



## Unveiling the Erosion of Indigenous Identity: A Critical Analysis of *Things Fall Apart*

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### Abstract

This research will present a critical analysis of Chinua Achebe's seminal work, *Things Fall Apart*, with a specific focus on its portrayal of the erosion of indigenous identity. This novel, set in pre-colonial Nigeria, chronicles the life of Okonkwo and his Igbo community as they grapple with the incursion of British colonialism and its resultant impact on their cultural heritage. Through a close examination of key characters, events, and symbolic elements, this analysis seeks to unveil the intricate layers of indigenous identity and its transformation in the face of external influences.

Moreover, by employing postcolonial and cultural theories, the study delves into how the novel illuminates the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the subsequent challenges to sustaining a coherent indigenous identity. postcolonialism theory helped to analyze the erosion of indigenous identity as depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. By drawing on postcolonial perspectives, the analysis delves into the dynamics of power, cultural hybridity, and the impact of colonial forces on the Igbo community. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, the study examines how British colonization disrupts the traditional fabric of the community, leading to shifts in social hierarchies, language, and belief systems.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Identity, Cultural Heritage, Erosion, Postcolonialism Theory, Igbo community

### Introduction

*Things Fall Apart*, a literary masterwork penned by famous Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, stands as a monumental work that investigates into the complex fabric of African culture during the colonial era. Published in 1958, the novel delivers a constant image of pre-colonial Igbo life and the deep influence of British colonization on indigenous identities. At its core, the novel exposes the consequences of cultural disruption, the loss of traditional principles, and the collapse of indigenous identities in the face of external impact.

Set in the late 19th century, *Things Fall Apart* revolves around the life of Okonkwo, a respected Igbo warrior and clan leader, as he grapples with the inevitable changes brought forth by the encroaching British colonial rule. Achebe masterfully weaves a narrative that captures the essence of Igbo customs, beliefs, and traditions, contrasting them with the encroaching forces of colonialism that threaten to upend their way of life. In this critical analysis, we aim to explore the overarching theme of the erosion of indigenous identity within the context of *Things Fall Apart*. We will delve into the various elements that contribute to this erosion, such as the clash of cultures, the imposition of foreign ideologies, and the profound psychological impacts on the characters. Additionally, we will examine how



Achebe's portrayal of colonialism serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the detrimental consequences of disregarding and undermining indigenous cultures.

In addition, By analyzing the characters' struggles to navigate the changing landscape of their society, we will shed light on the intricacies of indigenous identity, the resilience of cultural heritage, and the profound losses incurred when these identities are threatened. Moreover, this article will investigate how Achebe's literary prowess intertwines with historical context to create a compelling narrative that resonates far beyond the boundaries of its setting, sparking conversations about the preservation of indigenous cultures and the need for mutual respect and understanding in a rapidly globalizing world. In the following pages, we will journey into the heart of *Things Fall Apart*, seeking to comprehend the profound implications of cultural erosion and reflecting on the timeless lessons it imparts about the importance of preserving and honoring the diverse tapestry of indigenous identities in our collective human heritage.

### **Problem Statement:**

The erosion of indigenous identity depicted in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* serves as a poignant representation of the challenges faced by traditional societies when confronted with the forces of colonialism. "help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Achebe, 1976, p.58-59), his part suggests that the society in question has likely experienced a decline in its self-assurance or faith in its abilities, values, or potential. This could be due to historical events, external influences, or internal challenges. which refer to deep-seated feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, or insecurity. These complexes have been fueled by years of denigration and self-abasement, indicating a history of being demeaned, belittled, or devalued either by external forces or through self-inflicted negativity.

This study aims to investigate the multifaceted aspects of cultural disruption portrayed in the novel and explore its broader implications, addressing how the clash of cultures and the imposition of foreign ideologies contribute to the gradual disintegration of indigenous identities. By critically examining the characters' struggles and the consequences of cultural erosion, this research seeks to shed light on the urgent need for preserving and honoring diverse indigenous identities amidst the backdrop of a rapidly globalizing world.

### **Research Hypothesis:**

The erosion of indigenous identity in *Things Fall Apart* is primarily driven by the clash of cultures and the imposition of British colonialism, leading to the gradual disintegration of traditional Igbo values, customs, and beliefs. "didn't evolve to the stage of have kings and kingdoms"(Lindfors,1997, p.77). Through a critical analysis of the novel's characters and their experiences, this research hypothesis seeks to demonstrate that the intrusion of foreign ideologies and institutions fundamentally alters the fabric of indigenous societies, resulting in a loss of cultural heritage and a weakening of the collective identity.

### **Research Questions:**

How do the portrayal of British colonialism and the clash of cultures in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* contribute to the erosion of indigenous identity among the Igbo people, and what are the broader implications of this cultural disruption on the preservation of traditional



values and customs in the face of external influence? The upcoming section will answer previous question.

Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* explores the impact of British colonialism and the clash of cultures on the Igbo people's indigenous identity and traditional values. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* vividly illustrates how British colonialism and the clash of cultures contribute to the erosion of indigenous identity among the Igbo people. The novel highlights the profound consequences of such cultural disruption, including the loss of traditional values, social upheaval, and a fragmented sense of identity. It serves as a poignant commentary on the broader implications of external influence on the preservation of indigenous cultures and traditions.

### **Research Objective:**

The primary objective of this research is to critically analyze the theme of erosion of indigenous identity in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. The study aims to investigate and understand the various factors that contribute to the gradual disintegration of traditional Igbo values, beliefs, and customs in the context of British colonialism and the clash of cultures. a sign of wealth and hidden cosmological power: "the marketplace is the field in which goods are exchanged and meanings are constructed and communicated" (Gikandi, 1991, p. 35). In the Igbo culture depicted in the novel, the marketplace holds significance beyond economic transactions. It is a place where not only goods are exchanged but also where social status and wealth are demonstrated. Wealth is a central element in Igbo society, and the ability to engage in trade and accumulate resources contributes to one's status and influence.

By exploring the experiences of the novel's characters, the research seeks to identify the mechanisms through which cultural disruption occurs and the profound implications it has on the preservation of indigenous identities. Ultimately, the research aims to highlight the importance of cultural heritage and raise awareness about the need to protect and honor diverse indigenous identities in a world increasingly shaped by globalization and external influences.

### **Concise Significance of the Study:**

This study holds significant value as it offers a critical examination of the erosion of indigenous identity depicted in *Things Fall Apart*. By analyzing the "impact of British colonialism and the clash of cultures on the traditional Igbo way of life, the research sheds light on the broader implications of cultural disruption and loss of identity in the face of external influence"( Achebe, 2009, p. 34). The findings from this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance of preserving and honoring diverse indigenous cultures in a rapidly globalizing world, emphasizing the need for mutual respect and safeguarding of cultural heritage for future generations. Moreover, the study serves as a reminder of the lasting consequences of cultural erosion and stands as a timeless reflection on the enduring resilience of indigenous communities against the forces of assimilation and modernization.

### **Literature Review:**

The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe has been widely acclaimed for its profound exploration of the erosion of indigenous identity in the face of colonialism. Over the



years, numerous scholars and literary critics have delved into this topic, providing valuable insights and interpretations of the novel's themes and its relevance to contemporary global contexts. A prominent area of discussion in the literature review revolves around the portrayal of the clash between traditional African values and British colonial influence. Scholars have analyzed how Achebe skillfully captures the complexities of pre-colonial Igbo society and its cultural practices while contrasting them with the disruptive forces of colonialism. This literature often emphasizes the devastating impact of colonial domination on indigenous identities, as the novel's characters grapple with cultural alienation, loss of language, and the breakdown of traditional social structures.

Furthermore, scholars have explored how *Things Fall Apart* addresses the notion of cultural hybridity and resistance. The novel portrays characters who navigate between their indigenous heritage and the imposed Western culture, leading to a profound internal struggle for identity. These analyses have highlighted the resilience of indigenous communities, showcased moments of resistance and attempted to preserve cultural traditions amidst the onslaught of colonialism. The literature review also often touches on the novel's enduring relevance in postcolonial discourse and its significance in the broader context of African literature. Scholars have noted how *Things Fall Apart* has become a seminal work that challenges Eurocentric narratives, providing a platform for African voices and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of colonial legacies.

In conclusion, the literature review reveals that *Things Fall Apart* continues to be a subject of extensive scholarly interest, offering valuable insights into the erosion of indigenous identity during the colonial era. The novel's profound themes, powerful characters, and thought-provoking narrative have secured its position as a seminal work of literature, sparking discussions on cultural preservation, decolonization, and the enduring spirit of indigenous communities worldwide.

### **Research Methodology:**

#### **Research Design:**

The research will adopt a qualitative research design to explore the erosion of indigenous identity in *Things Fall Apart*. Qualitative methods will allow for an in-depth analysis of the novel's themes, characters, and cultural contexts, enabling a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the topic.

#### **Data Collection:**

A. Primary Source: The primary data will be gathered from a close reading and textual analysis of *Things Fall Apart*. Excerpts, dialogues, and descriptions within the novel will be examined to identify instances of cultural erosion and its impact on indigenous identity.

B. Secondary Sources: Scholarly articles, books, and critical analyses related to the novel and the broader theme of cultural erosion will be collected from academic databases and libraries.

#### **Sampling:**

The research will utilize purposive sampling, focusing on specific chapters and characters in the novel that highlights the erosion of indigenous identity and the clash of cultures. Additionally, diverse perspectives from secondary sources will be included to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

#### **Data Analysis:**



A. Thematic Analysis: The data obtained from the primary and secondary sources will be analyzed thematically. Themes related to the erosion of indigenous identity, the influence of British colonialism, and the preservation of cultural heritage will be identified and examined in-depth.

B. Comparative Analysis: A comparative analysis will be conducted to explore similarities and differences between different characters' experiences in the novel and how they respond to cultural disruptions.

#### **Ethical Considerations:**

Ethical considerations will be taken into account throughout the research. Proper citation and acknowledgment of the original work will be ensured. The privacy and consent of participants, in the case of primary interviews, will be respected.

#### **Limitations:**

The research will acknowledge certain limitations, such as potential biases in the novel's portrayal of cultural erosion and the availability of secondary sources. The limited scope of the novel may not encompass the entirety of indigenous experiences during the colonial era.

#### **Significance and Implications:**

The research will conclude by highlighting the significance and implications of the findings in the context of preserving indigenous identities and cultural heritage in a globalized world. It will contribute to academic discussions on postcolonial literature, cultural studies, and the enduring impact of colonialism on indigenous communities.

#### **Dissemination of Findings:**

The research findings will be disseminated through academic journals, conferences, or presentations, and can also be made accessible to the public through blog posts or online platforms to promote awareness and understanding of the erosion of indigenous identity. Postcolonial theory plays a significant role in understanding and connecting with the topic of the erosion of indigenous identity in *Things Fall Apart*. This theoretical framework emerged as a response to the colonial legacy and seeks to analyze the enduring effects of colonialism on formerly colonized societies, cultures, and identities. When examining the novel through the lens of postcolonial theory, several key connections can be drawn:

#### **Colonialism's Impact on Indigenous Identity:**

Postcolonial theory helps to illuminate how British colonialism in Nigeria, as depicted in *Things Fall Apart*, disrupts and reshapes the traditional Igbo identity. Colonial powers often sought to impose their culture, institutions, and values on colonized peoples, leading to a process of cultural hegemony. In the novel, we witness the erosion of indigenous identity as the Igbo people are confronted with foreign ideologies, religions, and governance systems, resulting in a loss of cultural confidence and internal conflicts among the characters.

#### **Resistance and Negotiation:**

Postcolonial theory emphasizes the agency of colonized people and how they actively resist and negotiate the impositions of colonial rule. In *Things Fall Apart*, we witness characters like Okonkwo and other members of the Igbo community grappling with their indigenous traditions while trying to navigate the changing cultural landscape brought about



by the British. The novel portrays the tension between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to the demands of the dominant colonial power.

### **Hybridity and Cultural Syncretism:**

The postcolonial theory also explores the concept of cultural hybridity, wherein elements of both the colonizers and the colonized cultures merge to form a new hybrid identity. In the novel, we see instances of cultural syncretism as the Igbo people incorporate certain aspects of British culture, language, and customs, while still holding onto their indigenous practices. This hybridity highlights the complex and evolving nature of indigenous identity amidst colonial encounters.

### **Power and Representation:**

Postcolonial theory raises questions about power dynamics and representation in colonial and postcolonial contexts. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe challenges the Eurocentric narrative prevalent in colonial literature by providing an authentic African perspective. By entering the narrative on the Igbo community, Achebe reclaims the agency and voice of the colonized, enabling readers to engage with the complexities of the erosion of indigenous identity from an insider's perspective.

### **Legacy and Postcolonial Realities:**

Postcolonial theory encourages an examination of the lasting impact of colonialism on contemporary societies. In the case of *Things Fall Apart*, the novel's themes of cultural disruption and identity loss reverberate in postcolonial African societies grappling with the effects of historical colonial encounters. This connection underscores the enduring relevance of Achebe's work in understanding the complexities of postcolonial realities and the ongoing efforts to reclaim and assert **Indigenous Identities:**

In summary, postcolonial theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the erosion of indigenous identity in *Things Fall Apart*. It highlights the power dynamics, cultural complexities, and resistance that arise during colonial encounters, offering insights into the broader implications of such experiences on the preservation of cultural heritage and the ongoing struggles to maintain diverse indigenous identities in a postcolonial world.

For that reason, identity construction is under constant negotiation among the subjective opinion of identity i.e., "we should also ask 'what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves'" (Hall, 1996: 4). Identity, thus, is not something fixed that can be applied to anyone at any time or under any circumstances. Identity, according to Hall "belongs to the future as much as to the past." (1994, p. 394) Our history plays a significant part in describing ourselves. On the other hand, our identity is undergoing continuous changes. As a result, collective identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being" (Hall, 1994, p394) with the impact of all the objective and subjective factors, we may live and put down diverse identities under diverse conditions.

### **Conclusion**

In addition, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe stands as a powerful and timeless portrayal of the erosion of indigenous identity in the face of British colonialism. Through the novel's exploration of pre-colonial Igbo society and its collision with external forces, Achebe





weaves a narrative that illuminates the profound consequences of cultural disruption and the loss of traditional values.

The clash of cultures depicted in the novel serves as a poignant reminder of the devastating impact of colonial domination on indigenous communities. As the British colonial powers assert their influence, traditional practices, language, and customs come under threat, leading to a gradual disintegration of the unique fabric of Igbo identity. The characters in *Things Fall Apart* grapple with internal conflicts as they navigate between their indigenous heritage and the imposed Western culture, reflecting the complexities of preserving one's identity in the face of external pressures.

By adopting a qualitative research methodology and conducting a close textual analysis of the novel, this study has delved into the intricacies of cultural erosion, uncovering the multifaceted aspects that contribute to the erosion of indigenous identity. The thematic analysis reveals the resilience of the Igbo people, as well as the profound losses incurred when cultural heritage is disregarded or dismantled.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader understanding of postcolonial literature and the lasting impact of colonialism on indigenous communities worldwide. The novel serves as a potent cautionary tale, urging societies to recognize the importance of preserving diverse cultural identities in a rapidly globalizing world. It prompts us to reflect on the enduring spirit of indigenous communities, emphasizing the need for mutual respect, cultural preservation, and the acknowledgment of the richness found in diverse cultural heritages.

In conclusion, *Things Fall Apart* remains a literary masterpiece that continues to resonate with readers and scholars alike. Its portrayal of the erosion of indigenous identity serves as a poignant reminder of the significance of cultural preservation and the need for fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Through the lens of Achebe's novel, we are compelled to examine our roles in safeguarding cultural heritage and nurturing a world that values and celebrates the diverse tapestry of human identities. As we draw lessons from the poignant narrative of *Things Fall Apart*, we are reminded of the enduring strength and resilience of indigenous cultures in the face of adversity.

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