
Cultural Dynamism in Nigeria with Reference to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*



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ABSTRACT: This article aims at raising the different aspects of life of Nigerian people prior independence and exalting inheritance or profit this people has gained in return after their encounter with the white man. It is certain that the issue of colonization has been the concern of many African and even non-African writers. In fact, colonization has disrupted the socio-economic and political structures and replaced traditional values by another system of values that are not suitable for African customs. From the image the white man has painted Africans, colonization does not acknowledge the existence of pre-colonial values. Hence, by necessity, the African writer is placed in front of an essential and complex duty, that of reconstituting the actual image of his group, rehabilitating the past in substituting to the distorted image depicted by the colonizers the African vision of history. Accordingly, Chinua Achebe is one of those intellectuals who have tried to make his readers realize the specificity of the African personality. This state of affairs has been his preoccupation in *Things Fall Apart*, his first novel published in 1958. He has proved in this book that the encounter of Africa and the West has resulted in a clash of cultures.

KEY WORDS: Clash of cultures, colonization, encounter, effects, writer, colonizer.

INTRODUCTION

As a piece of art, the novel evokes a strange but familiar world. This world may be similar but in no way identical with the historical world of every day existence. Thus, some of the earliest African novelists have devoted their writings to the African people's experience of the colonial period. They derived their inspirations from traditional lore, indigenous customs and the oral tradition, in a bid to demonstrate to the readers that Africa has a culture she could be proud of. And, one of them is Chinua Achebe for he has written novels among which *Things Fall Apart*, his first novel and referential book for this analysis. In this novel, the author depicts both his own culture and the advent of the white man in Africa which caused conflicts between both parties. The term of culture as such has obviously been the concern of many writers and critics. In fact, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines culture as 'the customs, arts, and social institutions etc. of a particular group or nation'. As one people has one culture, talking about cultures implies more than one people with different culture each. Put differently, we can talk of cultures only when there is more than one people as each has a culture. Such is the issue I am going to analyze, that is the cultural dynamism in Nigeria, the situation where a culture that was previously self-sufficient with its laws and customs begins to disintegrate in the face of an onslaught from a culture of an alien people who are politically more powerful.

Things Fall Apart is a novel which has been variously examined by many critics, Africans or non-Africans. Much has been said about characterization, language, setting and theme but less has been written on the organization of indigenous according to our survey. Nevertheless, some works of high interest have been conducted by our predecessors. 'The Portrayal of Religion in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (2017) is an essay written by Kristian Moseley. Throughout this study the author not only portrays the religion and the role it plays in Igbo community but also the impact that the missionaries and their religion had on Igbo society. Another study of similar interest entitled 'Clash of Cultures in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*' was conducted by Pala Mull. Throughout this study the author focuses on Achebe's presentation of Igbo culture, mainly on how Achebe complicates and problematizes multicultural representation in his novel.

However, on the basis of this review and in order not to conduct an identical analysis, I will have to show how organized is Igbo society before revealing the profit this people had from their confrontation with the white man. In this respect, my concern in this analysis is to answer the following main questions: How does Chinua Achebe perceive and depict traditional life before and during its confrontation with Western culture? How do indigenous appreciate this new atmosphere? The hypothesis backing up this study is that *Things Fall Apart* constitutes a real sphere where African people in general and Nigerians in particular reveal or attest their inner feelings before and during their encounter.

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Thus, in order to answer the above questions, some methodological approaches will be helpful and considered, especially historical approach, sociological approach, psychological approach, and Marxism approach. The historical approach proves itself helpful in the sense that authors often resort to the past to write stories. In the case, Achebe retraces the past to witness African culture which is disregarded by colonizers. It is certain that literature results from conscious acts from men in society. Thus, being a reflection of society from which authors inspire, literature necessitates sociology for it helps establish the relationship between literature and society. The psychological approach that probes into human nature is useful in a way that helps understand the behavior of different characters in a literary work. Finally, the Marxism approach is needed and helpful in this study for it is 'a class-based socio-economic interpretation of human progress and development', according to Johnson (2012: 45). Indeed, this literary theory favors us identify and make prominent some of the social and economic factors as crucial denominators of the relationships in the society. In this connection, Eagleton's (1976:7) wordings are useful when he writes:

Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of struggle of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression.

Concerning the limitation of this study, *Things Fall Apart* is the main reference of the corpus. However, I will not hesitate to resort to other sources of the same interest in order to strengthen my chain of argumentation. As far as the plan is concerned, I will first present the Igbo traditional society, especially the multi-organizational dimensions of Igbo society, then I will show the advantage this society drew from the white man and finally I will prove the native people's disintegration as well as impacts resulting from their confrontation.

I- The Igbo Traditional Society

In a society, people live together in organized communities where they share customs, laws, and different organizations. This was the kind of life Igbo people experienced before the advent of the white man. It matters to recall that this people, like other people in the world have their own understanding of the universe, having their peculiar laws, customs as well as institutions that suit them. However, how does Chinua Achebe perceive the life of this people in *Things Fall Apart*? The answer to this question lies on the different facets of organization of life that I have the privilege to unveil shortly.

1- Religious Organization

The traditional world has an important bearing on attitudes to gods and beliefs, attaching much value to divinities. Yet one cannot think of that without mentioning nature which is inextricably woven into the social, economic and metaphysical realities. In fact, the traditional imagination, physical nature is not dead, it is rather alive and filled with immanent vitality but behind nature there is the supernatural. However, it is certain that everything in nature is either a manifestation of matter, tangible, physical and responsible for sensual perception or supernatural, that is cannot be explained by the laws of science.

Since nature is intimately woven into traditional consciousness for people acknowledge its existence, it is an ever-present reality, it is more an object of veneration than of aesthetic appreciation. That is why reflecting on this integrative and functional perception of nature, writers refer to gods who dominate the lives of people (the villagers) as it is the case for Igbo people. However, it a general truth that the belief in an ultimate supreme being has always been a way of life for Africans in general and the Nigerian people in particular. Religion is acknowledged as a powerful force that has a strong influence on social behavior and human interaction; it is deeply entrenched in the culture of the Nigerian people, and this is largely reflected in the various religious practices amongst the different ethnic groupings in the country. It is also known that Nigeria is a pluralistic society with three major common religions: Traditional and foreign (Christianity and Islamic) religions culminating in different beliefs systems and acts of worship. Therefore, the Igbo traditional society as depicted by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* is a polytheist one. Despite the fact that religious life is organized around the belief of one Supreme God (Chukwu), there is also minor gods (male and female) who represent the vital forces in their different aspects. Among these gods, we can mention Ani, the Igbo earth goddess; Idemili, the god of water; Amadiora, the god of thunder. Accordingly, in the process of communication, gods and divinities communicate with people through the medium of the Oracle and their priestess or priest. Therefore, each individual has his personal divinity, the Chi whom he can negotiate his fate. In Achebe's depiction of the typical Igbo compound, we can understand that Okonkwo has the possibility of expressing himself spiritually at home in front of his Chi as stipulated "Near the barn was a small house, the 'medicine house' or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits" (1958:13). It is in this connection that Mbonu Ojike, quoted by Sunday Anozie (1970: 34) in *Sociologie du roman africain*, stresses the equality of Chi toward his owner in the following terms:

Il y a autant de Chi qu'il y a de personne, nul Chi n'est semblable à l'autre parce que jamais deux personnes ne sont identiques. Le Chi d'un homme riche est riche et le Chi d'un homme pauvre est pauvre. Le Chi d'un homme est l'égal de cet homme. Le dieu personnel ne saurait quitter son maître avant la mort. Il est le gardien personnel à qui est confié chaque être humain.

In Igbo society, Chukwu, the Highest god made all the world and all the other gods that he appointed to help him in his great work as attested by Akunna in *Things Fall Apart* p. 160: 'You say that there is one Supreme God who made heaven and earth,' said

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Akunna on one of Mr. Brown's visits. 'We also believe in Him and called Him Chukwu.' it is only when the minor gods fail to help that people turn to Chukwu: That is why people say that Chukwu is Supreme. Additionally, always in the traditional Igbo life there are numerous gods associated with markets, groves, streams and trees who sometimes prove decisive in the sharing of the people's fate in defining the course of events. The significance of these gods and spirits is linked with their functions. Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* best witnesses this point as observed by Obiechina. As a matter of fact, in that novel the priest of Idemili describes the significance of his deity as follows: '*Idemili means pillar. As the pillar of this house holds the roof so does Idemili hold the rain cloud in the sky so that it does not fall down*'. (1975: 34). Apart from that we also note the existence of caves which have had religious and mystical significances for the Igbo people from immemorial times. These caves contain the shrine of Agbala and its oracle, the oracle of hills and caves whose voice is powerful in resolving the crises of life because it is the spokesman of the powerful earth-mother goddess who has the capacity to tell the future of an individual. In this respect, Achebe (1958: 13) writes:

People came from far and near to consult it. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbours. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers.

As evidence, Unoka who is Okonkwo's father had gone to consult the oracle of the Hills and the Caves to find out why he always had a miserable harvest. Moreover, for this rural people, mystical association is revealed through a large number of sacred trees to minor gods and spirits. That is why most of novels set in traditional villages refer to sacred trees which are objects of worship, veneration, and awe. In this vein, Achebe (1958: 33) asserts:

The bicycle belonging to the white man murdered 'riding the iron horse' is tied up on a sacred silk-cotton tree, and elsewhere we learn that field at which wrestling matches are held in Umuofia has a 'bid and ancient silk-cotton which was sacred' and before which the drummers sit. We learn incidentally that this tree is connected with fertility, and spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting for to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade.

As we can see, religious organization of Nigerians in general and Igbo society in particular is centered on beliefs with religion referring to both the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals, stemming from a 'shared conviction'. This is absolutely evident for *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* sees religion as "a set of shared beliefs and practices often centered upon specific supernatural and moral claims about reality, the cosmos and human nature often codified as prayers, rituals and religious laws".

So far, in the traditional imagination nature is also full of threatening possibilities and rural people believe that the forest is full of mystery that is why for Igbo people the terror of the evil forest is a living reality as Achebe (1958: 33) explains in the following passage:

Every clan and village had its evil forest. In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases like leprosy and small pox. 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 power of darkness.

From then, it becomes clear that Igbo rural people also believe in the evil and danger that exist in the forest. The vivid instance is the forest in which Ikemefuna was murdered. Above all, the Igbo traditional society believe in many gods, from the highest Chukwu to common minor deities, (the *Alusi* endowed with forces for blessing or cursing depending on circumstances), village deities and personal gods. They punish social offences and those that unwittingly infringe their privileges. However, it goes without saying that this analysis will not meet the goal if I restrain myself on the religious aspect. Some other aspects are also useful for a better understanding of Igbo traditional life.

2- Economic organization

It matters to recall that many aspects contribute to explain and understand the Igbo traditional life. Indeed, from the economic point of view, we realize that this society was one community founded on exchange of consumer goods and the collective property of land. The personal wealth acquired by work and worth is proved through the quality and quantity of the harvest, the significance of compounds, the number of wives and children as well as titles. In the dense rainy-forests of the south, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, while in the sparsely covered thorn scrubs and savannah cattle-rearing is the major occupation and the novel under scrutiny is set in the rainy-forest region, especially in Igboland where the pre-colonial rural economy is marked by a near self-sufficiency. The main source of economic production was land and this was available to every male member of the family by virtue of his membership. No free man was without employment because his entitlement to land made available to him something to farm. Obviously, in rural life one is aware how closely human life is integrated with physical nature. As matter of fact, people are farmers, constantly in touch with the earth. They till the soil and sow their crops in it. They have to clear the forest first and then the bush in order to sow the crops, recognize bird-songs and finally build them into the consciousness as a way of telling the time or interpreting reality, though the songs of some birds are ominous.

In this society, agriculture forces people to be interested indifferent types of terrain. That is why in the search for good farmland they scan the hills and high lands, valleys and plains. Truly, the soil for an agricultural people is the primary source of sustenance

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and so holds the key to survival. Therefore its priest is the most important religious (because religion permeates every facet of social life) personage in the community. Once the earth goddess is angry and refuses to reward the agricultural effort of the people, crops fail and there is a general misery. Farming is of course the main occupation though fishing, hunting, trapping and keeping of livestock are also undertaken. The major crop is yam, a tuberous plant with green, climbing stem and clinging tendrils. In *Things Fall Apart* which consciously explores the traditional ideas of success and power, individuals are weighed by how good and successful they are as farmers, and this in turn is linked to their standing in the community. Thus, Okonkwo's agricultural success and his high standing in Umuofia are closely linked and established very early in the novel as we can read: 'He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams' p. 6. In addition to yam crop, there were other crops such as cassava, maize, cocoyam, and a variety of vegetables and legumes which complemented yam. With the economic organization of Igbo traditional life also we have a limited insight of this people. The socio-political aspect also accounts for it helps readers understand how members of this society interact among them.

3- Socio-political Organization

Life in community needs to be organized socially and politically. Thus, Achebe's first part of *Things Fall Apart* is worth mentioning for it describes the harmonious life of Igbo people before the advent of the white man. From the political view, the author presents a society without a democratic state where the power is held not only by the ancient Council but also by a male general assembly for important decisions. There are neither permanent army nor police forces. For important judgements, all the nine villages of Umuofia gathered together under the control of the elders, an opportunity given to each person to speak his mind. However, socially, the individual, being aware to keep his personality and power of decision for his own concern is submitted to the group for collective matters, relation with divinities, and the survival of the community. The same rule applies to every member whatever his social position. The group have developed a system of ruling that 'a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father' (p.11). This is seen with Okonkwo who, being an important and influent member of his society is condemned for seven years of exile in application of the common law and justice settled by the 'Egwugwu' council who represents spirits. Within the clan, the group is in good terms with divinities and the individual is entirely integrated into the collective life with solidarity being a fundamental creed. As illustration, Okonkwo's exile in his mother's clan. He is immediately dependent on the group as Achebe (1958: 117) states:

Okonkwo was given a plot of ground on which to build his compound, two or three pieces of land on which to farm during the coming planting season, with the help of his mother's kinsmen he built himself an obi and three huts for his wives... Each of Uchendu's five sons contributed three hundred seed-yams to enable their cousin to plant a farm, for as soon as the first rain came, farming would begin.

From the above extract, it appears certain that an active solidarity and union exist in this rural society for the clan has or speaks with the same voice. It is in this perspective that Okechukwu writes: 'There goes Okonkwo, our man. If you see him, you have seen all of us' (1971:56). This is to say Okonkwo epitomizes the Igbo people who consider themselves as a single man. Moreover, the success of an Igbo man is the success of the whole clan as Achebe (1960: 79) evidences through this extract:

We have now one of our sons in the senior service. We are not going to ask him to bring his salary to share among us. It is in little things like that he can help us. It is our fault if we do not approach him. Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in?

The above quotation shows that the Igbo people bear in mind the notion of kinship. This is to say that their society is first characterized by unity, solidarity and kinship as well, with clan mate at the centre of everything: 'So, ten pounds do not talk'. Accordingly, Achebe (1960: 79) writes: If you stand a hundred pounds here where I stand now, it will not talk. That is why we say that 'he who has people is richer than he who money' for money doesn't talk. Therefore, for this people in order to express their thought, to act as one, they should gather together and stand in one place. So far, that unity that holds them together is also expressed through this proverb from Achebe: 'If all snakes lived together in one place, who would approach them? But they live everyone unto himself and so fall easy prey to man'. P. 81.

Additionally, the Igbo traditional society observed so many laws and customs that one cannot mention them all. Nevertheless, a man who commits suicide for instance is not buried by his clansmen but by strangers and sacrifices must be performed afterwards in order to cleanse the soil which has been desecrated. And Okonkwo had been given such a burial for what he did. We can reach the conclusion that the Igbo traditional society was well organized from the socio-political point of view for it had its institutions that regulated life. People settled disputes among them respecting laws and also had their own legal and educational system. However, the cultural aspect that also characterizes the life of this people needs to be known. Thus, how does Achebe present the cultural aspect of the Igbo people in *Things Fall Apart*?

4- Cultural Organization

The Igbo traditional society has a very rich and varied cultural life. This means that so much is to be said about the issue but for the limitation needs of an article, I will restrain my analysis on music and wrestling for they have preoccupied the author in

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the novel under scrutiny. To this effect, considered as entertainment or accompaniment to the dance and for religious or ritual purposes, music features in many different settings within traditional societies such as palm-wine drinking, hunting, games and sports, harvesting and other aspects of agricultural work, death, funeral, burial, and marriage. Indeed, through music the rural community expresses its inner tensions in rhythm and melody, whether it is sorrow, suspense, fear, exaltation, happiness, anger or even reverence. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe shows that traditional societies are gifted in music since everyone sings, dances or produces rhythm. That is why, being inspired, novelists identify their characters in terms of this general attachment to the music atmosphere of traditional life. *Things Fall Apart* serves as example for in it several characters are artists. Thus, talking of Okonkwo's father, Unoka, the narrator (1958: 2) said:

He was very good on his flute, and his happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest when the village musicians brought down their instruments, hung above the fire place. Unoka would play within them, his face beaming with blessedness and peace.

Besides, Okoye who is Unoka's creditor was also musician playing the "Ogene", a musical instrument. The cultural aspect of this people didn't limited itself on music. Wrestling also played an important place within this society. In fact, in this novel wrestling appears as the most popular and the most practiced game in the Igbo society. The game involves two teams of equal wrestlers from different villages who fight by two in turn. It is only when the opponent's back touches the ground that one is declared winner. Okonkwo had experienced this reality for he threw Amalinze, the Cat right at the beginning of the novel as we can see:

Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old man agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights. P.2.

All traditional settings are almost performed with music and dance. So, during a wrestling match, people sing, dance, applaud, one way to encourage fighters on the battlefield. Accordingly, Achebe describes the match between Okonkwo and Amalinze in these terms:

The drums beat and flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their thighs and on their backs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end, Okonkwo threw the Cat. P.2

From the aforementioned quotation we can realize how eventful is a wrestling match, mostly when it opposes two villages. Thus, the cultural organization as well as the ones mentioned so far help readers understand the Igbo traditional society was a self-governing society living together in harmony. That solidarity has been broken up by the white man right at his invasion and from then things began to change knowing that the culture of a people lives with the people. This opens the way to talk of the different changes that occurred in the Igbo society, especially the colonial heritage and the people's disintegration with its effects as well.

II- Colonial Heritage

If the first part of this study has dealt with the Igbo traditional life before the invasion of the white man with his culture, in this second part however, I will be concerned with the life of the same people but during the process of (or after) independence. To start with, it is germane to recall that before the white man's arrival, the Igbo people was deep-rooted into the traditional way of life with naturally their own culture. However, their exposure to the West with their encounter with the British administration which brings about a new order with values that could be profitable for them. Some of them are abilities to read and write, how to worship, and how to manage public affairs that I have termed by Creation of School, Creation of Church and the New Administration.

1- Creation of School

Education plays a paramount role in a community, especially that of children who are the future of a country. In Africa, before the advent of western education, children were being educated by the traditional way in two manners: by formal teaching through initiation ceremonies and by informal teaching in observing and imitating the examples of grown-ups. This was the kind of culture the white was concerned himself with since he aimed at replacing the African culture to his own as Achebe has mentioned in the following lines "As daylight chases away darkness, so will the white man drive away our customs" (1964: 66). From this standpoint, that school and everything related to the white man weaken youngsters, Okonkwo, the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart* fears about his son Nwoye who joins the white man. Also with the new atmosphere brought by the white man, a man is no longer crowned because he has tilled the soil, has barns, wives and children as it was the case in the Igbo traditional life. From then, greatness depends on western education as Chinua Achebe (1958: 57) writes:

Those men were great in their day. Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune.

Thus, being aware of that reality and in order not to totally lose their culture, the Igbo people decided to create an association with a view to help their young men to go and study abroad. Obi Okonkwo was the first to be sent to England to pursue his studies. But

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the purpose of sending young people overseas to study was for Umuofians to be in conformity with the new regulation, that is to say having western education for them to be able to manage their own state. However, the existence of schools in African communities in general and in Igbo people in particular has served as a means for the white man to impose his culture on the Igbo traditional life. This is evidenced by Mister Brown's (1958: 129) wordings who has built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia when he argues:

The leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learned to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them... From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand.

In the end, Mister Brown's arguments began to have an effect for more people came to learn in his school and he encouraged them with gifts of all nature. The creation of school was not only the unique initiative undertaken by the white man on the African land. In order to convert this people who were deep-rooted into his culture, the white man also built the church that is my concern in the next section.

2- Creation of church

The church is one of the changes the white man brought into African societies. Evidently, the church was built but it encountered some obstacles. As a matter of fact, in its early days in Africa, Christianity was set to pave the way for colonialism as we can read it from Ngugi Wa Thiongo "the bible paved the way to the sword"(1964: 65). Indeed, missionaries won a handful of converts among whom Nwoyé, Okonkwo's son. In this process, the first contacts were no more than skirmishes to test opponents' nerves and know their intentions. But the traditionalists were sufficiently secure, perhaps too secure in their cultural life to feel unduly disturbed by the sudden appearance of a small group of people preaching what must have seemed to them a mad religion. In this respect, Achebe (1958: 129) handles the matter through verbal exchanges between the local people and missionaries in these terms:

The arrival of the missionaries has caused considerable stir in the village of Mbata. There were six of them and one was a white man... Stories about these changed men had grown since one of them had been killed in Abamé and his iron horse tied to sacred silk-cotton tree. And so everybody came to see the white man. It was the time of the year when everybody was at home. The harvest was over.

Facing the audience, the white man and his evangelists lose no time in opening their campaign as Achebe points out: "we have been sent by the 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" p. 102. Such is the gospel they preached and a lot of people were trapped and decided to follow the white man. In addition to school and church, the white man also had brought a new administration into the Igbo society. It is this administration that I am going to deal with shortly.

3- The New Administration

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines administration as "the management of public or business affairs". The adjective 'New' because the Igbo people were supposed to have one administration that could be termed old. Therefore, right upon his arrival, the white man had brought with him the government. He built a court where the district commissioner judged cases and had also court messengers who brought men to him for trial. The trade was also counted among the newly changes brought by the white man. Thus, the simultaneous penetration of Igboland by the British administration and Christian missionaries is a historical fact which led Achebe to consider the forces operating against the traditional system as tripartite. In other words, the Christian mission, the British administration and the introduction of European type trading stores combined to overthrow the traditional way of life. To this effect, Achebe believes that "the new religion and government and trading stores were very much in the people's eyes and minds" p. 129.

As we can see, colonialists and missionaries had offered schools, churches, government, trade and with it money to Africans. But, after these things had been set, the Igbo society which was a self-sufficient, harmonious culture did not think like one, speak like one, share a common awareness and ultimately did not act like one. In the end, the arrival of the white man broke the unity that existed before and these new changes reinforce each other and combine to undo the old order. Hence, disintegration that I propose to unveil in the following lines.

4- The Igbo Society Disintegration

The word disintegration stands for "the gradual breaking of something into small parts or pieces" or even "the fact of making something become much less strong or united" according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Such disintegration is widely seen in the Igbo society, especially in the relationship between young men and elders, and parents and children. In fact, the relationship between fathers and sons was so important to the traditional system for it is the foundation of the ancestral authority upon which the continuity of the institutions, common values, attitudes and sentiment of the traditional culture depended. Then, it appears clearly that traditional life in colonial Africa was based on the solidarity of people who shared common customs and beliefs. However, the intrusion of the missionaries who brought an alien culture to the Igbo society causes the disintegration. Their teachings and gospels have been at the basis of the tensions experienced within African families in general and the Igbo society in particular. In *Things Fall Apart*, the author presents the disintegration of Okonkwo's family. Indeed, his son Nwoyé opposes him and protests

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against his uncompromising traditional rigidity which led him to join the white man's religion in order to vent his discontent. He was then seen among the Christians as Achebe (1958: 107) reports:

One morning Okonkwo's cousin Amikwe was passing by the church on his way from neighbouring village when he saw Nwoy  among the Christians, he was greatly surprised and went straight to Okonkwo's hut and told him what he had seen.

Accordingly, commenting on the disintegration of Josha's family, Lioyd William writes "here is a family broken, a family whose central unity has been lost because of the attempted imposition of an uncompromising law" (1973; 62). By these wordings, Lioyd presents a family whose members do not speak with one voice. There could be unity right at the beginning but one law came and disorganized the harmony that existed. Moreover, some converts to the new faith take place in the desacralisation of traditional fundamental principle and places which make the Igbo tribal identity. The vivid evidence is the case of Okoli and Enock, two tribesmen convinced by the missionaries' ideology kill the sacred python, the most revered animal among the Igbo. This is a mere betrayal of their own ancestral customs due to their contact with the new faith. It goes without saying that this disintegration results from the arrival of hostile strangers within the relatively homogeneous local community. The new religion, by providing a set of moral values alternative to those offered by traditional religion and a solidarity alternative to the solidarity of the clan undermines traditional social life. Also, the new administration, having at its disposal the military strength to enforce its will deprives the power of traditional community and the will to defend its interests. But the result of all this is the breakdown of social homogeneity and the collective outlook which were two distinguishing features of life in Umuofia before the new cultural forces began to threaten it. Important to know is that the conflictual atmosphere between two civilization could not go without impacts mainly on the native people's side. Indeed, one of the side-effects undermined solidarity and therefore the ideological matrix that held the pre-colonial traditional society together. The collective conscience was split and the community could not stand in a partnership. In the novel, the early Christian converts neither appealed to the clan solidarity nor responded to its appeal. As neophytes, they were obsessed with their own importance and called themselves "people of the church" and the non-Christians "the people of nothing" or even "people of the world", translated in Igbo as "ndi-nkiti" and "ndi-uwa" p. 58. Obviously, the influence of the new religion was devastating for it affected the most fundamental and therefore most cohesive factors in the traditional system. One of the telling cases is that of Nwoy  who has joined the rank of missionaries and did not recognize even his father as we can realize when answering Obierika's questions:

"What are you doing here?", Obierika has asked when after many difficulties the missionaries has allowed him to speak to the boy.

"I am one of them", replied Nwoy .

"How is your father?" Obierika asked, not knowing what else to say.

"I don't know. He is not my father", said Nwoy , unhappily. P.30.

More significantly, the traditional society framework became inadequate to regulate the conflicts and stress which arose from cultures' contact. Traditional customary laws became ineffective, not only because their religious basis was undermined by Christianity but also because the colonial administration monopolized the use of coercion and so weakened the capacity of traditional society to exact conformity from their eccentric members. It sorts out that the missionaries' aim in Africa was twofold: to preach the gospel, with its spread and to impose their own culture wherever they went for they thought African did not have a culture. Thus, the impact of Christianity rested on beliefs and that of education on customs since the new religion went along with education. They built schools and in order to convince Umuofians to attend them, Mr. Brown argues that "the leaders of the land would be men and women who had learnt to read and write".

In the light of the aforesaid, we can be tempted to say that colonialism is a catastrophe for Africans for they not only lost their values but also adhered a system that doesn't favour them. In this regard, Ngugi Wa Thiongo observes that it is an inhuman system when he writes:

We Africans who have been under colonialism for many years believe that colonialism whatever its advantages is basically immoral. For anyone of whatever country to be content with alien rule, however sweet is to be less than human. (1983:15).

Substituting everything traditional by the new order was the ideal of the white man but this did not go peacefully as the natives were firm believers on their gods and customs. The clash arose from the fact that the new comer stands up against what the natives have taken for granted for long. Then, happened a misunderstanding between both parties. Consequently, schools weakened youngsters and the natives hated it for the impact of such a generation on agriculture which is the only sector that helps them become richer and live happier.

A look at Achebe's novels dealing with the situation of post-independence Nigeria also shows that the effect of the creation of schools is still felt on the social life of this society. In fact, in *A Man of the People*, Mrs Nanga, speaking of her children argues that her husband insists that their children shall be taken to their village at least once in a while. Both parents are afraid: "Without it, they would become English people. Don't you see they hardly speak our language? Ask them something in it and they reply in English". (1966:56). So, school does not only weaken people but it also causes youngsters to forget about their own language,

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therefore about their own ancestral values. Additionally, the encounter of the two civilizations will be a series of misunderstandings in *Things Fall Apart*. In fact, a man is killed in Abame just because those people do not understand that he is looking for the way to Mbaino. Also, a lot of misunderstandings hover between the people of Mbata and the first missionaries and the elders' will was not to allow them to settle in their village. That is why they offer them a part of the 'evil forest' where undesirable people are driven. Finally, the Africans' reaction is legitimate and normal for the coexistence seems impossible between the two communities. For them to regain peace, the white would go away as the narrator (1958: 170) mentions as follows:

We cannot leave the matter in his hand because he does not understand our customs, just as we do not understand his. We say he is foolish because he does not know our ways, and perhaps he says we are foolish because we do not know his. Let him go away.

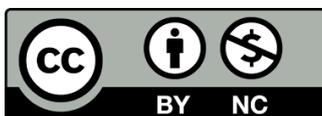
Finally, I can assert that African society is undergoing a profound change and social tensions, and clashes are inevitable especially resulting from colonial heritage which like leper contaminates a lot of people.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, it is germane to recall that this paper has been focused on the conflicts of culture in Nigeria through Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It sorts out that Nigeria like any other African country under the colonial power has lost its ancestral values, although some advantages it had gained from the colonizers. However, readers can learn throughout the paper that the Igbo society was a kind of society in which existed an intimate face-to-face relationship and co-operation among people, a society in which people lived together sharing the basic conditions of life with farming as mainstay. The white man came and broke the unity that held them together with his religion and school, disregarding even their culture. This had not been settled peacefully since a conflictual atmosphere happened between the two parties during the encounter. In the process of settlement, disintegration of the native people was recurrent as new converts joined the white man and misunderstanding between local people and the white man was observed. Above all, Chinua Achebe intends to establish in his readers (mainly Africans) a sense of pride in their past which will contribute to their sense of identity as people, expected regaining the dignity and strength lost during the colonial period. Thus, this analysis has revealed the Igbo cultural dynamism resulting from the British invasion on their land with positive and negative effects. From now on it is up to Africans or Nigerian people (especially Igbo) to imbibe the spirit of pleasant or enjoyable dynamism and avoid or deny the adverse one.

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