

**Navigating Identity in Transition: A Critical Study of Chinua Achebe's
*Things Fall Apart***

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Abstract

This article looks at the idea of "Self in Flux" in Chinua Achebe's important novel *Things Fall Apart*. It places this analysis within postcolonial theory and philosophical ideas about change. The study focuses on Heraclitus's ideas about change, the apocalyptic vision of W.B. Yeats, the cosmotheandric philosophical approach of Raimundo Panicker, economic critique of Dadabha Naoroji's especially the British economic policy towards India, and the cultural chaos that Matthew Arnold's reiterated through his poems. The affects colonialism on the Igbo society and question on personal identity is analyzed based on cultural displacement, identity, and colonialism.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Identity, Cultural Displacement, Colonialism, Igbo Society

Introduction

Heraclitus's statement that "no man ever steps into the same river twice, for he is not the same man and it is not the same river" captures the core idea of flux—change is the only constant. (Heraclitus / Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a key work in African literature, offering a deep look at the Igbo community's encounter with colonial modernity and the resulting identity crisis. (Al-Ghammaz).

This article intends to analyze how "Self in Flux" is represented in *Things Fall Apart*, focusing on the pre-colonial context, experiences of displacement, the "drain of roots" theory, loss of innocence, the impact of global culture, the rise of a "weak generation," the growth of an inferiority complex, modernity's ambivalence, and the weakening of subaltern culture. The study is based on postcolonial literary theory and empirical research on cultural

preservation and language loss to ensure scientific rigor (*Postcolonial Theory | Research Starters | EBSCO Research*).

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

Postcolonial theory serves as the main lens for this analysis, highlighting colonialism's effects on identity, culture, and power dynamics. (*Postcolonial Theory | Research Starters | EBSCO Research*). Key concepts like hybridity, subalternity, and cultural displacement are used to study the novel's portrayal of a changing Igbo society. Heraclitus's philosophy of flux provides a philosophical basis, emphasizing that change is both unavoidable and complicated. Raimundo Panicker's cosmotheandric view helps explain how self, society, nature and the divine connect in pre-colonial Igbo beliefs. Dadabha Naoroji's criticizes the economic policy towards India, particularly his "drain of wealth" theory, is modified to understand the "drain of roots," or the removal of cultural and spiritual resources by colonial powers. W.B. Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* and Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* offer an enhanced apocalyptic and elegiac overtones to the understanding of the novel.

Contemporary Scholarship

Things Fall Apart stands as a counter - narrative to the European centred view of the colonial masters, trying to reclaim their indigenous histories and identities. The negotiation of roles and identity and the cultural memory and the psychological effects and identity conflict in a globalized world is well depicted in the novel. (Gaurav).

Methodology

The qualitative, interpretive approach to understand the text based on historical and theoretical frameworks. Both primary and secondary sources have been used to understand cultural displacements, identity flux and colonial impact on African Literature. The philosophical, empirical and postcolonial theories have been used to have a better understanding of the novel. The approach combines postcolonial theory, philosophical analysis, and empirical findings on language and culture.

Analysis

1. Heraclitus and the Philosophy of Flux

The claim of Heraclitus that "everything flows" is the philosophical foundation on which the understanding of the transformations in *Things Fall Apart* is built. The serves as a philosophical foundation for understanding the transformations in *Things Fall Apart*. The characters and the structure of the novel depicts the constant instability of the social and personal identities. The depiction of the pre-colonial and the post-colonial Igbo illustrates Heraclitean idea that change is inevitable and disruptive. Nothing is permanent except

change and we need to keep abreast with it by rising above the horizon and redefining our direction and purpose. It is important to envision the right path in the midst of this chaos.

Actually, Chinua Achebe portrays the Igbo community, particularly the Umuofia clan with a detached standpoint. The moral and cultural decay culminating in the forsaking of the traditional values, language, culture and customs. The author rises above the empirical evidences and deeply ponders, reflects prioritizing spirituality and intuition to create such a masterpiece.

The title *Things Fall Apart* is taken from W.B. Yeats's famous poem *The Second Coming*. It is listed among the top hundred English novels from 1923 to 2005 and has become a canonical text for emerging writers. The novel examines these themes through folk tales, showcasing culture's impact on people. Achebe also explores religion, nature, myth, gender, and history. He critiques the portrayal of white men as civilized while viewing Africans as uncivilized. *Things Fall Apart* tells of the strength derived from community, illustrating our dependence on one another. The title reflects both the novel's tragedy and society's turmoil. The preface opens with lines from the poem:

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosened upon the world,"

In the scene where the Umuofia elders confront the White District Commissioner, the elders are handcuffed and face a hefty fine for their release. The commissioner states:

"We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man mistreats you, we shall come to your rescue. But we will not permit you to mistreat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my country under a great queen. I have brought you here because you joined together to harm others, to burn people's homes and their places of worship. That must not happen under our queen's dominion, the world's most powerful ruler." (Achebe 105).

2. Pre-Colonial Context: The Cosmotheandric Self

Achebe's holistic understanding of the universe by portraying the pre-colonial Igbo society having a deep connection with the individual, community, nature and the divine goes in proportion with the Cosmotheadric philosophy of Raimundo Panicker. The concept of chi, or personal god or spirit, highlights the link between fate, agency, and spirituality. Social customs, oral traditions, and communal rituals shape relationships and maintain social unity.

The death of Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is viewed as an outcome of spiritual and ecological balance. His death was seen as a shameful act towards the earth goddess, as he died from a disgraceful illness, described as "swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess." (18).

Illness is interpreted as an abomination against the earth goddess, emphasizing the unity of self and cosmos.

When Okoye visits Unoka to settle a debt, he offers a kola nut as a sign of hospitality and respect. Unoka prays for the well-being of all, expressing a collective hope:

"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 the egret perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wings break." (Achebe 02).

Chinua Achebe could not neglect underlying unity among society, nature, God, and humanity—an idea well-articulated by Raimundo Panicker . He believed that human beings cannot be separated from his environment. we cannot separate human beings from their environment. "Cosmotheandric intuition is the fully integrated vision of the seamless fabric of reality—the undivided consciousness of the totality" (Panikkar). to understand ourselves, we need to view it in relation with the earth. The tragic view of the universe is seeing these as separate entities. The gap separating the material from the sacred and the divine from the human needs to be bridged, allowing us to see the universe as a whole. Interdependence rather than focus on a single point is the core of this perspective.

Every person in Umofia has a chi, a personal god or spirit. A bad chi brings bad fortune, while good fortune stems from a good chi. This persona chi is being challenged by the protagonist, Okonkwo, trying to prove that when a person strives for a goal, their chi ensures their success. This illustrates the Trinitarian relationship among God (theos), humans (anthropos), and nature (cosmos).

When Unoka's resentful neighbor comes to collect a debt, he doesn't demand immediate payment. First, he and Unoka share a kola nut and pray to their ancestors while discussing community affairs. This practice proves how customs govern social relationships, collective interests, and culture, easing possible conflicts. Debt was expressed through proverbs which states how oral traditions are learned, shared and utilized. These practices were engraved in their hearts.

3. Displacement and Identity in Flux

Colonialism actually results in deep displacement impacting both psychologically and physically. Okonkwo's is in constant fight to understand and maintain his identity in a rapidly changing world fight to maintain his identity in a rapidly changing world. The

disconnect between "the West and the rest" is evident in the culturally specific response of Ekwefi's to a call from outside her hut. The enduring indigenous effect of local beliefs in spite of the foreign influence is evident. The narrator tries to keep a safe distance in order to connect both African and European viewpoints, and also to bring out the tensions and misunderstandings that come with cultural interactions.

4. The "Drain of Roots" Theory

Dadabhai Naoroji's "drain of wealth" theory, stands as the base to develop the "drain of roots" theory. It serves as a metaphor for the extraction of cultural, linguistic, and spiritual resources by colonial authorities. The enforcement of English and Christian values lead to the decline of indigenous practices. Igbo language, religion and social systems slowly goes to oblivion, forgotten by all. Judicial corruption and collection of tax echo economic exploitation and cultural loss. It shows that "the Western colonizers succeeded in producing loyal followers who adopted their beliefs. Those followers replaced foreign control with a different kind of occupation, where acceptance was judged by how well they fit Western standards in all aspects of life. In *Petals of Blood*, Thiog'o describes the effects of foreign languages on indigenous culture and the erosion of African identity." (Ismail, 55). The West and the rest represent the division we see today. ¿In chapter five, Ekwefi answers a call from inside her hut with "Is that me?" This may confuse non-Igbo readers, so the narrator clarifies: "That was how people responded to calls from outside. They never said yes for fear it might be an evil spirit calling." (45-46) The Igbo world is filled with spirits that might have bad intentions, and answering "Yes" could unintentionally invite one in. Throughout the book, the narrator explains aspects of Igbo culture to non-Igbo readers. The narrator straddles two worlds: one African and one European. From Igbo proverbs to complete English, it illustrates that a man is respected for his actions, while in Europe, such respect is tied to wealth.

The draining of roots theory is based on the drain of wealth theory. Dadabhai Naoroji was the first to argue that poverty in India was not due to internal factors but rather the drain of its wealth and resources. This theory became well-known through the book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. The drain of wealth started in 1757 after the Battle of Plassey when employees of the East India Company gained 'privileged status' and obtained excessive revenue from oppressive land revenue policies, monopolistic practices in Indian markets, and demands from company officials. This is similar to the tax collectors who were meant to collect two hundred cowries but took two hundred and fifty instead. From this, we can propose a new idea called the Drain of Roots theory, where the cultural roots that hold the people together are drained for the benefit of the powerful. The changes in education and society resulted from the selfish and reckless actions of colonizers. They imposed their language and culture, which gradually suppressed and erased indigenous culture. Over time, even the natives began to forget their traditions and did not respond as false histories and

stories were spread. Obierika discusses this with Okonkwo: "Does the white man understand our customs about land?" "How can he when he doesn't even speak our language? But he claims our customs are bad, and our brothers who have adopted his religion say the same. How can we resist when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly with his religion. We underestimated him and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife to the things that held us together, causing us to fall apart." (176) They lost their Language, tradition, and culture and have accepted the English language and Christian values. Old beliefs were discarded, such as the practice surrounding the birth of twins. They had their legal system, where the Egwugwu, or the elders of the nine tribes, pronounced judgment. The lament of the Israelites in Babylonian exile is apt: "besides the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept together as we thought of Jerusalem" (Psalms 137:1-5).

5. Loss of Innocence and the Commodification of Culture

The Igbo society lost their communal cooperation and innocence through commodified relationships. Trade, law, and social interactions became a means for exploitation and profit, undermining traditional values. The sacred institutions were stripped of their sanctity with the unmasking and killing of the Egwugwu, a revered spiritual ancestor, shows the community's vulnerability to outside interference. Though complaints were given to the commissioner, the elders were in turn arrested and forced to pay two hundred bags of cowries. Failed collective resistance and cultural breakdown is depicted through Okonkwo's final isolation and suicide. Innocence of relationships has been displaced by profit and trade. The legal system has changed swiftly. (175-177) These events highlight the exploitation faced by Africans under colonial rule. A lot of challenges arose against the Europeans and a final attempt to unite the Igbo community fell in vain as they found themselves alone in their struggle. As Shelley writes in the Ode to the West Wind: "Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud! I fall upon the thorns of life." Okonkwo had hope for his community, but those hopes turned into shame. His people have changed; they want to be different. This despair drives him to take his own life. (207).

6. Global Culture and the Erosion of Local Identities

Global culture based on European standards led to the speedy decline of local languages, customs, and perspectives. *Things Fall Apart* points to the fancied ornamentation of globalization and cultural dominance leading to the death of culture language, identity and collective memory. The enforcement of foreign values has sidelined indigenous cultures and a sense of inferiority complex in the Igbo community. They became outsiders in their own land and the outsiders without any understanding started to enforce their law and culture. It is an encroachment and annihilation of a vast tradition, culture and knowledge. This has bred a weak generation who do not have a close relationship with the nature and are not

shaped by challenges. The novel is also successful in portraying the psychological and social effects of quick modernization leading to depression, loss of independence, and a reduced ability to work together. The generation that is being bred now is not exposed to the sun or the fights of daily life. They are more depressed and are unable to fend themselves. The hard-working people who worked in the fields or touch with nature are lost. They were ready to face any realities in life as they had no option and were trained in a hard way.

Modernity for Achebe is both a promise and a danger. Adopting and adapting to the modern technologies and ideas can lead to progress at the cost of losing spiritual depth, connection with the community, and ecological balance. The dominant question that the novel put forth is whether the sacrifices for progress are fair or sustainable.

The silencing and marginalization of the subaltern voices, the destruction of oral traditions the curtailment of indigenous knowledge and rewriting of history by colonial authorities, Achebe's use of proverbs, folk tales, and community rituals is an attempt to preserve culture and resist, reclaiming their lost identity.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a self analysis of the turbulent times of the Igbo community engaging with the concepts from Heraclitus, Panicker's vision, and postcolonial theory. It tries to unveil how individuals and communities navigate identity, control, and belonging amid colonial disruption. The "drain of roots" theory is an attempt to understand the cultural and psychological effects of colonialism and the need the need to preserve the language and culture helps us understand the cultural and psychological effects of colonialism, while research on language loss highlights the importance of cultural preservation.

He could also depict the religion, nature, myth, gender and history. He hated the guts of the white men who portrayed themselves as civilized and the blacks or the Africans as uncivilized. *Things Fall Apart* is the story of the strength gained from a community. It is an opportunity, a lesson of how we are dependent. He transcends the beliefs and blindness of his time to give a new vision. He makes them transcend the boundaries and look with a new vision and pride, introspecting the failures that took place in the process of flux and how it can be rectified. As Mathew Arnold said, "swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies clash at night."

Conclusion

The text and characters of Chinua Achebe's world-famous novel *Things Fall Apart* as a projection of the retrospection of the self in flux through the characters portrayed in the novel. Many things in the name of modernism have endangered society, culture, language and individuality. The flux is good, but is it moving in the direction it ought to be? Flux is not

easy; it demands many sacrifices, but is this progress worth such a sacrifice? And in the name of progress, is humanity forgotten?

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