



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English

IMPACT OF IMPERIALISM ON CULTURE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND *ARROW OF GOD*

KEY WORDS:

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The Europeans held a Euro-centric view of the world; firmly believing European culture to be superior. Euro centrism therefore perceives Europe as the core of civilization and of humanity. Euro centrism had racist tendencies which granted an inferior status to the non-Whites. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays this tendencies of Europe clearly.

Things Fall Apart is one of the most influential novels of its time, both on a local and global scale. In order to fully understand the novel and its contents, it is important to look into the history of the novel that led to its publication. When Nigeria became a colony of Britain in 1906, the country became exposed to the British political structure and its various institutions. Achebe was born in 1930 almost a quarter of a century after the British assumed direct control of Nigeria. Although Achebe's parents at that time had been converted to Christianity, his grandparents were still firm believers in their traditional culture.

The change came as a result of his curiosity, as well as the curiosity of other young Africans who were exposed to education, as to why the Westerners have suddenly developed an interest in their land and were now more than ever determined to enlighten it.

Language is also a very important element to Igbo. It gives them a sense of belonging and they also use it as a means to preserve their culture and heritage. And although language is important to Igbo, it ultimately leads to the fall of their society. Igbo is a society that also appears to be sceptical about change. They refuse to send their children to school where they stand a chance to be able to read and write in the English language.

Despite Mr Brown, the White Officers efforts to show the villagers that they need to learn English because they are now being ruled by the European District Commissioner and other white missionaries who only communicate in English, the villagers still remain reluctant in educating their children. The Igbo depend on their language to differentiate them from other cultures. They also depend on language to define their social rank in their society. Okonkwo, the central character, for instance, when being compared to his father Unoka is considered as a wealthy man and not only because he has married a lot of women or his household produces many yams but because of his strength that helped him defeat one of the strongest wrestlers in the village. On the other hand, Unoka was a drunkard who had only one wife, not many yams and had no titles to his name by the time of his death.

The decision to follow Christianity by some members of Igbo society is greatly influenced by the suffering they had incurred from their own culture. Because they are so eager to get out of the pain and misery that Igbo religion had put them through, they do not realise that by joining the white missionaries they are actually making things harder for themselves in the long run. Achebe is successful in making readers aware that although the effect of European colonialism challenges the culture of Igbo, the benefits of it can also be seen. Igbo society stands to benefit from the school and from other smaller things such as bicycles that the white men come with.

Forcing Igbo people to abandon their own way of life to follow

theirs seems to be the only factor that makes the white missionaries bad people in history. The white missionaries take wrong approaches in their attempts to help civilize Igbo society. If all of the white missionaries who arrive in Umuofia had the same character as Mr Brown, all would have not been lost in the village and the missionaries would have not been referred to as such bad people as they are today. At first Mr Brown arrives in Umuofia with the hope that he will be able to convert most if not all of the villagers to Christianity as well as to introduce them to education.

The wrong approach taken by the Westerners is seen in their attitude towards the Igbo. They expect nothing but a total submission and gratitude from them. Their arrival in Umuofia itself comes unexpected and even before the Igbo accepts their presence the White venture to suppress them because they think they are more civilized and educated and also they should be the ones to rule in Umuofia and not Igbo. By so doing they immediately unintentionally belittled the status and importance of Igbo in their own land. This is a great disrespect to Igbo and their ancestors, which is what angered and offended the Igbo the most. It would have been pleasant if the missionaries held the Igbo people at the same high standard they thought they were at.

Achebe presents imperfections to readers that also contribute to the destruction of their culture; the main reason for the fall of the Igbo is caused by their inability and reluctance to learn English because they believe that they will never have to apply its usage in their everyday lives. Also, because the missionaries are stronger than the Igbo with regard to their advancement in modern day life and education, they have a stronger influence as well as controlling power of Igbo land and the Igbo themselves.

The land of the native Ibo in *Arrow of God* has recently been colonized by the British Administration. The people still live largely traditionally, but the ways of the white man encroach more and more on their traditions and everyday lives. There are several situations in the novel where the Ibo are confronted with the influence of their colonizers, some of which will be analysed and displayed to prove the presence of binarism and hegemony.

Towards the end of the novel Chief Priest Ezeulu, having been wrongfully imprisoned by the administration, fails to eat the Sacred Yam and to announce the annual harvest festival. This unfortunate turn of events leaves the starving Umuaro clan unable to harvest their yam. In the time of crisis, a Christian missionary devises a plan to show his god's superiority: His plan is quite simple. The New Yam Festival is the attempt of the misguided heathen to show gratitude to God, the giver of all good things. This is God's hour to save them from their error which is now threatening to ruin them. They must be told that if they make their thank-offering to God they could harvest their crops without any fear of Ulu.

To escape the tragedy of Ulu's Yam Festival, the people are urged to sacrifice to the white man's God so that they can gain protection from the Ibo deities, to 'harvest their crops without the fear of Ulu'. The people who ally themselves with the Christian God will also be safe from future famines to be brought upon them by the rigid and unforgiving Ibo priests. The white man's god offers salvation to the

desperate Ibo, who, although being 'misguided heathens', can be guided right and be forgiven as long as they turn their backs on their old gods.

consider that tribes can also become divided on their own. Hence the blame should go both ways and not just to the Europeans.

Throughout *Arrow of God* there are several cases where the colonisers present their interests to be superior. To steer off conflicts and keep a beneficial peace, the white man acts as an 'elder brother'. When conflicts do erupt, the white man puts an end to them and, in a display of force, even breaks the guns of Umuaro to save the clan from themselves. Furthermore, prosperity comes to those who trade with the white man's goods or work for the white man. Those who master the white man's language and writing gain even more power. At the same time, the colonizers' church claims to offer wisdom, experience and salvation, setting its believers above their peers.

The people of Umuaro become divided on their own without any external influences; this creates a very strong sense of hatred among them and the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood that once existed is lost. One of the similarities between *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is that both the people of Umuofia and Umuaro are divided as a result of the conflict that is caused by the arrival of the white missionaries in their villages.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the order of the Ibo society is disrupted with the appearance of the white man in Africa and with the introduction of white religion. Okonkwo, who is looked highly upon by his people, is unable to adapt to the changes that accompany colonization. He tries to live the traditional Ibo life; however the arrival of the white man into his society causes him to fall apart. In the end of the story, Okonkwo, in frustration, decapitates an employee of the British, then commits suicide which is a sin against the tradition to which he has clung to.

The conflict in the novel, vested in Okonkwo, derives from the series of crushing blows which are leveled at traditional values by an alien and more powerful culture causing, in the end, the traditional society to fall apart. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe recreated the tragic consequences that took place due to the clash between the Ibo society and the white man. By using a character such as Okonkwo, he showed how even the strong willed people of the Ibo society were unable to overcome the British influence. Traditional way of living for the Ibo society was rapidly changing in the early 1900's due to European colonization.

Many Nigerians were being absorbed by the British and were straying from their traditional beliefs and values. With the advent of the white man there was a loss of native values such as communal harmony, placing society above self, respect for the aged, and reverence for achievers, which resulted in the absence of self-analysis and a stable code of ethics in the society of pre-Independent Nigeria. Lured by western education and well-paying jobs, the youth of the country did not hesitate to stoop to the levels of immorality. Dangerous permissiveness is shown clearly in Achebe's both the novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

The difference between Achebe's novel and other colonial novels is that his novel thoroughly examines Igbo society as he portrays them in a manner in which shows all aspects of Igbo culture, not only the desirable aspect of their culture. He also predicts the future of Igbo and where they are headed if the white missionaries are to be successful in taking control of Umuofia.

Both the novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, are rich with Igbo proverbs that Achebe translates into English for the benefit of his readers who are unfamiliar with Igbo" (Alimi p.121). Achebe timelessly uses proverbs in these novels both to preserve Igbo culture and language as well as to show their value to the entire Igbo community and to the World. Here, Achebe shows the readers that although the missionaries are to be blamed for the destructiveness of their religion and culture, readers should also