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Colonial Power and Cultural Identity in Things Fall Apart: A Postcolonial Analysis

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Abstract

The following paper is a postcolonial reflection on Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe (1958), in which the connections between colonial forces and the cultural identity of locals in the novel are discussed. With the backing of a qualitative textual analysis based on the postcolonial literature as illustrated through the prism of postcolonial theory, the author explores how Achebe forms a counter-narrative of Eurocentric images of Africa and specifically how these images appear within the context of the colonial literary tradition most memorably expressed by the Heart of Darkness of Joseph Conrad (1899). These six dimensions are linked in the analysis: Okonkwo as an ambivalent precolonial character whose doomed life trajectory reflects the tensions in the African culture both internal and external to it; the advanced political institutions and communal practices of precolonial Umuofia; the strategic position of the Christian missionaries in the disintegration of the African communities; the systematic deconstruction of the social fabric by colonial administrative imposition; the use of language as a means of both colonization and resistance; and Achebe literary techniques of recovering the African culture through the forms of narratives, proverbs, oral traditions and creative appropriation of English. The results show that the Things Fall Apart does not simply turn the colonial gaze backwards but provides an internally produced account that validates the entire humanity and civilizational multiplicity of the precolonial African community and reveals how colonialism was disabling the indigenous modes of being.

Keywords: post colonialism, things fall apart, chinua achebe, colonial power, cultural identity, Igbo society, counter-narrative, indigenous identity.

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1. Introduction

One of the most lasting and far-reaching issues in the study of the postcolonial literature is the consistency of cultural identity in the context of colonial power and population. Colonialism in the case of Africa was never simply a case of acquisition and extraction of territories but the organized restructuring of knowledge systems, hierarchies, cultural practices and regimes of representation. In this regard, literature had served not only as an instrument of colonial domination, in that it created colonized people as inferior, voiceless, and uncivilized individuals, but also, at a later stage as a significant source of resistance in which colonized people were able to recover their pasts, their humanity, and reaffirm themselves. The contradiction between these two effects of literary discourse has been the centre of postcolonial criticism, and there has not been a novel which has taken a more central role in this discussion than one by author Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (1958).

Things Fall Apart appeared two years prior to the independence of Nigeria at a very critical time during the decolonization process. It was a calculated literary intervention to alter the distorted images of Africa that dominated the European literature. Heart of Darkness (1899) by Joseph Conrad was already described as a standard example of a text in which, even though colonialists supposedly showed the atrocity of the imperialist, in fact, the inferiority of certain races on which the colonial enterprise relied was perpetuated (Achebe, 2016). In his archetypal treatise An Image of Africa, Achebe claimed that Conrad has diminished Africa as a metaphorical setting and the peoples of Africa as dehumanized assets in a European psychological play. This criticism provoked decades of academic discussion and established Things Fall Apart as the first literary anti-colonial statement against the Western colonial imagination (Olugbamigbe, 2026), (Kingdom, 2026).

Things Fall Apart holds much more than just a relation to Conrad. The novel presents a very textural landscape of the precolonial Igbo society; its government, its practices and traditions, its beauty, its internal conflicts, and then leaves a trail of the disastrous breakage, the coming of European missionaries and colonial rulers. The novel dramatizes the strength and susceptibility of the indigenous cultural identity under the onslaught of colonization by dramatizing the tragic journey of its protagonist, Okonkwo. Achebe does not do this by idealizing but rather portrays a well-rounded, sometimes grim but always true picture of a society that is both beautiful in its many deep-seated contradictions and disturbing at the same time (Tchikola, 2017), (Mull, 2017).

The paper will provide a broadly postcolonial review of Things Fall Apart exploring the ways Achebe has portrayed the dialectic between the colonial power and the cultural identity as expressed in six interrelated dimensions. This thesis statement can be explained as follows: The Achebe novel does not only serve the reactive function of a counter-narrative to the Western colonial literature but has a structural independence of its own as a cultural reconstruction program. Locating the story in the middle of Igbo epistemology, language and social practice avoids an external colonial gaze in favor of an internally produced viewpoint that both documents the civilizational richness of the precolonial African society and also documents the exact mechanisms by which colonialism led to the destruction of indigenous modes of existence. The discussion is based on postcolonial theories, especially the writing of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, and has appealed significantly to the new research on the literary, cultural, and political implications of the novel.

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2. Literature Review

The literature on Things Fall Apart is enormous and interdisciplinary and includes literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies, historiography, and linguistics. The literature presented here has been reviewed thematically, sorting the sources in accordance with the claims and arguments they imply about how the novel treats the issue of colonial domination, indigenous identity, narrative strategy and cultural representations.

1.1 2.1 Colonial Domination and Indigenous Identity in African Literature

One of the major concerns of the postcolonial literary criticism has been the study of how the colonial power acted upon the deployment of discourse, or rather, not just on military power and economic exploitation, but also on the creation of knowledge systems, which defined the colonized as inferior, primitive and lacking history. The foundational notion of Orientalism as developed by Edward Said illustrated how the Western scholarship and literature created the object of knowledge referred to as the Oriental as the object of Western rationality and the pattern has widely been used to analyze European representations of Africa. Several scholars have created the argument that colonial writings were a kind of technology of othering and developed the African peoples and cultures to be presented as degenerate, exotic, and uncivilized to support the imperial agenda (Othering the Exotic Colonial Racism, 2025), (Khan, 2021), (Barman, 2026). Heart of Darkness by Conrad has been revisited countless times as a paradigmatic text in this aspect in that, although it contains an indictment of colonial cruelty, it ultimately reinforces the racial hegemonies that European imperialism thrived on (Kingdom, 2026), (Ballahi, 2026).

African subject dehumanization was a structural and not an incidental aspect of colonial discourse. One of the aspects of colonization has been demonstrated, through scholarship, to include conscious processes of dehumanization and animalization of African-origin people, which made them mere background characters in the histories of European existence (Mineiro & Santana, 2024), (Mogu, 2009). African characters were systematically dis-voiced and dis-interiorised by European colonial authors, which in Conrad happens to the African characters, who have practically no verbal presence, and their languages are treated as non-intelligible animal cries; this representational practice that scholars have characterized as epistemic erasure (Mogu, 2009), (Barman, 2026). This suppression of African subjectivity played the ideological role of justifying colonial rule by refuting the presence of African civilization, ruling, and cultural accomplishment.

It is in this wider context of colonial domination that arises the issue of indigenous identity as an oppressive and a resistant site. The postcolonial theorists have revealed that the acts of colonialism did not only force foreign dominance upon the African communities; colonialism altered the mechanisms by which individuals and communities established their identities. The introduction of colonial institutions churches, courts, schools, administrative bureaucracies, eroded indigenous structures of meaning maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity in a systematic manner (Ezzat, 2023), (Mutashar, 2024), (Tchikola, 2017). Christianity especially acted as a wedge that disunited communities by providing an alternative cosmological model that illegitimized the traditional religious communities disintegrating the social cohesion that existed among societies (Alam, 2014), (Mutashar, 2024).

Sustained academic interest has also been towards the psychological aspects of colonial domination. The theory of Frantz Fanon on the psyche of colonizers has been examined to guide research on how colonization resulted in devastating identity crises of the colonized

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people who were forced to accept the devaluation of their culture by the colonizer and in some instances, engage in subordination themselves (Lokhade, 2026), (Montle, 2024). The idea of the colonial mentality the appropriation of colonial ideals on the part of the colonized has been explored as a process which ensured survival of colonial power even when it was not physically enforced (Sadeghi, 2014), (Vardar, 2022). Research has revealed that Things Fall Apart is an excellent example of how characters are initially constructed by the colonizer and subsequently constructed by the colonized relative, demonstrating the dialogic and fluid identities formed in the context of colonialism (Vardar, 2022).

The annihilation of native cultural identity during the colonialism process was not a by-product or even a collateral effect; it was a calculated goal of the colonial project. Historical literature reveals how Europeans changed the culture, demonised the local religious practices, brought in other forms of economy and forced alien forms of governance, that rendered the local institutions irrelevant (Mogu, 2009), (Ezzat, 2023). An outcome was what several researchers have defined as a wholesale undermining of the social fabric - a process whereby the communal frameworks, ideologies, and cultural practices that formed the core of precolonial African life were, in a gradual but systematic by design, destroyed (Alam, 2014), (Tchikola, 2017), (Mutashar, 2024). This was a material, as well as an epistemological, dismantling: colonialism aimed to transform the native modes of knowledge with those of the Europeans, making the colonized intellectually reliant on the colonizer (Rafik, 2024), (Cheema, 2026).

1.2 2.2 The Counter-Narrative Tradition and Writing Back

A paradigmhetic notion within postcolonial literary criticism, writing back refers to the act by which authors of postcolonial nations are able to create literary texts that deconstruct, parody and rewrite the canons of the colonial literary tradition. The powerful formulation of the concept of The Empire Writes Back by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin gave a theoretical framework to the understanding of how the postcolonial literature is in a dialogic relationship with the metropolitan center and uses the language and literary forms of the colonizer to challenge the ideological presuppositions in these forms (Baazizi, 2015). Things Fall Apart by Achebe has been consistently marked as the paradigmatic representation of this counter-discursive approach, serving as a direct answer to representational violence of works such as Heart of Darkness (Tasnia, n.d.), (Rafik, 2024), (Baazizi, 2015), (Ghani et al., 2013).

The counter-narrative role of Things Fall Apart has several levels of functioning. On the level of the deepest fundamentality, the novel challenges the colonial doctrine that precolonial Africa was a historical and civilizational and culturally unreached place. Through his rich depiction of Igbo society, Achebe dispels the homogenizing stereotype of African primitivism that so dominated colonial literature (Othering the Exotic: Colonial Racism, 2025), (Okafor, 1988), (Mogu, 2009). Scholarship has in turn stressed that Achebe is not merely reversing the colonial opposites by making African culture utopian; he simply gives his audience a society that is fully human, with its glorious and deplorable sides, and that this is the alternative kind of balanced representation that the colonial literature had effectively denied systematically (Ballahi, 2026), (Tchikola, 2017), (Mull, 2017).

Things Fall Apart also responds to the colonizing text, on its literary terms, at a structural level. The novel substitutes the exterior colonial gaze (modeled when Conrad narrator is a viewing agent who views Africa through the window of a steamboat) with as internalized narration made through the means of Igbo proverbs, or oral tradition, or interior

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psychologicality, which creates an indication of the sources of African epistemological system (Ballahi, 2026), (Granqvist, 2008). This substitution on a structural level is important since it indicates that the dominance of the colonial text was, in fact, never absolute; the colonized subject has the cultural means to create alternative stories that are no longer reactive, but rather productive of new forms of knowledge and understanding (Cheema, 2026), (Kyoung-sook, 2011).

1.3 2.3 Language, Representation, and the Politics of Discourse

The issue of language has a pivotal role in the postcolonial literary theory and especially with regard to discussion of Things Fall Apart. To a considerable extent, the colonial domination was a linguistic project: the imposition of European languages as an administration, education, trade, and literary production tool marginalized the native languages and the worldview encapsulated in them (Rafik, 2024), (Tchikola, 2017). Meanwhile, it was by the language of the colonizer that the postcolonial writers were able to access the international markets and challenge the colonial representations on the largest possible scale. This is a paradox of the oppressiveness and productivity of the colonial language at the same time that has sparked a lot of debate in the field of postcolonial studies and is at the heart of Achebe literary project (Lawtoo, 2013).

The expression of writing in English itself was a political gesture that Achebe had to make and it has been used to analyze Achebe through various theoretical frameworks. Some scholars have examined how Achebe puts the English language, which was used as a form of colonial oppression, to action as a means of transmission of community resistance and other views (Rafik, 2024). Instead of merely imitating the standard language, Achebe invents what several researchers have termed as an Africanized English- linguistic hybrid, which harbors the rhythms, idioms, proverbs, and epistemological belief of the Igbo oral culture in the grammatical framework of the language of the colonizer (Alam, 2014), (Rache, 2011). Such a linguistic appropriation approach has been understood as culturally creolization, to generate a text that functions at the same time under English and Igbo language structures (Granqvist, 2008), (Roche, 2011).

The application of proverbs in Things Fall Apart has been subject to a relatively long scholarship interest. Proverbs are not only ornamental but also constitute the basic bearers of Igbo philosophy, enshrine moral values, social values, and cosmology in concise and easily memorable formulas (Riche, 2011), (Okafor, 1988). By adding proverbs to the story, Achebe determines the intellectual culture of the Igbo oral tradition and proves that the African civilization had complicated systems of knowledge sharing which were subjected to rejection or disregard by European colonialism (Alam, 2014), (Mogu, 2009). The formal role of the proverbial discourse of the novel is to deliver a unique narrative rhythm that stands the text in opposition to the norms of European realist fiction and identifies it as a rather representative of other cultural and epistemological tradition (Granqvist, 2008), (Riche, 2011).

The approach where Achebe uses the so-called cushioning, defined as tagging English calques on native words, has also been studied in scholarship, with an aim to narrow such cultural disparities between the text and its non-Igbo audience (Riche, 2011). The method acts as a cultural translation which translates Igbo ideas to the international community in a way that does not diminish them to western equivalents. The outcome is a text which is truly polyvocal, that is, one that simultaneously functions in a variety of linguistic registers and thus represents the type of cross-cultural dialogue that colonial literature

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systematically preclined (Granqvist, 2008). Due to the polyvocality mentioned in the study by Granqvist, the translations of the novel usually reduce such polyvocality, and abandon the paraliterary devices, glosses, and italics that help Achebe to sustain the Igbo voice in English text (Granqvist, 2008).

3. Method

The research paper uses a postcolonial literary theory on the textual analysis research technique that is qualitative in nature. Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart (1958) is the main work to be analyzed in terms of the wider body of postcolonial criticism that has gathered around the novel in the last 60 years. Theoretical framework is based on a range of postcolonial theorists, such as the concept of Orientalism by Edward Said, the offshoot of which is the theorization of the unity of discourse, power, and representation; or the theorization of colonial psychology and oppression within by Frantz Fanon; or the theorization of the dialectics of recognition, mimicry, and ambivalence in the encounters between colonization and the colonized as theorized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; and the theorization of the hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence of colonial encounters as theorized by Homi Bhabha.

The analytical method is based on the close reading of the narrative organization of the novel, the formation of the characters, linguistic strategies and the theme of the novel within the frames of these theoretical frameworks. The discussion is structured around six thematic axes based on the point of contact between the content of the novel and the available critical literature: (a) the construction of Okonkwo as a multi-dimensional precolonial subject; (b) the presence of Igbo governance and practices; (c) the influence of Christian missionaries in the colonial project; (d) the annihilation of the social fabric; (e) the use of language both as a colonial instrument and as a medium of resistance; and (f) counter-narrative strategies used by Achebe to reclaim the African cultural identity.

The secondary sources used in this research are a collection of corpus of postcolonial literary criticism of Things Fall Apart and its connection with Heart of Darkness written by Conrad and the themes of colonial domination and indigenous identity in African literature in general. The sources were located via the database and were determined using the relevance to the thematic axes of the study. The synthesis compiles the results of these materials to form a comprehensive story of how colonial authority and cultural being is represented, challenged and reimagined in Achebe novel.

This methodological reasoning behind this strategy lies on the realization that literary texts do not exist as independent aestheticized objects but rather operate within more pervasive discursive formations that define their production, circulation and reception. Evidently, postcolonial textual analysis does not simply take note of the what of a text, but the how, the formal and linguistic means by which the text in question attributes, challenges or repeats the dominant discursive regimes. Such a focus on content and form is paramount to comprehending a book such as Things Fall Apart, the importance of which should be seen as close to the narrative strategies of the novel as its thematic content.

4. Findings

1.4 4.1 Okonkwo as a Complex Precolonial Figure

The construction of Okonkwo with its psychological depth and moral ambiguity—the construction of his personality, which Things Fall Apart has been instrumental in executing, is one of the most important accomplishments of Things Fall Apart: that the African subject, long since stripped of its humanity by the colonial literature, is a human

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being of full size. Okonkwo is not a superhero, a noble savage, he is a man of great power and strength who at the same time may display great gentleness and be unbelievably violent, his strengths and weaknesses are irreplaceable with the cultural context in which he was created. It has been acknowledged by scholars that Okonkwo reflects the ideals of precolonial Igbo society-not least the priority of personal success, masculinity, and community duties, but also the conflict and contradictions within the ideals (Okafor, 1988), (Ezzat, 2023), (Mull, 2017).

The characterization of Okonkwo starts with his relationship with his father, Unoka who is a kind and irresponsible man and is perceived as a failure by society in Umuofia. This desire to be all that his father was not prosperous, respected, and powerful, influences the whole of Okonkwo life. This mind-body relationship, the rejection of the father by the son, promotes the active struggle to acquire success and attain the masculine ideal of the Eastern culture and adherence to it by Okonkwo. As it has been observed by scholars, the rise of Okonkwo in the economic sense can be considered an exemplification of the literary prototyping of the self-made man, and his psychological struggle is also akin to Greek tragedies structures (Riche, 2011). His effort, prowess in wrestling, and success as a farmer and a fighter assist in elevating him out of poverty into being one of the most influential men in Umuofia. Personal achievement is highly-prized by Umuofia rather than by the inherited position and it is evident that the society is merit-based and hardworking, as evidenced by the path of Okonkwo (Okafor, 1988), (Mogu, 2009).

But the masculine power that Okonkwo is so obsessed with ends up being some sort of emotional repression that also separates him with some of his humanity. His intimidation by the idea of being viewed as weepers such as his father makes him repress tender, nurturing, and feeling, which the Igbo culture calls feminine, but not at a condemnatory level. The most tragic result of this emotional inflexibility is the fact that when Okonkwo orders to kill Ikemefuna the boy in his care, he does not do it because tradition requires him to kill the boy with his own hands but because he is afraid of being perceived as a weak character in case otherwise. Theorists have seen this as an expression of the destructive power of the character of Okonkwo and, by proxy, of the dangers of an unreasoned follower of the cultural ideals (Mull, 2017), (Anitha and Veeramani, 2025). This is further seen in his expulsion after accidentally killing a member of his clan, which demonstrates how individual agency and communal norms do not always interact in a futile manner, and the personal tragedy of Okonkwo is put into a context of the communal law.

The difference between Okonkwo and a mere avatar of the cultural resistance is that Achebe does not indulge him spared of critical examination. The novel shows the inflexibility of Okonkwo as a strength, and as a death, a death that makes him unable to adjust to the Earth-shattering nature of what colonialism brings. His subsequent suicide is not only a demonstration against colonial domination, it is also an impact of his failure to discuss the new social reality, which lies in his quality, which contributed to his greatness in the old order. Okonkwo is the embodiment of the untamed potentials as well as the soul of Umuofia, potentials that will eventually be destroyed by colonial devastation (Alam, 2014), (Rafik, 2024). His career is therefore an example of miniature cultural disaster that the novel portrays: the coming together of a multifaceted, functioning civilization with a colonial-embracing power that lacks the inclination and ability to comprehend it.

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1.5 4.2 Igbo Governance, Customs, and Social Organization

One of the most significant aspects of Achebe counter-narrative approach is his elaborate and profound description of the Igbo precolonial regime, traditions, and the social structure. Colonial literature had depicted the African societies as anarchic, primitive and without the institutional constructions as per the European thought of civilization. Things Fall Apart explicitly disapproves these stereotypes by portraying Umuofia as a community with distinct moral principles, moral judgment, serviceable government systems, and intricate cultural values (Okafor, 1988), (Mull, 2017).

The Umuofia political system is not monarchical or anarchic and instead a sophisticated system of consensus-based decision-making that has been termed democratic and self-governing by scholars. The system of governance is multi-layered, with a council of elders, the egwugwu (masked spirits as embodiment of ancestral authority) and the general assembly of clansmen whose governance is decentralized and not centralized. Controversies are dealt with by communal adjudicative discussions and communal sanctions are used to enforce customary laws instead of centralized coercion. In the novel, this system is introduced as a working and valid one, it can help to create social order, solve conflicts, and show justice basing on accepted principles (Mull, 2017), (Okafor, 1988). The ewgwuwu court scene, where masked old men judge a marriage over a conflict, meticulously covering evidence and precedent, is a strong corrective to the colonial interpretation of African government as random and tyrannical.

The social structure of Umuofia is featured by a number of interlocking kinship commitments, age-dependent categories, systems of taking titles, and gender divisions that segment personal identity and society. Specifically, the title system offers a system of social mobility that benefits the efforts and contributions to the community. The establishment of Okonkwo by the title-taking system represents that the Igbo society has both its own internal processes of stature, rivalry and ambition-processes, processes that are humanly familiar and entirely analogous to the social systems of any advanced civilization. Farming, market and exchange as well indicate the economic complexity of the pre-colonial Igbo existence (Mogu, 2009), (Okafor, 1988).

Another vital aspect of Igbo social organization that Achebe describes with special attention is religious and ritual practices. The veneration of chi (individual spirit), the cult of forefathers, the consultation of the Oracle, and the communal rituals and celebrations are all signs of a unity of the cosmological structure in which the spiritual and material aspects of life are combined. Checks of social cohesion are collective rituals and possession trances, which put individuals in contact with the community and the cosmos through vitalizing ceremonies marking transition periods in their lives, and pressing embarkation and separation rites in the seasons (Lawtoo, 2013), (DiGiacomo, 2014). Masquerades and rituals serve as different metaphors of social totality which reveal the indigenous flexibility, innovation, and consciousness of the past (DiGiacomo, 2014). But Achebe describes these practices not as archaic remnant of an early and primitive past, but as the statements on a complex worldview that answers the main questions of human existence.

Importantly, Achebe does not showcase the Igbo society as utopian. The novel recognizes practices that are disturbing by any moral code of ethics- the exposure of twins, the underdog role of women in some aspects, the brutality of the osu caste system and it shows internal opposition and criticism to the community itself. This frankness is crucial to the counter-narrative approach of Achebe: by showing the Igbo society as a complete human

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with all the advantages and disadvantages, he invents a more plausible and more devastating image than even the idealized portrait would be able to do (Tchikola, 2017), (Kyoung-sook, 2011).

1.6 4.3 The Role of Missionaries and Colonial Institutions

The coming of Christian missionaries in Umuofia marks the critical point in Things Fall Apart as it sets in motion the process of cultural disruption that eventually kills the social fabric of the community. The portrayal of the missionary enterprise by Achebe that is remarkable is the lack of simplicity, the unwillingness to simplify the interaction of Christianity and the Igbo religion into the simple relationship of oppressor and victim. The missionaries are introduced as a mixed motley crew with different motives and styles, such as the reasonably respectful Mr. Brown, whose conversation with Igbo elders is an honest dialogue, to the fanatical Reverend James Smith, who sees everything localized in the eyes of the Igbo people as something sinful and which must be destroyed.

The missionary enterprise has always been seen by scholarship as the pioneer of the colonial domination in the novel. Arguably, the missionaries come in not with guns and canons but with a cosmological substitute which slowly weaken the pillars of the social fabric of the Igbo world. Christianity is intriguingly appealing to members of the community who have been marginalized by existing practices by providing shelter to the osu (outcasts) and the mothers of twins, thereby forming a wedge separating the community within (Alam, 2014), (Mutashar, 2024), (Lawtoo, 2013). This policy of attacking the weak and disillusioned is presented as both sympathetic (in its sympathy with sufferings of the poor) and extremely devastating (in its eventual impact on the unity of the community). The study has shown that missionaries and colonial agencies centralized authority and control by rejecting indigenous religion, enforcing individualism, and leading to the breaking of social fabric (Alam, 2014).

The second phase of colonial penetration is the introduction of the colonial institutions in the form of courts, prisons, administrative organization and schools and this process is subject to and goes within the cultural preparation of the missionaries. Colonial rule entails a form of rule that strategically supplants leadership, as council of elders and egwugwu are supplanted by district commissioners and court messengers who do not get their power through the consent of the community, but through the colonial power (Ezzat, 2023), (Mogu, 2009). On the one hand, missionaries and institutions like prisons and courts severely interfered with the established Igbo practices and power (Ezzat, 2023). The physical and symbolic humiliation of the elders of Umuofia illustrated the coercive violence that hides the veil of civilization that is the colonial project.

The collaboration of missionaries and traders with colonial rulers is one trend, which the scholarship has stressed to be major in the colonial business as portrayed in the novel. The three work in concert with each other: the missionaries rationalize African culture as spiritually wanting by building an African culture of economic dependencies which connects the colonized to the colonial economy and the administrators establish the new order by the use of institutional violence (Mogu, 2009), (Mull, 2017). The implementation of government, trade, money, and schools altogether rearranged the basic conditions of the social life in Umuofia and divided the unity of the clan and made the traditional institutions obsolete (Mull, 2017).

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1.7 4.4 The Destruction of the Social Fabric

The overall impact of missionary work, institutional imposition of colonialism, and economic upheaval is the devastation of the entire social structure that provided a life of communality to Igbo people. This displacement acts at a variety of scales institutional, psychological, epistemological, cultural, and is presented in the novel not as an abrupt disaster but as a slow, creeping process as the supports of communal identity are undermined internally. This process has been described as the degradation of the mimetic community the disintegration of the collective rituals, common beliefs and communal performances that were the foundation of the bond between people and the society (Lawtoo, 2013).

At institutional level, the substitution of the indigenous governance systems with the colonial control makes the old systems of social control ineffective. The egwugwu and the council of elders, as well as the customary system of law, are no longer the acceptable arbitrators of communal living; a foreign force has taken their place, who does not know nor value the premises under which they were founded. The result of this institutional displacement is a crisis of legitimacy that goes way beyond the idea of the power occupant, it is also the subversion of the very paradigm according to which people perceive their social responsibilities, their sense as a community, their belonging to the world (Ezzat, 2023), (Tchikola, 2017).

On the psychological level, colonialism has resulted in such a radical identity crisis in the colonized as has been termed by scholars. The enforcement of colonial ideals, specifically the Christian reproach of the native religious beliefs and traditions, compels people to devise a dilemma between the cultural identity inherited and the innovational identity implied on them by the colonializing regime. This decision goes through not as a rational calculation but as a heart-racking existential quandary that separates families and differentiates communities among themselves. The conversion of Nwoye into a Christian, in particular, is not only a shift of religious membership, but a vital breakage of the father and son relationship and by implication it is a breakage of the cultural-identity transfer among generations. The post-colonial mental and emotional trauma is significantly experienced as an individual trauma but with a far-reaching impact at the societal level (Mutashar, 2024), (Montle, 2024).

At the epistemological level, colonialism aims at ousting the indigenous knowledge systems with the European ones and making the colonized reliant intellectually to the colonizer. The colonial school specifically serves as a tool of epistemological conquest making colonized children think in European terms and perceive their own cultural legacy as primitive and insignificant. This epistemological violence is perhaps the most pernicious aspect of colonial domination as it acts, at the part of imagination, creating the subjects who have become alien to their modes of knowing and being (Cheema, 2026), (Mineiro & Santana, 2024).

The loss of the social fabric in the form of the destruction of the ceremonies, rituals, festivals and artistic practices forming the aesthetic and spiritual life of the community is revealed at the cultural level. The intervention by the Europeans swept away indigenous practices, social structure and brought chaos, changing traditions and vilifying the local religious practices (Mogu, 2009). The Festival of the New Yam, the wrestling games, the storytelling, the masquerade shows- all these cultural things are destroyed by the colonial order which sees the effect of being the same form of primitivism that the civilizing

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mission is meant to eliminate. The absence of these traditions is not just the question of cultural maintenance, they are the abolishment of the communal structures by which people found a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose (Lawtoo, 2013), (Tchikola, 2017).

The title of the novel, which is the quotation of the poem of W. B. Yeats called The Second Coming, sums up the entire annihilation of this world: Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. The centre that cannot hold is not only political authority or institutional structure but the whole network of common understandings, community practices and community identities which comprised the social life of precolonial Igbo. In the event that this centre is destroyed what is being left behind is not just a colonized society but an essentially dislocated society--a society where people have been cut off at the root of meaning and identity that once defined them (Kandel & Kandel, 2025), (Alam, 2014).

1.8 4.5 Language as a Colonial Tool and a Medium of Resistance

Things Fall Apart is analyzed in terms of language expressing one of the most advanced aspects of postcolonial project by Achebe. Language in the novel or the colonial experience more generally is seen as a source of domination and a means of resistance, and the literary strategies employed by Achebe tap into this duality with a deft skill and mastery. To a large extent, colonial domination was a linguistic venture: the establishment of English as the language of government, education and literary creation was used to exclude Igbo and other native languages and thus make the worldview reflected in it imperceptible to the global discourse (Rafik, 2024), (Tchikola, 2017).

Efforts to silence the use of African languages in colonial writings were not just silence, but an act of erasure of epistemic silence. The Europeans writers in their colonies banished Africans of any verbal interaction, limiting their voice to grunts and cries and meaningless noises that enforced the colonialness depiction of Africans as sub humans (Mogu, 2009), (Barman, 2026). The African characters in Heart of Darkness by Conrad have practically no intelligent speech; their language is translated as a noise but not a language, a technique of representation which negates even the existence of African linguistic and intellectual culture. This dehumanization of language played an ideological role of legitimizing the colonial regime by suggesting that colonized people were incapable of rational thinking and self-determination (Mogu, 2009), (Barman, 2026).

Achebe did not react to this linguistic violence by writing in Igbo, which would have reduced his audience and would have been tantamount to giving up the popular arena to language of the colonizer, but to adopt English and convert it into something that would be used to transport African cultural experiences. This technique of linguistic appropriation has found extensive discussion in scholarly literature. Achebe develops an Africanized English that maintains the rhythm, idiom and epistemological formations of the lore of Igbo on the grammatical platform of the language into which the writer is colonized (Alam., 2014), (Mutashar, 2024). What comes out is an article that reads very different to the normal British English, an article that bears what scholars have said with an Igbo flavor in its word usage, its imagery, and its thought process (Riche, 2011).

The most noticeable form of this linguistic strategy is the embedding of Igbo proverbs in the whole narrative. Within Igbo culture, according to the novel itself, proverbs are the palm oil over which they eat words--they are the means of eloquence and of profundity of speech. In interwoven proverbs, Achebe achieves many goals at once: not only does he show the level of intellectual sophistication of the Igbo oral culture, but he also defines the linguistic texture of the novel as uniquely African; and, not to mention, he has managed to

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build his own kind of cultural translation that will not treat Igbo philosophical principles to the Western standards (Okafor, 1988), (Alam, 2014), (Riche, 2011). The proverbial discourse of the novel represents a form of speech manners, style, and axiological system of belief of Igbo culture (Riche, 2011).

The linguistic strategy of Achebe takes another aspect on his use of the cushioning technique in which he gives English glosses alongside Igbo words. The method renders a dual nature in English text without erasing the Igbo language and world perception but carrying on with the narrative in English (Riche, 2011). The consequence is a kind of linguistic hybridity that reflects the type of cross-cultural communication that colonialism precluded where the source text and its translation occupy the position of plural and coeval as opposed to being hierarchically ranked (Granqvist, 2008). Strategies of duplication, parallelism, symmetry, parody, repetition and echoes are some of the ways the novel subverts colonial discourse and Western logocentrism (Granqvist, 2008).

Language politics of Achebe are far-reaching. Achebe disproves the colonial conception that European languages are superior natural modes of thought and that indigenous languages are primitive, inadequate or irrelevant by showing that African culture, unlike that of the colonials, can be expressed using English. Simultaneously, he adheres to keeping the presence of Igbo visible to the English text, and this development does not give the colonizer anything to swallow the colonized voice. The outcome is some sort of discursive resistance that is inside the house of the master but not negotiable by the master. By playing with the words of the colonizer, Achebe turns them against him, proving that discursive power is oppressive and productive at the same time (Lawtoo, 2013), (Rafik, 2024).

1.9 4.6 Achebe's Counter-Narrative to Western Representations of Africa

The above discussion of Okonkwo, Igbo people, missionary business, dismantling the social structure and politics of language brings up the question generalized as to how Things Fall Apart serves as a counter-narrative to Western discourse on Africa. The counter-discursive project of Achebe is not merely the writing-back of a text or a tradition; an all-involving cultural reconstruction that will, hopefully, replace the colonial imaginary with a text constructed of African experience, rooted squarely in African reality.

The counter-narrative of the novel has the level of representation. Things Fall Apart stands in contrast to colonial writing that has represented Africa as an undifferentiated, uncomplicated, and monolithic darkness--a society that cannot distinguish between its segments, nor determine whether it is composed of a vast number of stories or a single one. The polyphonic representation of multiple voices of the novel that are Okonkwo, Obierika, Nwoye, the storytelling traditions of the women and the egwugwu is a sharp contrast to the monologic power of the colonial narrator. Achebe uses the concept of post colonial mimesis to re-configure the popular images of Africa and to transcend binary oppositions to create a wholesome African presence (Lawtoo, 2013).

On the narrative form level, counter-discursive strategies that Achebe uses include the use and adaptation of the European novel. Using the new form, a literary genre traditionally linked to the European bourgeoisie and the colonial project, Achebe shows that not only can African experience be expressed through the new form, but also that the transformative potential of African cultural content can be realised through the new form. The assimilation of oral narrative culture (proverbs, folktales, songs, communal storytelling) into the novelistic structure of the text forms a hybrid and, at the same time,

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familiar to the Western audience and unique in African aesthetic values (Tchikola, 2017), (Alam, 2014), (Riche, 2011). The novel by Achebe, therefore, can be viewed as an example of the postcolonial approach referenced by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin as The Empire Writes Back in terms of deconstructing the Orientalist and colonialist dogmas by providing an indigenous response to the colonialist texts (Baazizi, 2015).

The counter argument is also at the level of historiography. Achebe reclaims African history by placing the novel in the late nineteenth century when the first Europeans had settled in Igboland, and thus when the colonial narrative was disapproved of its existence. The novel shows that precolonial Africa was not a historyless place but rather a place with historical roots, processes of social life, and cultural growth. The depiction of the reaction of Umuofia to the colonial invasion, both the expression of resistance and accommodation, historicizes the process of the colonial encounter, not as the origin of African history (as the colonial discourse would have it) but as a violent disruption of a historical process that was already in progress (Mutashar, 2024), (Tchikola, 2017), (Mogu, 2009).

Probably most importantly, the counter-narrative is on the level of subjectivity. Colonial literature had deprived African people of the human subject status making them items of the European gaze. The restoration of subjectivity of the African character in Things Fall Apart is achieved by putting the story under the purview of African mind by giving African characters a chance to think, feel, deliberate, struggle, love, fear and make moral choices. Such restoration of subjectivity is not just a representational correction; it is an ontological claim--a claim that African being can stand equal to European subjects in the questioning of literary focus on them (Ballahi, 2026), (Cheema, 2026), ("Othering the 'Exotic': Colonial Racism, 2025).

The latest scene of the novel is the culmination of the counter-narrative: a scene of devastating irony. When the District Commissioner considers the hanged body of Okonkwo, he thinks that the tale of this man could be worthy of a decent paragraph in the book he is planning to write, which is provisionally titled The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. This is the moment when Achebe reveals the whole operating of colonial representation: the taking of a human life full of intricate details to a footnote, the assumption of the right to name and classify the colonized, and the ignorance that can be chosen to become blind in order to perceive in the colony people the process of pacification instead destruction. The irony is further enhanced by the fact that the reader has just read a whole novel within the world of Okonkwo and that he/she has knowledge, which the District Commissioner will never get, of the depth of what was lost (Okafor, 1988), (Alam, 2014), (Mogu, 2009).

5. Discussion

This analysis has shown that Things Fall Apart is a complex intervention in the discursive aspect of colonial and postcolonial representation. The novel is not only challenging with certain colonial stereotypes, but it is also completely re-creating the system in which Africa and African people are perceived, substituting the colonial gaze with the internally produced, and at the same time more valid as well as more complex, expression of vision, than anything that the colonial literary tradition could have rendered.

There are several important patterns that can be outlined. This is first, the counter-narrative approach adopted by Achebe that rejects idealization. Things Fall Apart does not depict Igbo society through a lens of uncritical worship of native culture, as it is done in some postcolonial literature in the attempt to overcome the colonial denial, but rather it

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describes the society in its entirety, including its uncomfortable aspects and controversies. This method proves to be more efficient being a counter-narrative just because she manages to create the credibility of the narrator and, consequently, the authority of the native point of view. Such an honest and nuanced picture of society is, by definition, a society which has the intellectual and moral means of introspection--means which the colonial narrative deprived.

Second, the relationship between the cultural destruction and identity crisis is found to be intimate as shown in the analysis. Colonialism, as the novel shows, does not enter the body politic of the village only by exerting some outside pressure, but it penetrates the domain of epistemology and ontology around which the individual and collective sense of identity is built (Lawtoo, 2013). Umuofia disintegration is not merely a political occurrence but existential tragedy, a break in the unity of meaning that leaves people in the abyss between the two worlds, neither a full-member of either world. This insight has important ramifications in determining the long term effects of colonialism as it implies that there is a vast amount of damage caused by colonial domination that will go beyond the political and economic aspects to even the most basic of the human soul.

Third, the central role of language in the colonial domination and the postcolonial resistance is also pointed out in the analysis. Linguistic techniques, like the borrowing and assimilation of English, the implantation of Igbo proverbs, the cushioning technique and invention of a polyvocal narrative texture prove that language is not a neutral means, but a place that is subject to political struggle. The ability to name, to represent, to tell those are capabilities of power that colonialism attempted to monopolize and that postcolonial literature attempts to regain. Achebe succeeds not just in what but by how he says it: with the help of shifting the language of the colonizer into a means of expressing African culture, he shows that the power of storytelling may be turned against the institutions of domination that gave it birth.

The drawbacks of this analysis are also to be taken into consideration. The analysis concentrates mainly on the literary aspects of Things Fall Apart and reads the novel using the published literature on the topic instead of original archival and ethnographic study. Moreover, the dynamic of colonial encounter and indigenous resistance is evaluated but other significant aspects of the novel such as how it responds to gender, how the novel participates in the oral tradition into a living cultural practice and its reception history in various cultural settings receives less consideration. Future studies may fruitfully take these directions to explore the intersection of gender relationships with colonial domination in the novel, how the novel has been read and taught alongside variants of education and culture, and how recent African literature is carrying the counter-narrative project started by Achebe.

6. Conclusion

This postcolonial criticism of Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe has revealed that the novel is a multi-layered and structurally inventive counter-discourse of Western colonial discourses of Africa. With the multidimensional characterization of Okonkwo, the descriptive manner of the Igbo system of governance and culture, the subtle manner in which the missionary business is presented, the destructive nature of the manner in which colonialism shredded the inherent systems of being, Achebe creates a literary work that is not only a confirmation of the entire humanity and civilizational richness of the

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precolonial African society, but also a sophisticated use of language as a means of cultural resistance.

This is the lasting relevance of the novel that did reject the conditions of the colonial story. Instead of merely flipping the colonial binary (negative stereotypes would be substituted with positive ones), Achebe changes the system of representation entirely, creating a novel which creates meaning by utilizing some Igbo epistemological and cultural resources. What we have is not a mere reaction to colonial literature, but a kind of generative act of cultural recuperation- a text to show that with its mere existence, the colonized subject has the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic resources to tell his or her story and by doing so, recover their proper role in the narrative of human history. Even 60 years after it was published, Things Fall Apart is still, to this day, the canon text of African postcolonialism and one of the most significant novels ever written. Its success is not merely the success of literature, but the success of politics, philosophy: it is a testament to the fact that the resources of narrative can be turned against those mechanisms of domination that attempted to hush it down, and that the recreation of a cultural identity, painful, partial, as it may be, is not only possible but essential. Twenty years following the end of colonialism, the novel, Achebe, remains very urgent and highly undeniable in its voice in the world today.

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(2025). *"Othering the 'Exotic': Colonial Racism in Postcolonial Rewritings" A Comparative Study of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea, and Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye.*