

COLONIALITY AND CULTURAL TRAUMA IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S "THINGS FALL APART"

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Abstract

This paper examines the themes of coloniality and cultural trauma in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, examining how British colonialism upsets Igbo society and creates deep psychological and cultural repercussions. Through the figure of Okonkwo, Achebe depicts the individual and collective trauma that arises from colonial rule. The research utilizes postcolonial theory and trauma studies to analyze how colonial domination deconstructs native frameworks, destroys cultural identity, and inflicts epistemic violence. Achebe's novel is also a counter-narrative to Eurocentric representations of Africa, more specifically, a challenge to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe's description of trauma supports Frantz Fanon's theories of colonial psychology with the example of "Wretched of Earth". By placing in the forefront Igbo customs, language, and narrative, *Things Fall Apart* offers an important framework of understanding the long-term impact of colonial domination on colonized cultures. This essay contends that the novel not only records the ruinous power of coloniality but also emphasizes the strength of indigenous narratives in the face of historical erasure.

Keywords: Coloniality, Trauma, Igbo Society, Frantz Fanon

Colonialism has had a lasting effect on once-colonized societies, not just in terms of physical conquest but also cultural and psychological trauma. Coloniality, a concept derived by Aníbal Quijano, describes the enduring structures of power, knowledge, and identity imposed under colonial rule, which continue to inform postcolonial realities. Cultural trauma, as described by theorists such as Jeffrey C. Alexander and Frantz Fanon, is the situation where a collective group feels identity fragmentation from forces outside the group.

The book *Things Fall Apart* is authored by the late Chinua Achebe who was a Nigerian writer. The novel is set in the periphery of Nigeria in a small imaginary village, Umuofia just prior to the arrival of white missionaries in their country. As a result of the sudden arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia, the villagers do not

know how respond to the sudden cultural transformation that the missionaries stand to alter through their new political organization and institutions. This essay thus seeks to examine the impact of European colonization on Igbo culture.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century the majority of European nations moved to Africa and other regions of the globe where they founded colonies. Nigeria was among other African countries that hosted visitors who had come on a mission to colonize; spreading their religion and culture which is subsequently imposed on Igbo. The culture of the individuals of Umuofia (Igbo culture) is greatly threatened by this transformation. Achebe's main intention of composing the novel is due to the fact that he desires to enlighten his readers on the importance of his culture as an African. *Things Fall Apart* gives readers a glimpse of Igbo society just prior to the invasion of the white missionaries on their continent. The colonization invasion threatens to alter nearly every facet of Igbo society; from religion, gender relations and roles traditional to family structure and trade.

Therefore, Achebe accuses the white colonizing missionaries' rule and or invasion of causing the post-colonial oppressed Igbo culture, such oppression is perceivable in terms of the corresponding oppressed social coherence between individual and society. In addition, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicts pre-colonial Igbo society as multifaceted, ruled by ancestral customs, oral discourse, and communal rule. But the coming of British colonial officials and Christian missionaries brings with it a novel socio-political order that destabilizes indigenous authority.

Things Fall Apart (1958) is a literary examination of these issues, illustrating how British imperialism causes the breakdown of Igbo tradition, government, and identity. In the downfall of Okonkwo and his people, the novel documents the existential crisis of native societies under colonialism. This essay critically analyzes the ways in which Achebe depicts coloniality and cultural trauma, maintaining that *Things Fall Apart* is both a historical document and a postcolonial resistance text.

The book brings out prominent features of coloniality. The British imposition of Western religion and education makes Igbo knowledge systems irrelevant shows the epistemic Violence and cultural erasure the establishment of Christianity brings about ideological disputes, which results in internal strife. The colonial state imposes a non-Igbo judicial system; overlooking Igbo customs, as evident in the arrest of village elders, reflect the legal and political domination. The transition to a colonial economy undervalues native labor and upsets social hierarchies. The disintegration of these systems marks the loss of indigenous identity, leading to a deep sense of cultural loss.

The novel also explores the psychological impact of colonial disruption, specifically through the character of Okonkwo. His refusal to adapt and eventual

suicide represent the larger trauma of his community. Okonkwo as Cultural Trauma, his strict adherence to traditional masculinity and aversion to weakness exemplify the fears of a society under forced change. His failure to adapt to colonial modernity is his undoing. Generational and Ideological Rifts exemplified by, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, represents the younger generation which welcomes colonial influence, causing an irreparable gap within the family and society.

This inner turmoil is echoed in the greater battles of colonized people. Suicide as a Metaphor for Cultural Collapse, suicide, in Igbo culture, is an abomination. Okonkwo's action represents the absolute cost of cultural disconnection when the person's identity is made obsolete by the outside.

Achebe's description of trauma supports Frantz Fanon's theories of colonial psychology, which posit that colonial subjects are psychologically damaged as a result of systemic oppression and cultural dislocation. Fanon discusses how colonialism induces profound psychological trauma, especially in the idea of "the colonized mind." Colonized individuals suffer from an identity crisis due to having to reconcile their indigenous heritage with the colonizer's imposed identity. This results in internalized racism, inferiority complex, and loss of self-esteem. According to Fanon, this psychological trauma can only be cured by violent resistance and the re-appropriation of indigenous identity.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's masculinity and self-concept are closely rooted in the traditional values of his culture. The invasion of colonial forces and the disruption of these values propel him into an existential crisis. His individual tragedy is a reflection of the greater cultural trauma of the Igbo people, where their identity is broken by foreign imposition.

Much of the importance of *Things Fall Apart* lies in its status as a counter-narrative to colonial literature, especially Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Reclaiming African Agency, while Conrad describes Africa as a land of darkness and disorder, Achebe offers a sophisticated pre-colonial civilization with its own morality and system of government. Oral Tradition as Resistance: The employment of Igbo proverbs, myths, and linguistic forms in the novel resists Western literary dominance and asserts African cultural heritage.

Challenging the "Civilizing Mission" Narrative: Achebe uncovers the violence and hypocrisy of colonialism, refuting the notion that European intervention was a force for good. Through reimagining the African experience from an indigenous voice, Achebe subverts the colonial gaze and reinstates historical consciousness.

Things Fall Apart is still a foundational work in postcolonial studies, providing a complex analysis of coloniality and cultural trauma. Achebe not only chronicles the devastating effects of colonial occupation but also highlights the persistence of native identity. The novel's exploration of epistemic violence, psychic

dissolution, and postcolonial resistance makes it a crucial text for grasping the enduring legacy of colonial domination. By recovering African history and narrative, Achebe resists mainstream accounts and confirms the potential of literature as an agent for historical and cultural recovery.

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