



Character as a Symbol of Culture: A Study of Achebe's Things Fall Apart

prepared by



Asso. Prof. Dr. Abdulrahman Mokbel
Mahyoub Hezam
Department of English, Faculty of Arts
Taiz University, Yemen
Faculty of Science and Arts, Taibah
University, Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This study examines Chinua Achebe's protagonist Okonkwo in the postcolonial novel *Things Fall Apart*. Close reading focuses on Okonkwo as both a product and symbol of Igbo culture in Nigeria. The study analyzes Okonkwo in three roles – as a patriarch, father, and unwavering hero – finding he represents core Igbo values like masculinity, gender norms, and resisting change. His inability to adapt to colonial influences reflects the larger clashes in Igbo society during this period. Ultimately, Okonkwo's inflexibility and suicide metaphorically depict the 'falling apart' of Igbo cultural identity under colonialism. Okonkwo remains representative of his culture, and his fate parallels the demise of Igbo traditions. Thus, Achebe skillfully utilizes Okonkwo to provide insight into the cultural upheaval and human impact of colonialism on indigenous Nigerian communities. This analysis affirms Achebe's effective use of Okonkwo as a symbol encapsulating major societal transformations in *Things Fall Apart*.

Keywords: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, postcolonial literature, Okonkwo, Igbo culture, colonialism, cultural symbolism

1. Introduction

The culture of society encompasses its shared symbols, language, values, beliefs, and artefacts. Kingsley Davis states that “culture is complex whole including art, music, architecture, literature, science and all aesthetic technology, philosophy and social institutions, religious and moral and aesthetic values.(Kingsley,1949). These different cultural symbols and values carry meaning for members of that culture. Studying them provides insight into the represented culture. Sometimes a single character can embody an entire culture. The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe explores cultural themes. It follows Okonkwo, a proud Igbo man in the Nigerian village of Umuofia in the late 1800s. The novel depicts the clash between longstanding Igbo culture and encroaching British colonial rule. Through vivid portrayals of Igbo practices and convictions, *Things Fall Apart* intimately conveys a unique culture often overlooked in Western literature. The novel also examines colonialism's impacts on individuals and communities, and how it can lead to cultural decimation. Ultimately, *Things Fall Apart* powerfully explores cultural identity and its fragility when facing external forces. Igbo culture is a multifaceted culture of southeastern Nigeria. The Igbo are one of Nigeria's largest ethnic groups, with a rich history and traditions. The Igbo are known for their robust sense of community, hospitality, music, art, and cuisine. They hold strong beliefs in ancestors and spirits and emphasize education and diligence. They have a strong sense of justice and fairness, reflected in their traditional laws.

Chinua Achebe began writing during the colonial era and continued to chronicle Nigeria's political, social, and cultural transformations after independence from British rule. His works document the country's changes over the past century. He is a meticulous artist in full command of language. Achebe has a clear understanding of the writer's role in society. What sets him apart is his ability to grasp the historical complexities of his evolving civilization. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe examined a pivotal juncture in his country's history. The focus is investigating how social change affects the patriarchal social institution in a culture undergoing transition due to a clash with an alien culture. Achebe is a historical novelist who draws subjects, narratives, and settings from current events for his works. His novel *Things Fall Apart* is set in the late nineteenth century.

Nigerian town of Umuofia. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, with its colourful political, historical, and colonial themes, is reminiscent of E.M. Foster's *A Passage to India* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The most intriguing aspect of Achebe is how openly he addresses urgent modern social and political issues, maybe with a strong didactic intent to bring back the past and reflect the present in the remembered past.

An objective analysis of Achebe's works reveals carefully woven themes of social morality, archaic and confusing social mores, and cultural norms, vividly bringing their individual societies to life in superb allegorical and fictional form. His novels, particularly *Things Fall Apart*, stand out for their deep psychological understanding and exploration of the ethnological mentality of the common populace. *Things Fall Apart* is a meticulous examination of the effects of Western civilization on colonial people's sensibilities as a result of contact with the open culture and overly liberal religion of the Europeans. As described by Ferris (1973), the novel illustrates the two-fold role assumed by post-colonial African writers to both reclaim indigenous cultural practices endangered by imperialism, as well as expose the full atrocities of colonial rule as a hindrance to humanity's advancement. In his portrayal of Okonkwo as a symbol of Igbo traditions, Achebe (1973) seeks to "resurrect the cultural traditions" of his people who faced deterioration under colonial domination. Meanwhile, by depicting Okonkwo's tragic fate resulting from colonial imposition, Achebe also aims to describe "the horror of colonialism" and its damaging effects on native populations. The novel therefore captures Achebe's dual endeavours to restore aspects of Igbo heritage while casting light on colonialism as a destructive force.

Achebe utilized his novel as a stage to reflect the ominous legacy of British colonialism, which destroyed the traditional morals and cultural practices of Nigerian culture. In addition to pillaging this colonial country's tangible wealth, the British also shattered regular social cohesion by sowing the "Divide and rule" seeds. The clash between the ancient way of life and the contemporary manner that emerged with the coming of the white rulers is a major theme in Achebe's work. He highlights the common division between the "foreign" and the "local," and he describes the traits of the society at this time in history, such as social manners, customs, how people behave and react, and what they do, think, like, and detest. *Things Fall Apart* provides us with a social picture of a whole society through the story of Okonkwo's family. The novel reflects its writer's understanding of the social forces at work at the time and the way he uses his knowledge of human psychology to develop his central character Okonkwo. The novel dramatizes how circumstances are changing around the patriarch, particularly in the social realm, bringing about numerous changes in people's opinions regarding many topics, linking the themes of colonialism and patriarchy through the interaction of the personal and social. The traditional culture is represented and defended by Okonkwo, who advocates for traditional customs and the patriarchal system, in the cultural battle between the new and traditional cultures.

2. Objectives of the Study:

This research study aims to provide a modest contribution to the field of African literature by examining the novel "*Things Fall Apart*" as a focal point. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the protagonist's role as both a product and symbol of the Igbo culture. The research endeavors to address the following inquiries:

1. In what ways does the Igbo culture shape Okonkwo's character?
2. How does the author utilize the protagonist as a representation of his culture?
3. Is Okonkwo's downfall primarily attributed to cultural or personal inflexibility?

These questions are explored to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of Okonkwo's character concerning the Igbo culture, the novel's exploration of cultural and personal rigidity, and its depiction of colonialism and patriarchy.

3. Significance of the study:

This study sought to provide perspective on the role culture plays in shaping character through its analysis of Okonkwo from Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. While prior research has explored Okonkwo's suicide in depth, this paper posits that his death stemmed from weaknesses in Igbo culture when encountering other societies. In contrast to cultures like Indian and Egyptian that persisted through adaptation when facing Western influence, Igbo culture proved unable to adjust and ultimately dissolved. A key issue examined is the interconnection between colonial domination and patriarchal power structures as coexisting forms of subjugation. The analysis aimed to demonstrate how an individual can both embody and symbolize the cultural milieu that moulded their identity and worldview.

4. Literature review

There has been significant scholarly attention focused on analyzing the character of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. Several studies have examined Okonkwo's suicide and its implications for understanding Igbo culture's response to socio-political changes brought about by colonialism. El Arbaoui (2018) viewed the novel as effectively portraying the postcolonial African reality through multifaceted characters and narratives. Hajo (2018) contradicted the notion that Igbo culture collapsed, arguing it was Okonkwo alone who fell apart due to a fatal violation of cultural norms driven by his personal ambitions. This perspective positions Okonkwo's downfall as a consequence of individual inflexibility rather than solely cultural forces.

Other researchers have interpreted Okonkwo's suicide through broader theoretical frameworks. Friesen (2006) proposed it was a deliberate act of rebellion empowering his people against colonial domination rather than an inevitable tragedy of cultural dissolution. Minima et al. (2017) analyzed it through a sociological lens as an irrational response to disruptive societal transformation and the intolerable conditions of foreign rule. Contextualizing the work within post-colonial theory, Şule Okuroğlu Özün and Nagihan Başkale (2019) stressed the necessity of understanding Africa's colonial past for interpreting such texts. Likewise, Emad Mirmotahari (2011) examined *Things Fall Apart*'s narrative strategies for generating historiographic knowledge about this period. Additional studies have drawn existentialist and absurdist parallels between Okonkwo's fate and philosophers like Camus exploring rebellion amid cultural disintegration (Zimmerman, 1998; Anyawu, 2015). Okonkwo's rigid adherence to masculine Igbo ideals and pressures to conform are viewed as exacerbating his crisis of identity (Ouma, 2016; Inegbedion, 2017).

In summarizing extant literature, scholarly perspectives on Okonkwo diverge as to whether his downfall reflected individual frailties or inherent weaknesses in Igbo culture to adapt its patriarchal traditions amid social change. Regardless, his character functions as a potent symbol through which to examine the complex interplay between colonial domination and cultural resilience in Chinua Achebe's post-colonial magnum opus. The present study presents a contrasting viewpoint to the argument that Igbo culture and religion did not collapse but rather underwent a transformation. Instead, this research posits that Okonkwo's downfall serves

as a symbol of the broader decline of Igbo culture, which was unable to withstand the influence of foreign forces. While Achebe seeks to portray African societies as self-sufficient entities with a strong cultural identity, it is undeniable that colonialism brought about devastating changes, ultimately distorting the cultural fabric of African societies. In the case of Igbo culture, the extent of change is so profound that the society not only lost its cultural heritage but also its religious practices. Therefore, Okonkwo's tragic fate should not be attributed solely to his own inflexibility but rather seen as a reflection of the entrenched rigidity within the entire culture.

5. Methodology:

This theoretical study employed close reading and textual analysis techniques, drawing upon sources from the existing body of literature. Prior to focusing on the main character from *Things Fall Apart* as both a reflection and representative of Igbo culture, the paper began by reviewing relevant studies that had explored this topic. The data was categorized into three main sections for examination: the conflict between father and son, the patriarchal structure and view of women, and the protagonist's perception of change. Through a library-based analytical approach relying on meticulous evaluation and interpretation of the source text, the research aimed to gain new perspectives on how cultural forces can shape an individual character as portrayed in the selected work.

6. Discussion

6.1. The patriarch and women:

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe depicts Igbo society between 1850-1900. The protagonist Okonkwo represents his society at a moment of impending social change. This social change is dramatized through Okonkwo's story by portraying his reactions to the shifts happening around him. This includes his perspective on women's role in society, his response to the foreign Western culture, and his relationships with the younger generation, particularly his son. Achebe uses Okonkwo to illustrate the tensions within Igbo society as it confronted colonial influences. Okonkwo is a hard-core patriarch who rules his household with unrelenting rigidity, pervading the whole house and terrifying every member of the family. With an overwhelming personality, he completely subordinates his family making every member subservient to his iron will. Okonkwo is portrayed as an oppressive father and husband who intimidates his wives and children by threatening them with his loaded gun. He derives a sense of pride and identity from exhibits of hypermasculinity. "The obsession with masculinity is an essential shield marked also by the excessive indulgences expressed in Okonkwo's outrageous assertiveness and his intense repudiation of certain subjective values such as "gentleness" and "idleness." (Osei-Nyame, 151). The significance given to masculinity is not a personal obsession but a social tradition in Umuofia. One can argue that the beliefs of Okonkwo on the handling and treatment of issues termed feminine are cultural and not personal beliefs even if there is more extremism in Okonkwo's application of these beliefs than in other men in the tribe. Okonkwo does not demonstrate a romantic interest in women outside his marriages and disregards women as individuals, seeing them as threats to his masculine identity. His attitudes reflect his cultural upbringing and social environment. As the protagonist, Okonkwo serves as a representative of his Igbo society and its values. To understand his character better, one has to understand Igbo society at the time. The catalyst for change in Igbo society is the Western culture through the British presence that led to various social, economic and political changes. In *Things Fall*

Apart, we find a good example of what Fanon refers to as 'Cultural Racism' in which the colonizer makes the colonized "hate his language, dress, techniques, value-system, social institutions, historical past, religion and practically everything that is not connected with the colonizer." Okonkwo's life as R.S. Sharma tells us, "embodies the tensions that a society has to go through when a tradition fails to cope with change and when its exceptional individuals come to rely on their personal enterprise rather than relying on traditional wisdom." (38). Igbo society, described as a traditional society, is characterized by masculinity, hierarchy, self-containment, coherence, and organic structure. Polygamy is practised, allowing men to have multiple wives. The novel illustrates numerous instances of Okonkwo's exploitation and violence towards his wives. But the most discussed example is Okonkwo's beating of his fourth wife for being late. The Nigerian patriarch is unable to control himself and he immediately physically attacks his wife in the week of peace.

According to Weinstock and Ramadan, Okonkwo is consistently associated with masculinity and holds a deep mistrust, opposition, and tendency to attack anything feminine or associated with femininity. (1979). Okonkwo has a false concept of power that sees all human feelings like love, sympathy and compassion as feminine. He views everything around him through the lens of a male-female dichotomy. This dichotomy is best expressed through the story of the vulture and the tortoise, which has a very important symbolic meaning in the novel. This dichotomy exists within the fabric of Igbo society but Okonkwo is more rigid and inflexible than his society in ignoring the female principles in life. Beating one's wife is not an offence except in the week of peace. Okonkwo violates the sanctity of the week of peace by beating his wife for returning late from a visit. His obvious disregard for Aní the earth goddess and the source of all fertility shows his disrespect for the feminine.

Okonkwo holds to a rigid system of values in all situations and under all circumstances. He suppresses the feelings of tenderness and love because they are feminine qualities. This explains his relationship with both his father, Unoka, and his son. He hates his father and what he stands for. Unoka stands for "the poetry of life" or the human feelings that are essential in man's life. He loves poetry, music, and merriment, the very things that Okonkwo despises. R.S Sharma tells us that in excluding the poetry of life Okonkwo "strikes at the very sources of renewal so that when the crisis finally comes, he finds himself utterly helpless" (1978).

In the context of traditional societies, the prevailing ideal for women is often depicted as one of willingly and happily submitting to their husbands and fathers, embodying the qualities of a submissive wife. In the novel, the majority of women are portrayed as having a resigned acceptance of their social reality, refraining from questioning or challenging male superiority. However, there are glimpses of women attempting to assert agency and make choices within the confines of the patriarchal system. Okonkwo's wives are representative of traditional women living in a polygamous setting. However, one of his wives, Ekwefi, stands out as a rebellious figure who leaves her first husband to live with Okonkwo. This portrayal suggests that Achebe aims to shed light on various female stereotypes and raise awareness about the oppressive nature of patriarchal societies. By highlighting the experiences of these women, the author encourages a reevaluation of societal norms that render women helpless and passive. Through the depiction of such characters, Achebe's intention could be seen as promoting the empowerment of women, urging them to challenge and overcome the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society. These portrayals serve as a means of challenging the status quo and prompting a reconsideration of gender roles and expectations. By showcasing women who dare to defy societal norms, Achebe encourages readers to question and challenge the oppressive structures that perpetuate the subjugation of women.

6.2. Father-son Relationship: -

One of the important aspects of the novel is the Father-son relationship or the relationship between the patriarch and his son. Okonkwo has three wives and eleven kids. He is a resolute father who never imagines that one of his sons will dare oppose him in anything. What is remarkable is that the son's revolt against his father in the novel is connected with the alien influence. It is the son's attitude towards the British presence that prompts his disagreement with his father. As a domestic tyrant, Okonkwo expects his sons to adopt whatever attitude he imposes on them without reservation or questioning. In his book, *The Gender Knot* G. Allan Johnson(2005), states that one of the important characteristics of patriarchy is "an obsession with control as a core value around which social life is organized". Patriarchs, thus "come to see themselves as subjects who intend and decide what will happen and to see others as subjects to act upon" Their status is threatened when they start losing control. In *Things Fall Apart*, the patriarch gradually loses control over his household and the world around him. Nwoye is fascinated by Western culture and religion. Lloyd Brown (1972) attributes the heavy hand with which Okonkwo rules his family to "Fear, the fear of being his father in "Failure and weakness". It is his distorted image of manhood that leads him to deal in a rigid way with other people. He even misunderstands his father and his own son. In trying to avoid his father's failure, Okonkwo becomes rigid and inflexible with no room for feelings and emotions. He classifies things and actions into two categories "womanly" and "manly." For him, as O.Solomon Lyasere(1978) tells us, "one is either a man or a woman; there can be no compromise, no composite". This distorted view of manhood shapes his attitude toward his son. He laments that Nwoye "has too much of his mother in him". Nwoye is capable of feeling and emotion and his soul is open to compassion and pity. Unlike his father, he is not willing to follow the rigid old values without questioning them". Nwoye is repelled by his father's equation of masculinity with violence and bloodshed(Lyasere,1978). Nwoye's conversion to Christianity serves as evidence of his receptiveness to new values and lifestyles, as well as a rejection of the perceived shortcomings of his own society. Essentially, Nwoye's decision to abandon his traditional beliefs and align himself with Christianity becomes an act of rebellion against his father and the society he represents. Nwoye becomes a symbolic embodiment of contradiction to his father, representing a complete denial of everything Okonkwo embraces and stands for. In Okonkwo's eyes, his son's defection is seen as a grave offence, as it involves renouncing the deities of their ancestors and associating with individuals whom Okonkwo perceives as effeminate and weak, akin to clucking old hens, which he considers a despicable abomination. He refuses to accept the new culture and decides to fight this powerful force that has enabled his son to revolt against him. Okonkwo feels helpless and unable to control his own son and prevents him from adopting the white man's culture and religion. The missionaries who came to Umuofia succeeded in converting many people to their faith, especially those who were not happy with their social lot. They also succeeded in shaking the private world of the great invincible patriarch whose word was undisputed in his tribe.

6.3 The Unchanging Hero: -

Achebe conceptualized change as an inherent and inevitable component of social evolution over lengthened periods of time. In *Things Fall Apart*, he constructs striking juxtapositions through his portrayal of pre-colonial Igbo society and the post-contact era, representing two divergent worlds. The traditional culture characterized by long-held customs and mores grounded in mytho-historical traditions comes into conflict with an emerging reality influenced by an external Western culture. Achebe employs the Igbo community of Umuofia as an exemplar of a society in flux, experiencing stresses as entrenched norms confront modernizing pressures. The novel dramatizes the dialectic between persisting patriarchal conventions and

novel Western norms disrupting indigenous social structures. Through its dramatization of this transitional phase, the work allegorizes the gradual dissolution of Umuofia's symbolic signifiers and ritual practices as imperial domination erodes cherished socio-cultural infrastructures. Overall, the text provides commentary on changing societal configurations through periods of substantial cultural contact and confrontation. By positioning the Igbo world in a state of liminality, caught between anchoring heritage and foreign interventionism, Achebe brings into relief the vivisection of autonomous civilizational psychologies resultant of colonial subjugation. In doing so, the work offered post-colonial audiences an empirical-fictional lens for interrogating the tragically bifurcated cultural consciousness of colonized communities navigating such turbulent transformational eras.

Okonkwo sees the traditional values of his society disintegrating and tries to protect these values by confronting foreign influence. Okonkwo is confronted with a difficult choice: either accept the new order that is emerging or stubbornly resist it, even if his resistance may ultimately prove futile. This decision poses a significant dilemma for Okonkwo, as he must weigh the potential consequences of either course of action. Okonkwo chooses to act against the forces of change though he is aware that he has no hope of succeeding in his mission. In the last part of the novel, Okonkwo appears as a lone man who finds the process of change around him incomprehensible and too quick for him to cope with. When he returns to his village, he is faced with a world "out of joint" and he sees it as his responsibility to "set it right". But he acts rashly without carefully measuring his steps. "Unable to change himself, he will not accept change in others, in the world around him, in the people of Umuofia" (Lyasere,1978). Okonkwo fails to view time as both a negative and positive force moving steadily, bringing about changes that help societies move forward. His death is viewed as "the result of his inability to understand the irreversibility of changes" (Ravichandra ,1998). The much-admired patriarch and strong, feared hero, finds himself alienated from his society. He is "swept aside" because he is unable to change or accept change. The change is rapid and radical and affects all social aspects. The encroachment of British civilization destroys the whole social fabric of Umuofia. There is no amalgamation of the new and the old but an erosion of the traditional values. Change in Umuofia takes Okonkwo by surprise like a nightmare that he has never expected. The institution of patriarchy was also affected by the process of change. The more he loses control, the more tormented he is with the sense of helplessness in the face of events. Okonkwo does not want to be reduced to just a shadowy figure of what he was – a colossus giant. He does not try to fight the forces of change; he never learns how to make concessions and accept changes. He tries to act as the defender of the old society. He does not accept falling into oblivion, being dropped by life and spending the rest of his life awaiting death watching events but not participating in them. Okonkwo's end is caused by his inability to come to terms with his reduced manhood.

As observed by Jameson (1986), in Third World literature the story of the individual protagonist frequently serves as an "allegory of the embattled situation" facing the wider public of third-world culture and society. Similarly, Hezam (2016) notes how in third-world works, "the private story of the individual is tied with the national story of the country," such that "the personal becomes the national and the family becomes the nation." This highlights how the individual narrative functions as a microcosm that reflects the broader public and political struggles confronting the third-world nation on a macro level, according to these theorists. As Erele (2000) points out, the import of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* arises from this framework, in that it registers "an acute consciousness of historical and cultural discontinuity caused by the colonial encounter in Africa, and of its ontological implications." Specifically, the colonial encounter in the novel resulted in "cultural discontinuity" whereby Igbo culture and heritage could not withstand the disruption, as their traditional ways of life clashed with foreign imperial

imposition. Okonkwo's anguished death then takes on symbolic meaning, representing on one hand the shattering of long-held native values due to outsider influence. On the other hand, as Achebe preferred, it may signal the emergence of new social values that could revitalize society through adopting aspects of modernity while preserving cultural heritage.

Achebe perceived time as both fostering progress through steady modifications across generations, as well as posing risks to continuity through inevitable alterations.(Achebe, 1958). Some communities adeptly blended old traditions with new Western influences, creating a natural synthesis between local customs and an evolving world. Okonkwo and his Igbo culture faced such changes due to the missionaries' arrival. Symbolizing Igbo resilience, Okonkwo stubbornly clung to tradition despite challenges to values and practices. However, when exiled for accidentally killing a clan member, his traditional views led to a tragic end. By committing the shameful and cowardly act of suicide through hanging, Okonkwo brought great dishonour upon himself - underscoring the dysfunctional aspects of unyielding adherence to the past in a changing society (Achebe, 1958). His death symbolizes the destruction of traditional Igbo culture and values in the face of British colonialism. Okonkwo's rigid stance towards the new culture is the product of his personality which is in turn the product of Igbo culture. Igbo society failed to create a harmonious synthesis of the local and foreign cultures just as some other societies under British control did. Okonkwo is unwilling to accept the fall of Igbo society and decides to commit an abominable act of hanging himself on a tree, an act the culture he so much fights for, condemns. This act does not only mark the victory of Western ideology over the African belief system but also Okonkwo's final protest against the culture that lets him down. Ending his life through suicide reflects the seeds of self-destruction within Igbo culture that led it to commit cultural suicide by adopting a foreign culture. As the natives clearly stated in the novel the Imperial colonist has put a knife on the things that held Igbo society together and it has fallen apart. In this sense, the tragic end of Okonkwo depicts the overall fall of his people. Okonkwo thus symbolizes the erosion of the Igbo people's national identity and that of their surroundings. (Abu Jweid, 2016) Okonkwo functions as an allegorical representation not only of his own Igbo culture but also of other societies that have endured the dissolution of long-held traditions resulting from processes of Western imperialism over centuries. His individual downfall symbolizes the larger-scale erosion of cultural cohesion and national identity experienced by numerous groups facing the corroding effects of outsider domination on indigenous customs, values and worldviews. Okonkwo consequently serves as a microcosmic embodiment of the macro transformation imposed on colonized populations - representing the fragmented remains of once-unified communities unable to withstand the cultural assaults of Imperial occupation. In this allegorical capacity, his tragic fate speaks to the profound civilizational impacts that can arise from the imposition of foreign rule and the concomitant loss of autonomy and distinctive heritage it often precipitates.

7. Conclusion:

This study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* examines the protagonist Okonkwo as a representation of Igbo culture and a symbol of its demise under colonial rule. Through close reading, Okonkwo is analyzed in his roles as a patriarch, father, and unwavering hero within the clan. The study finds that Okonkwo embodies core Igbo values like masculinity, strict gender norms, and resistance to change. His attitudes and inability to adapt to colonial influences reflect the larger clashes occurring in Igbo society. Ultimately, Okonkwo's inflexibility and suicide at the end metaphorically depict the 'falling apart' of Igbo cultural identity.

Okonkwo remains a product of his culture and his downfall parallels that of Igbo traditions under colonialism. Achebe skillfully utilizes Okonkwo to provide insight into the cultural upheaval and human impact of colonialism on indigenous Nigerian communities. The protagonist gives a human face to the profound societal transformations that occurred in Nigeria during colonization. In essence, this analysis reaffirms Chinua Achebe's effective use of Okonkwo as a symbol encapsulating major themes in *Things Fall Apart* – illuminating Igbo culture and the turmoil wrought by colonialism. The novel provides a personal lens into the human costs of colonization through its culturally representative protagonist.

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