



# Chinua Achebe`s Occidental World and Okonkwo Conflict Based on African Trilogy.

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## Abstract

Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* made him the doyen of modern African writing in English, and this was reinforced the subsequent publication of *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*. They altogether came to be known as African Trilogy. These developments happened in the decades following the receding grip of the colonial powers not only in Africa, but world across. Edward Said's theory of Orientalism had a strong support wherein the Occidental was challenged in its own terms, much like sports, scientific developments, governance and other cultural markers. These happened at the time when literatures were being increasingly producing several magnum opuses by authors from Latin Americas, India, Middle East and South East Asian nations, most areas which were connected by colonialism. Achebe successfully brought out the conflict faced by the otherwise isolated cultures and how individuals/nationals were interacting with an interconnected world. This article therefore attempts to form a discussion on how in the African Trilogy, the protagonist, who was himself is representative of native African ideologies, tackled the changes of his self-vis-à-vis the changes of the community.

## **ACHEBE AND THE OCCIDENTAL WORLD**

What happens when everything is getting worse? The kids aren't working out like you expected. The partner is taking you insane, and the people you love and be with are falling apart. Okonkwo, the character of Chinua Achebe's 1958 masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, confronts this exact same plight. Okonkwo is the leader and a powerful person of the Igbo, an African cultural group, who live in the community of Umuofia. Okonkwo turns in the epitome of being a tragic hero, one whose marvelous talents take him to the heights of success but to make about his downfall.

The story of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* takes place in the Nigerian village of Umuofia in the late 1880s, before missionaries and other outsiders had arrived. The Ibo clan practices common tribal traditions- worship of gods, sacrifice, communal living, war, and magic. Leadership is based on a man's

personal worth and his contribution to the good of the tribe. Okonkwo stands out as a great leader of the Ibo tribe. Tribesmen respect Okonkwo for his many achievements. Even though the tribe reveres Okonkwo, he must be punished for his accidental shooting of a young tribesman. The Ibo ban Okonkwo from the clan for seven years. Upon his return to the village, Okonkwo finds the tribe divided by the influence of missionaries and the English bureaucrats who have interrupted the routine of tradition. Only when Okonkwo commits the ultimate sin against the tribe does the tribe come back together to honor criticism.

## **OKONKWO CONFLICT**

Critics consider Achebe's process of the struggle that arises when tradition encounters with geopolitical changes. He uses his characters and their specific words to represent the multiple tragedies that happen in the story. Audiences recognize not only with Okonkwo and his own hardships but also with the Igbo society and its destruction. Chinua Achebe published *Things Fall Apart* not for his fellow Nigerians, but for people beyond his indigenous land. He wanted to tell the fact about the consequences of losing one's society. Printed in 1958, this novel was not widely understood by Nigerians or by Africans in general.

Similar to other tragic heroes, Okonkwo also has a tragic flaw, which is a fear of weakness and failure. While the fear of failure and weakness drives Okonkwo to work hard and helps him earn his fame and achievement, on the other hand it also causes him many problems. Many times, throughout Okonkwo's life, his fear of failure and weakness leads him to act harshly, violently and impulsively towards other people, including his family members. Okonkwo is always harsh and violent with his family members because he doesn't want to be seen as a weak person. Okonkwo is a very prosperous and well-respected man throughout Umuofia, but his life is ruled by fear. His father was very weak and poor, and Okonkwo constantly fears that he will end up the same. Okonkwo fears being seen as less of a man, and this drives him to use harsh and abusive behavior towards his family. Okonkwo sees Nwoye as a boy who is prone to laziness, so he constantly torments his son, in hope that he will be shaped into a man. Okonkwo main fear is that he would end up resembling his father. His father, Unoka, was tall but very thin and had a slouched posture, whereas Okonkwo has shown great valour during two inter-tribal wars.

## **WHEN THINGS HAD ALREADY FALLEN APART**

It is just at No Longer at Ease that the confrontation between the reality of colonialism and older Nigerian beliefs take centerstage. Also, an important role is played by Obi, who is the grandchild of Okonkwo. These people of his village get banded together to direct him to England for *The Education*. When Obi returns to the business at the colonial government, they have him to deal with them the fruits of his education. His isolation from their world precipitates a series of crises, as he attempts to balance his responsibilities to them with his personal, quiet other beliefs. Obi comes in the long run in part because he sees the either-or in a place that requires *both-and*.

Chinua Achebe took issue with this axis of misinterpretation and denigration. Through one of his most eminent quotes, 'If you don't like someone's story, write your own.' One may come to an understanding with what inspired the writer to take up the pen, the intention to overturn the circulating narrative laden with misperceptions drove him to pen the very first novel.

As the most widely understood study of African fiction, *Things Fall Apart* has played an instrumental part in presenting African writing to audiences throughout the globe. Particularly, Achebe's fable has led to world writing by retelling African history, also as the history of European colorization from the Afrocentric view, rather than the Eurocentric one. By changing this narrative, emphasis from the view of the coloniser to the view of the colonized, Achebe's novels expose and correct some of this unfair assumption seen in past historical and literary descriptions of Africa.

### **HOW MUCH OF ACHEBE IN THE TRILOGY**

Obi undergoes the same turmoil as much of the Nigerian youth of his time; the clash between traditional culture of his clan, family, and home village against his government job and modern society. Later that year, Achebe was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship for six months of travel, which he called "the first important perk of my writing career". Achebe used the fellowship to tour East Africa. He first travelled to Kenya, where he was required to complete an immigration form by checking a box indicating his ethnicity: European, Asiatic, Arab, or Other. Shocked and dismayed at being forced into an "Other" identity, he found the situation "almost funny" and took an extra form as a souvenir. Continuing to Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now united in Tanzania), he was frustrated by the paternalistic attitude he observed among non-African hotel clerks and social elites. Achebe found in his travels that Swahili was gaining prominence as a major African language. Radio programs were broadcast in Swahili, and its use was widespread in the countries he visited. Nevertheless, he found an "apathy" among the people toward literature written in Swahili. He met the poet Sheikh Shaaban Robert, who complained of the difficulty he had faced in trying to publish his Swahili-language work. In Northern Rhodesia (now called Zambia), Achebe found himself sitting in a whites-only section of a bus to Victoria Falls. Interrogated by the ticket taker as to why he was sitting in the front, he replied, "if you must know I come from Nigeria, and there we sit where we like in the bus." Upon reaching the waterfall, he was cheered by the black travellers from the bus, but he was saddened by their being unable to resist the policy of segregation at the time. Two years later, Achebe travelled to the United States and Brazil as part of a Fellowship for Creative Artists awarded by UNESCO. He met with a number of writers from the US, including novelists Ralph Ellison and Arthur Miller. In Brazil, he discussed the complications of writing in Portuguese with other authors. Achebe worried that the vibrant literature of the nation would be lost if left untranslated into a more widely spoken language.

### **HEART OF 'WHITENESS'**

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe portrays the cultural roots of the Igbo people to instil self-awareness while also referring to universal principles that limit their destructive potential. Seeing his duty as a writer in a new country to show people the dignity they had lost during the colonial period, he believed that before

the European colonial invasion of Africa, the Igbo were 'very deep and had a worthwhile philosophy and beauty, poetry and, above all, dignity.' What is remarkable about his Igbo people is the extent to which they have achieved the basics of what most people want today – democratic institutions, tolerance to other cultures, the balance of masculine and feminine principles, the ability to change for the better or the new, impressive and memorable poetry and art. Achebe seems to have tested Igbo culture against the goals of contemporary liberal democracy and shows how Igbo culture meets these criteria.

Critics have warned of the dangers of presenting a Eurocentric version of Achebe's novel and have advised immersing students in African culture as a means of getting them to recognize and appreciate difference among culture might object to the focus here. These critics are correct in nothing that one of Achebe's aim is to present the peculiarities of the Igbo culture, especially the beauties and wisdom of its art and institutions, though, Achebe also presents its weakness which require change and which aid in its destruction. A further aim, however, is the presentation of a common humanity which transcends the European and African, which belongs to both but is peculiar to neither. In addition to representing elements of common humanity, Achebe emphasizes certain basic political institutions which might form the foundation of a modern African state. Written at a time when Nigeria was about to achieve independence from the British, *Things Fall Apart* looks like the work of a founder of sorts. Achebe has often said that "art has a social purpose and can influence things". Such statements suggest that Achebe is not trying simply to reproduce Igbo history or only to lend it dignity. If he were, he could have followed the pattern other historians.

Achebe is not the first to write about Africa, so the old image needs to be cleared to give a real sense of the dignity of the people. Works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* imagine Africans as primitive men, representative of Europeans in the early stages of civilization, or all of the primitive human instincts that civilization hides. Achebe makes it clear that the Europeans' thinking about Africa is wrong. Perhaps the most important mistake of the British is that all civilizations like them have gone from the tribal stage through the monarchy to the parliamentary government. Upon arriving in Mbanta, the missionaries expected to find a king and, unable to find any officials to work with, the British set up their own hierarchy system and from the Queen of England. delegated power to local court messengers through district commissioners. It does not belong to any village government.

## Conclusion

Achebe's novel thus points to the actual and potential sources of contemporary Nigerian dignity in both Africa and Europe. The *Trilogy* suggest that perpetual human types recur in all cultures and that all effective civilizations must learn to deal with those types. Revealing the capacity of pre-colonial Igbo to integrate into the Igbo society, Achebe defined his Igbo society as a set of criteria that both Africans and European Americans could aspire to as goals: a redistribution of wealth to some degree, a male and female principles, a combination of persuasive art and poetry and music, tolerance, democracy, morality and capacity for meaningful change. By keeping a clear eye on cultural flaws that need to be corrected,

Achebe brings truth to the account of Igbo's history and presents a worthy harbinger of modern civilization that is both sound and fair.

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