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Cultural Rootedness and Colonial Displacement in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the preservation of culture by staying in one's home country through the lens of postcolonial theory and qualitative literary analysis, critically examining Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in which colonialism undermines local customs, traditions, and social unity. The novel illustrates how cultural identity, land, community, and spirituality intersect on a large scale, and how they are, at the same time, helpless in the face of foreign intrusion. The narrative Achebe narrates is an example of how one can lose the connection to cultural heritage, leading to personal crisis and the disintegration of the community. The paper employs principal characters, such as Okonkwo and Nwoye, who argue that indigenous identity is maintained through spiritual and cultural practices, as well as through a permanent link with the motherland and the homeland. The paper contextualizes *Things Fall Apart* within the broader postcolonial discourse, highlighting that identity is eroded by displacement, which often involves assimilation and the pressures of hybrid cultural worlds. It is part of the ongoing debate on the preservation of culture, as it has been proposed that Achebe's work highlights the need to preserve the native languages, cultures, and territorial ties of indigenous peoples. In this way, the article attests that rootedness is the most important aspect in resisting the eroding forces of colonialism, globalization, and modern-day migration.

INTRODUCTION

Things Fall Apart (1958) is a novel by Chinua Achebe, widely considered a masterpiece of African literature and postcolonialism. The novel offers a comprehensive, well-organized account of the life of the Igbo people before the colonial era and of the tremendous social and cultural transformations caused by British colonialism and Christian missionaries (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007). The protagonist of the story is Okonkwo, a respected member of the Igbo community. The customs, traditions, and ideals prevalent in his society are important to him and integral to his identity within it. The second theme of the story by Achebe is the need for being rooted in their cultures by the indigenous people, implying that it is of extreme importance to live in the native land and practice the active and continued cultures as they are the most important in their cultural identity, stability of their society, and self-respect as people.

The story depicts how colonization has affected indigenous people in both physical and cultural ways for a long time. The process of introducing foreign political systems, religious ideas, and social behaviors among communities disrupts and impairs pre-existing patterns of life within a society (Nayar, 2010). Chinua Achebe holds that the disagreement is not merely a matter of historical interpretation, but a matter of identity. He does this to highlight the fact that by severing their linkages with their motherland, language, and customs, indigenous civilizations risk facing extinction (Achebe, 1958). *Things Fall Apart* focuses on the deep relation between geography and identity, and the description of traditions, family structure, and social responsibilities is elaborated. It also depicts the way in which these relationships can be

destroyed and broken (Chapagaee, 2024).

In Achebe's work, this implies the significance of the connection to culture by native people in preserving their identity, as far as this study is concerned. The notion is that cultural assimilation and displacement are harmful, as they can destabilize social relations and individual identity, potentially leading to issues within the community (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007; Paudyal, 2022). The book prompts us to reconsider indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and practices as essential components in protecting against external forces that tend to homogenize all people and erode their culture (Smith, 2012).

The book remains relevant as it addresses concerns that indigenous and low-income individuals continue to face. With globalization, migration, and the embracement of other cultures, it is clear that a conflict arises between preserving cultural pasts and adapting to new environments (Nayar, 2010; Fanon, 1963). *Things Fall Apart* is a seminal work that prompts us to reflect on the plight of cultural survival and the complexities of identity. It strives to understand how the book depicts the impact of colonialism on Igbo society, the toll that attachments to tradition and external forces took on Igbo society, and the various ways in which indigenous people resisted it. This paper will contribute to the body of knowledge on issues related to postcolonialism, and the significance of living in a country and upholding its cultural roots is key to social cohesion and identity. Such a theory is highly relevant to the modern world, as local people everywhere continue to face the need to relocate and negotiate their cultures.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Things Fall Apart is a milestone in African and postcolonial literature. Many people have studied it because it offers a thoughtful examination of the effects of colonization on African society, culture, and identity. Individuals across various professions have explored how the book captures the cultural barriers posed by British colonialism and the problems through which native people had to struggle to resist, preserve their culture, and reinvent themselves. Rani (2023) examines the impact of colonization on African culture and identity, exploring the psychological and social consequences of colonial rule in Achebe's works. She writes about how the book enlightens people on Igbo rituals and social hierarchies, as well as the belief system, before the encounter of the Igbo people with European nationals. She states that they are similar to the peculiar practices of Christians as well as the British government. With the interference of the religion and government of other countries, the Igbo way of life becomes unstable, creating the problem of identity and splitting within the society. In their use of characters such as Okonkwo and Nwoye, Rani demonstrates that colonization led to challenges faced by members of different generations and those with varying ideals, necessitating the need to accommodate one another. The concepts of colonialism are more likely to be taken into account by younger people, as the older generation attempts to maintain their traditions. This friction suggests that former colonies struggle to reconcile with their past and adapt to the demands of modern life. Pramudya and Puspita (2025) adopt a Fanonian approach to analyze Things Fall Apart, indicating how this book helps preserve civilizations and how people perceive the world since the colonial period. Achebe is part of the colonial revolution through culture, which challenges the colonial discourse of erasing African histories and other sources of knowledge. The teachings of Igbo cosmology, theology, and the Igbo community life in the book suggest that the Igbo people possess a strong culture, one that the colonists cannot easily take away. The authors paint the bloody clash of cultures, which involved missionaries and people in charge of the colonial project, which made the colonized population live in a liminal zone with diffused identities, a notion called third space, a postcolonial idea. The death of Okonkwo highlights the devastating effects of colonization on the Igbo community, which meant the lack of social organization and loss of culture, but the novel also highlights how cultural values and practices could help people overcome the absence of culture and restore it.

Juma (2025) analyzes Things Fall Apart within the framework of postcolonial theory, focusing on the core concepts of otherness, opposition, and hybridity. The story by Achebe is a counterpoint to the colonial discourse of Africa as the "other," irrational, chaotic, and inferior to the Western self. Achebe turns these binary oppositions inside out, allowing Africans to possess agency and identity, thereby overturning the paradigm

of the multidimensional and multi-layered Igbo society. Juma then discusses how Achebe wrote in both English and Igbo to deconstruct the colonial histories of linguistic orders. It offers a hybrid sense of narrator voice that describes the sentiments colonized people have regarding their culture and how they respond to it. The resistance displayed in the book, in terms of social norms, religious resistance, and cultural continuity, presents a reflective picture that postcolonial nations are unable to reclaim their lost power.

According to Paudyal (2022), the book authored by Achebe explores the early Nigerian culture and the culture clash, including the clash between tradition and colonial modernity. Paudyal argues that a close examination of the rituals, myths, and societal structure of Igbo culture, as depicted in Achebe's anthropology, reveals that the Igbo culture is sophisticated and can be influenced by external elements. Colonialism and the Christian faith have led to conflicts within the community due to differing interpretations of the faith. This has created opposing views between traditional believers and those who have joined other religions. It is on these clashing cultural identities that Paudyal argues Achebe uses the tensions to break the stereotypes of Africans as primitive people by emphasizing the difficulties and contrasts already present within Igbo society. The unfortunate thing is that the character of Okonkwo, a classical warrior spirit, has lost track of the changes brought about by colonialism. The transformations are similar to the death of native civilizations under imperial occupation.

These researchers all concur on the following important facts about Things Fall Apart. It is a refutation of colonial historiography, in which the novel pays considerable attention to the voices and opinions of Africans. It illustrates the destructive effects that colonialism had and the way it fragmented the social and cultural relationships of the natives. It argues that postcolonial identity construction is indeed a complicated and nuanced topic to debate. The language and concepts that Achebe uses offer a means to resist colonial power and reclaim one's identity. The image of the colonial countries is not that simplistic, as it was about the victimization and the perpetrator. It is also an example of how people tried to cope and live.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative literary research project based on an in-depth analysis of Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart through a postcolonial theoretical lens. Qualitative literary analysis offers an effective approach for this research, as it enables careful examination of characters, themes, symbols, and narrative techniques employed in the novel. Achebe (1958) portrays how colonialism disrupts Igbo cultural life and threatens the maintenance of indigenous identity, while this study's qualitative design is informed by established discussions of qualitative inquiry and research design (Creswell, 2013).

The initial step involves a thorough and critical reading

of selected passages and dialogues from the text. These decisions demonstrate the multi-polar and even anti-social behavior of Okonkwo regarding the Igbo society and how British colonization led to the woes in different areas of the Igbo life. In his novel, Achebe (1958) pays particular attention to the scenes where the cultural gap is evident, specifically those in which community members of the traditional lifestyle interact with colonial missionaries or bureaucrats. This literary comprehension utilizes the language, symbols, and plot of the story to convey complexity and highlight cultural alienation and collision in Achebe. The paper focuses on a few texts, examining the depth of meaning underlying colonialism that created a new identity for the indigenous people in social, political, and psychological spheres.

The study has also employed extensive archival research on major interpretations of *Things Fall Apart* by eminent scholars in the fields of African and postcolonial literature, in addition to primary textual analysis. The secondary sources used in this analysis add value as they provide a new outlook and theories to help answer the question of why the book is important in culture and politics. Some of the most influential thinkers who have influenced the themes in the novel include Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homi Bhabha, Chinweizu, and Edward Said.

They have provided important insights into the impact of colonialism, cultural identification, resistance, hybridity, and the creation of the 'other'. It is a multidisciplinary research practice that makes it clear the research is based on well-developed academic discourses, which creates a strong sense of critical analysis.

The paper undertakes a comparative analysis of *Things Fall Apart* with other primary postcolonial literature on related issues of cultural survival and rootedness. In addition to bringing out how the work of Achebe measures against other works related to indigenous identity and how the work has been a champion of cultural preservation, this strategy also places his novel within the big-picture context regarding the nature of displacement, assimilation, and issues with hybrid identities that modernization and encounters with colonization have brought about (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007; Belsey, 2002). In this sense, this study highlights the broader trends and shifts in postcolonial discourses, providing insight into how different cultures have sought to preserve their identities. The method also examines the socio-historical and political issues that are crucial for understanding the context of the book in Nigeria in the late nineteenth century. The local practices and beliefs faced challenges against the backdrop of British colonialism and the prevailing trend of spreading Christian beliefs during that period. This paper offers a deeper insight into the cultural issues of the book, presenting the historical background of the events that contributed to its creation (Nayar, 2010). This provides an additional insight into what this war is all about, as evident in the cultural erosion depicted in the book.

This contextualization makes the analysis weightier

because the interpretations have been cross-linked to reality in the actual life history and the politics of power. Finally, the principles of postcolonialism are central to the whole work. To specify the relationships between colonizers and the colonized, cultural imperialism, hybridity, imitation, and resistance are formulated (Bhabha, 1994). This framework highlights the importance of maintaining one's own cultural identity and resisting the imposition of other cultures. Achebe mainly addresses these two concepts in the book. The theoretical background helps to ensure that the novel's ideas concerning identity, power, and cultural negotiation are studied critically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the key findings of the paper related to the themes of indigenous rootedness and the threat of cultural displacement as depicted in the novel. By giving close attention to characterization, cultural background, and historical context, it becomes apparent that Achebe presents a strong argument in favor of preserving cultural identity amidst the trends of colonialism and transformation.

Indigenous Rootedness and Cultural Identity

Having a close tie to his cultural establishment is an essential part of not only Okonkwo's character but also that of the entire community, which Achebe has explained primarily through the intricate character of Okonkwo (Achebe, 1958). Traditions, rituals, and social structures employed within the Igbo community are important aspects of Okonkwo's life. These are the essential bonds that people form with their past, their community, and their land of origin (Chapagae, 2024). His name and social status align with his involvement in ritualized festivals, such as the worship of the spirits of the dead and the New Yam festival. Such activities enable people in the community to remember their past, feel a sense of belonging, and move forward. This sense of belonging to a community is not only a cultural symbol; it is, to a large extent, what defines Okonkwo's self-image, his relationships with other people, and the way he perceives the world. Using this description, Achebe propagates the belief that indigenous identity is supported by a complex web of relationships and practices that validate a person's position in the larger social and spiritual network (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007).

In Achebe's novel, the native identity of an individual is firmly rooted in their tangible connections to their motherland, as well as the spiritual and cultural attachments that comprise their heritage. In Achebe's novel, the native identity of an individual is firmly rooted in their tangible connections to their motherland, as well as the spiritual and cultural attachments that comprise their heritage, with elders and oral traditions serving as vital mechanisms for transmitting cultural values across generations (Olawale, 2025). In the Igbo tradition, land is not merely a piece of property, but a sacred element

that embodies life, representing the continuation of a lifetime connection between the living and the dead across generations (Nayar, 2010). The society attached great respect to natural features such as rivers, forests, and ancestral shrines (Achebe, 1958). These regulations, which govern the use and transfer of land, underscore the significance of land ownership. His cultural norms, as learned during his childhood in his society, make him always worry about being perceived as weak or feminine, illustrating the interdependence of identity with a cultural and social set of rules and regulations, and also giving him a sense of belonging to a particular place. This alarm is not limited to personal insecurity, but is rooted deep in personal thoughts and actions due to communal values. The fact that Okonkwo did all he could to protect these concepts demonstrates how being tied to a particular culture can impact not only an individual in society but also himself (Juma, 2025).

In Achebe, Okonkwo also resists colonial influence bitterly, as an expression of his cultural pride and insistence on defending his own culture (Bhabha, 1994). The most significant tension is evident in the fact that Okonkwo opposes his son Nwoye's conversion to Christianity, which is an indication of a larger battle between one's traditional values and imported religions. The conversion of Nwoye to Christianity introduces novel ideas that conflict with the spiritual worldview and customary practices and rites that define Okonkwo as an individual (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986). The conflict between the families and the communities showcases the wider social problems of the conflict between traditional cultural values, as compared to the colonial forces, who are in search of domination and control. The conflict that Okonkwo engages in is an individual endeavor to preserve himself and his community, to protect the traditions of the people (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007). The conflict also highlights the untold suffering associated with people losing their culture, as they are engulfed by the insurmountable need to cling to ancestral cultures and the temptations brought by colonial modernity (Pramudya & Puspita, 2025; Nayar, 2010; Fanon, 1963).

He also reveals the difficulty and the paradox of anchoring as exhibited by Achebe. Okonkwo is so committed to the traditional ways that he often fails to see how things are evolving and becoming more complex in his era. It implies that being rooted plays a crucial role in sustaining the culture, but should be balanced with the ability to change and adapt (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007). His troublesome breakdown can be attributed to his failure to adapt, which suggests that cultural pride can be counterproductive when it does not embrace change. Okonkwo has a sense of solitude in his neighborhood and within himself, as he cannot accept the way society is changing. The complexity of this tale underscores the irreversibility of standing firm on traditional issues, which can lead to tragedy (Achebe, 1958).

Nevertheless, the picture presented by Achebe is sympathetic, as it suggests that indigenous identity can

be preserved with minimal loss, provided that complete assimilation is avoided. He wants to help people understand the significance and complexity of cultural roots. However, he also wants them to acknowledge that the consequences of colonization cannot be averted. This expectation is directly associated with all the contests of the indigenous and minority groups globally in safeguarding their cultural traditions. The narrative supports this idea because people can feel most culturally when they live in their native territory and participate fully in the traditional life (Smith, 2012). Dislocation, diaspora, and cultural displacement, however, are inferior in terms of the survival of indigenous identities. Achebe's words regarding the importance of roots remain true today, as globalization and migration continue to influence society. To survive in the contemporary world, many indigenous peoples are struggling to maintain their culture and defend their rights by preserving their language, ceremonies, and ties to their ancestral territories (Nayar, 2010). *Things Fall Apart* portrays the power of cultural roots and the agony of their destruction (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007).

The Threat of Cultural Dislocation

Things Fall Apart reveals that colonialism is very destructive to native culture through many ways, including cultural dislocation, which is involved in physical relocation, as well as psychological division (Achebe, 1958). When the British colonial soldiers, particularly missionaries and colonial officers, invaded Nigeria, they were bringing with them a completely different set of religion, laws, and modes of administration, which the Igbo people of Nigeria had long used. This outside interference disrupts the social structure of Igbo society and gradually undermines the traditional lifestyles that have sustained the community for generations (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007). Establishing that dislocation of culture is not just about land loss or loss of political power, Achebe creates the intention to show that the dislocation is about a crack in the identity of a people and the dissolution of their sense of peoplehood. It is beyond enormous, as it shifts the paradigm of individual and collective life, altering the framework of human interaction, and challenging the assumptions of local life (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978).

One of the most heart-wrenching examples of how this culture has morphed is Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo. His conversion to Christianity had a profoundly transformative effect on his life and society (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). The fact that Nwoye opts to leave behind the culture of his father and traditional Igbo spirituality shows the attractiveness of colonial culture to the younger generation. A change of religion is not merely a religious affair, but a strong manifestation of the way colonialism divided cultures (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007). By using Nwoye, Achebe tries to demonstrate the devastating effect of colonialism in destroying family and communal ties among people, as he pulls them away from their former beliefs and heritage. The inner struggle that

Nwoye faces in adjusting to the concepts he has been socialized to perceive and the new ideas being introduced by the missionaries illustrates how moving to a new society can have not only intergenerational problems but also emotional ones (Paudyal, 2022). Okonkwo sees his decision to be a Christian as a betrayal of the things he has fought to uphold, thereby making him the direct opposite of the one he was. This separation between family members resembles the dissension of social cohesion in the Igbo society. It reveals that colonization has been disastrous and its effects are lasting (Nayar, 2010).

The foreign rule of the religious that, regardless of the colonial imposition of the foreign politics and legal systems, disrupts not only the religious life but also drastically disrupts the traditional authority and governance. The traditions of solving problems and managing the community that existed in the past, which intertwined people and provided justice, became incompatible with the tradition carried out by the colonial government, which was established with the help of the British courts. They based the formation of these institutions on shared values, cultural knowledge, and traditions that made them. They become dispossessed and lacking political freedom, which causes society to crumble (Juma, 2025). Achebe effectively illustrates how these systemic problems leave the Igbo people severely disadvantaged and socially isolated, resulting in communities that lack cohesion. The society has to deal with a colonial government that is disruptive and subversive to its established worldview. Colonial power not only replaces one system with another one, but it disrupts the general social order, causing instability and a sense of powerlessness (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007).

The characters are engaged in significant identity troubles since they are going through the pressure of being under colonial domination and losing touch with their African heritage. As Okonkwo becomes more and more enraged, a sense of powerlessness and eventual suicidal death show how this cultural displacement harmed him on a personal level in a very gruesome manner. His inability to find a balance between the firmly embedded identity and the growing situation of colonialism reveals how emotional issues are caused by moving, grieving, and hopelessness. The fact is that many native people have to compete with the external, alien order, and at the same time, they decide to keep their traditions alive. This is a good example of the story of Okonkwo. His gruesome death is not only the death of a man, but also the destruction of a life, a life annihilated by colonialism (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). Achebe's writings demonstrate how readers can comprehend the emotions and experiences of culturally dislocated individuals, as well as the human costs of political or social transformation (Bhabha, 1994).

Achebe's narrative is a harsh judgment against colonial cultural subjugation as a symbolic form of violence that erases native identity and social relations through necropolitical regimes that destroy cultural memory (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007; Zobayer & Hasan, 2025). Things

Fall Apart cautions that when the cultures of the more powerful colonialists replace those of the natives, hybridity may similarly result in a decline and erasure of the original culture (Bhabha, 1994). The reason is that postcolonial philosophy tends to perceive hybridity as the mechanism through which people who seek to negotiate their cultural identity derive a source of power. The complexity of the ideas on blending cultures unfolds in the story through an emphasis on the threats to cultural identity that result from the meeting of different cultures. According to Achebe, it was not easy to interact with other cultures during the colonial era. However, it is also made clear that the power differences render indigenous identities vulnerable and fragmented. This criticism challenges the notion of romanticizing cultural fusion by examining how colonization contributed to the problems (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007).

The issue of cultural displacement goes beyond the historical context of the narration. It suggests that humanity, which is becoming colonized or pushed to the margins of society around the globe, continues to experience difficulties in preserving its cultural character and autonomy against encroachment. Achebe discusses the mental, social, and political costs of cultural displacement and the importance of preserving and revitalizing culture (Nayar, 2010). There is a hint in the story that reinstatement and further integration in indigenous practices and connection with the land are one of the ways to survive and resist. This lesson is particularly relevant today as indigenous people across the globe are facing challenges that endanger their cultural legacy due to globalization, diaspora, and neo-colonialism (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007; Smith, 2012).

CONCLUSION

As *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe reveals, staying connected to one's own culture, i.e., residing in one's native homeland and following local traditions, is crucial for retaining one's identity and social relationships. Okonkwo and the Igbo demonstrate that identity is closely tied to their tradition, land, and sense of belonging to their people. Colonialism erases this sense of rootedness, causing individuals and societies to lose their cultural identity, become torn, and experience identity crises. According to Achebe, the preservation of one's cultural heritage involves more than merely adjusting to external forces; it also involves active participation in the culture and the societies surrounding one. The land is depicted as sacred, serving as a means to decorate and strengthen cultural vitality. The sad fate of Okonkwo reminds us of the risks that one may face when they lose the cultural space in their own country and fail to maintain it actively. Future research may be interested in how colonialism transformed the social arrangements of the Igbo people, or it could also focus on how different generations reacted differently to cultural change. Interesting approaches to the study of the novel include the use of interdisciplinary

concepts such as anthropology or sociology to offer fresh insights into the cultural conflicts described by Achebe.

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