

# Identity Crisis in Africa During Colonial Era as Reflected in Chinua Achebe's Novel Things Fall Apart

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## Abstract

Globally, readers have been really drawn to African literature. In African literature, nearly every writer has focused on the interaction between Africa and the West. African writings capture the rich complexity and diversity of post-colonial African realities. Writers who have explored social and cultural identity through their history and customs include Wole Soyinka, T. M. Aluko, Chinua Achebe, Ayi Armah, and James Ngugi. By depicting the misery of African people, societal ills, corruption, political injustice, and economic imbalance, it has been fulfilling social purposes. As a result of colonization, the majority of the protagonists are discovered to be caught between tradition and modernity. Because of the cultural collision, they experience a great deal of pressure and tension as they search for their identity. Outside of Nigeria, Chinua Achebe popularized Igbo culture. In actuality, Nigeria is the largest country in black West Africa. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Achebe is a novel about Igbo life. The historical background of Africa is also presented. Chinua Achebe investigates the deep identity crisis that Okonkwo and his Igbo community experience when colonization upends their traditional beliefs, causing them to face a loss of cultural identity and a changing sense of self. This research paper examines the identity crisis that African communities have experienced as a result of colonial control, with a focus on *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Nationalism, Nativism, Alien, Other, Culture, Community, etc.

## Introduction:

Readers from all around the world have been really drawn to African literature. Nearly every writer in African literature has focused on the interactions between Africa and the West. African writings capture the rich complexity and diversity of post-colonial African realities. Through their history and customs, authors like as Wole Soyinka, James Ngugi, T. M. Aluko, Ayi Armah, and Chinua Achebe have been addressing the topics of social and cultural identity. By depicting the suffering of Africans, societal ills, corruption, political injustice, and economic disparity, it has been accomplishing social objectives. As a result of colonization, the majority of the protagonists are discovered to be caught between tradition and modernity. Because of the cultural collision, they experience a great deal of pressure and tension as they search for their identity. It's also true that African writing has matured. It has undergone a transformation from being written in the Igbo language, the native tongue of Africa, to being written in English. It is acknowledged as expanding literature as well. More significantly, Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize in 1986 as a result of it. Additionally, it captivated Western imaginations by portraying African mythology and folklore. In popular culture, Africa was associated with cannibals, jungles, valleys, and wildlife. However, readers became acquainted with the depth of the continent's traditional and cultural legacy over time thanks to its writings. It also displays the African people's stated emotions as well as the stresses, concerns, hopes, and fears that follow. According to R. K. Dhawan (1987), "The logic of cultural transition, compelling new ways of self – differentiation, and new forgeries of identity, continuity and affiliation are the central premise of these literatures" (p. 5). Because of the profound effects of colonialism on their culture and education, African writers felt it was their moral obligation to write about it. They are all therefore found to be constantly learning about and rediscovering the history and customs in an effort to find their cultural identity. Prominent African author Chinua Achebe has also drawn contrasts between Western and indigenous cultures in his writings. Outside of Nigeria, Chinua Achebe popularized Igbo culture. In actuality, Nigeria is the largest country in black West Africa. It is extremely large and populated. There are three main ethnic groupings there. These are the Igbo in the south-east, the Yoruba in the south-west, and the Hausa-Fulani, who rule the north. The Igbos lacked strong chiefs and any organized, well-established

institutions. Although there is no hierarchy, the labor is divided in a methodical manner. They have diviners, medicine men, priests, and so forth. People typically congregate in the marketplace to have conversations and make decisions.

It is, nonetheless, an achievement-focused, egalitarian, and agrarian society. Through certain titles, people are recognized for their accomplishments and output. From the moment of birth to the moment of death, they also observe rites such as peace week, naming ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, and title-taking ceremonies. They do funeral rites. In addition, they have faith in both personal gods like Ikenga and Chi as well as public deities like Ulu, Idemili, and Eru. Chukwu is their ultimate god; other gods include Ala, Ani, and so forth. The masked Egwugwu is another representation of their forefathers. Achebe has also addressed psychological crises brought on by cultural clashes. Nonetheless, the novels are more concerned with the community as a whole than with the individuals. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) depicts the frustration of the entire Igbo society, not only Okonkwo. The same is emphasized by the Christian notion of alien culture triumphing over native culture. As a result, he has been concentrating on the issues that affect all of African society, especially Igbo society, as well as collective consciousness rather than individual consciousness.

Achebe's book *Things Fall Apart* explores Igbo civilization. The historical background of Africa is also presented. Actually, it is this body of work that has elevated Achebe to the status of distinguished African writers of English. Here, Okonkwo is the main subject. Nonetheless, he stands in for the community symbolically. The entire Igbo community can be seen in his frustration. The narrative portrays Nigeria's pre-colonial state at some point in the late 19th century, prior to the entrance of White people in Africa. Okonkwo does not demonstrate adaptability or flexibility. Even if the White people's new ideals and administrative structures are accepted by the cohesive and organic society, the White man is unable to accept the transition and ends his life.

The scene of *Things Fall Apart* is an Igbo village. It depicts the history of Igbo territory from 1875 to 1904. The region of Igbo land lies in southeast Nigeria. The main character of the narrative is Okonkwo, who tragically is unable to adjust to the changes that the colonial invaders have brought about in his village. The conflicts between the Igbo village tribes and the British colonial authority are also present. Furthermore, all of this causes the Igbo community in the Umuofia village to split into three main factions: the colonizers, the first-converted Christians and those chosen and assigned by the colonial authorities through their rule, and the marginalized and shunned "others." Unoka, Okonkwo's father, promises Okoye that he will settle big bills first. Even throughout his father's lifetime and beyond, Okonkwo had to start his life on his own following Unoka's death in a state of great debt. He put a lot of effort into his work, driven by fear of his father's disgraceful life and shameful death.

The Igbo society was safe and sternly regulated, as Achebe depicted it. It was quite well organized, in a sense. The elders oversaw, controlled, and governed it. Periodically, priests would step in to mediate. They were considered to be in intimate communication with the ancestors' spirits. The belief in life after death was highly held in the society. It was believed that this life was just a continuation of the previous. There was always the chance that it would be viewed as superstitious. However, Achebe believes that society, including the customs and beliefs, have a philosophy. It wasn't barbaric. In the past, Igbo people believed that life was a journey towards death. The old Igbo community also accorded enormous honor to the ancestors. There were other criteria for leadership than age.

A man's notoriety was never dependent on that of his forebears. One needed to ensure their own position in the community. In this civilization, hard work was valued and sloth was frowned upon. The offerings made to god were never understood by the priests as a replacement for long hours of labor. The priestess' encouragement of hard labor for all points to a unique blend of spirituality and pragmatism in traditional Igbo society. Furthermore, worship was not intended for worldly wealth. Furthermore, a strong emphasis on hard work prepares people for success in the actual world. According to Achebe (1958), "Fortunately among those people a man was judged according to his own worth and not according to the worth of his father" (p. 7).

Okonkwo was the son of Unoka, a failed businessman. As Achebe distinguishes between the father and the son, the narrative progresses. In the community, Unoka possessed no titles. He was a debtor, careless, and indolent. Because of these characteristics, Okonkwo began to despise his father, considering his personality a disgrace to both his clan and himself. He was quite unhappy and haunted by the actions of a cowardly and spendthrift father. He died without any kind of reputation leaving a lot of debt on his head. Unlike his father, Okonkwo was a brave warrior, respected among the Umuofia clan among nine connected villages. In the tribal wars, he earned two titles at an early age. He also brought honour to his village, having thrown the great wrestler known as Amalinze at the age of eighteen.

In an incident, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a respected village elder passed away. Through the use of a musical instrument called the ekwe, the surrounding villages were informed of his death. In Igbo community, firing guns and beating drums are customary final salutes during funerals. Unfortunately, Okonkwo's gun explodes, killing Ogbuefi Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son. The youngest son of Ezeudu had his heart pierced by a piece of iron from Okonkwo's rifle. Since it was an offense against the Goddess Earth, Okonkwo was banished for a grueling seven years. As David Carroll (1980) remarks, "Okonkwo becomes a victim of the harsh laws he had previously defended and administered (p. 47)"

In actuality, the exile was the pivotal moment. Upon his return from banishment, Okonkwo saw his town was in disarray. Six missionaries had journeyed to Mbanta. Mr. Kiaga was the interpreter present. Through that interpreter, Mr. Brown, the missionary leader, addressed the villagers. He once persuaded people to stop worshiping multiple deities. Regretfully, the locals were aware of the Holy Trinity. They were therefore unable to embrace the idea of a single God. Nwoye's, his son, defiance of his gods and following the New Faith had shocked Okonkwo. He thinks even of killing his son if they all will follow the path of Nwoye. Okonkwo finds himself helpless in case of Nwoye as he had already considered Nwoye as worthless reason to fight for. But he resolves to fight against the New Faith. G.D. Killam (1969) comments, "But the way has been prepared for the inevitable clash between Okonkwo, symbolizing the traditional way of life, and the new order, symbolized by the Christian Church" (p. 28).

Umuofia's inhabitants were being attempted to convert to Christianity. People who suddenly become Christians have a sudden change of heart regarding every tradition they have grown up adhering to. They suddenly view anything associated with the Umuofia's traditional practices as "bad". As Okonkwo (1958) says: "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 bad" (p.25-26).

Mr. Brown did not, however, disregard the people or their beliefs. Regretfully, Mr. Brown became unwell. The harsh and intolerable Reverend James Smith took his position. A convert named Enoch unmasked an Ekwugwu in the meantime. It happened at the yearly ritual honoring the earth goddess. For the Igbo people, it was the same as destroying an ancestor's spirit. The Ekwugwu destroyed Reverend Smith's church and Enoch's compound with fire the very next day. Actually, Okonkwo took the lead in this developing dispute between the village elders and the Christian missionaries. He and five other elders were taken into custody and imprisoned for their roles in the church fire. The District Commissioner had to subject them to physical torture, humiliation, and insults there. After paying a fine, they were all set free. He points out how everything has undergone change in his following comment: "Even a man's motherland is strange to him nowadays" (p. 100).

## **Conclusion**

In the market place, they convened a meeting. However, it is cut short. The conference was to be dissolved, according to the five messengers who arrived. When Okonkwo could take it no more, he used his machete to murder the chief messenger. However, after the others were permitted to leave, he saw that his people were unwilling to engage in combat. Okonkwo killed himself by hanging himself, taking no time to consider his next move. But it was unlawful once more. He suffered the consequences. Instead of being buried, his remains were cast into the terrible forest. Consequently, even after his death, a man who had been accorded tremendous honour during his live and had dedicated his life to the cause of his land had to endure disgrace.

To sum up, Okonkwo's displeasure is shared by the entire Igbo community, not just him. As a result, he has been concentrating on the issues that affect all of African society, especially Igbo society, as well as collective consciousness rather than individual consciousness. The strongest evidence for the veracity of this claim comes from Chinua Achebe, whose books faithfully reflect the postcolonial colours that obscure the ambitions and hopes of the community to which he belongs. The tribe's reliance on traditional religions and all of the values they represent has significantly decreased, if not completely disappeared.

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