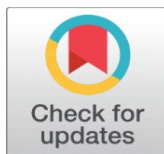


A STUDY ON THE 'THINGS' IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the reason of the fall of the Umuofia tribe and the main character, Okonkwo. There are certain events, both internally and externally, caused things to fall apart. This study divides 'things' into two main subtitles: Okonkwo dreams that fall apart and the tribal System that falls apart. These subtitles include main influences of the changes that occur in the book. The first chapter includes the events such as Ikemefuna's death, Nwoye's conversion, Okonkwo's desire to rule the tribe etc. The second chapter includes the reasons for Okonkwo's exile, the arrival of christianity, the death of python, tribe's not acting as one.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the name of the book suggests it is the story of disintegration of both tribe and individual man, Okonkwo. When reading one can easily understand the emphasis made on Igbo culture in the first half of the book. There are no statements about West. Achebe clearly wants us to feel as if we are one of the members of tribe. Therefore, we can easily realize the change that western people make in the next part of the text. When disintegration is examined, it is impossible to move beyond without mentioning the concept of modernization. David Harvey describes the process of modernization as a condition leading to an "overwhelming sense of fragmentation, ephemerality, and chaotic change." In the Achebe's novel we see this fragmentation through the religious motives; people haven't only one god.

The character Okonkwo in the book is obsessed with the idea of being a 'real man'. He is always trying to prove his masculine character which is actually the main reason for his own fall. He thinks he has proven his masculinity by beating his wives and son. From the very beginning of the book, Achebe allows the reader to read the mind of Okonkwo. He never shows any sign of fear or weakness. Although Okonkwo is described as fearless, powerful wrestler and meaning so much to village as it started following lines, the reader sees this character as a total loser by the end of the book.

He promises to himself that he will be the opposite of his father whom "people laughed at because he was a loafer and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back"(Achebe5) In the novel, Okonkwo does many things in order to see in the respect of people, proving that he is a real man, and achieving his dream of being the leader of the tribe. He never shows any sign of weakness. However, the things he did actually reared his downfall. In the novel, Okonkwo is always beating his wives and son, Nwoye. It is because he fears as a weak person. He thinks that his son Nwoye looks like his father and he cannot bear this feeling. This is the main reason why Okonkwo never hesitates to punish or beat Nwoye every time. Even one day when Nwoye was cutting the yams, Okonkwo came and gave a treatment to Nwoye because of the size of yams. According to Okonkwo, Nwoye was cutting with a wrong size and said: "If you slit another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw." (Achebe32) This masculine character of Okonkwo was the main reason for the conversion of Nwoye. His dreams of Nwoye have fallen apart because of himself. His desire to hide his emotions for his son actually drove a great distance between father and son. Therefore, during Okonkwo's exile years, Nwoye converted to Christianity. Additionally, Nwoye abandoned most of the traditions and customs of his own tribe.

The case of Ikemefuna is another example of Okonkwo's fear of weakness. Ikemefuna is a boy from the tribe of Mbaino. His father has killed a girl from Umuofia and he is given to Okonkwo for three years. Ikemefuna got used to the family of Okonkwo and saw them as if they were his real family. However, everybody in the family revealed the same emotions of Ikemefuna except for Okonkwo. It is not surprising that Okonkwo has done this once again for fear of being thought of as a weak person. He has only one emotion, anger. One day Okonkwo learned that the tribe decided to kill Ikemefuna. Okonkwo was strictly warned not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna because Ikemefuna was calling his "father". He did not do what was said to him and killed Ikemefuna with his machete. Once again being afraid of weakness, he ended the life of Ikemefuna. The inner voice of Okonkwo clearly shows his affection for Ikemefuna, loving him more than his own son, Nwoye. However, his emotions did not stop him. At this point readers see how his life has been dominated by fears.

Okonkwo breaks many rules throughout the book. He beats his wife in the week of Peace. He beats his son. He takes the worst punishment this time and kills a boy from his own tribe. As a result, he is exiled for seven years. After the death of Ikemefuna, Ezeudu dies and during his funeral Okonkwo commits another unforgivable fault, accidentally killing Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son. This costs Okonkwo dearly. His dream of being the leader of the tribe is missed because everything was deeply changed after his exile. He was a stranger in his homeland.

Okonkwo's greatest fears were failure, seen to be just like his father. When he committed suicide at the end of the book, he did the only thing he feared. He became a total loser just like his father. No matter what he did, he could not escape his fate. Therefore, we see the irony and tragedy of Okonkwo. All he wanted to do was to be the leader of the tribe and live happily after. However, his masculine character and the arrival of white people did not let that happen.

It can be said that Okonkwo's exile was a failure for both himself and his tribe. When Okonkwo returned from exile, his tribe would not be in that situation. His homeland was now a different place anymore. Whites made many changes without native support. The most important change whites wanted to change on the native people was with 'religion'. *Things Fall Apart* clearly reveals that the gods of natives were made of stones and wood. They had more than one god, each representing different aspects. Their main god was called Chukwu and the natives thought that he created the sky and the earth. Chi was their personal god, if someone says 'yes', chi is believed to say the same. They were very obedient to their gods. If their gods told them not to fight at war situation, they would not fight. If someone breaks the rules, they are strictly punished. For example, one day Okonkwo beats his wife during the week of Peace and he was punished. There was no tolerance for those who disobeyed the laws.

Samatar argues that "when things fall apart and Umuofia's independence is lost, it is due to cracks in its own structure, unhappy and outcast people whose desire for a different way of life allows Christianity, and with it the colonial project as a whole, to take root." (65) Therefore, it can be concluded that the Umuofia tribe actually did not really act as one or speak as one. If we consider the last part of the book in which Okonkwo killed the messenger with his machete, some people asked "why did he do it?"

There were ones who already had doubts about their religion. Therefore, it is easy to convert them to Christianity. At this point Achebe's sentence from the book clearly shows the situation, "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (176) Okonkwo's son, Nwoye was one of those who converted to Christianity. That was the real disaster for Okonkwo. The arrival of whites did not bring them happiness, civilization or modernity as the whites suggested. The religion of natives that endured for centuries was changed by whites. Additionally, it was said that this conversion was the love of God. However, if the readers read between the lines of Ache's *Things Fall Apart*, they can

surely understand that it is not love for the God but for love of money and power. The changes in religion was not enough for the whites. They also altered the economy of the Umuofia tribe. The economy of the people of Umuofia was based on agriculture. If one has lots of barns, they were one of the richest amongst the tribe. People worked really hard to plant yams, working as family, father, wife, son and daughter. Farming was really important for them. They even celebrate a festival every year giving thanks to yams. Again the natives conflicted with whites, as in the case of religion, because whites values were very different than white's.

Whites did what was appropriate for their interests. They made agriculture worthless because money was important for them. Whites introduced their own trade and this destroyed the economic value of Umuofia tribe. Money can buy everything. situation is revealed in the book. Everything that natives worked really hard could be brought with money. The rich people are poor and the poor are rich. Whites in a way turned the natives upside down. Before the whites came, there was hierarchy. This hierarchy showed showed similar features to patriarchal society. In this society, father was the head of the family. Readers clearly see this alteration in the relationship of Nwoye and Okonkwo. After Nwoye converted to Christianity, he did not want to visit his father. Achebe states ,

“he told Mr. Kiaga that he had decided to teach young Christians to read and write”(102) As it is stated, the people of Umuofia tribe strictly obey the laws . White people destroyed the beliefs of tribe and did the kind of things which were prohibited in the tribe. White people came and built a church in the Evil forest. According to the natives, the ones who went there were expected to die within four days. However the natives saw that nothing happened. As a result, natives went through a chaos thinking that white people had incredible power.

Things Fall Apart not only reveals the history of African culture but also provides a general overview of Igbo society. The book touches readers on the historical and literary value. The customs, traditions and life style of Igbo society is nicely delineated. The importance of the fiction must be “discovered and defined from within the maelstrom of change.”(Harvey 11)

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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