

4. ALIENATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN FICTIONAL CHARACTERS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* (1994)

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ABSTRACT

The two main objectives in this paper are: To identify and examine how Chinua Achebe presents the concept of alienation and identity crisis in *Things Fall Apart* and to examine the experiences of the major characters in the novel and extract lessons learnt. Achebe focuses on the traditional / modernity dichotomy and the conflict between the traditional way of life and the modern way brought by the British. Literature has the ability of recording the characteristics of times including the social manners, customs, how people act and react, what they do, think, like and dislike. In *Things Fall Apart*, the way people act and react leads to alienation and identity crisis. *Things Fall Apart* provides us with social pictures of whole societies through the story of Okonkwo. The novel derives its strength from the quality of 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 who is Okonkwo. The novel dramatises how conditions are changing around the protagonist especially in the social sphere bringing about many changes in the attitudes of people towards many issues. It also dramatises the conflict of the new culture with the traditional culture and the consequences of that conflict. Hezam (2016) points out that the cause of alienation and identity crisis in *Things fall Apart* is none other than Okonkwo's inability to adjust to the new reality created by the white people.

Key words

Alienation, identity crisis, fictional characters, dichotomy, protagonist, coloniser, self-esteem.

NB: There are so many editions of *Things Fall Apart* but this paper used the 2008 version, ISBN 9780435913502)

INTRODUCTION-OVERVIEW OF THE NOVEL

The narrative structure of *Things Fall Apart* follows a cyclical pattern that chronicled Okonkwo's youth in Umuofia, his seven-years of exile in Mbanta, and his eventual return home. Each of these periods in Okwonko's life are covered in three divisions of the novel. The novel's three parts also map onto a gendered narrative structure that follows Okonkwo from fatherland to motherland and back to fatherland. This gendered narrative structure functions in counterpoint with Okonkwo's ongoing obsession with his own masculinity. Despite every



attempt to gain status and become an exemplar of traditional Igbo masculinity, Okonkwo suffered from a feeling of relentless emasculation (Bartleby, 2024). Okonkwo's struggle to achieve recognition repeatedly drew him into conflict with his community, eventually leading to both his downfall and to that of Umuofia and the nine villages.

Part One of *Things Fall Apart* emphasises Okonkwo's coming-of-age and his attempts to distance himself from the disreputable legacy of his father, Unoka. Okonkwo's tireless efforts and singular drive, along with his local fame as a wrestling champion, went a long way in securing him a place among the titled men of Umuofia. Yet Okonkwo's zeal frequently led him astray when he killed Ikemefuna, the young boy who became his surrogate son after being surrendered to Umuofia by another village to settle a violent dispute. When the clan elders decided it was time for Ikemefuna's execution, an elder named Ogbuefi Ezeudu warned Okonkwo that he should "not bear a hand in [Ikemefuna's] death" (Achebe, 2008. p.45). Despite this warning, a moment of panic ultimately drove Okonkwo to bring his machete down on his surrogate son: "He was afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe, 2008, p.49). In other instances in Part One, Okonkwo had a short temper and in a fit of rage, he would punish his wives and children. His obsession with upward mobility and traditional masculinity tended to alienate others, leaving him in a precarious social position.

In addition to narrating Okonkwo's struggle to build a distinguished reputation, Part 1 also provided a broad view of the precolonial Igbo cultural world. Achebe highlighted numerous Igbo cultural values, religious beliefs, and ritual practices to provide the reader with a sense of the Igbo world. By the end of Part 1, however, both Okonkwo's life and the life of his community were on the brink of disaster. The first blow came with the death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man in the village, and the same man who warned Okonkwo against killing Ikemefuna. The second blow came when, during Ezeudu's nighttime burial, Okonkwo's gun misfired and killed Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.

"Violent deaths were frequent, but nothing like this had ever happened.

The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years" (Achebe, 2008, p.99).

The manslaughter of Ezeudu's son forced the remaining village elders to burn Okonkwo's huts, kill his livestock, and send him and his family into exile for seven years. He was exiled for committing a feminine (i.e., accidental) crime. Okonkwo retreated from his fatherland to the land of his mother's kin, a retreat that Okonkwo found deeply demoralising. This personal sense of emasculation paralleled larger cultural and historical changes, as white Christian missionaries began to infiltrate the lower Niger region, including both Umuofia and Okonkwo's site of exile, Mbanta. The personal and historical senses of emasculation came to a head when an old friend (Obierika) from Umuofia visited Okonkwo in Mbanta to inform him that his eldest son, Nwoye, had abandoned traditional Igbo beliefs and joined the Christian faith. Realising that this event constituted a major rupture in his patrilineal line, Okonkwo disowned Nwoye (Pars, 2019).

By the time Okonkwo and his family left Mbanta, the growing presence of foreigners in Umuofia had already created deep internal divisions. In addition to the missionaries who arrived in his absence, government officials also began to filter in, installing a foreign rule of law. The changes in Umuofia compromised Okonkwo's homecoming, which he hoped would represent a new start. Finding himself once again in a passive, emasculated position, Okonkwo grew increasingly furious with his fellow Umuofians, who refused to take violent action against the missionaries and force them out. Whereas others praised the British for providing increased access to resources along with medicine and education, Okonkwo saw the British as a cancer whose presence would eventually kill Umuofia and the nine villages (SparkNotes, 2024).

Following another emasculating incident where colonial officers threw Okonkwo and others in jail and set a steep bail, Okonkwo took an uncompromising position in favour of tradition. His final acts of violence—murder and suicide—cemented the novel's tragedy. This tragedy was, once again, deeply gendered. In the law of Umuofia, an intentional killing constituted a "masculine" crime. Although Igbo tradition did not explicitly code suicide as a "feminine" crime, killing himself was an unspeakable act that stripped Okonkwo of all honour. Thus, his suicide brought a final instance of emasculation, as he would be denied the honour of a proper burial.

The plot analysis above will be of great help in the presentation and analysis of alienation and identity crisis of the following characters in the novel: Okonkwo, the protagonist, Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, Obierika, Okonkwo's friend, Mr Brown, the first white missionary, Mr Smith, the second white missionary and The District Commissioner, a white man sent to rule over Umuofia.



REVIEW OF THE PAPER BASED ON THE MAJOR CHARACTERS ASSOCIATED WITH ALIENATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* (1994)

(b) Major characters associated with alienation and identity crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart*

Okonkwo

All stories have a protagonist, which is a person that the story focuses on and gives special traits. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the story followed the life and actions of Okonkwo. As the story progressed, the reader became most intimate and learned a great deal about Okonkwo. Okonkwo acted as the protagonist in *Things Fall Apart* because he appeared to be a very strict father and husband, by showing loyalty to his village, and by working hard. In the Nigerian culture during the time the novel was written, it was a custom for a man to be strict and harsh in the ruling of his family. For example, in the story, Okonkwo said,

“I will not have a son who cannot hold up his head in the gathering of the clan. I would sooner strangle him with my own hands” (Achebe 2008, p. 26).

This showed that Okonkwo was so strict that he would threaten his own son, maybe even strangle him rather than let him grow up as a weak young man. Another reason that Okonkwo was the protagonist was because he showed loyalty towards his village. He fought skilfully and bravely in order to defend his village. When Okonkwo had his fill of the invading British, he risked his life by killing the head messenger, who was attempting to break up a traditional Umuofian meeting. This showed that he had loyalty for his village by sacrificing himself and killing one of the messengers. Okonkwo was also a very hard and dedicated worker. For example, following the harvest,

“The only work that men did at this time was covering the walls of their compound with new palm fronds. And Okonkwo had already done that. He had finished it on the very day the locusts came...” (Achebe, 2008, p.51)

This made it evident that Okonkwo worked hard and did not procrastinate. Okonkwo, the son of the effeminate and lazy Unoka, strove to make his way in a world that seemed to value manliness. In so doing, he rejected everything for which he believed his father stood. Unoka was idle, poor, irresponsible, cowardly, gentle, and interested in music and conversation. Okonkwo consciously adopted opposite ideals and became productive, wealthy, thrifty, brave, violent, and

adamantly opposed to music and anything else that he perceived to be “soft,” such as conversation and emotion. He was “stoic” to a fault (Merriam-Webster.com Thesaurus, 2024).

“When Unoka died he had taken no title and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him...Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things...” (Achebe, 2008, p.7)

This clearly shows that he had alienated himself from all the unmanly qualities of his father. He was ready to build his own identity based on the principles of manliness. Okonkwo embodied the powerful masculine of the clan even at a tender age. The quotation below proves it:

“He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages... And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders” (Achebe, 2008, p.7).

Okonkwo achieved great social and financial success by embracing these ideals. He married three women and fathered several children. Nevertheless, just as his father was at odds with the values of the community around him, so Okonkwo found himself unable to adapt to changing times as the white man came to live among the Umuofians. As it became evident that compliance rather than violence constituted the wisest principle for survival, Okonkwo realised that he had become a historical object, no longer able to function within his changing society.

In many literature genres, identity crisis comes because of conflict. This could be conflict between a person or group and another person, which can drive one into change. This is typical of what Okonkwo went through and he eventually became a tragic hero in the classical sense: although he was a superior character, his tragic flaw—the equation of manliness with rashness, anger, and violence—brought about his own destruction. Okonkwo was harsh and rough, at times, and usually unable to express his feelings (Achebe frequently used the word “inwardly” in reference to Okonkwo’s emotions). However, his emotions were indeed quite complex, as his manly values were in conflict with his unmanly ones, such as fondness for Ikemefuna and Ezinma. Achebe privileged us with information that Okonkwo’s fellow clan members did not have—that Okonkwo surreptitiously followed Ekwefi into the forest in pursuit of Ezinma, for example—and thus allowed us to see the tender, worried father beneath the seemingly indifferent exterior (Kamila. 2024).



Hussam (2013) asserts that alienation can come because of loss of identity. It is quite imperative to note that human beings sometimes fail to find meaning behind life and they later find the world they live in to be unfriendly and antagonistic towards them. This is typical of what Okonkwo went through as highlighted in the plot synopsis of *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo was an over-reacher because he tried too hard to find meaning behind life but lacked humility. He saw himself as an exceptional man and had little patience with “unsuccessful men” (Achebe, 2008, p.3). This made him too proud and arrogant (Mhene, 2013).

In trying to shape his identity into masculine values, Okonkwo paved way for his own destruction and that of his clan. He was alienated from Umuofia and his banishment to his motherland in Mbanta was a wound in his soul and that of his clan.

The analysis below will summarise how Okonkwo’s actions paved way to alienation and identity crisis throughout the novel. As pointed out by Chinua Achebe (1994), Okonkwo was not a man of thought but of actions. Msiska (2008) in his analysis of Okonkwo pointed out that Okonkwo acted positively to achieve success in accordance with the masculine principles, which shaped his identity throughout the novel.

Msiska (2008) pointed to the fact that some of those principles, which determined his success, became obsessions, driven by pride and arrogance. Some misfortunes were not of his making. The arrival of the white men and the changes brought to Okonkwo’s culture and clan contributed to identity crisis, which led to his alienation from the entire clan and finally his tragic death.

Right from the start, we noticed his rise from nothing to success as alluded to earlier on in this section. He was a fearless warrior who threw Amalinze the Cat and brought honour to the village (Achebe, 2008, p.3). This single-handed success made him arrogant.

Okonkwo “breathed heavily” and “when he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground.... And he did pounce on people quite often.... He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fist...” (Achebe, 2008, p.3).

In the quotation above Okonkwo was described as a man of action. It was his character. It was his identity never to show emotion except in anger. For him to show affection was a sign of weakness and the only thing worth demonstrating in the eyes of Okonkwo was strength. His character caused impulsive actions. He beat his wife Ojiungo, during the Week of Peace and Ezeani, who was the

priest of the Earth Goddess; Ani reproved him by saying,

“You are not a stranger. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth, we should observe a week in which a man does not say any harsh word to his neighbour..... you have committed a great evil The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan...” (Achebe, 2008, p.24)

Okonkwo's uncompromising attitude towards his son Nwoye alienated his son from him and this made Christianity look attractive for his son. Okonkwo also beat his second wife Ekwefi for cutting off banana leaves (Achebe, 2008, pp.30 – 33).

Anger drove Okonkwo to beat his second wife. He did not consider her explanations about the New Yam Festival preparations. Okonkwo's key motivator for actions was to gain control over others and this identity crisis drove him to behave in strange ways.

Schultz, and Schultz (2009) believe that in most cases tragedy strikes when characters are unable to extricate themselves from the conflict between who they are and who they are supposed to be. Okonkwo was warned by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, one of the oldest men in Umuofia that he was not supposed to bear a hand in the killing of Ikemefuna:

“That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death... Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it ...But I want you to have nothing to do with it...” (Achebe, 2008, p. 46)

As pointed out by Schultz and Schultz (2009) above, Okonkwo did not consider the warning. He was driven to kill Ikemefuna through fear – the fear of being thought weak. This was yet another offence against Ani, the earth goddess. As a result of this incident misfortune followed Okonkwo's footsteps and at Ezeudu's funeral, Okonkwo killed the dead man's son. When the burial was near, guns were fired as the last salute to honour the great man. Okonkwo's gun exploded and a piece of iron pierced the dead man's sixteen-year-old son. Nothing of this had ever happened in Umuofia. For this crime, Okonkwo had to flee from the clan and be alienated from his people. This incident was seen as retribution or wrath of Ani, the earth goddess for Okonkwo's three offences he committed before this incident. It was a crime to kill a clansman. This was fate and beyond his control.

The crime for this “female crime” (Achebe, 2008, p.99) was for Okonkwo to leave the clan and return after seven years. This was the turning point in



Okonkwo's misfortunes because he never regained esteem or prominence in the clan again. Okonkwo and his family had to flee to Mbanta, his mother's village. That alienation from his clan and friends proved to be the end of his fame. It was during these years of exile that the White Colonists arrived in Umuofia, Abame, Mbanta and all the surrounding villages. This was critical in the destruction of Okonkwo. His son Nwoye joined the missionaries and had declared that Okonkwo was not his father. Okonkwo's family was irreparably split.

On his return to Umuofia, Okonkwo told his friend Obierika that it was now time for action. He said:

“We must fight these men and drive them from the land.” (Achebe, 2008, p. 140)

In response to Okonkwo's proposition, Obierika told Okonkwo that it was too late by saying:

“Our own men and sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion, and they help to uphold his government.” (Achebe, 2008, p.145)

Okonkwo could not think or reason and clung to his simplistic solution of violence. His attitude and behaviour divided and alienated his own family and the clan at large. He mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia who had become soft like women.

Marcia (1980) highlights that certain situations and events (called crises) serve as catalysts in promoting internal and emotional conflicts. We discover that Okonkwo developed these conflicts within himself, and he committed suicide rather than suffer the Whiteman's punishment. This action was the ultimate expression of his power over his own destiny. This action held true to all that he lived by – being a warrior but ironically suicide was an “abomination... an offence against the Earth” (Achebe, 2008, p.65). His body was therefore evil and the land had to be cleansed.

In fighting to maintain his individual identity (Marcia, 1980), Okonkwo killed himself showing an expression of masculine clan values not understanding that those values were already dead. Okonkwo did not consider his father's words years back when he said,

“You have a manly and proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more – bitter when a man fails alone” (Achebe, 2008, p. 20).

In attempting to uphold masculine values, Okonkwo died an ignoble and womanly death. Okonkwo would not allow himself to recognise a force stronger than he was and thus he was destroyed in a similar way his clan was destroyed by colonialism.

Based on the identity theories of Stryker and Burke (2000) and Tajfel and Turner (2004) it is quite evident that Okonkwo committed suicide as his complete rejection of British colonisation, as well as his sense of alienation, especially when he realised that his clansmen would no longer stand with him in the fight against the British colonisers. Therefore, he decided to die liberated, rather than living colonised.

According to Dunn (1997), Okonkwo's suicide was the struggle between the motivational aspect of the stability of his self and the instability of his identity, due to British colonisation. By completely denying and rejecting British colonisation, Okonkwo seemed to have developed an overwhelming internal struggle within his self-image and identity. In this context, Okonkwo attempted to restabilise his identity by stabilising his self-image through motivation.

It is his identity, which had already been torn apart by British colonisation, which drove him to self-destruction through suicide. "Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously:

"That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog..." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words (Achebe, 2008, p.68).

Hence, the change in this transitional identity, which had been disrupted, created this tragic situation (Cao, 2013).

Nwoye

Nwoye was Okonkwo's oldest son, the child of Okonkwo's eldest wife. He was growing into a lazy boy despite his father's constant nagging and beating. He finally became emotionally unfulfilled. He had a rocky relationship with his father. However, when Ikemefuna came, he filled that void and Nwoye, in his adoration of his adoptive brother, began to emulate him. In a strange way, Ikemefuna filled the role of both father and brother for Nwoye, providing him with a peer to share his thoughts and for being a role model. He was no longer alienated or lonely but felt that his identity was taking a new shape and he developed a progressively greater commitment to a particular individual identity via the process of identity exploration (Marcia, 1990).



More than any other character, Nwoye encapsulated an innocent child who was very sensitive to his surroundings and was baffled by the seemingly arbitrary cruelties being committed around him. His dominant characteristic was his incredible ability to feel and sympathise, even more so than some of the female characters. Though considered positive traits by modern women looking for a sensitive man, Okonkwo was not impressed and aggressively tried to keep his son from acting like a woman (Paulman, 2016).

After Ikemefuna's unjust murder, Nwoye grew increasingly alienated from his father and seemed to lose respect for him. Without Ikemefuna's companionship and influence, and with a loss of faith in his father, Nwoye reverted to his former gentle nature, instead of adhering to the false masculine one he pretended to have in Ikemefuna's presence. Increasingly, Okonkwo came to view Nwoye as a disappointment and extremely effeminate. Neither father nor son was unable to see and understand the other on his own terms (Jay et al, 2021).

Ultimately, Nwoye was unable to forgive Okonkwo for his betrayal in killing his adoptive brother. Nwoye's betrayal of his father by converting to Christianity can be read as an attempt to get back at his father for his crime. Christianity, too, had its appeal for Nwoye. The missionaries' hymn about brothers living in "darkness and fear, ignorant of the love of God" touched Nwoye deeply. This missionaries' message seemed to speak of another way to live that Nwoye never knew about – a way of life in which fathers did not kill their adoptive sons and twins not abandoned to die in the Evil Forest. Marcia (1980) points out that the crises that Nwoye went through created internal conflict and emotional upheaval hereby causing Nwoye to examine and question values and beliefs.

Hudspeth (2018), summarises Nwoye's identity crisis and alienation based on his personality, tendency and personal beliefs. On personality, the first notable trait was his lack of confidence. A large part of the reason for this was Okonkwo's treatment of Nwoye. In order to teach Nwoye to shape the identity Okonkwo wanted, Okonkwo chose to threaten him with violence rather than kindly encourage him. For example, when Nwoye did not cut yams for planting properly, Okonkwo said to him,

"If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw. You think you are still a child. I began to own a farm at your age..." (Achebe, 2008, p.26)

Okonkwo's treatment of Nwoye left the boy feeling unsure of himself and scared of making mistakes because his father's disappointment was constant and overwhelming.

On tendency, Hudspeth (2018) says that the culture of the village was very much like it was in the Nigerian villages – very masculine and very violent and this was against Nwoye's tendency to be gentle and peaceful. He was aware that society did not approve of his people and he pretended to be what he was not, thus falling into an identity crisis. Even though he pretended to act like his father and how his village thought a man should act, he did not appreciate violence.

On personal beliefs, Hudspeth (2018) points out that the beliefs of the village often came in conflict with Nwoye's personal code of ethics. For example, the village had a custom of leaving twin babies to die in the evil forest because they believed that identical twins were an evil abomination. When Nwoye walked near the forest and heard the cries of the babies, dying something gave way inside him. That something was melancholy at the death of innocent babies. This ultimately paved way for his change of identity and alienation when the White Missionaries offered a better solution to his sadness.

Obierika

Every protagonist has to have a close friend. Okonkwo's closest friend was Obierika but he was different from Okonkwo. Breazeale (2020) says that Obierika was a strong, level-headed man of the same village as Okonkwo. The two were great friends despite being complete opposites--- or foils of one another. Obierika had several wives and many children, which was the custom of Umuofia, and though he greatly respected the traditions of his culture, he was also forward-thinking and level-headed enough to realise that Umuofians could learn a thing or two from the outside world.

Obierika also treated people fairly, was kind and just in dealing with his family and showed himself to be an excellent friend and confidante to Okonkwo. He was rational, and reasoned out his actions before doing anything. He was curious too, and interested in the British colonists when they came to Umuofia. He was honest and fair, shown by his trade dealings and business interactions. Since Obierika was a real stand-up man, he was greatly respected in Umuofia. Obierika did not have any identity crisis because he was not rebellious and was down-to-earth. He weighed all the pros and cons in his society and provided logical solutions to problems that the people encountered.

Breazeale (2020) goes on to say that Obierika often did not approve of Okonkwo's actions and even counselled him against acting the way he wanted to, but he was always there in the end to comfort and help his friend Okonkwo. An example is when Okonkwo joined the party of the men who would take Ikemefuna, the boy from another village who had been taken into Okonkwo's home, out into the jungle and slaughter him. Obierika wholeheartedly disapproved of it. However,



Okonkwo out of fear and desire to prove his manliness killed the boy with his own machete. Obierika comforted and consoled his friend without mentioning his disapproval.

Obierika also helped Okonkwo when he was exiled from Umuofia for accidentally killing Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son at the funeral of his father. He sold Okonkwo's yams and gave him the money. However, perhaps the greatest difference between these two great friends came from their beliefs. Obierika was loyal to the traditions of Umuofia but he understood the need for change and evolution. He was open to progress. He believed that there could be learning opportunities that came from Christians who moved just outside the village, and that they should be treated with respect and dignity. He also thought that the traditions the Umuofians lived by needed to be questioned from time to time, and he did so openly. On the other hand, Okonkwo wanted to slaughter all the Christians and remain strictly adhering to the values and traditions passed down through generations. Obierika was far more open-minded, and it was he, who had the voice of reason when he said to Okonkwo,

“The White man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe, 2008, p.141).

Obierika's speech is a clear testimony or a summary of how people were alienated due to the coming of the white missionaries. People changed their identities in order to meet those of the White missionaries. Because of alienation and identity crisis, things that held the Umuofians together fell apart. In that speech Obierika became Achebe's mouthpiece about why the novel was given the title, *Things Fall Apart*.

Mr Brown

Mr Brown was the first White missionary in Umuofia and Mbanta. He was patient, kind and an understanding man. He was also open minded and willing to try to respect and understand the Igbo beliefs. Mr Brown befriended many great men of the clan who began to listen and understand his message. This was the beginning of changing people's identities and this later contributed to alienation and division among the people of Umuofia. Mr Brown discussed religious beliefs with Akunna, a clan leader of Umuofia. Neither men gave up their beliefs but they learnt about each other's faith and gained respect for one another. This was yet another turning point, which led to identity crisis, and alienation since Mr Brown “trode” on the Igbo people “softly” in order to win

their hearts (Achebe, 2008, p. 142). Mr Brown succeeded in winning a large number of converts because he listened to the villagers' stories, beliefs and opinions.

In order to attract many converts, Mr Brown built a school and a hospital in Umuofia. He urged the Igbo people to send their children to school and made it a point to give gifts such as singlets and towels to the children and later to adults who attended his school. This was something that triggered identity crisis because the converted adults and the younger generation wanted to overturn the outdated old culture. It was Mr Brown who brought about this identity crisis, which culminated into alienation. Mr Brown knew the British way – to do away with the traditional government of the Igbo people and instate their own form of government. Mr Brown informed the Igbo people that they would need to adapt so that they would not lose all their autonomy and their traditional beliefs.

Mr Smith

Mr Smith or Reverend Smith who replaced Mr Brown was strict and uncompromising. He was a stereotypical fire – and – brimstone preacher. “He condemned openly, Mr Brown’s policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil” (Achebe, 2008, p. 147). He denounced the tribe’s customs and banned from his church clan members who were filled with the devil’s spirit because of the tribal Igbo tradition.

Mr Brown befriended the clansmen and Mr Smith harshly condemned the clansmen. While Mr Brown used respect to reach the clansmen, Mr Smith imposed his religion on the clansmen. Mr Smith created identity crisis and alienation because the clansmen rejected his religion because he made it clear that the tribesmen’s customs and traditions were ridiculous. He was convinced that Umuofians were ignorant, backward savages and made no effort to understand the rituals and tradition they practiced. He even suspended a woman for performing an Umuofian ritual for the body of her dead child (Achebe, 2008, p.147). One of his overzealous converts, Enoch unmasked an Egwugwu in public. According to the Umuofians,

“One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an Egwugwu in public (Achebe, 2008, p.148).

This created animosity between Mr Smith’s followers and the Umuofian elders and gods. As a result, Enoch’s behaviour, a man who had totally alienated himself from his traditional way of life because of Christianity, the clan retaliated against the Christians. They destroyed the symbol of Christianity by burning down the



chapel. The clan forced the whites to pay a fine (losing their church) equal in value to their offense (ripping off the mask).

Because of Smith's arrogance, the rift between the church and the clan widened leading to identity crisis and further alienation between the new faith and Umuofians. Achebe echoed this in the following words:

“The church had come and led many astray. Not only the low-born and the outcast but sometimes a worthy man had joined it. Such a man was Ogbuefi Ugonna, who had taken two titles, and who like a madman had cut the anklet of his titles and cast it away to join the Christians.”
(Achebe, 2008, p.139).

With the conversion of this great man under Mr Brown, the clan was further divided and many more conversions were going to destroy the clan.

The District Commissioner

He was a white man sent to rule over Umuofia. He and his court messengers were corrupt officials who abused the natives. He judged cases although he knew nothing of the people, their culture or their customs. He was another fixture of colonisation that the people of Umuofia were subjected to. He understood himself as a representative of the queen of England and he believed that the British had the right to replace the native rules and their system of justice.

The Commissioner was proud that the British had brought a peaceful administration and he claimed that the goal was to make the Igbo people happy (Achebe, 2008, pp.154-155).

The Commissioner was responsible for the alienation among clansmen. He used force to divide the people. He even used other black men as his messengers to suppress other black men. He is the one who ultimately led Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel to kill himself.

He was only moved to think of the peculiarities of the natives and how such interesting stories would fill the book he was writing on colonisation. The final chapter of the book gave the best indication of why the District Commissioner and the British were in Africa. The title of the District Commission's book was “The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger” (Achebe, 2008, p.166). The British, as they were colonising, actually believed that they were doing the tribes a favour. They felt they were teaching them to be civilised and live in the right ways but not knowing that they destroyed the unity that existed among the natives.

They promoted alienation where people of the same tribe were no longer united but falling apart. They caused the brave protagonist to die. Okonkwo whose strong identity was admired by all became a joke in the eyes of the District Commissioner. Okonkwo's death was a symbol of impending loss of cultural and political autonomy of the Igbo people. The identity crisis came because of conflict created by the District Commissioner representing the British government. The District Commissioner and his British government had "put a knife on things that held" the Igbo people together, and they had "fallen apart" (Achebe, 2008, p. 141).

In conclusion, as Msiska (2001) puts it, the tragic quality of the story was given an epic dimension in its stage as a mythic confrontation of cultures and nations on a number of levels: religious, economic, political, and cultural and metaphysical, rendering the novel trans-generic. *Things Fall Apart* is a perfect example of the power of psychological realism when blended with traditional African narrative practice.

Things Fall Apart is a novel that humanises Africa, presents its past and culture as intriguing, profound, and elaborate enough to inspire the most considered literary treatment ("Oral and written literature in Africa: a structuralist reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* 2016"). In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe teaches us that the colonisers leading to "things falling apart" created alienation and identity crisis.

ANALYSIS OF THIS PAPER BASED ON THE OBJECTIVES STATED IN THE ABSTRACT

Objective 1 is to identify and examine how Chinua Achebe presents the concept of alienation and identity crisis in *Things Fall Apart*

In *Things Fall Apart* (1994), Achebe explored the deterioration of national identity. According to Jweid (2016), such deterioration was brought about by the spiritual and tentative defeat inherent in the failure of the protagonist, Okonkwo, to face the colonial whites. Ultimately, the protagonist's failure led to a tragic death. In the novel's context, Achebe exhorted the fall of national identity and its pathetic aftermath. The deterioration in national identity symbolically correlated to the protagonist's personal irresolute experience, which was at first physically powerful but in the end spiritually weak (Jweid, 2016). Achebe dramatised how conditions were changing around the protagonist especially in the social sphere bringing about many changes in the attitudes of people towards many issues. It also dramatised the conflict of the new culture with the traditional culture and the consequences of that conflict.



Hezam (2016) points out that the cause of alienation and identity crisis in *Things fall Apart* was none other than Okonkwo's inability to adjust to the new reality created by the white people. Alienation and identity crisis were partly attributed to fear of change and fear of being like his father in failure and weakness. His violations of his own tribal values and customs, due to his impetuosity before the arrival of the white coloniser, foreshadowed his tragic end. Okonkwo became alienated from the village because his own people had ostracised him. He was exiled from the world he had grown up in. The good name he had built up his entire life following the rules of his society had become outdated. Hence, in addition to the struggles and conflicts arising from British colonial powers and internal disorder within Igbo society, these violations reflected Okonkwo's own inner conflicts. Despite his ultimate power within his clan, and the many honourable titles that he attained, Okonkwo could not achieve harmony, either within himself, or with his own family, due to his reckless behaviour.

Nwoye, Okonkwo's son went through a lot, as Okonkwo believed that Nwoye was like his grandfather Unoka. Because of this, Nwoye was mentally alienated from his father Okonkwo due to the belief that he was more on the feminine side.

With the murder of Ikemefuna, however, Nwoye retreated into himself and found himself forever changed. His reluctance to accept Okonkwo's masculine values turned into pure embitterment toward him and his ways. When missionaries came to Mbanta, Nwoye's hope and faith were reawakened, and he eventually joined forces with them.

His alienation from his father and the entire family gave him a sense of belonging and an identity he was proud to keep and cherish unlike the identity his father wanted to impose on him.

In conclusion, the fatal flaw was Okonkwo's inability to accept the change that took place in his society due to historical forces. He tried to set things right and face the force of change but found himself alone betrayed by those close to him. Okonkwo failed to view time as both a negative and positive force moving steadily, bringing about changes that help societies to move forward. His tragic death was viewed as the result of his inability to understand the irreversibility of changes. He found himself alienated from his society and swept aside because he was unable to change or accept change. Okonkwo's rigid stance towards the new culture was the product of his personality-an identity crisis that cost him his life (Hezam, 2016).

Objective 2 is to examine the experiences of the major character in *Things Fall Apart* and extract lessons learnt.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the protagonist adopted various identities across the novel's three main transitional phases, starting as a traditional farmer, and then becoming a protestor against the colonial powers, before being annihilated through his self-destruction, thereby demonstrating an unstable identity. Thus, what may first be concluded is that Identity Theory, which predicts that in each interaction, people take on a different identity, was more in Okonkwo's social context.

Furthermore, in the last phase of the novel's events, it became clear that Okonkwo's identity was shaped by the distinct cultural and social circumstances that led to his self-destruction. Hence, the strict tribal traditions of his social background not only dominated his life but also alienated him from his society and this alienation resulted in his death. For example, it was according to these restrictive customs that Okonkwo was judged for his violations against the Umuofia clan, his own people, causing him to be sent into exile. Finally, his suicide was considered as an unforgivable sin in his culture, with the Umuofians stating that his body was evil. This demonstrated that instead of Umuofia taking his suicide as a sacrifice, their strict tribal rules condemned it as a sin, and his clansmen would not bury a man who committed it.

In short, Okonkwo contributed to his self-destruction, aside from the issue of his guilt or innocence, violations, and role in his own downfall. He was merely a body, devoid of social worth and isolated from his people. Okonkwo embodied this in an ironic representation of a tragic hero, since his flesh was not even considered worthy of burial according to the customs of his people; his flesh was merely left to pass into the earth with no subjective or socially sanctioned value (Abormealeh, 2020).

It is of paramount importance to note as Abormealeh, (2020) says that the reader should become aware that Okonkwo "was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond... had no patience with unsuccessful men... was a man of action, a man of war" (Achebe, 2008, pp.3-8) This is ultimately the



reason Okonkwo was attempting to maintain superiority and the self-image, rather than inferiority and the other.

It is as if Achebe, in one way or another, was trying to reverse the pattern in which blacks could never attain superiority or realise the self. In failing to retain his superiority and his self- image, Okonkwo ultimately chose to die independent, rather than stay alive and be colonised, especially when he realised that his clansmen would no longer fight with him against British colonisation (Abormealeh, 2020). The following extract is clear testimony of what Abormealeh (2020) meant above:

“Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside his uniformed body... Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action” (Achebe, 2008, p.163).

According to Msiska (2008), the masculine hero of Umuofia, Okonkwo would be buried like a dog in the same evil forest where his effeminate and hedonistic father had been buried. In this as Msiska (2008) puts, it is the indeterminacy of the will of the gods as well as the inscrutability of fate. Okonkwo was not buried as a hero. It was Okonkwo’s defiance to colonialism that led Obierika to utter the first anti-colonial protest. We are told that:

“Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend’s dangling body turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: ‘That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog...’ He could not say anymore. His voice trembled and choked his words” (Achebe, 2008, p.165)

The story of Okonkwo according to Msiska (2008), afforded Achebe the opportunity to explore a complex range of emotions because of alienation and identity crisis. This aspect allows the reader to see Okonkwo’s anguish, which he could not reveal in public, showing how his harsh external persona was sustained at the expense of his own vulnerable side, which he had in some ways been forced to repress in order to succeed socially. That Okonkwo’s emotional side haunted him repeatedly, most movingly when he was reflecting on the implications of the loss of his son to the new religion.

In conclusion, the story of Okonkwo teaches us that the novel’s protagonist, Okonkwo, epitomised what we would now call toxic masculinity. As he had antiquated ideas when it came to gender roles, Okonkwo firmly believed that men should be powerful, dominant, and at times even cruel if they were to fulfil

their traditional roles and command the respect of everyone (Morrison, in Wu 2017).

Okonkwo was by no means alone in displaying such attitudes. Largely, they were a product of his culture and upbringing. The problem, however, was that he took them too far, causing suffering to others as well as bringing him a lot of trouble.

The consequences were dire. Okonkwo regularly beat his wives, even threatening to kill them. He ended up killing his adopted son, Ikemefuna, and accidentally killed a man from the village. It was the latter of two actions that caused the most difficulty for Okonkwo, as it led to him being exiled.

Okonkwo was alienated from his people because he suffered from an identity crisis. It is advised that we realise the power of psychological realism so that we do not allow forces greater than our determined will to destroy us. Okonkwo was temperamental and impulsive. Impulsivity, or an impulsive behaviour, is broadly defined as actions without foresight that are poorly conceived, prematurely expressed, unnecessarily risky, and inappropriate to the situation. Impulsivity is associated with undesirable, rather than desirable, outcomes (Salters, 2023). The lesson from Okonkwo is that is important that we should try to be level-headed in order to avoid frustrations and tragedies.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper focused on alienation and identity crisis based on fictional characters in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It is important to note that *Things Fall Apart* fits the definition of tragedy because it documents both the personal downfall of Okonkwo and the broader erosion of the Igbo cultural world that Okonkwo wished to defend. Owing to alienation and identity crisis the protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo who was rich and respectable at the beginning of the novel met a tragic fate at the end of the novel, but when he suffered, his whole tribe also suffered. Obierika, Okonkwo's best friend and the voice of reason clearly outlined in his speech below how alienation and identity crisis caused by the new faith and government led to the death of his friend and the collapse of the Igbo society:

“The White man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart”(Achebe, 2008, p.141).

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