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The Causes and Failure of Okonkwo in 'Things Fall Apart' from a Postcolonial Perspective



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Abstract: *This research study explicitly scrutinizes the tragic collapse of Okonkwo, a czar of Igbo society in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart through a postcolonial perspective, scrutinizing the devastating ramifications unleashed by colonialism on both individual identity and societal structures. The analysis focuses on Okonkwo's internal struggles, cultural conflict, and resistance to change, especially in relation to the imposition of colonial values viz. Christianity and British governance. The findings categorically affirm that Okonkwo's failure to reconcile his deep-seated Igbo values with the evolving colonial world leads to his identity crisis, alienation, and eventual demise. His rejection of hybridity and resistance to adapting to the new colonial realities are central to his tragic fate. The study confirms two main hypotheses: Okonkwo's inability to find a middle ground between traditional Igbo culture and colonialism precipitates his downfall, and the clash between these forces directly causes his collapse and death. The theoretical framework, informed by postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, accentuate the psychological and cultural ramifications of colonialism, explaining Okonkwo's inner emotional turmoil and resistance. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and societal effects of colonialism and highlights the complex dynamics of identity formation in postcolonial contexts.*

Keywords: Okonkwo, *Things Fall Apart*, colonialism, postcolonial theory, identity crisis, hybridity, psychological struggle, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, ambivalence, societal transformation, postcolonial identity.

Introduction

Postcolonial literature emerged as a field of study in the aftermath of the mid-twentieth century decolonization movements in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. It developed to address the consequences of imperialism and colonialism, as well as the complex power dynamics involving race, culture and identity. The crux of this body of work is its genealogy: it is an examination of the remnants of colonialism, whether that colonialism be defined in relation to a certain culture, social structure, or political formation, and whether the colonial entity has been dissolved or not. Identity, the

rewriting of history, and the re-envisioning of cultures systematically disregarded and silenced by Western imperialism are at the heart of postcolonial literature (Emmanuel, 2010). Postcolonial writers defy the Eurocentric narratives that were enforced during the colonial period and provide their own counter-narratives that are conditioning the values, traditions, and lived experiences of original peoples. These authors create their novels as forms of reclamation, reassessing their cultural identity and reinstating their histories that were warped, or erased completely, by colonial powers (Mamund, 2011).

In this context, Chinua Achebe is one of the most significant in post-colonial literature. His 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and is regarded as not only the bedrock of African literature, written in English, but a vital part of the shaping of postcolonial discourse in literary studies. It is a deep challenge to Eurocentric versions of history, especially ones that frame African societies as savage or primitive. Achebe's work presents a multifaceted and sophisticated depiction of Igbo society, illuminating its customs, values, political structures, and religious practices. In doing so, he pushes back against the reductive, dehumanizing representations of Africa proliferated by Western literature at the time (Mumu, 2022).

Things Fall Apart Achebe has delivered more than a story about colonization and the negative consequences it has on indigenous cultures. This novel is a conscious effort to reclaim and redefine African identity, to tell the story of a people whose voices were stifled by the colonial powers (Sofiane, 2025). Achebe is not presenting an idealized utopia in his description of the Igbo community prior to British colonialists arriving, but an intricate and dynamic society with its own flaws and contradictions. Achebe does through this realistic portrayal claim that African cultures have their own intrinsic value and should not be evaluated through the lens of colonial Western civilization (Fagrutheen, 2014). His reflections of Igbo society have become more than fictionalism; they are economic and cultural statements. Achebe exposes the contradictions found within the colonial encounter, revealing the often-destructive consequences of Western imperialism, not only on the physical landscape but also on the spirit and social fabric of African communities (OKOLIE, 2019).

Postcolonial literary works are those that directly or indirectly examine the effects of colonization and give much-needed attention to the impacts of colonialism on both personal and collective identities. Postcolonial literature, which is a literary genre that emerged in the mid-20th century, provides a vital lens to interrogate the cultural, political and psychological aftermath of imperialism across countries and

cultures, and the complicated process of decolonization. As colonized nations became independent, literature emerged as a crucial instrument with which to give voice to the silences imposed by colonial domination and the striving for self-definition and the restoration of culture. This genre of writing examines how colonial powers sought to impose their values, systems, and ideologies on the colonized, as well as how postcolonial societies responded to the disparate forces of tradition, modernity, and cultural preservation (Lokare, 2025).

A significant theme in postcolonial literature is the impact of colonization on individual and societal identities. Colonized societies need to contend with their cultural authenticity and self-image due to the colonizer's imposition on their language, religion, and customs (Alam, Hussain, & Ahsan, 2021). These dynamics frequently generate fragmentation, alienation, and identity crises. The pressure of colonialism becomes a constant concern for those in colonized societies, who must either assimilate with or resist the systems of power forced on them. In postcolonial literature, this tension between cultural preservation and a drive for change is a major theme (Jahidul, 2022).

Discussion and Analysis:

In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe the protagonist Okonkwo embodies the catastrophic possibilities evoked by these polarizations. It is highly respected as a landmark in post-colonial studies and similar areas, detailing the crashing together of old-school African communities with the expanding force of European occupying powers. Achebe examines the psychological, social, and cultural consequences of colonialism on the Igbo society, which is increasingly disrupted by British missionaries, colonial officials, and Christianity. Through the character of Okonkwo, Achebe depicts the destructive effects of colonization on native societies and on those who cannot change with the times.

Post-colonial Thematic Insights on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: The Scholarly Works of (Abdu- Alhakam, Elshingeety, & Sherif, 2020). Said's critique of Orientalism provides a lens by which to view the way the West created and

reinforced stereotypes of the East as both exotic and inferior (the “Other”). For Said, these representations served as a justification for colonial domination, portraying the colonized as requiring the benevolence and control of the West. In *Things Fall Apart*, the British arrival is a foreign rule imposed, but it’s an attack on the cultural integrity of the Igbo community as well. Igbo practices and beliefs were perceived as primitive and, as such, offered resistance to wider Western forms of governance, religion and education.

Another potential lens to analyze *Things Fall Apart* is Bhabha’s concept of hybridity as explored in *The Location of Culture* (Woodard, 2023). Hybridity is the cultural syncretism that arises when the colonized people fulfill, oppose, and modify the features of the language of the colonizing nation. The concept emphasizes how colonized cultures are altered through colonial encounters, producing a hybrid identity that is both indigenous and colonial. Bhabha’s theory thus elucidates the predicament that characters such as Okonkwo experience, refusing to succumb to the colonial order and refusing to align themselves with hybrid identities. Okonkwo’s tragic fate mirrors the broader crisis of identity and cultural destruction that underpins the postcolonial experience.

The duality of resistance and submission creates tension between colonialism and indigenous tradition in *Things Fall Apart*, which is foundational for the analysis of resistance in postcolonial texts. Colonial powers will frequently suppress their opposition, the colonized will often resist the political control and cultural erasure of powers. Evidence of the Igbo community’s defiance can be seen in their early resistance to colonial rule and refusal to convert to the new belief system imposed by the British. This resistance is ultimately defeated, and the traditional Igbo way of life is permanently altered. The tragic outcome of Okonkwo’s intransigence demonstrates the nature of the consequences that can arise from an implicit cultural struggle to maintain traditions against external forces.

Another theme in post-colonial literature is cultural revival and renewal. While colonialism

presents a real threat to indigenous cultures, postcolonial societies adapt, resist, and transmogrify the colonial project they inherit (Sultana, 2023). In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s tragedy underlines the complexity of this process. Chinua Achebe’s “*Things Fall Apart*” depicts the destruction wrought by colonialism on the Igbo village after the colonialists arrive: not only are cultural practices and beliefs undermined, but resources are pillaged while everything familiar slowly crumbles. Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son who initially spurns his father’s values, takes to Christianity and the new order. His conversion is a new generational thinking: a double-edged ambivalence, hybridizing the space of postcolonial societies struggling in the realities of the postcolonial condition.

Things Fall Apart is emblematic of the postcolonial critique of colonialism as a process that unravels both the political structures and the cultural identity of colonized societies (Spencer & Valassopoulos, 2020). By detailing both Okonkwo’s struggles and the challenges faced by the clan, Achebe’s book presents the devastating emotional and psychological costs of colonialism as it shows how colonialism complicates questions of identity, culture, and tradition.

Education is another area that simply cannot be compared to anything else in any other region [7] Searching for An Alternative: Asking the Right Questions, Section 'Education: Old and New > (Google Books are just a way of searching it Exploring Antarctic ice melts for carbon capture potential, Alianza Research Summary Extract.' In large part, terrorists must be global to become one and to do so with impunity; the Norway attacker must be international because that is the process of becoming a terrorist and terrorists do not care about that, as are terrorists seeking to destabilize the ideological other because they cannot do it without broadcast coverage and therefore they cannot exist without being global and the last, and most important, step For globally funded and all the better the only way, therefore to understand the postcolonial position is to put the word 'the' in front of it and so if you put the word

the before the word 'postcolonial' that just means that those people belong to a postcolonial world'. - Such works as *Things Fall Apart* reveal much about the personal and communal impacts of colonialism on colonized peoples, with implications for their social and psychological welfare. Through the exploration of these dynamics, postcolonial literature continues to offer important critical tools for understanding and critiquing the contemporary legacies of colonialism in the modern world.

iquated Igbo values in the presence of colonial efforts. These potential themes will then be reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately capture the essence of the data. This process will include collating similar themes, removing duplicative, irrelevant codes, and defining the scope and meaning of each theme (Gang, 2023). It is through this iterative process that themes become well-defined and insightful, directly responding to the research questions and providing clarity on the multiple dimensions of Okonkwo's identity crisis, as well as the larger colonial experience as understood through textual evidence.

The identified themes will be discussed within the larger theoretical framework of postcolonial studies. Step 4: This relates the findings from the thematic analysis to the main postcolonial concepts as developed in the literature review, namely hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and psychological resistance (Capan, 2023) Each thematic finding will then be integrated with elements from postcolonial theory, culminating in a comprehensive analysis of Okonkwo's story against the backdrop of how colonialism shapes identity and culture. Also, the theme of "Resistance to Change" will be explained and connected to the notion of ambivalence from Homi Bhabha that states that the colonized people are drawn and repelled by the colonizer (Eizadirad, 2025). Okonkwo's response to colonial rule—his inflexible repudiation of any sort of change—will be read as an expression of this ambivalence, providing insight into how a colonized subject negotiates and resists cultural change within. Likewise, Frantz Fanon's theories of psychological trauma wrought by colonialism will be drawn on as we read

Okonkwo's emotional and psychological disintegration, as heuristics to help us understand the mental and emotional toll attached to failing to adapt. I have, however, reflected on the data in the context of the existing literature, maps and interpretations during this phase of the study before being able to synthesize all the qualitative data and mapping them to Okonkwo's behavior solutions using a theoretical lens to better understand the complex undercurrents driving Okonkwo's character and colonial forces at play.

In this section will be a pass-through on what the finding reveals in an analysis of *Things Fall Apart* through post-colonial lens. These findings reflect the nuances of how colonialism affects not just the individual level, but also reinforces or undermines social orders, as shown by their internal struggles and ultimate demise (Okonkwo). The results lend further support to the study's hypotheses: Okonkwo can neither yet live according to modern colonialist values, nor simply avoid them; his demise presents a trajectory illustrating the cultural collision between indigenous Igbo and colonial forces. The postcolonial theoretical ideas of hybridity, ambivalence, and cultural conflict are crucial verbs to interpret Okonkwo's resistance of change and refusal of adaptation. These results highlight the psychological and cultural consequences of colonialism, alongside the political and social ones, for societies in the modern world. This analysis opens up a number of avenues for further research, both in how these themes are explored in other postcolonial literature, and in the long term impact of colonialism on postcolonial societies today.

Thus far, the analysis points to Okonkwo's failure in *Things Fall Apart* as not only (or even chiefly) an individual failure, but as a reflection of the tension between traditional Igbo values and colonial impositions. Endings: "The Lamentation of Simon Okwongwara" ends with Okonkwo's exile. This societal and personal conflict between colonialism and Igbo culture is one which Okonkwo is ultimately incapable of reconciling. This war is not only about outsiders penetrating a previously sacred land (shock horror!) but it is also about the internalized dread

and trauma that Okonkwo faces, himself terrified of being seen as weak.

The closest relation to these findings would be that the postcolonial identity crisis represented through the character of Okonkwo is a reflection of these bitter truths and broader struggles of colonized individuals and communities. Okonkwo's tragedy is that he cannot adapt, resist or hybridize his sense of who he is in the world as colonialism reconfigures the world as he knows it. This emphasizes the idea that colonialism has its roots in a people, and continues to affect them generations later, with a twisted sense of identity, caught between two worlds, both painfully distant, with pure and strong ties. These outcomes highlight the socio-psychocultural ramifications of colonialism that continue to manifest in many postcolonial societies today.

This struggle is focused on the internalization of colonial ideologies. Okonkwo's failure to grasp the colonial encounter as complex and contained possibilities for its transcendence, is reflected in his ultimate rejection of the new colonial world, and his refusal to come to terms with the possibility of a hybrid identity, which would include both the Igbo tradition and the colonial world. His actions, then, reveal a failure of not just adaptation but also of understanding the hybridity that colonialism breeds. While postcolonial theory, particularly the writing of Homi Bhabha (1994), provides an interpretive lens for understanding how hybrid identities are constituted, Okonkwo's outright rejection of hybridity leads to his ultimate fall from grace, both as an individual and as a member of a society. The results also highlight why colonialism should be viewed as an amorphous force with varying impacts based on individual circumstances, sex and class. Okonkwo's unyielding sense of self ultimately leads him to his doom, but other characters in *Things Fall Apart* — like Nwoye — demonstrate the ability to adjust and adapt. Nwoye's conversion to Christianity is emblematic of the possibility for people to experience an alternative form of identity within a colonial framework, in stark opposition to Okonkwo's tragic insistence on holding to the past.

The theoretical framework, which is largely rooted in postcolonial theory and the notions of hybridity and resistance, offers a lens with which Okonkwo's tragic downfall can be interpreted. Key concepts upon which one can explore Okonkwo's struggle with colonialism are hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence, alluded to espoused by Homi Bhabha (1994). His refusal to accept or even acknowledge hybrid identities — either by compromise or entry adaption of resistance — makes him unable to navigate the complex postcolonial terrain. Okonkwo's failure to adapt demonstrates the destabilizing impact of colonialism, which undermines established identities and creates reactionary transitions in the lives of people like Okonkwo that never end well. In addition, Frantz Fanon's (1961) theories on the psychological impact of colonialism shed valuable light on Okonkwo's internal conflict. His internal struggle to maintain cultural preservation when lured into the world by means of colonial force demonstrates the psychological cost of colonial subjugation. It's this alienation, this sense of a fractured identity, that Fanon explores in works like his seminal "Black Skin, White Masks," and so these concepts help me frame how to think about the deteriorating mental state into which Okonkwo is descending as the narrative progresses. And so, in its furtherance, Bhabha's postcolonial critique would pair well with Fanon's psychological analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the forces that ultimately drive Okonkwo's tragic end. These findings have important implications for postcolonial studies. Through its rich and referenceful structure, postcolonial literature like *Things Fall Apart* captures the all-consuming nature of colonialism, both in terms of individual and group identity. Achebe explores the tragic effects of colonialism on traditional cultures and the psychological repercussions of the cultural dislocations it produces through Okonkwo's character. The study's findings highlight the need to think about colonialism not just as some external, political infestation but as a species of profound psychological and cultural disruption that runs through life's every aspect.

This body of work also contributes

methodologically to an emergent set of studies that identify links between personal identity crises and sociopolitical change. In his characterization of Okonkwo, Achebe is both symbolic of the failure to evolve with the ideologies of the colonizers and of the intricacies of cultural contact and the strength of trauma by which the psyche transgresses the embodiment in order to grasp these changes. This reading of Okonkwo's tragedy is also useful because it provides a more nuanced view of the colonial experience that incorporates an internalization of the imposed foreign cultures that characters grapple with.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides an in-depth analysis of Okonkwo's character through the lens of postcolonial theory, several avenues for future research could build on these findings:

Future research could extend this analysis by comparing Okonkwo's character and his struggles with those of protagonists in other postcolonial novels. Comparing characters like Okonkwo with figures from novels such as Ngũgĩ we Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* or Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso*

Sea could provide insights into the different ways in which individuals within colonized societies respond to cultural disruption and identity loss.

Future studies could explore the gendered dimensions of colonialism and identity formation, particularly how women in postcolonial texts like *Things Fall Apart* respond to colonial influences. While Okonkwo's male-centered perspective provides valuable insights into resistance and identity, a closer examination of female characters could reveal alternative responses to colonial pressures and cultural change. Another potential area of research is the exploration of postcolonial identity in contemporary Nigerian literature. Analyzing how modern Nigerian writers reflect on the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for cultural identity could provide valuable insights into how colonial influences continue to shape contemporary Nigerian society and literature.

Future research could use psychological theories, such as those developed by Fanon and others, to examine the mental health impacts of colonialism on characters. This would allow for a deeper exploration of the emotional and psychological toll of colonialism, providing a richer understanding of how colonialism shapes both personal and collective identities.

Language plays a key role in postcolonial identity construction. Future research could explore how language in *Things Fall Apart* and other postcolonial texts functions as both a tool of resistance and a symbol of colonial imposition. Examining the role of language in shaping identity and belonging could provide additional insights into the colonial experience.

Conclusion

This research study categorically depicts the deep-seated repercussions unleashed by colonialism, affecting the very structure of Igbo society's traditional roots and heritage as having been exemplified by the character of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Through the employment of postcolonial theory, this research has posited that Okonkwo's tragic demise is a consequence of his inability to reconcile and integrate his cultural identity with the impending pressures and changes brought about by colonialism. His resistance to colonial influence and his rejection of hybridity ultimately led to his alienation and death, mirroring the broader struggles of colonized societies in their efforts to p

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