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## **“Postcolonial Identity and Cultural Conflict in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*”**

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### **Abstract**

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is a quintessential postcolonial novel that deals with the crisis of identity and culture that arose as a result of the intrusion of colonialism into Igbo society. Umuofia is described as a community rich in culture, social order and spiritual beliefs, prior to the presence of British missionaries and colonial administrators. Achebe portrays the power, pride and shortcomings of traditional Igbo manhood in Okonkwo and illustrates the psychological strain of social expectations and fear of effeminacy. In the study of postcolonial identity in the novel, the focus is brought to the realization that identity is not only personal but is also communal, religious, linguistic, historical. There is an essential identity to Igbo life, which is disrupted by colonialism, as Achebe demonstrates by attacking the foundations of the Igbo: religion, family, justice, oral tradition, leadership and cultural memory. The clash between Igbo culture and western colonial cultural forces is manifested in Christianity, colonial courts, conversion, language and the undermining of the unity of the community. The conversion of Nwoye is symbolism of the internal division brought about by the colonial religion while the death of Okonkwo is symbolism of the failure of the dogmatic cultural resistance in a changing world. The use of proverbs, Igbo expressions and the style of oral narrative is also an effective tool for cultural preservation in Achebe's writing. So, *Things Fall Apart* is not only the story of one man's fall; it's the story of a society whose cultural structure is broken by the colonial power. The novel restores African voice, challenges the misrepresentation of Africa by its colonizers and presents the postcolonial identity as an intricate struggle between tradition and change, resistance and loss.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Identity, Cultural Conflict, Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo Society, Colonialism, Okonkwo, Cultural Resistance, Oral Tradition, Proverbs, Christianity, African Literature, Colonial Discourse, Cultural Memory

### **Introduction**

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is one of the greatest literature works of the postcolonial era as it has brought the African experience, identity, culture and colonial conflict from the African perspective. For the first time published in 1958, shortly before the independence of Nigeria, the novel was a significant literary response to the colonial portrayal of Africa as primitive, voiceless and uncivilized. Igbo society before and during the advent of British colonial rule. This story provides evidence that prior to the Europeans' arrival, there existed a social system, religious



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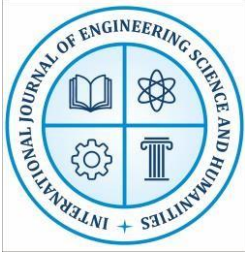
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beliefs, moral values, political system, oral tradition and cultural identity in Africa. The novel thus questions the notion of an African history and civilization being nonexistent. Achebe's aims are not just to tell the story of Okonkwo, but to reclaim the dignity of African culture. In his famous essay "The Novelist as Teacher," Achebe states that the African writer has a duty to inform his people that "the African past was not one long night of savagery from which Europeans rescued them" (45). This clearly states the cultural and historical context of *Things Fall Apart*.

It is suggested that the study of "Postcolonial Identity and Cultural Conflict in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" is an examination of identity under colonial pressure. Postcolonial identity has been defined as the sense of self, culture and belonging (S, C, B) that is formed, fractured and/or reformed through the impact of colonialism. It encompasses individual identities and group/community identity. Achebe portrays the Igbo as a very strong cultural community with their own festivals, traditions, kinship, religion and social laws. Their identity is intrinsically linked to land, family, ancestors, gods, titles, masculinity, language and communal life. As the novel opens, Okonkwo is a respected citizen of Umuofia who became famous for his personal bravery and diligence and for having achieved social success. Because of his victory in wrestling and his strength in the community, Achebe states that Okonkwo was "well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond" (Achebe 3). This introduction demonstrates that the notion of "identity" in Igbo society is not an abstract one but a one that is constructed through social recognition, physical courage, family responsibility and community honour.

Traditional Igbo values are also intricately tied to Okonkwo's personal identity. He is eager to appear strong, successful and manly: he fears becoming like his Unoka (father), who is regarded as weak, poor and unsuccessful. The fear of failure and weakness dominate his life. Okonkwo's entire life was "dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness" (Achebe 13). This fear affects his identity and behaviour. He starts to be rough with his wives, kids and even himself because he feels that the tenderness indicates weakness. Thus, Achebe introduces the concept of identity in social and psychological terms. Okonkwo's identity is shaped by the expectations of Igbo society, but is also harmed by his own fear. The tragedy of him starts when he arrives in the colony, but also because of the stereotypical form of masculinity he follows. The novel can thus be considered as exploring identity through multiple levels: individual identity, family identity, gender identity, religious identity and cultural identity.

Another central issue of the novel is cultural conflict. Cultural conflict refers to a conflict between two sets of values, beliefs and life styles. In *Things Fall Apart*, the battle seems to be primarily between traditional Igbo culture and the European colonial culture. Before the coming of the white missionaries, Umuofia has its own system of justice, religion and social discipline. The inhabitants worship gods, spirits of their ancestors and the earth goddess. They follow customs related to marriage, harvest, titles, sacrifices and punishment. Achebe does not represent the Igbo culture as perfect either; he also illustrates the harsh practices of the Igbo, like the killing of Ikemefuna and



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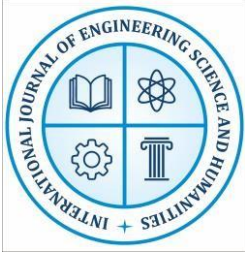
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the abandonment of twins. He makes it a holistic and self-standing cultural system, however. This balanced portrayal is significant since Achebe does not glorify the African tradition unconditionally and is not a believer in the superiority of the colonial. He demonstrates that although Igbo society is beautiful, wise and orderly, it has its limits. Christianity, with its arrival to the land of Umuofia, brings with it a profound religious and cultural crisis. The missionaries do not just introduce a new religion, but one which threatens to undermine the spiritual base of Igbo society. They question the gods, customs and beliefs of the people. This fosters in the family and in the community disunity. While some of the violent rituals of his community, particularly the killing of Ikemefuna, disturb him, Nwoye becomes interested in Christianity after his father's death. The new religion provides him emotional comfort and a new identity. The Christian hymn is a response to a "vague and persistent question" that tormented Nwoye's soul, according to Achebe (147).

The conversion of Nwoye is a great example of identity conflict. He is trapped in the dilemma between his father's old world and the new Christian world. His conversion comes at a time that shatters Okonkwo's pride and thus the filial relationship between father and son. Achebe demonstrates how colonialism triumphs, in part, due to its infiltration into the weaknesses and contradictions of the native society through Nwoye. When religion is followed by colonial administration and law, the conflict intensifies. The British are not just preachers of Christianity, but they are also setting up their courts, prisons and governments. This alters the power dynamics of Umuofia. Traditional leaders are deposed of and colonial officials start to run the community based on their own rules. The District Commissioner represents colonial power and arrogance. He is not well-versed in the culture of the Igbo people but he wants to write about it from a superior position. Finally, at the end of the novel he considers that his entire life and tragedy could be summed up in a small paragraph in his book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (Achebe 209). From a postcolonial perspective, it is particularly important because it illustrates the colonial discourse that encapsulates the African experience into a miniaturized version of the experience, a smaller, distorted and inferior one. The knowledge about the colonized produced by colonial discourse typically works to control and dominate them (Said 3). The District Commissioner's attitude in Achebe's novel is an example of this colonial practice of talking about Africa without really knowing the African way of life.

Language is also a significant part of Achebe's creation of the postcolonial identity. The novel is written in English but Achebe peppered with Igbo proverbs, idioms, names, songs and oral expressions. The use of language imparts an African rhythm to the English language and renders the novel culturally rooted. African writers, Achebe famously declares, can write in English, but must make it "carry the weight of African experience" (62). In *Things Fall Apart*, English does not obliterate Igbo identity, but rather, Achebe remakes English to capture the essence of Igbo culture. Proverbs are particularly significant because they are the wisdom of the community. Achebe says



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that “proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe 7). Oral tradition is a valuable asset in Igbo society in this line. Language is used to build cultural memory and to prevent the misrepresentation by colonialism. In the novel, postcolonial identity is not easy or definite, as it can be found in other contexts. It is represented as a subject of antagonism to colonialism and as subject to internal contradictions. However, Okonkwo's identity is shattered because he is unable to adapt to the new world. He advocates direct resistance, violence and traditional honour, though a changing society has already begun. He slaughters the colonial messenger and he hopes that Umuofia will follow suit, but they say nothing. This is the sign of a lack of unity of the community. Okonkwo discovers that his society is not reacting as he anticipated. His death is a personal tragedy and a sign of cultural degradation. Suicide is an abomination in Igbo culture and Okonkwo's death takes him away from the traditions he sought to preserve. At the end, his identity has been broken and bruised by culture and colonization.

Thus, *Things Fall Apart* is a powerful exploration of postcolonial identity and cultural conflict. Achebe's portrayal of the Igbo world is dignified, complex and realistic. He demonstrates that colonialism isn't just about taking over territory it is also about defeating memory, language, religion, social order and self-respect. The novel also demonstrates that cultural conflict is not just external, but internal. The Igbo are being pressured by outside colonial forces but they also experience pressures and divisions amongst themselves. Okonkwo, Nwoye, the missionaries and the District Commissioner, offer various reactions to cultural change, through the character of Okonkwo. The novel is still significant as it gives African voice and the questions to the history that has been created by the colonialism. It demonstrates that the collapse of Umuofia is not an “collapse of a primitive society,” but a terrible devastation of a living culture. Thus, the study of post-colonial identity and cultural conflict in *Things Fall Apart* enables the reader to gain insight into the ways in which literature can be used as a tool of cultural recovery, historical correction and resistance to colonialism. The novel's historical and cultural context is provided. Historical and Cultural Background of Novel is given.

The historical and cultural background refers to the social, political, religious and traditional setting in which a literary work is set. The background of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is the Igbo society in Nigeria before and after the advent of the British colonial rule. It is important because the novel does not start with colonialism, it starts with the full life of the Igbo people, their way of life—culture, beliefs, festivals, justice system, family structure, oral history and social values. Achebe's intent is to demonstrate that there was an organized society in Africa prior to the Europeans. As such, the historical and cultural context of the novel aids in reading the actual connotations of the novel's postcolonial identity and cultural conflict. In the early pages of the novel Achebe presents Umuofia as a strong and respected Igbo community. It isn't depicted as a place lacking in discipline and/or manliness. It has 9 villages, social rules, religions and a system of honour. Social identity in the Igbo society is founded on courage, hard work, titles and



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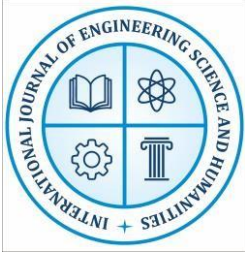
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community recognition, as seen in the fame of Okonkwo in Umuofia. Okonkwo “was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond” (Achebe 3). This line indicates that the society has its own definition of success. Respect is earned by a man through achievement, farming, wrestling, through his bravery and through his family responsibilities. So, if the subject matter concerns the Igbo culture, the community is represented as an organized social world in which one's identification is formed through his or her role in the community.

Another significant factor to the culture of Things Fall Apart is religion. The Igbo believe in many gods, the spirits of their ancestors and natural powers. They revere Ani the earth goddess and honour the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. Religion is not an abstract but a way of life, which influences marriage, agriculture, punishment, social behavior and moral choices. This is also a vital consideration of the egwugwu system, as it is a symbol of ancestral power and traditional justice. The egwugwu are regarded as the spirits of the ancestors when they appear and their verdict accepted by the community. This demonstrates the existence of law and moral system in Igbo society in the pre-European presence of the British courts. Achebe exposes this system of traditional justice as a means of countering the colonial notion that there is no law or order in Africa. The novel's cultural context is also largely oral history, of the Igbo people. Proverbs, folk tales and songs and storytelling impart the wisdom of the community. Achebe sprinkles Igbo proverbs throughout the novel to imbue the English language with an African tracery. “proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe 7). This is a well known line that demonstrates that language is not just for communicating but is a cultural treasure in Igbo society. Proverbs make speech meaningful, respectful and wise. The community passes on knowledge from one generation to the next by word of mouth. That is how the style of Achebe's writing is a means of cultural preservation.

Once the European missionaries come into the story, as well as the colonial officers, the historical background of the novel becomes more complicated. The British come to Umuofia not only to preach religion but slowly introduce a new system of power. First the missionaries introduce Christianity. Afterwards the colonial government, courts, prisons and foreign laws take charge of the community. This establishes a conflict between the Igbo culture and the Western culture. The missionaries denounce the Igbo gods as false and attack traditional beliefs. A number of people, particularly those who are dismayed or resentful of some of the practices, are drawn to this new faith. One such example is Nwoye's conversion. Achebe demonstrates that Christianity offers emotional comfort to Nwoye: he is troubled by the killing of Ikemefuna and the twins (Achebe 147). Thus, colonial religion is introduced into the weakness of traditional society. The Second Coming:”

A strange bell rang beyond the stream,  
It broke the village's ancient dream;



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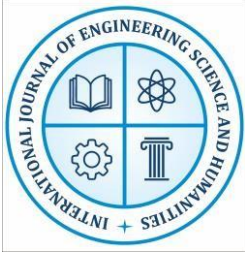
Old gods trembled, new words came,  
And Umuofia changed its name.

The onset of cultural conflict in the novel is when the values of the Igbo community are disputed by colonial values. The Igbo world is a communal one, governed by a system of ancestral authority, oral history and spiritual equilibrium. The colonial world is based on written law, Christian doctrine, individual conversion and political control. These two systems cannot cohabit easily since each one takes control of truth, justice and identity. The British court takes the place of the elders and *egwugwu*. The church undermines the influence of traditional religion. The colonial government divides the community by giving power to converts and court messengers. Therefore, there is a beginning to the disunity of Umuofia. Hence the profound meaning of the title *Things Fall Apart* - the fall of an entire cultural system.

Achebe gives no representation of Igbo culture as perfect. He reveals the darker aspects, like the killing of Ikemefuna, the banishment of Okonkwo and the rejection of twins. But he demonstrates that this society is also dignified, beautiful, wise and of moral order. It is a balanced presentation, this, one of the merits of the novel. It is not Achebe's intent to romanticize the African tradition but to introduce it as a vibrant, complex culture. Achebe believes that it is important that the people of Africa be educated to realize that their history was not “one long night of savagery” (45). It is seen in *Things Fall Apart*, in which he gives back the cultural pride of Igbo and rectifies the misrepresentation by the colonizers.

It can also be seen from the historical background that colonial domination began in Nigeria. The District Commissioner is a representative of British colonial rule. He has little knowledge of the Igbo, but he wishes to tell about them from a higher colonial perspective. Towards the end of the novel, he considers diminishing Okonkwo's tragedy to a paragraph in his book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (Achebe 209). This instant reveals one way that colonial history can mute native voices and narrow the life of Africans to a colonial record. Edward Said discusses how colonial knowledge can be used as a means of domination as the colonizer describes the colonized from a position of power (Said 3). Achebe's decolonisation is to give voice to the Igbo people, to give them a history, to give them a depth of culture.

Therefore, the background of the novel *Things Fall Apart* is the basis of the whole novel. It depicts the richness of Igbo life before colonialism and the gradual destruction it brought. The novel describes Umuofia as having its own religion, language, customs, justice and morals. Meanwhile, it demonstrates the dividing, confusing and identity crisis of British colonialism and Christianity. This background is necessary to understand Okonkwo's tragedy, Nwoye's conversion and the fall of Umuofia. It is in this context that Achebe demonstrates that the battle in the novel is not a man-to-man struggle, but a struggle between two civilizations, two belief systems and two ways of articulating identity.



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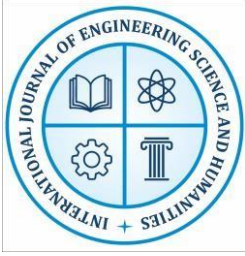
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## Postcolonial Identity in Things Fall Apart

Postcolonial identity: feeling of self, culture, history and belonging that is formed, dislocated and/or re-constructed as a result of colonialism. Identity is not just personal, it is also social, cultural, religious and political in Postcolonial literature. It reveals how the colonized people think about themselves prior to, during and after the colonial domination. In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, postcolonial identity is introduced for the Igbo community of Umuofia and particularly for Okonkwo. Achebe demonstrates that there was an Igbo identity prior to the British. They were associated with the land, the family, ancestors, religion, customs, the oral tradition, the title, courage, communal honour. The novel is postcolonial because it argues against the colonial assertion that there was no civilization, no culture and no meaningful history in Africa prior to the Europeans. At the beginning of the novel, Achebe presents Igbo identity as strong, organized and deeply rooted in community life. Umuofia is not a stunted society or a place that was previously backward; it is a society with its own values, laws, religious beliefs and social organization. In this society, identity is based on a person's work, courage, family responsibility and respect in society. Okonkwo's wrestling win makes him renowned for his work ethic, his manliness and his strength. Okonkwo is a "well-known" man "throughout the nine villages and beyond" (Achebe 3). This line illustrates the fact that the Igbo society's sense of identity hinges on public recognition and communal approval. Individuality is not the only measure of a person; he is a member of the community.

In the village where drums awake,  
Names are shaped by earth and lake;  
Men and women, gods and land,  
Hold one culture, hand in hand. (Achebe 3)

One of the most significant instances of post-colonial identity in the novel is Okonkwo's identity. He has an idea of being a strong, brave and successful man. The identity he develops is in contrast to his father, Unoka, whose qualities are that of a weak, poor and unsuccessful man. Okonkwo doesn't want to get his father's face. Thus, his life becomes a struggle to establish his own strength. Throughout Achebe's story, "the fear of failure and weakness," as he says of Okonkwo, dominates his entire life. This is the psychological basis of his identity. He thinks that being a man is being violent, being in charge and being emotionally hard. Achebe thus reveals that identity is not only cultural, it is also psychological. The tragedy of Okonkwo is that he cannot tell the difference between strength and harshness. *Things Fall Apart* also has a collective postcolonial identity. Achebe's Igbo community is portrayed as a people with many similarities in beliefs, rituals, festivals and oral traditions. They are maintained by stories, proverb, songs, religious ceremonies and social customs. The importance of proverbs in Igbo culture is second to none since they represent ancestral knowledge and experience. The proverbs are the palm oil that words are eaten with (Achebe 7). This is a reflection of the fact that language is an integral part of the culture. The



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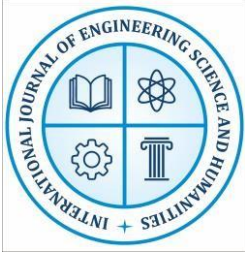
Igbo people need no written colonial records to show that they are a civilization; their oral language will serve as a living document of their history, wisdom and values. In these expressions Achebe elevates the dignity of the African language and culture.

Another factor that impacts upon the Igbo identity in the novel is religion. The Umuofia have many gods, spirits and ancestral powers. The earth goddess, Ani, is revered as the embodiment of fertility and moral law. Important decisions are made with the help of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. The egwugwu symbolize ancestral justice and social authority. These religions are not social life apart from, but it controls marriage, farming, punishment and community discipline. So, Christianity is not just a new religion; it is attacking the spiritual foundation of Igbo identity when it comes to Umuofia. When missionaries arrive, the people who are not happy with some of their traditional practices are confused. An example of such identity crisis is Nwoye's conversion. The death of Ikemefuna and the rejection of twins leaves him emotionally disturbed and Christianity provides him with a second emotional protection. In a vague and persistent question in Nwoye's heart, he seems to find an answer in the Christian hymn (Achebe 147).

A new bell rang across the plain,  
Old songs trembled under pain;  
One son walked where strangers prayed,  
And father's pride began to fade. Achebe, Chinua.  
*Things Fall Apart*. Anchor Books, 1994.

The transformation of Nwoye is an example of how the inside of the family is divided by colonialism. Okonkwo is troubled by Nwoye's conversion not just because it is a religious issue, but because it's a personal and cultural betrayal. Okonkwo's son becoming a Christian is a sign of weakness and disrespect to Okonkwo. For Nwoye, however, the new religion becomes a means to get away from the emotional violence of his father and the painful customs of his society. The struggle demonstrates that the postcolonial identity is not a simple thing. It is not just the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized but it is also the struggle within the colonized society itself. Achebe handles this complexity subtly. He does not portray Igbo culture as a flawless culture but nor does he take colonial culture for granted as a better culture.

The identity of Umuofia is changed by colonial rule since it introduces foreign authority instead of the traditional authority. The elders (also called the titled men), the oracle and the egwugwu are the leaders of the community prior to the colonial era. The court, prison, church and District Commissioner gain power with arrival of British. This change is a blow to the Igbo communal identity. They have their own system of justice, their own leadership and it is inferior to the colonial leadership. Edward said describes how the knowledge of the colonized is produced by the colonial power to control and define the colonized (Said 3). The District Commissioner's mindset on this is very apparent; he considers it as if he can write the story of the Igbos without knowing their life. Toward the end of the novel, he would like to distill all of Okonkwo's tragedy into a



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paragraph in his book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (Achebe 209). This moment reveals how colonial writers diminish African identity and how they have taken away the voice of the African experience.

The novel is itself a postcolonial act of resistance as it allows for an African identity to be heard. Achebe conveys not an outsider's description of Africa, but an insider's view of Igbo life. He introduces African people as thinking, feeling, speaking and culturally rich human beings. As Achebe explains in his essay "The Novelist as Teacher," the writer is obliged to help his people realize that their history didn't consist of "one long night of savagery" (Achebe 45). This concept is at the heart of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's goal in writing the novel is to bring back the fractured image of Africa and correct the misrepresentation of African society by the colonists.

The end of the postcolonial identity crisis is symbolised by Okonkwo's death. He is determined to fight the British using force but Umuofia is no longer united with him. When he slays the colonial messenger he expects his people to retaliate, but they don't. In this silence, the communal identity already has been destroyed. Okonkwo knows that things have changed in the old Umuofia. His suicide is deeply saddening, because suicide is an abomination in Igbo culture. So, even after his death, Okonkwo is now distanced from the tradition that he once sought to uphold. His end is the surrendering of a fixed sense of self and the coming to an end of a colonial-stressed culture. So, the post-colonial identity in *Things Fall Apart* is portrayed as a complex battle between tradition and change, self and community, native culture and colonial power. Colonialism does not only take up space, Achebe demonstrates; it is also an intruder in language, religion, family, memory, self-respect. The novel demonstrates varying reactions to cultural change through Okonkwo, Nwoye and the people of Umuofia. Okonkwo is a symbol of resistance, Nwoye is a symbol of conversion and the community is a symbol of fragmentation. Achebe's genius is that he demonstrates that the identity of Africa was strong and respectable before colonization and that its loss constituted a tragedy in history. Hence, *Things Fall Apart* is a strong postcolonial work because it reclaims the culture of Africa and uncovers the violence of the colonialism.

## **The novel is a study of cultural conflict**

Cultural conflict refers to the conflict between two different cultures, value systems, religions, traditions and ways of life. Cultural conflict is mainly interpreted in the novel *Things Fall Apart* to the clash between the traditional culture of the Igbo of Umuofia and the new colonial and European culture introduced by the British missionaries and colonial officials. This war is not only a religious war, but a social, political, psychological and historical one. Before Europeans came, the Igbo had their own form of family, religious, legal, moral, festival and community life, farming and story-telling and their leadership structure, Achebe demonstrates. They were not a primitive or barbarous people. This was a whole way of life. Colonialism upsets this order and causes a profound conflict between old and new, foreign rule. The opening of the novel depicts Igbo culture as very traditional and communal. Umuofia's leaders are titled men, priests, ancestors and customs,



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who are the elders. People have faith in their gods, earth goddess, Ani and spirits. Social life is controlled by festivals, marriage customs, funeral rites, market days and religious ceremonies. The Feast of the New Yam illustrates the relationship between farming, religion and ethnic unity. Achebe says it is a festival of thanksgiving to Ani and ancestral spirits before the new harvest starts (Achebe 36). This demonstrates that, as well as being a way of life, Igbo culture is a whole way of thinking that celebrates land, gods, ancestors and people. Thus, when the culture of the colonists comes into Umuofia, it strikes down not just one of their customs, but the whole igbo way of life. W. B. Yeats – The Second Coming:

The drums were loud, the elders wise,  
Old gods lived beneath the skies;  
Then strange words crossed the village land,  
And broke the circle, hand from hand.

There is the first major cultural conflict in the novel between traditional Igbo religion and Christianity. The missionaries come with a new set of religious messages and challenge the Igbo deities and beliefs. They say that the native gods are false and that Christianity is the one true religion. It is a serious challenge to the Igbo community because religion is the basis of their social order. They are related to their customs, laws and morals with their ancestral faith. As Christianity begins to convert the village begins to fall apart. The new religion lends protection to the people who feel that they have been rejected by the Igbo traditional way of life, including outcasts and people who have emotional problems. What is significant about Nwoye's conversion is that it demonstrates how religious conflict turns into family conflict. He's upset by the killing of Ikemefuna and other brutal practices and the Christian hymn has a sore spot in his soul (Achebe 147). Achebe shows that cultural conflicts reach beyond society into the individual mind and soul of Nwoye, culminating in his repugnance toward the Christian school.

There is a fundamental struggle between tradition and change in the relationship between Okonkwo and Nwoye. Okonkwo is the symbol of traditional male honour, strength and resistance. Nwoye is a representation of doubt, emotional sensitivity, attraction to the new religious identity. Okonkwo considers Nwoye's conversion a disgrace to his family and clan. It is a means for Nwoye to transcend the violence and fear associated with his father's world that Christianity becomes for him. The father is not only an apostate of culture, but a divider of native families as well. The house itself is a space of cultural conflict. Achebe shows this conflict in depth because he does not just present Nwoye as a traitor or Okonkwo as a hero. Both are involved in a historical opportunity that requires them to face the collapse of old meanings and the birth of new identities. Yet another cultural clash is between Igbo justice and British colonial law. Prior to the advent of colonial rule, Umuofia has a traditional system of justice. The egwugwu resolve conflicts and act as agents for the ancestors. They are accepted for their judgments because they are connected to religion, custom and communal respect. It is a system which demonstrates the existence of law and order in Igbo



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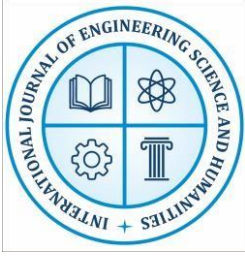
society before the Europeans' arrival. The British colonial government brings in courts, prisons and court messengers, however (Achebe 176). These institutions are not familiar with the cultural logic of Igbo justice. They regard native traditions as unworthy of their value and substitute their own rule. This results in political and cultural tension as power is transferred from elders/ancestors to colonial officers. All those who used to revere their own institutions must now bow down to an alien system.

Another way to see cultural conflict in Achebe is in terms of language and communication. Oral tradition, proverbs, songs and folktales in the Igbo culture are important factors. Proverbs are full of wisdom and social experience. According to Achebe, “Words are eaten on the back of a palm-oil known as proverbs” (Achebe 7). This line demonstrates that speech is an art in Igbo society, is respectful and has cultural value. Colonial culture, on the other hand, relies on written law, written records and official communications. The District Commissioner is not a native speaker of the Igbo language and neither his custom nor his emotions are native to the Igbo people, but he nevertheless wants to write about them in his book. Toward the end of the novel, he considers summarizing Okonkwo's life in a tiny paragraph in *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (209). A strong illustration of cultural conflict, as the life lived oral tradition of the Igbo people becomes a chilling colonial document. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*:

“The white man has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe 176).

Cultural conflict can also be observed in the conflicting views of community and choice within the novel. The social organization of the Igbo is one of the community. The identity of a person is linked to family and clan honour, ancestors and to the village honour. Collective customs and public ceremonies play a part in making decisions. But the new Christian religion gives importance to individual conversion. An individual can depart from the typical community and enter into the church as an independent believer. This reduces collective identity. Members of the convert begin to stand apart from their clan and the clan starts to fall apart. This wounding of the things that held them together is obvious to Obierika, who states that the white man “has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe 176). This line clearly provides an explanation for the novel's title. The culture does not simply drop away; it is broken by means of a gradual series of cuts in the bonds of religion, kinship, law and common belief.

Achebe's depiction of cultural conflict is fair and believable. He does not paint an idealized picture of Igbo culture. He shows its beauty, wisdom and dignity, but he also shows its harshness. The tradition of killing Ikemefuna, twins and punishment of some actions is a painful tradition. Some people are susceptible to the new religion because of their weaknesses. So, colonialism's success can be brought about not only by the power of Europeans but also by internal conflicts of Igbo society. It is here that Achebe's greatness comes in—by revealing the points of view of both. He exposes the arrogance of the colonist but he also delves into the weaknesses of native culture. In



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this way the novel becomes a complex and powerful post-colonial work. When Okonkwo attempts to oppose the colonialism with violence, it is the last phase of cultural conflict. He kills a colonial messenger because he believes that Umuofia should fight against foreign rule. But the people don't support him. That they have ceased to speak signifies that the old united spirit of Umuofia is beginning to weaken. Okonkwo discovers that the culture he wishes to fight for is divided. His suicide is the tragic emblem of cultural collapse. Ironically, suicide is seen as an abomination in Igbo religion and Okonkwo's death places him far from the same religion he is attempting to defend. In this way, Achebe demonstrates that cultural conflict not only leads to the destruction of society, but to the lost identity of the individuals who are unable to adapt to change (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* 207). From a postcolonial point of view, cultural conflict in *Things Fall Apart* exposes the violence of colonialism. Colonialism is not just about land and people – it is about meaning, history, religion, law and representation. Edward Said suggests that the colonizer, of course, has more power and decides what constitutes the colonized's 'knowledge'. This colonial attitude is embodied in the District Commissioner's final attitude. He is not an unhappy human being, he is a book to be written in a book of the colonizer.” This is challenged by Achebe who writes the novel from the inside out of the Igbo world. He puts into words, history and dignity in the mouths of those that colonial writing attempts to silence.

So, cultural conflict is the main element that brings disintegration in Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*. The war starts with the religion, expands to law and admin, penetrates the family life, splits the community and ultimately destroys Okonkwo. The conflict between the Igbo culture and British colonial culture is not a straightforward encounter between two cultures, but rather an unequal meeting of an indigenous culture and an imperial power. The novel demonstrates how the culture and society of a community is fractured by colonialism. It also demonstrates that culture is complex, dynamic and fractured. *Things Fall Apart* is a great post colonial novel because of its representation of cultural conflict as a historical, emotional and human tragedy.

## **Colonialism and Disintegration of Igbo Society**

Colonialism and disintegration of Igbo society is the gradual erosion of the traditional social, religious, political and cultural fabric of the Igbo community as a result of colonialism. The first to enter Umuofia is the colonialism disguised as colonial missionaries, then as the Christian faith, then as courts, prisons, trade, education and administrative authority. This process will gradually undermine the unity of the Igbo. Umuofia possesses its own religious, judicial, leadership, family honour, oral tradition and communal culture prior to colonial intervention. However, once the white colonists and missionaries come to the region, these traditional institutions start to lose their prestige. Achebe demonstrates that colonialism can not only be about land, it is about belief, language, law, identity and memory.

The novel starts with the picture of an orderly Igbo community. There are nine villages in Umuofia and strong discipline in the village. Elder, titled men, ancestors, gods and customs are respected



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by the people. They have a justice system which is linked to the egwugwu (ancestral authority). They are followers of their religion, which is related to the earth goddess, Ani and other spiritual elements. They form a social unity through their festivals, marriage, funerals and farming. In this society, individual identity is always linked with the community. Okonkwo's reputation is also significant in that it is known by the entire family. Okonkwo is well known in the nine villages and beyond, according to Achebe (3). This demonstrates that prior to the coming of the colonists, there was a way of giving honour, respect and identity in Igbo society (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* 3).

The missionaries also draw in the socially rejected or the ones who do not like the conventional norms of society. Osus, or outcasts, are given a home in the Christian church. They are treated as inferior and set aside from the normal social interaction in the traditional Igbo way. Christianity provides them with a new identity and dignity. This undermines the traditional system of authority in Igbo society since the previously unprivileged groups join a new religious community. Achebe demonstrates the strength of colonialism is due to the weaknesses and the contradictions of the indigenous society. The church speaks for the outsiders, while at the same time it is a dividing power in the clan. This makes the break up of Igbo society more complex because it is a result of external pressure from the colonialists and internal pressure from the social tensions.

In the second phase of disintegration, the colonial law and administration are visible. As the church comes, so comes British political power. The colonial government builds courts, prisons and administrative offices. These institutions serve as alternatives to the elders, priests and egwugwu - the traditional leaders. The Igbo system of justice is rooted in communal involvement and respect for the ancestors while the colonial system of justice is rooted in foreign laws and punishments. The District Commissioner and court messengers don't understand the Igbo culture, but these people make themselves powerful over it. This alters the political makeup of Umuofia. The folk who solved their conflicts by their own rules are now compelled to follow foreign laws. Given that, the old order of authority is falling apart. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe:

A foreign court, a stranger's law,  
Made village hearts withdraw in awe;  
One by one the old ties broke,

And silence answered when elders spoke. (Achebe 176).

It is evident that Obierika knows what the power of colonialism is. He tells Okonkwo that the white man is clever, because "he has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe 176). This is one of the most significant lines in the novel as it helps to explain the title *Things Fall Apart*. These "things" that bound the Igbo people together were religion, kinship, ancestral law, common customs and language and communal identity. Colonialism is stealing them, piece by piece. It does not destroy the society by physical violence, it destroys the society by means of dividing the minds of the individuals, their beliefs and their



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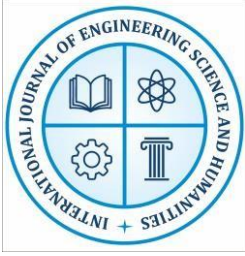
loyalties. Some retain their traditional beliefs, some become Christians, some serve the colonial government, some are uncertain. As a result, collective resistance is nearly impossible in this division. The destruction of the egwugwu house is another symbol of social disintegration. The egwugwu are the ancestors' spiritual and judicial power. An attack on this institution is an attack on the moral centre of the Igbo society. When the church and egwugwu clash, it reveals a direct attack on the sacredness of the clan by colonialism. If the symbols of the traditional system are not being honored by all members of the community, then the traditional system will not work. That's why the coming of Christianity is not the mere religious event it is made out to be, but a political and cultural revolution. It changes the source of authority in society and breaks the emotional bond between people and their ancestral tradition.

The loss of the village leaders and their humiliation only further illustrates the lack of power that existed in Igbo society under colonial rule. The leaders of Umuofia are arrested, insulted and a fine imposed upon them. This is an event which exposes the inhuman and demeaning behavior of colonial authority towards the traditional leaders. Those who used to be respected by the elders of the clan are disgraced by the officers and messengers of foreign courts. This is a public disgrace which erodes the people's confidence. It also demonstrates that British power has greater authority than traditional. The clan no longer protects its leaders and the leaders no longer protect the clan. It is a big indicator of the internal disintegration of the political regime.

The last phase of this breakdown is demonstrated by Okonkwo's last act of violence (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* 186–88). He is killed because he feels that Umuofia should revolt against the British. He believes the clan will give him their help, but they do not help him. But their silence indicates that Umuofia has already been changed. The spirit of courage and unity of the clan is gone. Okonkwo understands that his society is no longer prepared to engage in warfare. His suicide is the symbol of personal and cultural failure. Subtly, suicide is an abomination in Igbo culture, leaving Okonkwo apart from the same tradition he seeks to uphold. As he has died, so has the inner identity of those who oppose colonialism been destroyed by colonialism.

Districts' Commissioner's attitude at the close of the novel represents the last degree of colonial dominance. He is oblivious to the suffering of Okonkwo or to his pain or his background. Yet he thinks of writing about him in a small paragraph in his book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (Achebe 209). This moment exemplifies the power of colonialism in the control of representation. The colonizer not only governs the colonized people but writes their history in a diminished and distorted manner. From a superior position, Edward Said believes that colonial power defines a colonized as an object of knowledge (Said 3). Achebe sets itself against this colonial practice by narrating the story from the Igbo perspective and by elevating the experience of the African people.

Therefore, the colonialism destroys Igbo society by eradicating the values of religion, family system, justice, leadership, language, culture and collective identity of the people. It starts with



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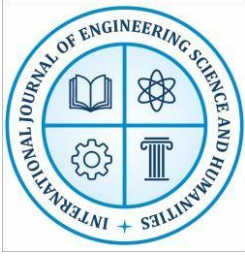
missionaries and conversion, proceeds through courts and administrative power and culminates with the breakdown of communal unity. The problem is that Achebe has demonstrated that no African community has ever collapsed due to a lack of culture; it has collapsed when a strong colonial system arrives and splits the underpinnings of the culture. Achebe is honest, however, in depicting some of the weaknesses that are present in Igbo society and which also enable the growth of colonialism. Thus, the fall of the Igbo society, is a historical tragedy and a cultural warning. The strength of *Things Fall Apart* as a postcolonial novel lies in the demonstration of the breakdown of a living civilization from within and from without, as a result of the action of colonialism.

## **Okonkwo as a Symbol of Cultural Resistance**

Okonkwo is a symbol of the traditional Igbo culture's resistance to the new colonial influences that are brought by the Europeans into Umuofia. Okonkwo is not only a character but he is also a symbol of the old Igbo world, its values, pride, strength, masculinity, social honour and resistance to foreign domination in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. He is firmly convinced in the traditions of his family and will do everything to keep the traditional order intact rather than being influenced by Christianity and British colonialism. His resistance is cultural, not simply for the sake of power, but for the survival of his clan's religion, customs, justice system and communal identity. Achebe displays Okonkwo's resistance as both heroic and tragic, however, because he is brave, but also rigid, violent and unable to understand change. From the start of the novel, Okonkwo is introduced as a strong and respected person in the community. He is defined by wrestling and farming and through hard work and social recognition. Okonkwo is known throughout the nine villages and beyond, due to his own accomplishments (Achebe 3). This fame demonstrates that Okonkwo is very much a part of the old ways of the Igbo people. He gains respect by labour and courage, not by inheritance. In that regard, he is a symbol of the self-made Igbo man who takes pride in his manhood and the struggle for success. He's a man of Umuofia values; he wants to maintain those values at all costs. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*:

He stood like iroko, firm and high,  
With clan-fire burning in his eye;  
The drums of fathers shaped his name,  
And honour lived within his fame.

Okonkwo's stubbornness is also influenced by his fear of weakness. He does not want to be like his father, Unoka, who is considered to be gentle, poor and unsuccessful. As a result, Okonkwo has a very negative view of masculinity. Okonkwo's whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness, Achebe clearly defines. It makes him strong due to fear, but also limits his emotions. He considers softness, compassion and compromise to be evidence of failure. So, when colonialism comes into Umuofia, Okonkwo reacts to it with anger and violence. He refuses



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to negotiate or to allow for slow change—in his perspective, he has to resist by using direct action and physical courage.

The love for tradition can be seen in Okonkwo's attitude towards family and religion; clan honour. He thinks that it is a man's duty to maintain the honor of his family and the community. He adheres to the ways of Umuofia, even the painful ones. In the killing of Ikemefuna, this is his bad side. Okonkwo feels love for Ikemefuna, but he participate in his death so he will be seen as weak in front of other men. The action shows that the cultural resistance of Okonkwo is guided by fear of society and pressure of males. He is not a straightforward hero: Achebe demonstrates that Okonkwo's power is tempered with brutality and fear. When Christianity comes to Umuofia, Okonkwo views it as an attack against Igbo identity. The new religion is an outspoken attack on the gods, ancestors and culture of the clan. Okonkwo's conversion to Christianity is not only his personal decision of faith, it's a betrayal of the entire community. This is what hurts Nwoye so much when he converts. Akili Bonyi Okonkwo's pride as a father and a traditionalist is shattered by Nwoye's decision to embrace Christianity. For Nwoye, the new religion provides emotional satisfaction, for Okonkwo, it is an unwomanly and disreputable thing. Achebe demonstrates colonialism's capacity to generate cultural resistance through an interference with the family structure. Okonkwo's opposition to Nwoye is now an opposition to old tradition and new colonial identity.

Okonkwo resists more after his return from exile. He imagines that Umuofia will stay as strong and warlike as when he left; and that it will not be subdued. He expects the same Umuofia that he left, powerful and warlike, not to be subdued. He discovers that things have changed in the village, however. The church has been strengthened and the colonial court has come into force and many, many people have accepted the new order. This surprises Okonkwo, because he thinks that a proud clan such as Umuofia ought to challenge the foreign domination. He cannot see the reason for his people's silence and division. Obierika explains this situation when he says that the white man “has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe 176). This line indicates that Okonkwo's resistance is broken because the unity of the clan has been destroyed already. Things Fall Apart, by Chinua Achebe.

He raised his hand against the tide,  
But broken clans stood far aside;  
One warrior called, no voices came,  
And silence swallowed ancient flame.

Okonkwo's strongest resistance comes at the end of the novel when he slays the colonial messenger. This is symbolic because he is attempting to stir up the fighting spirit of Umuofia. If the messenger is killed, the clan will rebel against British rule, he thinks. But His people are against Him. The fact that they are silent indicates that Umuofia is not united anymore. The tribe that once celebrated bravery and community is split apart by Christianity, colonialism and fear. Okonkwo



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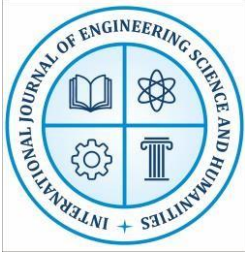
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understands that he must fight on his own if the society is going to perish. It's courageous but it is not effective and that makes his act tragic. Okonkwo's suicide is the last emblem of the resistance of the culture to fail. He has no place in a world where colonial rule has supplanted traditional honour. He can't endure compromise or adaptation too. So he takes the decision to die. However, there is a heart-wrenching irony in his suicide as it is believed in the Igbo religion to be an abomination. Those who live their entire lives fighting for tradition, end their days killing themselves off from the tradition. Since his death infringes on the religious norms of the clan, his people cannot touch his corpse. This reveals the tragic nature of Okonkwo's resistance. He is attempting to preserve the Igbo culture, but his rigid and violent understanding of the same does him in. Okonkwo is a figure of cultural resistance, but, of course, Achebe doesn't make him a perfect nationalist hero. His resistance is strong, it is rooted in love for his clan, anger at colonial insult and loyalty towards "traditional" values. However, it also has its drawbacks, relying heavily on violence, masculinity and pride. He can't comprehend that culture evolves over time and that some people are accepting Christianity because of a suffering they experience from specific culture. Thus, Achebe makes Okonkwo a multifaceted character. He's an Igbo defender and an Igbo sufferer (Begam 396).

In a postcolonial context, Okonkwo's character reveals the negative effects of colonialism on the identity of the natives. Colonialism not only beats him to his knees, it also makes his values worthless in the new political climate. The authority of elders, warriors and ancestral institutions is taken away by the British system of courts, prisons and messengers. The old way of being a man of courage won't do in this new order of colonization. His tragedy is a demonstration of the disease of colonialism and its effect on the relationship between individual identity and cultural structure. There can be no society that acknowledges a man like Okonkwo. When this society starts to break down, so does his identity. So, in the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is one of the best symbols of cultural resistance. He embodies the pride, courage and honour of traditional Igbo society. He is angry with Christianity and colonialism, suggesting his efforts to preserve the cultural unity of Umuofia. But he is not able to adapt to the changes in history and the clan is split from within. Through Okonkwo's life, Achebe is able to demonstrate that colonialism not only attacks social institutions, but people who are the very pillars of the institutions. However, Okonkwo's downfall is also the downfall of a cultural world that was coming to an end under colonial rule (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* 207).

## Language, Proverbs and Cultural Identity

A community's oral expressions, sayings, stories, songs, names and speech, because of language, proverbs and cultural identity, holds the community's culture, history, wisdom and social values. Language in *Things Fall Apart* is not just a means of communication but a bearer of Igbo identity as well in Chinua Achebe's novel. Achebe is a writer in English, but he uses Igbo words, proverbs, idioms, folktales, songs and traditional expressions throughout the novel. In this way, he does



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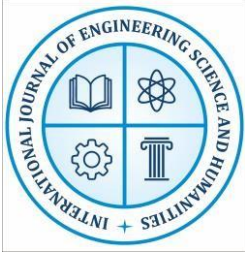
Africanize the English language. The novel, therefore, can be considered a postcolonial novel, as the language of the colonizer is altered to reflect the culture and experience of the colonized. Achebe doesn't allow English to efface Igbo identity, but rather makes English the rhythm and the meaning of the Igbo world.

Achebe is obviously demonstrating the relevance of the proverb in Igbo society in the opening chapters of the novel. Proverbs are not regular sayings but they are indicators of wisdom, respect and cultural maturity. In Igbo culture, someone who speaks proverbs is thought of as being thoughtful and refined socially. In the Igbo way of thinking, the art of conversation is highly valued and proverbs are the palm-oil that words are eaten in (Achebe 7). It is a pivotal sentence as it establishes the novel's role for language. Palm-oil is part of Igbo food and Achebe likens proverbs to palm-oil to indicate that proverbs enrich speech—make it meaningful, rich and graceful. Proverbs are like palm-oil that adds flavour to food. Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe Summary, Characters and Analysis.

Words rise softly like morning flame,  
Proverbs carry an elder's name;  
In every saying, old truths stay,  
Guiding the clan through night and day.

Things Fall Apart also demonstrates the existence of a precedent for using proverbs in Igbo society. Achebe's writing often countered the negative image of Africa as primitive and voiceless that was put forth by colonial writers by illustrating the richness of Igbo speech. The elders of Umuofia are known for their care, wisdom and dignity in their speech. They are patient, experienced and knowledgeable in morals in their language also. Proverbs are used in meetings, family discussions, ceremonies and social judgments. They assist individuals to articulate challenging scenarios into simple but impactful words. Achebe shows through the use of proverbs that Igbo society has a sophisticated system of thought prior to the Europeans. As a result, language turns into a strong means for fixing colonial misrepresentation.

Achebe also uses Igbo words and expressions to ensure cultural identity. Some words like chi, egwugwu, obi, osu and ilo are not just translated because they have significant meanings in the local culture. In the case of chi, it is a person's personal god or spiritual force. The concept can not be adequately conveyed with one word in English. In the same way, the spirits of previous generations and traditional justice are represented by egwugwu. Achebe preserves the depth of the Igbo culture in his English text by leaving in these words. His approach is to make the reader enter into the Igbo world rather than to force Igbo culture into the Western language. Language thus becomes a means of cultural resistance. A significant aspect of the novel's cultural identity is also its folktales and storytelling. The values of the Igbo society are maintained by way of oral tradition. Elders, Mums and kids share stories and these stories convey a moral. Ekwefi's tales to Ezinma demonstrate the emotional and educative power of oral culture. The teaching of children the values



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of cleverness, patience, obedience, danger and social wisdom comes through folktales. Storytelling also establishes intimate relationships among family members. It is a link between generations. Achebe thus demonstrates that there is cultural identity that is not limited to reading books: it is also sung and narrated from memory. Oral history is now the living word of the Igbo (Achebe, “The African Writer” 62).

Language is also related to social respect and social authority. In Umuofia they are judged not only by their wealth and their strength, but also by their skill in public speaking. Controlled and respectful speaking is necessary during meetings of elders, marriage negotiations and clan discussions. The power of words is in their social nature. Words which are ill-chosen can offend a man and words which are judicious will pacify men. This indicates the importance that is attached to verbal skills in Igbo society. This is a cultural value reflected in Achebe's style. Sentences tend to have the flow of spoken language. He doesn't write in a very complex or sophisticated way, but his narrative has a sort of African expression and thought. This not only helps readers to understand the book but also gives it a cultural and social context. Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart*:

The drum may fade, the fire may die,  
Yet spoken truths refuse to lie;  
A people live where stories stand,  
And names still breathe within the land.

The use of English is of special interest to the postcolonial perspective in Achebe's work. English is the language of the colonizer but Achebe is not totally against English. Rather, he modifies it for use in Africa. Achebe makes the claim in his essay “The African Writer and the English Language” that the African writer must use his English in a way that is freighted with African experience (Achebe 62). This concept is apparent in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's English is not just British English, but Africanized English. It includes Igbo cultural logic, oral rhythm and native imagery. In this way, Achebe makes the colonial language the vehicle for an African self-expression.

The oral culture and the written culture of the Igbo people is also significant in the novel. The culture of the Igbo relies on the use of words, memory, performance and participation in the community. Written records, courts, reports and administrative documents are the basis for colonial culture. When he is asked at the end of the novel to write about Okonkwo in his book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (209), the District Commissioner considers writing his protagonist's name in the book. This moment is an example of the perils of colonial language. The District Commissioner is determined to compress a whole human life and a complex culture into a small colonial record. His language is not a language of Igbo reality, it's a language of the control over reality and also a distortion of it. But Achebe does not accept this and writes the whole story from the perspective of the Igbo world. The language, then, becomes a theatre of conflict between colonialism and native identity. Based in language, the colonizer sees



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Africans as primitive, while Achebe sees Africans as dignified through language. The planned book of the District Commissioner is a book of colonial misrepresentation, the novel of Achebe is a book of cultural correction. Edward Said believes that colonial discourse can produce knowledge about the colonized with the aim of dominating them (Said 3). In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe defies that by using Igbo proverbs, values and cultural forms to let the Igbo people tell their own story. The novel is a counternarrative to colonial writing. Therefore, language, proverbs and culture are central themes in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe employs proverbs to convey Igbo wisdom, folktales to represent the oral tradition, to use Igbo words to safeguard cultural contents and to use Africanized English to defy colonial rule. Language becomes the "voice" of a community that colonial history has been determined to quell. Achebe demonstrates that the Igbo culture is rich, complex and meaningful in his style. When a people lose their language and stories they lose a part of themselves, this is the novel enlightenment. Thus, Achebe uses language in a way that is artistic and also cultural, political and postcolonial.

## Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a compelling post-colonial work that examines the cultural, social and psychological impact of colonialism on the people of Igbo country from an African perspective. The novel does not start with the Europeans, it is simply a world of Umuofia, an entire world, fully realised. This world has its say and observances, its religion and law, its family life and its oral culture and ethics. In doing so, Achebe challenges colonial notions that African societies were primitive, unspoiled, uncivilized. He demonstrates that before colonialism, there was a meaningful lifestyle for the Igbo people that was organized. They belonged to the land, to their ancestors, to their gods, to their language, to their proverbs, to their titles, to their family honour and to their communal responsibility. The novel's theme is postcolonial identity. Achebe offers a double perspective of identity, individual and collective. Okonkwo is characterized by his courage, diligence, manliness and social acceptance. He is determined to be different from his father, the unsuccessful and weak Unoka. But fear is another guideline that regulates Okonkwo's identity. He is harsh, violent and emotionally rigid because he is afraid of weakness. Thus, Achebe demonstrates that identity is not an easy thing to determine. It is a product of society, family history, personal insecurity and cultural expectations. Okonkwo is a symbol of traditional Igbo strength, but a victim of his limited understanding of the term.

The clash of cultures is manifested in the form of cultural conflict when the traditional Igbo culture meets British colonial culture. The Igbo world is organized along communal lines, on the premise of ancestral authority, oral traditions, religious practices and social equilibrium. Christianity, written law, courts, prisons and administrative control are introduced into the colonial world. This leads to a conflict of beliefs and authorities. The missionaries are challenging the gods and traditions of the Igbo people and the colonial government is supplanting the old Igbo laws with new ones. Thus, the unity of Umuofia is starting to weaken. Now converts find a new identity in



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the church and the colonial court is a new political power. The conversion of Nwoye is one of the foremost instances of the identity crisis in the novel. He is emotionally disturbed by some harsh customs of Igbo society, especially the killing of Ikemefuna and the rejection of twins. Christianity provides him emotional support and a new family. His conversion brings his father and son into conflict, tradition and change, native culture and colonial religion. Achebe demonstrates that colonialism can be achieved not just by force but by the “weaknesses and the contradictory nature of native society” through Nwoye. The new religion is appealing to those who have been turned down, stifled or hurt by conventional practices.

Okonkwo's struggle against the colonialism is heroic and tragic. He wishes to preserve the honour and unity of his own clan but he does not realize that Umuofia has changed. He slaughters the colonial messenger and is hoping that the people will rise with him, but they do not. This is a sign of the end of the old collective power among the clan. The suicide of Okonkwo is the last testament to the resistance of culture. The tragedy is compounded as it is an abomination in Igbo religion to kill oneself. So, Okonkwo ends up dying outside of the very culture he was trying to fight for. His fall is a personal fall as well as one of a cultural world that is under the pressure of the colonial experience. Language is also very important in maintaining the cultural identity. Achebe is an English writer but he has reworked English in Igbo proverbs, idioms, names, folktales and oral expressions. Proverbs are a symbol of Igbo wisdom and a memory of the community. Achebe in this Africanized English resists colonial language and enlivens African speech. The District Commissioner's intent to confine Okonkwo to a small paragraph demonstrates the colonial writing that muffles native experience. Achebe's novel is an alternative to this colonial record.

So, *Things Fall Apart* is a novel that explores two main concepts that are intertwined: postcolonial identity and cultural conflict. Colonialism is not confined to land, it is an assault on culture, memory, language, religion, law and self-respect. In Achebe's view the fall of Umuofia is the fall of not a primitive society but a living civilizations. The novel is still relevant due to its contribution to the liberation of Africa's cultural and social image and the enlightenment of the violence of colonial rule. Achebe shows various reactions to the change of colonialism through Okonkwo, Nwoye, Obierika, the missionaries and the District Commissioner. So *Things Fall Apart* is an African novel, it's also a great postcolonial work that still continues to say something about identity, resistance, cultural memory and historical justice.

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