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THE THEME OF PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN *THINGS FALL APART* BY CHINUA ACHEBE

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Abstract

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is a complex heterogeneous, multi-layered, hybrid, and significant novel. It is not merely about other written texts, or even about textuality but it is also yet unwritten, perhaps still-born texts. It is written as a riposte to the dominant Western discursive practices. And it represented, reproduced, and reversed the dominant Western history. Achebe stated that he wrote *Things Fall Apart* "in order to reassert African identity and as part of the growth of Nigerian nationalism" (O'Reilly 2001: p. 61). Through the writing of this novel, he removed the various slanderous prejudices about Nigerian and African culture. *Things Fall Apart* is split into three parts describing the history of Igbo society, the influence of Christian Missionaries, and the tragic downfall of Okonkwo's life. Okonkwo who was rich and respectable at the beginning of the novel meets a tragic doom at the end of the book. Okonkwo's greatest weakness is his pride and his anger which brings suffering to him and his tribe. Because when he suffers, his whole tribe also suffers. So, the present study aims to analyze the theme of pride and prejudice in *Things Fall Apart*. And also investigates the various factors behind the writing of the novel and the collective downfall of Umuofia along with the protagonist Okonkwo.

Key Words: Pride, downfall, Okonkwo, Nigeria, prejudice, colonialism.

Introduction

The father of modern African literature, Chinua Achebe or Christened Albert Chinualomugu Achebe by his Igbo parents, was born on November 16, 1930, in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria. And for his primary education, he attended a primary school in Ogidi run by The Church Missionary Society before he was chosen to attend government college at Umuohia, where he studied from 1944 to 1947. In 1948, he entered University College in Ibadan for his B.A and left for London University in 1953. He had studied Literature, History, and Theology at the

university. After his return from England in 1957 Achebe joined NBC (Nigeria Broadcasting Company) as a talk producer, later here, he was promoted to director of external broadcasting in 1961.

In 1966, due to some communal violence, Achebe was forced to leave Lagos and take his family back to Eastern Nigeria. When Eastern Nigeria seceded from the federation and declared itself as Biafra, a separate republic, Achebe became an official spokesman for the Biafran cause and was sent on several political missions to Europe and North America. He returned to Nigeria in 1977.

Achebe began writings early, probably in 1950, and his first novel is his magnum opus *Things Fall Apart* (1958) followed by *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964), completing the so-called African Trilogy. Later he wrote, *A Man of the People* published in 1966, and *Anthills of Savannah* in 1987. In the same year, he received Nigeria's highest award for intellectual achievement the Nigerian National Merit Award.

Things Fall Apart is a novel weaving the tales of Nigerians in the pre-colonial eastern part of Nigeria and the arrival of Christian Missionaries to educate the people about religion. Chinua Achebe's motivation in writing *Things Fall Apart* is chiefly, to crush the prejudices and racist portrayal of Africans in world literature. In his essay "*The African Writer and the English Language*" (1964), Achebe states that African literature should be defined as having "*the complexities of the African scene*" in material time, otherwise it is "*doomed to failure*" (p. 75). He was firstly responding to the negative images or representations of Africa portrayed in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1839), and *Aissa Saved* (1933), H. Rider Haggard's 1887 novel *She (A History of Adventure)*, and many others show Africa as a nation of uncivilized, dark or savage people. The local scenery and Indigenous characters were represented in these stories as the other, alterity and the different, the unfamiliar, unknown, and the strange. *Things Fall Apart* was a watershed moment in Chinua Achebe's life. It has since propelled him from obscurity to become one of the most widely read African writers of the contemporary era and the African (and even English) canon. Readers and intellectuals from all over the world admire Achebe's use of literary methods, with some even proclaiming *Things Fall Apart* to be the first moment in African literary history. Achebe differs from African purists in that he considers himself an African citizen despite writing a novel in the dominant language of English. He did it because he repudiates, the Western cliches, stereotypes, and prejudices of Africa and Africans. Thus, the narrative breathes in the odor of African living, landscapes, or environments full of indigenous and culturally specific. About African literature, Ojaide writes that

"African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; ... their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty... they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity" (Ojaide 2013: p.150).

Discussion

The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, portrayed as an arrogant and prideful man, who always leads by his ego and his desire to be 'manly'. Unlike his father Unoka, who was a lazy and irresponsible drunkard, depicted as a failed man, as an 'Agbala', Okonkwo wants to prove himself, emotionally and physically strong, among the villagers. His personality is quite different from others, he has a tall, huge body with bushy eyebrows and a wide nose which gives him a very severe look. He is a courageous warrior and well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. And this fame he earned, when he was eighteen years old, he defeated the great wrestler Amalinze 'The Cat' and became the leader of the village.

Okonkwo's fame and status grow day by day and he becomes one of the greatest men in the land. He is asked to take care of a young boy named Ikemefuna who is given a peace offering by the neighboring village to avoid disputes with Umofia. Staying with Okonkwo's family Ikemefuna becomes very close to them, and soon starts to call Okonkwo 'father'. Ezeudu, the respected man of the village informs Okonkwo that The Oracle pronounced that the boy must be killed and warns him not to take part in his murder as he calls him 'father'. But to avoid seeming fragile to the villagers, Okonkwo disregards the warning and cuts the boy down. After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo feels guilty and regretful. The second tragical incident happens in his life when he accidentally shoots Ezeudu's son during a funeral ceremony. And for atonement, he and his family were exiled for seven years to his motherland, the nearby village of Mabanta. During his exile, the Christian Missionaries came to Umofia and convert their religion into Christianity. Many villagers even his son Nwoye have adopted Christianity. As a result, the clansmen hold a meeting and expect his fellow clans to join him in the uprising. Okonkwo murders one of Christian's leaders with his machete. When

the villagers allow the other messengers to escape, Okonkwo realizes that his clan is not willing to go to war. The District Commissioner Gregory then comes to Okonkwo's compound, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself. And according to Igbo customs suicide is a grave sin. So, no clansman touches his body, and the fame, status, and reputation of Okonkwo destroy due to his pride.

Okonkwo dictated most of his life decisions with his pride which leads his life to a disaster. His exile in Mbanta also deals a serious blow to his pride. When he returns to Umuofia he wants to restore his pride by defending his home against European influence. Okonkwo explains his position with an analogy: "If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head" (p. 263). Okonkwo eventually resorts to violence to defend his pride, and this violence leads to his tragic downfall. He had the desire to be completely unlike his father Unoka which caused him to provide for his family and have the bravery to be considered successful. Unoka, his father advises him not to be prideful. He tells him that if he survives a general failure such as a harvest, it means that such failures will not prick the ego of a person because when a man fails alone, it becomes painful and bitter for him to survive. "A proud heart can survive general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone" (p.162)

Conclusion

In conclusion, Okonkwo was responsible for his own collapse because the fact that he commits suicide. His character is dominated by his fear of weakness and failure. His concerns with his father's failure allowed him to believe and understand that he had the potential to succeed more beyond in life. Moreover, Okonkwo's development of his pride became the necessary reason for his hard-worked to avoid equivalence of his father but truthfully had become worse than his father. Okonkwo's flaw, his pride, his unreasonable anger, and his fear to be a failure caused his tragic end but the Igbo's public demise results from the destruction of one culture by another and by their turning away from their tribal God.

Igbo society would be dead if it didn't have its culture, which is why Okonkwo's death is so significant. The Igbo, like Okonkwo, committed suicide by not questioning or being suspicious of the white missionary's motives in their nation. Igbos lost much of the values that united them as a people; social cohesion between individuals and society, as well as traditional values and ways of life, were lost. The Igbo's conflicted state of mind, not knowing whether to reject or welcome these developments, eventually led to their demise, owing to their devotion to the language. The arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia was intended to take over the ruling of the region, and because the Igbo are a compassionate people who were also unaware of the white men's intentions, they welcomed them into their land and gave them a piece of land, not realizing that these men would be the cause of their culture's demises.

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