

Analysis of things fall
apart by chinua
achebe essay sample



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“ I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan.”

Things Fall Apart is an African novel written in 1958. The text above was expressed by an old native of Mbanta, the motherland of Okonkwo.

When Okonkwo was exiled for seven years from Umuofia due to a “ female” crime, his homeland was greatly influenced by the newcomers, the Whites. These Westerners introduced Christianity and a new type of government to the Africans. However, this Western culture caused chaos to the villagers of Umuofia. Some of them accepted the new culture and some were against it. So the text above was saying that the youth had changed and became easily influenced by new attractive things like Christianity and the White’s government laws. The speaker believed that this was one factor why “ things” fell apart in Umuofia.

The novel Things Fall Apart is a postcolonial text. Aside from being written after Africa achieved its independence from the Whites, the text addresses the matters of postcolonial identity which involves the exploitation of the Africans by the Whites using religion and new laws (Fischer-Tiné, 2010). The Whites had a very wise tactic of sending missionaries first to introduce Christianity instead of using violence that leads to forced capturing of the

land. They convinced people to believe their faith so that when they establish laws, the Africans would respond according to the faith instructed on them which taught the value of obedience and loyalty “ their” God and “ His men’s” laws.

The novel shows how a more knowledgeable race can take advantage of another. Because the Whites knew more about colonization, and government, they successfully brainwashed a number of Africans to assist them in claiming power over Umuofia. While the Whites were implementing their colonizing tactics, Okonkwo who represented the villagers who believed that the Whites were the enemy, the evil who respected the tribe’s religion (paganism) and laws, expressed his intentions first by convincing his fellowmen to drive the Westerners away and second by killing a White man when he failed to do the former.

The text may be considered postmodern because Achebe leads the readers to believe that there is no hope for the Africans after Okonkwo killed himself. Paranoia exists in the third part of the novel which indicates that a search for order (Lewis, 2001) to the chaos between the Whites and Africans, Christianity and Paganism, White laws and African laws, is fruitless or absurd. The disappointing ending- the death of Okonkwo showed the hopeless situation of the people in Umuofia. It was not only because of the Whites that they fell apart but also for the reason that they themselves- their beliefs, laws fell apart because of the fragility of the identity of a number of them. This fragility of identity is referred to the young generation who were addressed by the quotations above.

Another indication to prove the text's postmodernism aspect is the presence of irony (Lewis, 2001) in the fate of Okonkwo. He was considered one of the prominent men in Umuofia. He received a title at a young age and he was a respected warrior and farmer. While he carried these positive impressions of others, he lived with a stone heart. He never showed his real feelings toward his family. This was apparent when he was forced to kill Ikemefuna, his adopted son whom he was very fond of, because of the tribal law. This strong adherence to patriarchal beliefs also led Okonkwo to lose his title and admired reputation. His strength which was founded by the belief on manly strength alone toward success was also the cause of his fall.

References:

Fischer-Tiné, Harald (2010). Postcolonial Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/europe-and-the-world/postcolonial-studies/harald-fischer-tine-postcolonial-studies> on 12 September 2012. Lewis, Barry. (2001). "Postmodernism and Literature". The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism. Ed. Stuart Sim. London and New York: Routledge.