
Exploitation of the Natives by the Colonizers in *Things Fall Apart*

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Article Received: 09/12/2025

Article Accepted: 10/01/2026

Published Online: 11/01/2026

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.8.01.83

Abstract

The colonial project launched by the European Colonizers was aimed to capture land, people, and all the resources available in the colonized land. The colonial forces brought European administration, education and religion to impose on the natives. They used various ways and tricks to win the native people and their land. They wanted to rule the colonized land for long period hence they started building schools, churches and courts to win the confidence of native people. They imposed their modern religion and education by proving their gods and rituals as mere superstitions. They exploited the native culture, religion, faith, festivals and the native way of life with their administration and education. The present research paper is an attempt to analyze Chinua Achebe's first and the most famous novel *Things Fall Apart* is an embodiment of the exploitation of the native Africans at various levels by the white European colonial forces. One of the aims of Chinua Achebe's writing is to expose the European Colonizers false claims of enlightenment and emancipation of the natives on behalf of the God.

Keywords: Exploitation, missionary, Christianity, colonial administration, authoritarian etc.

Introduction:

The theme of exploitation of the Africans by the Europeans encompasses Achebe's first three novels very appropriately. Achebe begins his first novel *Things Fall Apart* with the daily life of the people in Umuofia. Umuofia is a fictional village which has very specific local colour of the life of its inhabitants. The people are busy with their routine, working, eating, playing, celebrating, and worshiping their traditional gods and goddesses with great loyalty and enthusiasm. The same happy life is in Mbanta, Okonkwo's maternal village. Their happy and easy going life is disturbed by the arrival of White men in Mbanta. The White men need a plot of land to build their church. The elders of Mbanta give them the land of Evil Forest. According to local religion, the Evil Spirits live in the Evil Forest. Gradually the White people start their religious practices to invite the attention of the natives. They go into the village and sing songs of brotherhood. They call the native people and say that they all are brothers and sons of the God. The missionaries try to explain them that the native

Gods, Gods of wood and stones are false and urge them, “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” (TFA, 145). If they continue to worship the false Gods, on the Day of Judgment they will be thrown into fire to suffer, and the ignorant and simple people are attracted towards the new faith. Prof. Radha Kanta Mishra explains the motif of White men, “The white managed to win over some inhabitants by taking advantages of latter’s simplicity and gullibility” (239).

This is how the White men make the native to believe in the new God by creating favorable situations. They promise the natives to give the iron horse, if they accept the new faith. The White men use every means to abuse the innocence of the natives. The Missionary proves the native culture inferior and effaces it and exploits the native’s ignorance. Their victory over the Evil Forest and their singing of hymn of brotherhood become the subjects of discussion in the village. The missionary wins the heart of the young boy Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo. Nwoye sees the murder of Ikemefuna by his father and the sight of twins which are thrown in the Evil Forest; he abandons his religion and joins Christianity. The simple logic of Christianity and the equality principle attract others. Nwoye is very sensitive and able to understand the false myths and customs in his religion. The prominent critic David Carroll sees the matter differently. According to him Christianity does not attack directly but shows the simplicity and equality in it. Nwoye is captivated by the brotherhood of Christianity. Carroll finds that, “Christianity makes its inroads not by a frontal attack-but responding clearly to a need so deeply felt that it has not been clearly formulated” (57). Nwoye leaves his father’s house forever and joins the missionary. He meets Mr. Kiaga, the White missionary, and says that he wants to go to Umuofia and join the missionary school to teach the young Christians. Mr. Kiaga pleases very much by Nwoye’s decision because Nwoye is a son of a leader of Umuofia, and he expects others to follow his example. Mr. Kiaga expresses his joy, “Blessed is he who forsakes his father and his mother for my sake. -Those that hear my words are my father and mother” (TFA, 152). Thus the Christian missionary misguides the young children and directs them against their family, religion and creates misunderstanding about their own religion. The White men bring their administration to manage the newly acquired regime and to rule over the natives. The White government helps to avoid the clashes between the villagers and the converted people and defends the followers of Christianity. After the establishment of government, the White men begin to teach the converts “to defy them by burning all their shrines” (T154). It is clear that Christianity misuses the sensibility of the natives in the name of new faith and with the support of the government.

The colonial administration establishes court in Umuofia to protect the converts and to rule with laws. The court appoints some of the converted natives as messengers to keep watch in the village and convey the decisions of the court to the villagers. One who does not obey the administration the messengers fetch him to the court. The court also resolves small

disputes between the natives, groups and families. Gradually these courts turn into the centres of exploitation where “the District Commissioner judges cases in ignorance” (174). The court messengers are cruel and high-handed. They guard the prison and ill treat the prisoners. They often beat the natives without reason. The greatest exploitation is that they make the titled and prestigious men to work in government compound and to fetch wood for the colonial officers. Such kind of work is an abomination for the titled men. The court messengers are corrupt. Obierika recalls the land disputes between Aneto and Nnama’s family. The District Officer decides that the disputed land belongs to Nnama because the Officer has taken bribe and the messengers and the interpreter also have their share. The White man’s court only protects the interest of White administration and exploits the natives. Mr. Brown, the White missionary, is very intelligent. He knows how to get things done differently. He preaches against excess of zeal. He holds the view that, “Everything was possible, he told his energetic flock, but everything was not expedient” (178).

He uses his converted flock as a tool to spread Christianity, but he warns them to avoid excesses. His softness about the native religion earns respect for him from the clan. He makes friends, specially the great men in the village and discusses with them the native religion. He collects information through discussion and comes to conclusion that the frontal attack on native religion would not succeed. Opening of schools and pleading the influential natives to admit their children in the school proves very effective move on the parts of the colonizers. He tries to convince them that the future leaders of their land will be the men and women, who know reading and writing. The British Government offers jobs of messengers and interpreters for those, who are able to read and write. After few days Brown’s argument shows effect and more children and people come to study in his school. Those who have attended the school, he appoints them as clerk and those who continue the school are promised to be appointed as teachers. Thus Brown’s school grows slowly and he succeeds in attracting them to Christianity. After some days Mr. Brown’s health begins to decline and Mr. Smith takes his place. Mr. Smith is an arrogant, impatient, and authoritarian man. He condemns the policies of Mr. Brown and does not follow them. He sees things as Black and White, and for him Black is evil. He ill treats the native in a number of ways. There is a convert Enoch who, under the spell of Mr. Brown’s school kills and eats the royal python-a very sacred animal to the community and the whole village is pushed in confusion about the school education. It can be said that the Christian school education does not prove itself as a means of civilization, but it turns against the customs and traditions of the village and a means of exploitation in Umuofia. The missionary education not only attacks their beliefs but their religion too. The education forms such personalities, which are neither able to adopt the Christian values nor to abandon their native religious teaching.

The colonial administration has not only abused the natives by means of introduction of Christianity and court. Moreover, it also has brought market economy in the colonies particularly in Umuofia. The simple people of Umuofia are still not exposed to the trade and

commerce for gigantic profit. The village has its own market place, and they sell and buy things in it. The people of Umuofia do not give more importance to money making than barns full of yam, titles and personal achievement in sports and war that are highly valued in Umuofia. But later on the European traders introduce market economy to them. The agricultural products and food items are in abundance in Umuofia. Hence, they are not sold at high cost. But the White men collect as much as palm oil and export it to European countries. The palm oil creates its market in European countries and more money flows into Umuofia. The growing demand for palm oil causes the increase in its price in Umuofia and the common people find it difficult to pay the amount for it. Such mentality and trade give way to capital accumulation and its result is the economic exploitation of the common people of Umuofia.

The event of arresting of the six leaders is an effective example of the inhuman treatment and financial exploitation by the White men. These six leaders are titled men, and they are the rulers and decision makers of Umuofia. It happens that the ancestral spirits *egwugwu* were coming from abroad and at the same time some Christian women were returning home. Therefore, one of the Christians requested the *egwugwu* to retire for some time to pass the women, the spirits agreed to retire meanwhile Enoch, the overzealous Christian, barked that they dare not to touch a Christian. For this the *egwugwu* gave a stroke of the cane to Enoch. Suddenly Enoch fell on an *egwugwu* and teared his mask and killed him. Consequently, all *egwugwu* burned the house of Enoch and the church in Umuofia. All this happened in absence of the District Officer. As soon as District Officer returns, he summons the leaders of Umuofia to compromise on the issue. As six leaders arrive at the church, the District Officer very cunningly arrests and puts them behind the bars. The court messenger, who guards the prison, shaves their hair off and it is an abomination to them. They are not given water to drink and are not allowed to go to urinate. The prison guards taunt the six leaders and knock their heads and beat them severely by whip. The titled men receive such treatment in the prison. The District Officer fines two hundred bags of cowries to release them from his custody. He advises that the amount should be collected from the villagers. The six leaders including Okonkwo have never been treated with such contempt and insult before. This is an example of the brute force of British Administration with heavy penalties. Moreover, the court messenger goes in Umuofia and commands them to collect two hundred and fifty bags of cowries. It can be observed that the same practice is continued by the messenger, who adds his own fifty bags. This is how not only the colonial offices but the converted natives-the prison guards and the court messengers also participate in the exploitation of humanity in Umuofia.

In the end of the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo realizes that the White men and Christianity are well established in his village. Though he wants to fight and drive them away, his people will not support him to the last in this fight. He also knows that he is unable to obey the White administrator's commands and cannot bear the degradation and

devaluation of his culture and religion. Therefore, he decides to end his life and hangs himself to a tree. It can be said that Okonkwo's suicide is the worst outcome of colonialism. The District Officer goes to arrest Okonkwo but finds him dead and mentions that he has never come across such incident. Then he finds this matter of suicide useful for his book, which he has planned to write and even he has decided its title as *the Pacification of Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. He thinks the episode of Okonkwo's suicide will be sufficient to write a whole chapter. If not, it will form a reasonable paragraph at any rate. It clearly means Okonkwo, the protagonist and champion of his clan and great warrior's life is reduced mere in a paragraph. This is also sort of devaluation of Okonkwo's heroic life and deeds. The critic Lewis Nkosi argues on the victory of Christianity in *Things Fall Apart* as, "Christianity wins out because Christianity probes and exploits real weakness in the old social order which has begun to crumble internally from its own contradiction" (36). The final triumph of British Administration and Missionary is a result of both the flexibility of the new faith which attracts the people to it and the security and brotherhood of administration. Consequently the loose space in native traditional religion and the rigid adherence to it gave chance to White men to insert themselves permanently into the world of Umuofia.

Conclusion:

The very project of Colonization was based on to grab native land; introduce their administration, education and religion. The traditional natives could not understand the real motives behind the settlement of White people. The European invaders being modern in attitude and outlook are able to exploit all deficiencies in local nature, native administration and ancient religion. Hence, at last they win.

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