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African Igbo Community and Culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract:

Achebe's projection of Africa is pre-colonial that rejects the modern and contemporary version of his nation. By using his Igbo oral traditions, contextually and ethnographically, he narrates the stories of his communities and discovers the individual, social and cultural factors that gave shape and meaning to his people. Igbo ethnic clan is a group of Africans with a complex, vigorous and self-sufficient way of life. Their culture is heavy in traditions and laws that focus on justice and fairness. The people are not ruled by a king or chief but by a kind of democracy where the males meet and make decisions by consensus and in accordance to an Oracle that should be written down. The Igbo society is based on patriarchal system that devalues its women.

Keywords: Igbo community, African culture, Chinua Achebe, pre-colonial, Church.

Chinua Achebe is a well-known Nigerian writer from Africa. He has recorded what he has directly experienced from the British colonization of Nigeria and Igbo land. His birthplace, Ogidi, has been the center of Anglican missionary work in Eastern Nigeria. His first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1950) has not only brought him the fame but also widened the horizon of African literature. After graduation he joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and entered into the metropolis of Lagos. He has also published the novels— *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Being a son of Nigerian soil he wrote vastly defending his own culture and won many laurels after showing real image of his own Africa to the world (Bandel, ix). African culture was falsely viewed as the liberating Dionysiac force which would shatter the Apollonian certainty of nineteenth-century bourgeois society. For the early twentieth century, Africa was an image which offered either absolute horror or an absolution from the decayed and destructive fragments of a 'civilization' whose bloodthirsty, hypocrisies and violent contradictions had been exposed on the battlefields of the Somme and Verdun. (Ashcroft et al, 157). Achebe's projection of Africa is pre-colonial that rejects the modern and contemporary version of his nation. Achebe uses his Igbo oral traditions, contextually and ethnographically, to narrate the stories of his communities and discovers the individual, social and cultural factors that gave shape and meaning to his people. *Things Fall Apart* is deeply rooted in the social customs, traditions, and cultural milieu of African people. It explores the Igbo ethnic clan that is a group of African people with a complex, vigorous and self-sufficient way of life. Chinua

Achebe reveals "the psychological and sociological consequences of colonization and the cultural features of colonized peoples" (Fanon 1961) through his writings.

Household Structure:

The African village like Umuofia had typical household structure. It was full of huts, or *obi*. One's prosperity was visible in one's household. As Okonkwo had

"a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or *obi*, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the *obi*. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats, and each wife built a small attachment to her hut for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the 'medicine house' or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal good and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with a sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children" (Achebe, 11).

Ibo people lived by sowing the yams in a farm. The women worked hard to grow women's crops like coco-yams, beans and cassava. Yam, the king of corps, was a man's corp. Yam stood for manliness. And he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed. The farmers would face the terrible harvest. The uncertainty of rain made many farmers weep as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams. The farmers countered the forces of these extremes of weather.

Law of the Land:

It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. He could return to the clan after seven years. So Okonkwo went to his motherland Mbanta, just beyond the borders of Mbaino. There he was received while arranging the requisite rites and sacrifices. As the justice of the earth goddess, the people dressed in garbs of war set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls killed his animals and destroyed his barn. They acted as the messengers of the earth goddess. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. The royal python was the most revered animal in the Ibo society. It was addressed as 'Our Father,' and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. If a clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he would make sacrifices of atonement and perform an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. No punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen.

The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves:

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The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves was the part of life of African people. It was called Agbala and people came from far and near to consult it. They came “when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbors. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers” (13) The worshippers and those who came to seek knowledge from the god crawled on their belly through the hole and found themselves in a dark, endless space in the presence of Agbala. No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess.

Ibo people followed the custom of Week of Peace. During this sacred week everyone observed the peace. If anyone broke the peace, she/he would be punished by Ezani, the priest of the earth goddess. The custom was meant to respect their gods and ancestors. The forefathers of Ibo people ordained that “before they plant any crops in the earth they should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. They lived in peace with their fellows to honor their great goddess of the earth without whose blessing the crops will not grow.”(23) It was a great evil to break the custom. And its punishment was given. In some clans it was an abomination for a man to die during the Week of Peace. This custom was in Obodoani. In the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoilt the peace which it was meant to preserve. Thus, the punishment for breaking the Peace of Ani prevailed in the country. After the Week of Peace every man and his family began to clear the bush to make new farms. It was marked as the beginning of the rainy season after the dry season.

Village meetings and Communal Feasts:

The people would gather at the big village meetings. The communal ancestral feasts were organized to nourish the bond of community. The feast of the New Yam was given for paying thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth.

The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New Yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival because it began the season of plenty-the New Year. Before the festival begins, yams of the old year must begin with tasty, fresh yams and not the shriveled and fibrous crop of the previous year. All cooking pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yams was pounded. Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. The greetings were exchanged. “The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man, whose arm was strong, as the Ibo people sag, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide.” (28). The Ibo people would offer a sacrifice of a new yam and palm-oil to his ancestors and asked them to protect their children, their mothers in the New Year.

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The second day of the New Year was reserved for the great wrestling match between Umuofia and its neighbours. The people would enjoy the feasting and fellowship of the first day and the wrestling contest of the second. To show the gratitude to the village / motherland, a great feast was arranged. The foo-foo, yam pottage, egusi soup and bitter-leaf soup along with pots of palm-wine were prepared. All the umunna were invited to the feast, all the descendants were also called. Yam pottage was served first because it was lighter than foo-foo and because yam always came first. Then the foo-foo was served.

The feast or gatherings strengthened the bond of kinship and produced one voice. The aim of gathering was to awaken the young generation about its duties and responsibilities regarding the clan, its gods and ancestors. The feasts brought the young as well as the elder together to protect their faith from an abominable religion, Christian.

Valiant men of society:

Ibo society produced many valiant men like Okonkwo who had risen so suddenly from great poverty and misfortune to be one of the lords of the clan. Okonkwo was respected for his industry and success. Ibo men were fierce fighters and courageous. The Ibo people had a proverb that when a man says yes his chi or personal god says 'yes' also. The children like Nwoye and Ikemefuna would listen to Okonkwo's stories about tribal wars or how he had stalked his victim, overpowered him and obtained his first human head.

The nine villages of Umuofia had grown and of the nine sons of the first father of the clan. Evil Forest represented the village of Umeru, or the children of Eru, who was the eldest of the nine sons. Each of the nine *egwugwu* represented a village of the clan. Their leader was called Evil Forest. Smoke poured out of his head. The *egwugwu* means the ancestral spirits of the clan had their house. They would emerge from the earth and greet themselves in their esoteric language. Their house into which they emerged faced the forest, away from the crowd, who saw only its back with the many-coloured patterns and drawings done by specially chosen women at regular intervals. The *egwugwu* would settle the dispute. Thus, the *egwugwu* dealt with trifle as well as great land cases. They judged the domestic cases and people accepted their judgments without any words.

There was a belief that 'he who brings kola brings life' (05). The honour was attached to the act of breaking the kola. As the Kola was broken, the people prayed to their ancestors for life and health, and for protection against their enemies. As Okonkwo broke it saying, 'We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break.' (15)

Tradition and Festivals:

For the festivals, the women would scrub the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light. Then they draw patterns on them in white, yellow and dark green. They then set about painting themselves with cam wood and drawing beautiful black patterns on their stomachs and on their backs. The children were also decorated, especially their hair, which was shaved in beautiful patterns.

The ekwe carried the news of death to all the nine villages and even beyond. It began by naming the clan: *Umuofia obodo dike* ‘the land of the brave.’ It said this over and over again, and as it dwelt on it anxiety mounted in every heart that heaved on a bamboo bed that night. Then it went near and named the village: Iguedo of the yellow grinding stone! It was Okonkwo’s village. Again and again Iguedo was called and men waited breathlessly in all the nine villages. At last the man was named and people sighed ‘E-u-u, Ezeudu is dead.’ (88)

At the funeral of a great man the ancient drums of death beat, guns and cannon were fired. Men dashed about in frenzy, netting down every tree or animal they saw, jumping over walls and dancing on the roof. The warriors and an ancestral spirit or egwugwu attended the warrior’s funeral. The elders knew all the clans like Aninta, Umuazu, Ikeocha, Elumelu, Abame. Chukwu was a supreme God who made heaven and earth. The Ibo people believed that he made the entire world and the other gods. *Ikenga* was His messenger to approach him.

The people tried to get the titles like the Idemili, the third highest in the land. After getting the title, the title holders would celebrate the ceremony by gathering all his resources together. Okonkwo had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. He did not bear the comment that his father was agabala. Agbala was not only another name for a woman; it could also mean a man who had taken no title. The Ibo man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Age was respected among Okonkwo’s people, but achievement was revered (06). The wealthy man who had taken the highest title would be addressed as “our father, Nna ayi”. The village had men of high title, the chief priests and the elders.

Darkness and superstitions:

Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it could hear. It was called a string. Dangerous animals, they thought, became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. On a moonlight night it would be different. The happy voices of children playing in open fields would then be heard. As the Ibo say “when the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.”(08) When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die. The sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels. The twins were forbidden in the culture. They were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest. The Earth had decreed that the twin children were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed

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on all the land and not just on the offender (91). The Ibo people had their own ideas about *ogbanje* children. The diviner of the Afa Oracle or medicine man told whether the child was *ogbanje* one of those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mother's wombs to be born again. He suggested:

“When the (your) wife becomes pregnant again, let her not sleep in her hut. Let her go and stay with her people. In that way she will elude her wicked tormenter and break its evil cycle of birth and death.” (57)

The *ogbanje* children were buried in the Evil Forest and mutilated to their coming again to the house. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala was possessed by the spirit of her god and she began to prophesy.

When a man died, the one handed spirit appeared by dancing to the dead body, he asked:

“If you had been poor in your last life I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young, I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So I shall ask you to come again the way you came before. If your death was the death of nature, go in peace. But if a man caused it, do not allow him a moment's rest.”(90)

The Ibo people believed in rebirth of human beings. Even the clan and village had its 'evil forest'. All those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox were buried in it. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An 'evil forest' was therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness. *Osu* was “a person dedicated to a good, a thing set apart – a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste – long, tangled and dirty hair. A razor was taboo to him. An *Osu* could not attend an assembly of the free – born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by him kind in the Evil Forest.” (115-116.)

Status of woman:

Woman was the priestess of Agbada. Chika, the priestess was full of the power of her god. She was greatly feared. Chielo was the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. The first wife of a man would be honoured and allowed to sit in the company of men. She could drink the wine. She wore the anklet of her husband's titles. She had authority to rule over the women folk in a large and prosperous family. To respect her husband, the senior wife would call him by his name.

The women folk were controlled by men. The women planted maize, melons and beans between the yams mounds. They weeded the farm three times at definite periods in the

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life of the yams, neither early nor late. They would go to the bush to collect firewood. The masculine stories of violence and bloodshed were narrated to encourage the boys. The girls were taught to follow the feminine ways of life. While looking at his daughter Ezinma, Okonkwo thought that ‘she should have been a boy’ (46).

The bride-price was given to her father-in-law. In other clans like Abame and Aninta the bride-price was not decided with sticks. They haggled and bargained as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market. In Umunso, another clan, the people did not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just went on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It was a bad custom because it always led to a quarrel. “In the traditional African society, bearing children is the *raison d’être* of contracting marriages and every family aspires to have many children, especially boys” (Agbasiere, 67).

The Ibo society was patriarchal. The male child was welcomed with great celebration. “When his first wife borne her third son in succession, Okonkwo had slaughtered a goat for her, as was the custom”. (58). No woman ever asked questions about “the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan” (65). The law of Umuofia was that if a woman runs away from her husband her bride-price is returned. But in this case she would run away to save her life.

Celebration of *uri*, made the entire neighbourhood festive. It was really a woman’s ceremony and the central figures were the bride and her mother. A great feast was given. The bride was praised and prayed for good wife, good mother as the forms of bride. The prosperous men as great warriors were excepted to be born from the bride. The singers sang for every man. Some were great farmers some were orators who spoke for the clan; Okokwo was the greatest wrestler and warrior alive. The Ibo people thought that the girl will be a good wife and will bear the nine sons like the mother of their town. After it the bride was taken to spend seven market weeks with her suitor’s family. New bride would be taken through three steps—paying the bride-price, receiving palm-wine from the bride, kinsmen and the ceremony of confession.

Thus, a man is considered as the head of the Ibo family and his wives do his bidding. Here, the child belongs to its father and his family and not to his motherland. When a woman dies she is taken home to be buried with her own kinsmen. She is not buried with her husband’s kinsmen. The Ibo people believe that it is true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. The mother is there to protect her child.

Cultural Encounters with Church:

The white man appeared in Abame clan during the planting season, riding an iron horse. The Igbo people who saw him ran away, but he stood beckoning to them. The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread

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destruction among them. It also said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. The Ibo people killed him and tied up his iron horse to the sacred silk-cotton tree. After the planting season, the three white men led by a band of ordinary men saw the iron horse and went away. For many market weeks nothing else happened. On Afo day, the white men shot the Abame people. "Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose *chi* were wide awake and brought them out of that market". (102) The great evil came upon their land as the Oracle had warned. The white men then made the powerful guns and the strong drinks. They also took slaves away across the seas.

In Umuofia, the missionaries came and built the church. They won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages. That was a source of great sorrow to the leaders of the clan; but many of them believed that the strange faith and the white man's god would not last. None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an *efulefu* in the language of clan was a man who sold his matchet and more the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up. (105)

The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta. The white man spoke through an interpreter who was an Ibo man, though his dialect was different and harsh to the ears of Mbanta. Many people laughed at his dialect and the way he used words strangely. Instead of saying "myself" he always said 'my buttocks'. But he was a man of commanding presence and the clansmen listened to him. White man said that he was one of them, as they could see from his color and his language. He told the Ibo people about the new God, the Creator of all the world and all the men and women. He told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone. He told them that the true God lived on high and that all men when they died went before Him for judgment. Evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm-oil. But good men who worshipped the true God lived for ever in his happy kingdom. The white man said: "We have been sent by this great God to ask you to leave your wicked ways and false gods and turn to him so that you may be saved when you die." (106)

The gods and goddess of land had no relation to the white man's God. The white man told them that their gods are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who will tell them to kill their fellows and destroy innocent children. He stressed that there is only one true God who has made the earth, the sky, the men and women. He continued that the Ibo gods are just the pieces of wood and stone. They are not alive and cannot do any harm to them. The Ibo people like Okonkwo raised the question about 'wife of God' by listening to the son of God, Jesu Kristi. They did not believe that their Gods like Ani, Amadior, Idemili and ogwugwu are harmless. The young men of Ibo community get attracted to the logic of the Holy Trinity. The Trinity captivated a young lad, Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. The poetry of the new religion,

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the hymn about brother's who sat in darkness and in far seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth (108). The missionaries preached the gospel in the morning to the villagers. They then were received by the rulers of Mbanta and built the church in the Evil Forest. The white man began to convert the Ibo people. In Umuofia, he built his head quarters and paid regular visits to the other villages.

The people of Mbanta believed that their gods and ancestor were sometimes long-suffering and would deliberately allow a man to go on defying them. The missionaries won a handful of more converts. The women like Nneka joined the Christians. The missionaries set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write.

Okonkwo felt a strong desire to take up his machet, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang. But he thought that the converts like Nwoye were not worth fighting for. 'To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination'. (112). He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god. If such a thing were ever to happen, he Okonkwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth' (112) Okonkwo, a flaming fire, sighed heaving because his son was converted to Christianity.

The white man brought a religion as well as a government. A place of judgment was built in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion. The missionaries began to punish the man who killed a missionary. Primarily, nobody gave serious thought to the stories about the white man's government or the consequences of killing the Christians. If the converts became more troublesome than they already were; they would simply be driven out of the clan. The young church admitted the *Osu*, the outcasts of clans. 'These outcasts, *Osu*, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received'. (115). But the whole church raised a protest and threatened the church not to involve them. The church remained constant that the outcasts need Christ more than the others. This firmness saved the young church. 'The wavering converts drew inspiration and confidence from his unshakable faith'. (116)

The teaching of church that the same God created the outcaste and others revealed that the heathen spoke nothing but falsehood. The outcasts then shaved off their hair and joined the new faith. The indigenous people accepted the new faith saying that they had no custom to fight for their gods. They only ostracized the Christians. (117). But the people like Okonkwo never agreed upon such thoughts and felt disgusted. The clan saw no reason then for molesting the Christians. The Christians had grown in number and were now a small community of men, women and children, self assured and confident. Mr. Brown, the white missionary, paid regular visits to them. It was happened only in eighteen months. Not only

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the low born and the outcaste but sometimes a worthy man had joined the church. The man of titles Ogbuefi Ugonna also joined the Christians. The white missionary was very proud of him and he was one of the first men in Umuofia to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, or Holy Feast as it was called in Ibo.

Apart from the church, the white men had also brought a government. They built a court where the District commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers who brought men to him for trial. Many of these messengers came from Umuru on the bank of the great River, where the white men built the centre of their religion, trade and government. These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed. They were called Kotma, and because of their ash-colored shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-buttocks. They guarded the prison, which was full of men who had offended against the white man's law. Some of these prisoners had thrown away their twins and some had molested the Christians. They were beaten in the prison of the Kotma and made to work every morning clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white commissioner and the court messengers (127). Some of these prisoners were men of title who should be above such mean occupation. They were grieved by the indignity and mourned for their neglected farms. They lived at the cross-roads of cultures.

The white man termed the customs of Igbo societies as 'bad' and the converted Ibo people supported him saying the same thing. The white man's nature can be revealed through the comment of Obierika, as he says:

"The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (129)

This growing feeling was due to Mr. Brown, the white missionary, who was very firm in restraining his flock from provoking the wrath of the clan. He came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith. He made friends with some of the great men of the clan and on one of his frequent visits to the neighboring village he had been presented with a carved elephant tusk, which was a sign of dignity and rank.

Mr. Brown learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them. Mr. Brown's school produced quick results. The new religion and the government and the trading stores were very much in the people's eyes and minds. But Umuofia did not notice the warrior's return. The clan had undergone such profound change during the exile of Okonkwo that it was barely recognizable. Okonkwo "mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the

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warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women”. (133) Mr. Brown’s successor saw ‘things as black and white.’ To them, black was evil and the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in moral conflict with the sons of darkness. Mr. Brown’s policy of compromise and accommodation was openly condemned. The *egwugwu* of the nine villages taught the lesson to Mr. Smith by destroying his church. Okonkwo killed the head messenger of the District commissioner as a part of revenge. Thus the commissioner or the Christianity was defeated by the Ibo people. As Innocent Ebere Uwah aptly states:

“Using Okonkwo as the protagonist of the story and Umuofia as his traditional community or fatherland, Achebe tells the story of Africa and the subjugation of her cultural values at the behest of Western colonialism. By introducing new systems of religion, law and Western civilization, he creatively indicts the West for igniting the fire of frictions between Africa and Europe; and by so doing he raises questions regarding African identity and cultural values” (Uwah, 108).

African culture encountered in the great period of European expansion from the sixteenth century onwards. Africa was not perceived as a decayed remnant of an alternative, earlier, and superseded model for ‘high civilization.’ Achebe portrays the African people who are caught between two conflicting cultures. He focuses on “the revaluation of traditional African cultures and the representation of culture conflicts that had their genesis in the colonial era” (Whittaker and Msiska, xii). The Umuofia people follow the traditional way of life and Okonkwo struggles to maintain that cultural integrity against an overwhelming force of the colonial imperialism. Additionally, one can see the hesitation of Okonkwo and his entire society to choose either European-style or traditional Igbo life. The desire to become a member of European-style society has its attraction. When some members of Umuofia community accept the invitation and take on the “strange faith”, then the things begin to fall. The integrated, organic community is irreparably ‘fractured’. The gods of Igbo people are blasphemed and their hero Okonkwo becomes disabled. Their culture is heavy in traditions and laws that focus on justice and fairness. The people are not ruled by a king or chief but by a kind of democracy where the males meet and make decisions by consensus and in accordance to an Oracle that should be written down. Religious leaders are also called upon to settle debates reflecting the cultural focus of the Igbo people. The Europeans especially Christians upset this system. Achebe tells that the high rank can be attained to all freeborn Igbo men as he attained his through fighting as opposed to reading or to plough the land and by growing herbal remedies, vegetation, rearing cattle, and fowl. The Igbo society is patriarchal and agricultural. The communal ancestral feasts and festivals nourish the bond of community. Being aware of the untainted and pure Africa, Achebe rejects the European perspective that projects the non-European as exotic. He uses a village Africa not only to declare the cultural independence but to decolonize the African culture.

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