

**Colonialism in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart:
An Analytical Approach**

Mariwan Hasan*

Department of English, College of Basic Education, Sulaimani University, Iraq.

Gullan Karim

Sulaimani University, Iraq

Nigar Hassan

Sulaimani University, Iraq

Rezhin Ahmed

Sulaimani University, Iraq

*Corresponding author E-mail: mariwan152@live.com

ABSTRACT

This paper studies *Things Fall Apart* via adopting an analytical approach that sheds light on colonialism that has different phases for African countries. They explore the land and finally give excuses for colonizing it. Through analyzing the incidents of the novel the negative role of the colonizer will be demonstrated which is obvious in causing psychological problems for the colonized people of Africa. The paper also illustrates Achebe's purpose in writing *Things Fall Apart* as a critique of the British, who colonized African people. His upset about colonialism is demonstrated, which ruined the core of his society, and the novelist wants to make all the people, especially Africans and British aware of the history of African people and their agonies.

Keywords: exploration; invasion; excuses; Achebe; *Things Fall Apart*; Africa;

Introduction

To explore and analyze colonialism in *Things Fall Apart*, it is necessary to give some definitions of the term "colonialism". The word colonialism, as explained in the *Oxford English Dictionary* derived from the Greek "colonia" that conveyed field (a land for agriculture or animal breeding) or residence, which was used to the Greeks who resided in another region; however, they maintained ties with their homeland and remained nationals of their home state. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, colonialism is defined as a group of

foreigners, who reside in another region and build a new society that is tied to their homeland with keeping their citizenship (Loomba 2005).

Although the definition includes a brief meaning and the aim of colonialism, it is ambiguous about how the outsiders work to colonize the region that they want.

Accordingly, colonialism can be defined as settling of foreigners in other regions to dominate and control the whole society to change it into a different community that will be similar with their own land, by spreading their own cultures, customs and beliefs

gradually with the aim of achievement of their own interests, economically, culturally and politically.

Colonialism in Africa

Sudan is a belt of grassland that runs across western Africa. The word comes from "the country of the Sudanese countries", "the land of the blacks". The northern coast of Sudan, the coast, merges into the desert and has long been affected by exchanges with the desert and forests and with mountainous regions such as Futa Jallon in Guinea, in all regions of Africa, the region that has experienced the longest development of agriculture, markets, far-reaching trade, and complex political systems. It was also the first sub-Saharan region where African Islam is rooted and flowered. This study is concerned with three former French colonies: Senegal, Guinea, and the agricultural part of Mali. For most of modern history, western Sudan was a source of slaves in other parts of the world. In the early 2000s, provision of Portuguese began in the fifteenth century, people were directed to the slave trade in the Atlantic Ocean. A long period of participation, over a thousand years for the deserts trade and four centuries for the Atlantic trade, formed its foundations, through other areas below the coast that were able by the eighteenth century to provide more slaves. (Klein 1)

Most African slaves arose as prisoners of war. The desire for spoils encouraged war, shaped the way the war was fought, and, as a consequence, the political systems of gentile nations. Major military campaigns generally took place during the dry season, but raids and kidnappings can take place at any time of the year and generally involve small teams. They were probably on the borders of kingdoms or the side of the desert, but

kidnapping was a problem in many kingdoms, and it was often severely punished. The vast majority of male prisoners were sold in the Atlantic trade while women dominated the desert trade. Most of those held in Africa were women and children. With the end of the Atlantic trade, it became commonplace to simply kill male prisoners, who were more difficult to handle and absorb. (Klein 1998)

Colonialists Investigation in Africa

Italian was founded in 1867, just one year after the new kingdom acquired Venetia, an important step on the road to unification. In Portuguese colonial history, the Sociedade de Geografia Company played an important role in 1875. At the same time, the increased interest in indigenous races has sparked interest on the part of humanity and missionary enthusiasm, as well as the commercial and scientific endeavor, to form several specialized bodies. These included the ethnological community in London, founded in 1843, and later the Society for the Protection of Indigenous Populations, which is part of a human foyer, somewhat an ethnographic study group, which willingly declared its belief in the unity of mankind by taking its slogan abune sanguine. Other similar organizations include the Societe des Anthropologists of Paris (dating back to 1859) and the anthropology of Gesellschaft in Vienna (founded in 1870). (Gann and Duignan 1969)

On the eve of the colonial invasion and occupation

By 1880 they had succeeded in filling the huge economic void created by the cessation of the slave trade. By that date, instead of humans, the mainstays of Africa's internal economy were ivory, gum

or cup, cloves, beeswax, honey, wild coffee, peanuts, cotton, and above all rubber. Indeed, in Ghana, rubber did not become the second-largest export, with the first being palm oil, but by 1891 Ghana had become the largest rubber producer in the British Empire and the third in the world. In eastern, central, and tropical Africa, ivory became the largest export, followed by wax and cobalt, and after 1870, rubber. The consequences of this evolutionary shift from the slave trade to the trade in natural products were truly enormous. First, the steady decline in the slave trade meant a similar end to the wars and raids that produced slaves, thereby bringing peace and stability to the regions of the continent that were the main source of this in human trafficking. (Boahen 2011)

Analysis of *Things Fall Apart*

The work of *Things Fall Apart* is composed by the African novelist Chinua Achebe. It was "published" in 1958 for the first time, and it was one of the effective works that caused to the rebirth of the literature of Africa later (Achebe).

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born on 16 November 1930 in Ogidi, Nigeria, and he died on 21 March 2013 in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S (Achebe).

Chinua Achebe lived in Nigeria during the age of colonialism in which Nigeria was colonized by the British. The writer wanted to represent the real life of people in Nigeria during the age of colonialism in his novel. The novel is written in English to be understood by all people, and to make all people aware of their misunderstandings about the Nigerian society.

The novel, *Things Fall Apart* takes place in Nigeria and shows the life of people during pre-colonial, colonial, and

postcolonial times.

At the beginning of the novel, the writer wants to show the life of people, cultures, beliefs and religions in Nigeria before the coming of British.

Okonkwo is the protagonist of the novel who resembles most of the realities of Nigeria. He is an Igbo hero of Umuofia. He is nicknamed as Amalinze the cat because he is strong. Okonkwo is a leader of Umuofia which is one of the nine villages of Nigeria. One of the themes of the novel relates to the protagonist which is insecurity or fear. Okonkwo lives in fear and insecurity, fear of failure and weakness. His father Unoka died a shameful death because he spent all his life like playing flute and drinking palm wine. All the villagers thought like he was the loser. For this reason, Okonkwo hates everything that his father loved and he struggles so much to win the championships. He lives opposite to his father in order not to be a loser. Accordingly, he spends all his life in insecurity.

A boy from a neighboring tribe is given to Okonkwo in order not to allow a battle to take place between them. The boy (Ikemefuna) lives with Okonkwo's family and has a good relationship with Okonkwo's son, Nwoye.

"Even Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy-inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength. He therefore treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else-with a heavy hand" (Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*). In this quote, how much Okonkwo cares about his strength can be seen. He never represses his emotions except anger to appear strong among people, because in his thoughts anger is a sign of

strength and other emotions are signs of weakness. While he loves Ikemefuna, he does not show him empathy in front of people, because he does not want to become like his father, who was weak and could not take care of himself.

But later, the respected older villager informs Okonkwo that the oracle had said that the boy must be killed. Although he warns Okonkwo not to participate in the killing, Okonkwo kills the boy by himself, in order not to be said he is a weak leader. When his own son, Nwoye hears that his father killed his brother he stops his connection with his father.

The events are going badly when Okonkwo shoots a boy with his gun by accident, and this is a crime against the earth goddess. For this reason, Okonkwo and his family are sent to exile for seven years.

At the climax of the novel, the writer wants to explain how the colonization occurred, how Britain could control Nigeria by their own good techniques that people could not feel it.

During the seven years, the exile of Okonkwo the white men missionaries come to Umuofia, Igbo, and then to the other clans. They want to colonize the land secretly. They start by changing and disturbing the psychological thinking of the people—changing their beliefs to Christianity, and with the name of civilization, they make schools, courts, jails, and churches. Bypassing time more people are coming toward Christianity. Even Okonkwo's boy Nwoye becomes Christian, and people start to think that the European are better than themselves. So, British power becomes the dominant power in Nigeria.

During these years, Obierika who is Okonkwo's friend, he sometimes visits Okonkwo and talks about everything that

happened in Umuofia. In one of their discussions, Obierika says that “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” (Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*). Obierika's quote resembles Achebe's thought about colonialism. He worries about his land which is controlled by foreigners in such an easy way. Although they did not know anything about their language traditions, they could colonize their land by using their quiet techniques. They put a knife on the things that held the Nigerian people together in order to be fallen apart. And then they could be easily controlled. In this discussion. While Achebe blames the colonizers, he also blames Umuofians who have turned their backs on their own brothers and turned to Christianity. They have facilitated the colonialism process.

After seven years, when Okonkwo comes back, everything has changed. Nothing is like before. He wants to fight them and not to allow them to control their land, but it is too late.

Mr. Brown the white missionary is kind to the people, talks about their beliefs and tries to understand their tradition. After Mr. Brown, Reverend James Smith comes as a new head who is unlike Mr. Brown. He is quite strict and uses violence. When he learns

that the church is destroyed, he orders his supporters that the six leaders of the village, including Okonkwo to be jailed. So, they have to pay a fine in order to be free.

As a result, at the middle of the novel, the writer wants to show how Nigeria in real life was colonized, and to show the techniques the British colonizer used to control Nigeria and the way they used the scientific theories, such as “Darwin’s Evolution” theory, to prove that Europeans are better than Africans based on Darwin’s Evolution theory. So, they should control and govern them, and with the name of civilization, they could colonize the land.

Furthermore, at the resolution of the novel, after the leaders are set free, one day Okonkwo and other clansmen are in a meeting together. Suddenly five court messengers arrive and break it up. Okonkwo beheads one of the messengers, but the other men who are in the meeting do not support him. “Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: Why did he do it?” (Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*) Then Okonkwo understands that these people do not follow him and do not go to war against British people. He understands that this society has fallen apart and it is impossible to return to its origin.

As a result, Okonkwo’s inside is completely broken and feels guilty. For these reasons, Okonkwo decides to commit suicide.

At the end, when the district commissioner arrives to arrest Okonkwo, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself and no longer he is alive.

Committing suicide by Okonkwo indicates that the Nigerian society is

disturbed psychologically, and the death of Okonkwo shows that everything in the Nigerian society has fallen apart. So, Nigerian cultures, traditions, beliefs, and religions are extinct.

Colonialism in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

Does the white man understand our customs 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.'(Emenyonu 1990)

According to the above quote in we realize that colonizers had broken down the rules which guide lined Igbo society, culturally, socially, religiously and many more aspects of their lives. Moreover, the Christian missionaries who come and establish among the Igbo have come initially to turn the population of Igbo society from their previous ways and religious faiths and attitudes, not through conviction, but by a constant force of an obtrusive dogma. The colonial administrators, known as District Officers (Commissioners), have also come to colonize and assure the Igbo areas for the British Government. (Emenyonu 1990)

Arriving of the white man with his government fractured this old tradition and there was a great struggle between the new and the old disposal. The white man set his own court which was administrated by the District Commissioner. The District

Commissioners were ordered to have 'judged cases in ignorance' because they were foreigners and did not know the customs of the people, especially in land disputes. Besides that, the commissioners scolded the customs, identities, and beliefs of Igbo society, so that they set different rules for them to follow. Some people allowed their rules without any complaint and this was a great cudgel to the culture and religion of Igbo society. The commissioners also punished those who were not following the rules either by flogging or hanging. (Emenyonu 1990)

Mahbul Alam in his essay argues that "In *Things Fall Apart* we see that before the advent of the colonial power the people of Umuofia lived in communal agreement in an organic society of economic, cultural, political and religious stability. But colonial rule turns the social stability into instability and disintegration. The title of the novel itself signifies this claim- things are no longer in order; colonialism has made them disordered. Before colonialism, in Igbo land, we see that people performed various cultural issues without anxiety. But colonialism comes and imposes restrictions on those performances. Colonialism makes the Igbo 'drained of' their 'essence'. Okonkwo symbolizes the essence of Umuofia; the suicide of Okonkwo, which is also a colonial effect, signifies the suicide of Umuofia's essence. Colonialism makes 'extraordinary possibilities' of the indigenous people 'wiped out'. Okonkwo stands for that extraordinary possibility which is wiped out through his suicide. Okonkwo symbolizes that 'mighty voices' which Cesaire claims is 'stilled forever' by the colonial power". (Alam 2014)

Ezenweke and Nwadiolor declared that "The colonial masters bring with them different ideologies and philosophies about

human relations such as individualism and Marxism. In the African philosophy of relationship, a person is fundamentally defined as 'being-with' or 'belonging to'. But Western philosophy emphasizes the condition of a human person as 'a being for itself'.

Accordingly, we realize that through their power in Igbo society the white man changed most of Nigerian society, for example, the individualism ideology that brings about by the colonizers was a reason to damage and decimate the unity, conjoint, relationship and association in Igbo society. For example, the relation between Okonkwo and his son (Nwoye) had completely changed when Obierika asked Nwoye about Okonkwo, Nwoye replied "I don't know. He is not my father" Christian colonizers were the main reason for this individual changes in Igbo society. (Alam 2014)

Okonkwo is the last person to preserve his identity. But his grievance of both colonial power and his people's "flux" disgruntled him. Most of his companions have been murdered or sent to jail by the whites, so he becomes the last jingoism guardian. on the other hand, the ignorance of his people to him and following the British commissioners lead him to commit suicide to escape from the disgrace realities. (Nimer 2016)

Conclusions

Chinua Achebe lived in Nigeria during those years in which Nigeria was colonized by the British. The Nigerian society had extremely changed and had lost its identity. Achebe wanted to illustrate the history of Nigerian society to all the people clearly, and he wanted to provide awareness to all the people, especially African and European people about colonialism, to show how

colonialism destroyed the identities of the Nigerian society. For this reason, he wrote the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, which was published in 1958.

Because of the importance of this novel, many writers expressed their opinions about it, especially about one of the most important themes of it, which is colonialism. While there are different opinions about this theme, Achebe's feelings about colonialism can be seen in the novel. He is upset about losing his society when the British came and colonized their lands by their secret techniques. They tried to disturb Nigerian's psychology by making doubts about Nigerian's religion and making them come toward Christianity. With the name of civilization, they built churches, schools, courts, and hospitals. They changed Nigerian cultures, traditions, and customs into European's, gradually.

At the end of the novel how the society destroyed can be seen, by committing suicide by the main character. Death of the main character conveys the death of Nigerian society.

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