intolerance for laziness, and his impulsive actions. The impulsive action is seen through the killing of one of the messengers from the British district office. These types of rash actions can be observed throughout Okonkwo's entire life. Okonkwo's actions and choices are all

driven by his single anxiety: becoming idle and weak like his father. This lifestyle helps him become a very successful farmer and leader, but it also has negative results. Okonkwo does not show emotions, the only emotion he has was anger. Compassion and kindness according to him are for weak and lazy men. As a result, his driven personality results in material success but emotional isolation.

In addition to that, Okonkwo's ability in war makes him dangerous in peace, for he is harsh with his wives and children and even kills Ikemefuna because he is afraid of being thought weak like his father. Okonkwo's lack of respect for women is pervasive and problematic. The anxiety can also be detected through the ways the tribesmen of Umuofia were afraid to take actions against white men due to the killings of Abame. The British controlled the natives through fear, trade, education and religion. The Igbos feared the whites because the massacre at Abame.

### **II.3.2 Freedom**

For Sartre, freedom means always having a choice, and where there's a choice, there's hope. This is the optimism Sartre's philosophy offers — not that the world will be perfect, not that your choices will be easy, but that you'll have a choice, and with that choice an opportunity to change yourself, your situation, and your world for the better (Panza & Gale, 2008). From Sartre's point of view of freedom, Achebe clarifies it through different characters such as Okonkwo, Nwoye and Igbo community. Sartre states again that freedom is not best achieved alone, in isolation, through radical self-assertion and honesty. Being free requires that other humans recognize me as free (Heter, 2006). This can be viewed through the behaviour of the converts within the novel; they were recognised by those who stayed attached to the Igbo tradition and culture.

Through Unoka's behaviour his laziness and improvidence, his son Okonkwo learns how to work independently at the early age. Unoka did not take care of his family. Due to Okonkwo's choice and freedom, his success gradually develops into a dangerous sense of individualism that disregards the community's rules and decisions. For example, he beats his youngest wife during the sacred Week of Peace because he did not return in time to cook the meal, and he attempts to attack the British instead of waiting for and accepting the community's collective decision. From such a perspective, this individualistic disregard for the community's values and customs is Okonkwo's primary tragic flaw, though it is perhaps difficult to separate this individualism from Okonkwo's other character flaws such as inflexibility, and an obsessive reaction against his father.

Okonkwo's brutality and harshness urge also his son Nwoye to be free from him. This is seen through the refusal of Nwoye to accompany his family when his father Okonkwo was exiled after killing accidentally a member of the clan during a funeral ceremony. The relationship between Nwoye and Okonkwo was completely destroyed. Nwoye decides to take his own path different from his father. In addition to that, Igbo people could have attempted to kill their brothers who were converted to Christianity. Instead they let them free because their tradition and their law did not allow them to kill the members of the clan. It could be an abomination against their tradition as stated by Rhoads through her article entitled *Culture in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1993)*:

*Those who initially convert to Christianity are members of the clan who have not been fully incorporated into clan life. The first woman convert in Mbanta has had four sets of twins who have been thrown away. Once the osu, the outcasts, see that the church accepts twins and other matters seen by the clan as abominations, they join the new church. Nwoye, the gentle son who cannot accept Okonkwo's harshness and especially his killing of Ikemefuna, finds in the poetry of Christianity the promise of brotherhood. (69)*

### II.3.3 Engagement

According to Sartre, engagement is a social virtue that entails obligations to others. To be engaged requires an awareness of one's situation, including the impersonal social roles one occupies. An engaged person is aware of the networks of coercive power into which he finds himself thrown (Heter, 2006). In relation to Sartre's concept of engagement, Achebe, through the novel *Things Fall Apart*, portrays Okonkwo the main character who finds himself engaged against European's cultural invasion. Though the clan was afraid to be killed, Okonkwo as a reputable man of his village Umuofia tries to defend the Igbo community but he did not succeed due to his loneliness. Again, Sartre states that engagement requires a broad concern with 'injustice in all its forms' (Ibid.). This is explained by the way Nwoye, Okonkwo's son condemns his father's actions. For instance Okonkwo beat him (Nwoye) heavily to suppress what he sees as weak and effeminate behavior.

The novel is significant because of its mastery and the portrayal of the characters. Through Okonkwo, his father, Unoka and his son Nwoye one can discover Achebe's complexity of his characters and their ways of conduct. While Okonkwo's success and engagement rely on his father's failure and flaws, his son Nwoye rejects his father's brutality and behaviour. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo makes a choice early in life and engages to overcome his father's legacy (Unoka). As a result, he gains the tribe's respect through his hard work and commitment. Okonkwo is strongly motivated to have a life dominated with constant work and no relaxation. The tribe rewards him by recognizing his achievements and honouring him not only as a hard worker by also as a great warrior. *Accepting the need for recognition entails a basic respect for others upon whom one depends for recognition* (Ibid.) The tribe believes that Okonkwo's personal god, or chi, is good (fate has blessed him). Nevertheless, they realize that Okonkwo has worked hard to achieve all that he has (Igbo

proverb: if a man says yes, his chi says yes) as stated by Dr. Whittaker and Dr. Msiska through their book entitled *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (2007)*:

*Okonkwo's high status in the community is measured exclusively in relation to his success in the male realms of wrestling and warfare, and against the culture's patriarchal system of sanctioning titles, polygamy (men having more than one wife) and wealth accumulation (8)*

In addition to that, gender influences Okonkwo's behavior within the story. Through Okonkwo's ways of conduct, his arrogance and personality, he constructs his strong sense of masculinity by repressing any sense of femininity. This urges him to be more committed to his activities and actions. In Okonkwo's mind, there is an internal psychological conflict between the masculine and feminine. He does not want to be seen as a weak man or woman.

*Even his ability as a farmer is demonstrated by his success in growing a staple vegetable which has been culturally reified with a gender bias. Okonkwo appears to be a man destined for greatness as a result of his conformity to his society's ideals of masculinity and patriarchal hegemony (Ibid. p.8)*

### **II.3.4 Isolation**

Okonkwo's exile isolates him from all he has ever known. All his plans and success become nothing. He could not return to his village as he wants to fight against the white men's settlement. For, he has to wait until the end of his punishment. As stated by Panza & Gale through their book entitled *Existentialism for Dummies 2008, real courage comes from within, not from without (150)*. As he is isolated from the rest of his clan, he could not feel the power anymore because he is outside. According to Sartre, an isolated man fundamentally misunderstands himself because he attempts to define himself in isolation from the other. He thinks his domination proves his superiority and hence his independence from the other, but to be superior to the other is to need him (Heter, 2006). Achebe clarifies this point in saying that the good name he had built for himself with his tribesmen is a thing of the past. He must start

anew. The thought overwhelms him, and Okonkwo feels nothing but despair. News of the white man's behaviour and the tribe's reactions to it disturb him. His distance from the village, and his lack of connection to it, give him a sense of helplessness. Even worse, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, joins the missionaries. Okonkwo feels betrayed by his personal god, or chi, which has allowed him to produce a son who is effeminate. Nwoye continually disappoints Okonkwo. As a child, he prefers his mother's stories than his father's. Okonkwo's return to the village does nothing to help his feelings of loneliness.

Through *Things Fall Apart* at the end of the novel, Okonkwo who is regarded as a leader of the village Umuofia with high esteem is not recognised. The tribe he rejoins is not the same tribe he left. While he does not expect to be received as the respected warrior he once was, he does think that his arrival will provoke an occasion to be remembered. When the clan takes no special notice of his return, Okonkwo realizes that the white man has been too successful in his efforts to change the tribe's ways. Many of the tribe's leaders have joined the missionaries, tribal beliefs and customs are being ignored. Okonkwo grieves the loss of his tribe and the life he once knew. Okonkwo also feels betrayed by his clan. He does not understand why his fellow tribesmen have not stood up against the white intruders.

### **II.3.5 Death**

As stated by Sartre, there are several meanings of death. Death is not a project, but the termination of all human projects (Heter, 2006). Through Panza & Gale in their book entitled *Existentialism for Dummies 2008*, Sartre defines death as adamant that people must acknowledge that it is a choice that's available. The significance for Sartre is that death is always an option, always an available choice. It may not be one you would readily choose, but that doesn't change the fact that it exists (162-163). In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe tries to shed light on these Sartre's concepts of death.

Though Okonkwo from the beginning is seen as a successful man who has risen from nothing and made his own fortune, his personality has been marked by four deaths. The first death is that of Ikemefuna. It is an event which leaves Okonkwo traumatized; which causes a conflict between Okonkwo and those who oppose his part in the killing. It provokes an internal conflict between his emotions and principles and destroys the relationship with his son Nwoye. The second death caused by Okonkwo occurs at the funeral of Ezeudu. Okonkwo accidentally shoots and kills Ezeudu's son. He is forced to flee the land, leaving his prosperous life in Umuofia behind, and "seek refuge in his motherland" (TFA Chapter 14, 91). He is allowed to return after seven years. The third death by Okonkwo is the death of a court messenger who was sent to stop the clan meeting. He kills the man and when he realizes that his clan is not behind him, he returns home and hangs himself in a tree behind his compound, completing the fourth death.

Moreover, the departure of Nwoye (joining missionaries), Okonkwo's son to the missionaries is regarded as death according to Okonkwo. It is due to Ikemefuna's death. The death of his new brother, killed by his own father, makes him lose faith in the traditions that demand that an innocent boy must be killed. For Nwoye, it marks the end of the period of his relation with his father. As a result, Nwoye disowns his father and joins the Christian missionaries, whose teachings seem to confirm his doubts he has had about his clan's customs and religion. For Okonkwo, Nwoye is not his son anymore as he states it in the novel "To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens the very depth of abomination." He goes as far as to convince himself that his wife has "played him false" since Okonkwo, "popularly called the 'Roaring Flame' . . . could not have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate" (TFA Chapter 17, 108).

From the beginning till the end of the novel, the theme of death is remarkably noticed. There are some deaths provoked by the white men (massacre of Abame, village) conduct and



others due to the rituals of Igbo community such as death of twins regarded as an abomination to earth, sacrifice of Ikemefuna to avoid war between two villages and suicide committed by Okonkwo. The character of Okonkwo is extremely strong as well as complex one. His strength and determinism could serve him well, but in the end they lead to his fall. Okonkwo ends up realizing that his clansmen do not support his rash actions and in turn, he commits suicide, a very shameful death as stated by Dr. Whittaker and Dr. Msiska through their book entitled *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (2007)*:

*Okonkwo's ignominious death irrevocably severs his ties with his beloved clan, as his sacrilegious suicide ensures that he will be denied his place as a revered ancestor in the spirit realm and is instead transformed into an evil presence, one that cannot even be touched by fellow clansmen. (14)*

It is true that Okonkwo's death can be taken as the heroic death of a warrior identified with his people, and a symbol of the tragic death of a great people. Yet it is equally true that he is seen by his own people to have died in shame. Because he takes his own life, he has committed an abomination against the Earth and cannot be buried by his own clansmen.

## **II.4 Achebe's Depiction of his Existentialist Models Character**

### **II.4.1 Okonkwo and Obierika**

In the character of Okonkwo, there is a sentimental anxiety due to his father's laziness, Unoka. Unlike other children, Okonkwo did not inherit a barn or a title, or even a young wife. Okonkwo worked like one possessed and indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death. The presence of his father in his life was meaningless and he lives as a fatherless child. Though this situation makes him anxious, Okonkwo feels very restless and thinks that he must develop the liberating forces and make his world better. His determination goes together with the fear of resembling his father. In reality he does not show emotions and even voluntarily he takes part in killing Ikemefuna (who is like his

adopted son) in the name of tradition and moral order of his community. Okonkwo is inflexible and is also a man who exhibits imperfection, tends to hold on to his beliefs and culture. Bloom (2010) asserts that Okonkwo's own inflexible devotion to initiative, violence, and power, and his disregard for pluralistic cultural traditions and ancestral history, result from his traumatic upbringing and do not represent the totality of the cultural norms of the clan. The very different responses to changing circumstances shown by Nwoye and Obierika, men of different generations, display the clan's flexibility.

Unlike Okonkwo, Obierika's reactions when Okonkwo is banned from the tribe for seven years for the accidental murder of a clansman, shows that he is a man of words. He also laments about the custom of killing twins. He questions and for him it does not make sense why people continue to trust and have faith in old traditions that keep burying his brothers and sisters. Obierika acts as the voice of reason and sympathy in the novel. He is described as "a man who thought about things" (TFA Chapter 13, 87). And those thoughts prove and reveal a mind willing to explore the great complexities of pertinent issues concerning communal identity and race relations. During an exchange with Okonkwo, Obierika asks him not to take part in killing Ikemefuna, but Okonkwo never gets back to his decision. Obierika is also described as a wise man this is noticed later in the novel when he questions why "his family had to throw away his own twin children just because the clan had called such births an offense on the land" (TFA Chapter 13, 87)

His reactions to these situations suggest a thoughtful approach to communal custom that divides him from some of the other people. True, Obierika never wants to rebel against such social norms, never attempts to stop them; unlike Okonkwo, he is not a man of action. However, his behaviour and inaction do not help to change clan tradition because he respects it and stays quiet. Obierika is tolerant of his people's beliefs and chooses quietly to form his own spiritual convictions and stand by them as closely as he can. Despite hearing Okonkwo

and other's comments that killing Ikemefuna was the Oracle's will, Obierika insists that "it is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families" (TFA Chapter 8, 46). While he does not necessarily condemn other men's roles in the incident, he can see beyond their imagination and judge for himself that killing a boy who is innocent for unclear reasons is not good.

Indeed Obierika's thoughtfulness places him at strange with Okonkwo at the end the novel. Okonkwo in contrast to Obierika is not afraid to act on his violence. Okonkwo's actions stem from fear, fear of failure and fear of weakness. So while Okonkwo might appear to refuse to cooperate with new institutions, Obierika reveals his true identity by trying to find compromise with British authority. Illustration of Obierika and Okonkwo's divide is their last conversation on white men. Okonkwo suggests to fight against white man "We must fight these men and drive them from the land" (TFA Chapter 20, 124). However, Obierika's response does not reassure or agree with Okonkwo's idea. He asks a series of questions: "But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? (...) How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us?" (TFA Chapter 20, 124). To Obierika, Okonkwo's dream for war is out of date because Okonkwo's people have completely changed their manner of living. Obierika is a guide, advisor and trustee to his friend Okonkwo not only in his life but even after his death. During Okonkwo's seven years exile in Mbanta, it is Obierika who manages things in Umuofia for him like a trustee. Okonkwo's death leaves him very sad and he could not help accusing the Commissioner "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself, and now he will be buried like a dog" (TFA Chapter 25, 147).

#### II.4.2 Ikemefuna and Nwoye

Ikemefuna and Nwoye in the novel are both innocent victims due to their respective traditions and cultures. Ikemefuna arrives in Umuofia, together with a girl, as compensation for a crime committed by his father, an enemy clan, in order to avoid war. Throughout the novel, he acted as an older brother to Nwoye, and behaves like a perfect clansman. He serves as a bridge between Nwoye and the traditions of the tribe and engages in all of the village's activities and knows so much about so many things. His arrival affects and changes Nwoye's life at the point that his father Okonkwo feels comfortable. Ikemefuna's presence marks the end of Nwoye's beatings and sufferings as stated by Bloom through his book entitled *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart 2010*:

*Okonkwo has been sorely disappointed in his son until the arrival of Ikemefuna, a boy ransomed to the people of Umuofia as settlement for the killing of one of its daughters by another village. After spending three years in Okonkwo's family, Ikemefuna seems to have had, at least in Okonkwo's mind, a good influence on Nwoye (78)*

Despite Ikemefuna's respect and good behaviour towards the Igbo community and his peers, the decision was given by the Oracle to put an end to his life. His killing becomes symbolic of the death of innocence in Umuofia. After Ikemefuna's death, Nwoye's connection to his father and to the old traditions is broken. This is clarified by Dr. Whittaker and Dr. Msiska through their book entitled *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (2007)*:

*The conflict is created out of the gradual breakdown of a normal relationship between father and son, and Nwoye's final alienation from his father which prevents a resolution. The final breaking of the filial bond is directly related to the killing of Ikemefuna (82)*

Before the Christians arrive, Nwoye is deeply uncomfortable about the deadly customs surrounding him. He openly rebels against traditional ideals of masculine behaviour that his father wants him to be. But as long as believers in those customs surround him, his feeling can

never become more than a vague anxiety. Nwoye is the symbol of a change, he finds it difficult to understand and follow the old traditions and rules of Igbo people. Especially after Ikemefuna death which happened only because the Oracle had said that he had to be killed. Though the process of change remains mysterious, numerous signs show that there has been change within Umuofia society due to Nwoye's endeavour. In other words he rekindles new generations to take the future in their hands. Nwoye's dissatisfaction with his own culture makes him vulnerable and consequently he finds a new religion and rejects his father, his religion, his beliefs and everything he stands for, Dr. Whittaker and Dr. Msiska explain this point:

*Nwoye is presented all along as a sensitive young man whose psychology turns against certain customs of the village, particularly the casting away of twins into the forest. In fact, Nwoye's defection to Christianity later on has a double significance – it is at the same time an act of revolt against his father as well as a rejection of the society that he embodied (Ibid:83)*

#### **II.4.3 Mr Brown and Reverend James Smith**

Throughout the novel, Mr. Brown represents a change of mentality, he does not use cruelty to convert the Igbo community. He does not try to impose his religion on the tribe. He rather tries to understand them despite their differences. Brown leads the mission with calmness and patience. Mr. Brown learned 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. Achebe depicts Mr. Brown as a wise man with good intentions who has got mission to change bad image that colonialism has inflicted on his tribe (African people in general) as stated by Fagruheen through his article entitled *Downfall of Traditionalism in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God 2014:*

*Some members of the Igbo clan like the changes in Umuofia. Mr. Brown the white missionary respects the Igbo traditions. He makes an effort to learn about the Igbo culture and becomes friendly with some of the clan leaders. He also encourages Igbo people of all ages to get an education. (26)*

In addition to that, Mr. Brown succeeds in winning a large number of converts because he listens to the villagers' stories, beliefs, and opinions. He also accepts the converts unconditionally. In a few words he is a thoughtful defender of his religion and culture. The way that Mr. Brown was respected even by the clan is demonstrated through the many friendships that he formed and the respect with which he was held. However, Mr. Brown's replacement, Mr. Smith was very different:

*Mr. Brown's successor was the Reverend James Smith, and he was a different kind of man. He condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal. (TFA Chapter 22, 130)*

After Mr. Brown becomes ill and is forced to return to his homeland Reverend James Smith becomes the new head of the Christian church. He is the total opposite of Brown, Reverend Smith is nothing like Mr. Brown he is intolerant of clan customs, uncompromising and is very strict. He believes that what he is doing is right and the clan is wrong. Anyone bold enough to go against him is thought to be a devil. Dr Whittaker and Dr Msiska (2010) assert that Reverend Smith represents the pursuit of hegemonic ideals without the kind of critical reflexivity of an Obierika, and to some extent perhaps, even of a Mr. Brown. Reverend Smith demands that Igbo clansmen who convert to Christianity reject all indigenous beliefs. He is determined to follow a strict interpretation of the scriptures. Mr. Smith demonstrates his intolerance of Igbo beliefs when he suspends a woman convert from the Christian church who followed traditional custom regarding her dead Ogbanje child (possessed by evil).

*Within a few weeks of his arrival in Umuofia Mr. Smith suspended a young woman from the church for pouring new wine into old bottles. This woman had allowed her heathen husband to mutilate her dead child. The child had been declared an Ogbanje, plaguing its mother by dying and entering her womb to be born again. Four times this child had run its evil round. And so it was mutilated to discourage it from returning. (TFA Chapter 22, 130)*

Although Mr. Brown is more sympathetic with more understanding than Smith, it is crucial not to forget Mr. Brown's purposes of his real intentions. They all share the same goal that is to convert as quickly as possible all Igbos. Mr. Brown, as clever as he is, still seeks a control, like all the rest of his fellow British, over the lands and societies of Africa. Unlike Smith, Brown uses a good manner to succeed his mission. Brown may seem more kind, but he still wants the same cruel thing as Smith, Fagrutheen explains this through his article entitled *Downfall of Traditionalism in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God 2014*:

*In Things Fall Apart, the Europeans' understanding of Africa is particularly exemplified in two characters, the Reverend James Smith and Mr. Brown. Mr. Smith sees no need to compromise on unquestionable religious doctrine or practices even during their introduction to a society very different from his own. He simply does not recognize any benefit for allowing the Nigerians to retain laments of their heritage. Mr. Brown on the other hand prides himself on being a student of primitive customs and sees himself as a benevolent leader who has only the best intentions for learning the primitive tribes and bringing them also his culture. (27)*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is a survey on Achebe's conceptions about social and cultural change through *Things Fall Apart* and his orientations as an African writer. As presented in the novel, cultural and social changes are unavoidable in all societies. Culture and tradition can be changed due to the external and internal influences. In *Things Fall Apart* external influences are symbolised by Europeans and their ways of life whereas internal influences are characterised by Igbos' cleavages. Achebe shows how diverse cultural influences play an

important part in shaking social change. For example urbanisation, industrialisation, education and development of science have had major effects on the way in which Igbo people think, attitudes to authority, and have thus influenced their social structures, systems and values.

This chapter sheds also light on linguistic universality and the significant role of existentialist models character depicted by the writer through the novel. For him this universality relies on mixture of languages. As a result, language changes and that change, happens not through fate, but through the individual choices made by the speakers of that language. Finally it emphasizes the affinities between Sartreism and Achebe's collectivism and individualism from the existentialist point of view.



## Conclusion

*Things Fall Apart* was notable for being the first novel by a West African to portray how colonized subjects perceived the arrival of the colonizing Europeans, and one of Achebe's significant achievements in the novel is the way he succeeds in depicting Umuofia as a vibrant and sophisticated society, with its own complex culture. On the other hand, He shows the true identity of white men and the effects of European colonialism on Africa through the Igbo society. In the first place, the novel provided an image of an African society, reconstituted as a living entity and in its historic circumstance: an image of a coherent social structure forming the universe of meanings and values.

Then the writer presents some changes due to the European influence with their religion, modes of life and their conceptions about Africa. Achebe did not idealize both communities with their cultures or desire to portray Igbo community as an idyllic pre-colonial utopia. Ngara (1982) asserts that it is true that in *Things Fall Apart* Achebe represents or re-represents the cultural roots of the actual Igbo society in order to provide self-confidence. But at the same time the roots are referred to some universal principles and difference may be necessary in the frame of national self-confidence. The novel reveals that the perpetual human types recur in all cultures and that all effective civilizations must learn to deal with these types. Achebe's aim as he said is to present a humanity which is beyond the European and the African.

Achebe's goal of the novel is to neither support nor condemn either of the rival cultures that are presented, but to hold up a mirror to its readers and challenge them with their own strengths and weaknesses and those of their ways of life. It is not about colonisation or the rival claims of coloniser and colonised: rather about the rival claims of individual self-interest and expression versus the essential need for loyalty to the clan/tribe or nation.

Throughout the novel, from the beginning till the end the writer deals with the disappearance of culture, change and clarifies the motives behind such disappearance and change. It is first due to the disintegration within the Igbo society and second to the powerful wave of white European civilization. Bhabha in his book entitled *The Location of Culture* (1994) denies categorically the existence of a culture which is not only pure and homogenous. According to him, every culture is determined according to a space. Achebe's depiction of his characters explains clearly the change process of culture.

*Things Fall Apart* contains characters that categorise two different types within each community (Igbo and English). For instance, within Igbo society, there are those who are for change and others who are against change. Those who are in favour of change are people (outcasts) for example who do not have place, titles in Igbo society. And also those who have been undergoing hard times: case of woman who loses twins several times which is considered an abomination to Earth and those who lose their closest friend (case of Nwoye) and wise men who do not want to fight in order to avoid war and killings (case of Obierika).

Another category within Igbo society is characterised by men like Okonkwo who do not want any change fearing of losing their social status and rank. Unlike Igbo society, Achebe presents English society with different character point of view. Mr. Brown and Reverend Smith are presented as Christian missionaries who are a major cause of the things falling apart. It is obvious that Achebe, without being critical of Christianity as a religion, criticizes the methods that were used by the white colonizers to undermine the African culture. While the conversion tactics used by the two missionaries are very different; Mr. Brown is moderate and tries to establish a good relationship with the people while Reverend Smith is intolerant and uncompromising and causes major conflicts inside the Umuofia clan both contribute to the same end: the falling apart of a culture. The portrayal of such characters by Achebe is to show that no culture or society is inflexible; this comes to confirm Bhabha's

conception of the existence of culture which is every culture is determined according to a space. The process of cultural change has to be defined according to the needs and space of a society not by force or imposition. Therefore, Achebe suggests such new way of conduct in Africa to articulate a new vision of the African world and to give expression to a new sense of the African experience.

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## Résumé

Cette thèse est une étude du changement et de la tradition dans roman *Le Monde s'effondre* d'Achebe. Dans le roman, Achebe rachète les conceptions erronées des romans européens qui représentent les Africains comme des sauvages dans une toute nouvelle lumière avec sa représentation de la société Igbo. Il présente au lecteur l'histoire de son peuple avec ses points forts et les imperfections en décrivant par exemple, festivals Igbo, le culte de leurs dieux et les pratiques dans leurs cérémonies rituelles, leur riche culture et d'autres pratiques sociales, l'époque coloniale qui retardait la culture Igbo et aussi apportait une certaine nouveauté à leur culture. Le but de cette étude est d'étudier les effets du changement et de la tradition sur la société Igbo de perspectives à la fois africaines et européennes. La tension de savoir si le changement doit être dominant sur la tradition implique souvent des questions de statut personnel. Cela nous a conduit à avoir un regard sur le monde existentialiste (du point de vue de Sartre) qui aborde les questions de statut personnel, le choix, la décision, le changement, l'existence, la liberté. Ainsi, cette enquête aboutit à la conclusion que les modèles de comportement entre les Blancs et les personnes d'Igbo ont eu des conséquences à la fois positives et négatives sur la vie de la société et de la tradition Igbo.

Mots clés: Changement, tradition, Achebe, la culture, la société Igbo, Européens, époque coloniale