

Misconception of the generation gap



Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is set in Nigeria; the novel examines the clash between traditional African culture, and western ideals by the Igbo tribe, through the protagonist, Okonkwo. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is a story about a teenage girl, Kambili, which focuses on family relationships and cultural ethics. Moroccan author Laila Lalami's novel, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, examines the life of four Moroccans who are fleeing Morocco to Spain in search of greener pastures. *Things Fall Apart*, *Purple Hibiscus*, and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, portray that defiance within children to their parents' beliefs is attributed by generation gap in families, between parent and child, and it is influenced by imperialism, and the society, as the children attain their socio-cultural identity and it causes scramble between the parent and child relationship.

Imperialists “ submerged and dismantled indigenous institutions and, in its place, a foreign rule was established. Traditional institutions before then were regarded as not only political authorities but also custodians of cultures” (Arowolo 7). The clash between the Western, and African ideals of African citizens created by Western Colonialism in Africa resulted to a generational gap within families. In *Things Fall Apart*, Western imperialism affects the family of Okonkwo, especially his relationship with his eldest son, Nwoye. Nwoye is raised in the village of Umuofia through the Igbo culture.

The igbo culture consists of its own religion that is intricate and has a number of gods. When colonialist came to colonize the Igbo tribe, they brought with them a new culture. “ We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man

ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice as it is done in my own country under a great queen...that must not happen in the domination of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world” (Achebe 137). The new culture is brought in place of already existing Igbo culture. The colonialist culture consisted of Christianity because they arrived to the village as missionaries and they forced Christianity upon the villagers and they are able to intrigue most of the villagers into joining their culture by defying the Igbo cultural beliefs. At this time that colonialists are forcing villagers to take up Christianity, Nwoye is in the midst of attaining his own socio-cultural identity. Children are usually vulnerable at this stage of attaining their own socio-cultural identity as Amara Uzoigwe asserts that, “ in an attempt to realize themselves, youths are affected and influenced by the social environment and the social structure in which they live” (4). Nwoye is not fond of his father’s cultural beliefs because he differs with some of their beliefs such as throwing away twins, which came about during his childhood, when one day he heard a pair of twins crying in the evil forest and that disturbed him because he couldn’t understand the cultural belief. He abandons his family’s belief and joins the Western ideals because the church allows twins, and they answered a lot of questions about religion that he was grasping since childhood. On the other side, Okonkwo disapproves of the white man’s belief and retains the traditional cultural beliefs. The difference of beliefs between Okonkwo and Nwoye causes disunity between their relationship. Okonkwo is aggravated by Nwoye’s actions and he exiles Nwoye, which is ironic because he is also in exile from the village of Umuofia. One of his friends “ Obierika went to Mbanta to see” him, “ he found that

Okonkwo did not wish to speak about Nwoye, it was only from Nwoye's mother that he heard scraps of the story" (Achebe, 144). Despite, their connection by blood their relationship is weakened and both of them did not want to be associated with each other. After Nwoye becomes rebellious to his father's beliefs and he is exiled, he prepares to go to missionary school in Umuru. The introduction of a new culture by the colonists causes a generational gap between Okonkwo and Nwoye, which results in the two on different ends of the spectrum of beliefs.

Also in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, the effect of imperialism on the unity of the family is portrayed. Kambili's father, Eugene, is a catholic who defied his own father's beliefs because he believes in the traditional cultural beliefs. Imperialism affects Eugene and his father's relationship by causing a generational gap. Eugene is educated by the missionaries and he copies from the missionaries how to do things " the right way, the way the white people did, not what our people do now!" (Adichie, 68). The missionaries lure him into the western ideals and away from his father's beliefs. The opposing of ideals between Eugene and his father cause Eugene to become rebellious to his father and renounces him. He strongly defies his father that he later on denies his children a relationship with their grandfather because of the difference in beliefs.

Culture is " conceived of as the collectivity of human activities and general principles that tend to guide ideas of a group of people with shared traditions , which are passed on, instilled into generation and reinvigorated by members of the group" (Aworolo 4). Culture is an important aspect on the unity of a family which is influenced by the society and when intrigued on <https://assignbuster.com/misconception-of-the-generation-gap/>

the grounds of beliefs, religion, and customs, it brings disunity in a family. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* takes place during post-colonial Nigeria, and the reader is introduced to a fifteen year old Kambili whose family and country are falling apart.

The relationship between Eugene and Kambili's brother, Jaja, is deteriorating because of cultural gap. " Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (Adichie 3). Jaja decides to defy his father, who is a strict, religious man, on the aspects of religion. His father expects his son to follow as per his religious beliefs but they are combated by a cultural gap. The current society does not respect religion as it was during Eugene's teenage. Jaja is influenced by the new culture in the society and that causes him to defy against his father because the new culture was not parallel with his father's beliefs.

The influence of society on parents and child relationship is portrayed in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* through Noura's relationship with her parents. Noura and her father, Larbi, have an extraordinary parent and child relationship because they attain the same beliefs and they don't attain a cultural gap. Their relationship takes a turn for the worst when Noura becomes friends with Faten, and she is exposed to a different culture within her society. Faten is a religious woman, who covers her hair with a head scarf, and as the relationship grew with Noura she " becomes a regular visitor in Larbi's home" (Lalami, 25). As Noura spent a lot of time with Faten, she picks up Faten's religious culture. Noura's parents have a liberal culture which differs to Faten's culture and her father discourages her of Faten once

he notes Noura drifting away from his culture. After Noura spending a lot of time with Faten, she shocks her parents with her news of she has “decided to start wearing the hijab” (Lalami 32). The company of Faten who has different cultural beliefs as her made her decide on wearing the hijab because she was being exposed to that kind of culture and as Timyan argues, “the daily routine of a child takes place in a social setting peopled by members of the community. It is in recurrent interaction with these people that the child learns appropriate social behavior, that he discovers the need for and has the opportunity to practice certain behaviors” (7). Lardi does not approve of the hijab because he thinks of it as a “peasants” dress and as “the accoutrements of the new breed of Muslim Brothers” (Lalami, 34). Noura’s parents had taken up the western ideals along with Noura but the relationship changed whenever Faten is introduced to Noura’s life and she adopts the old school religious beliefs that her parents had abandoned. The clash between the two ideals resulted to Noura becoming a rebel to her father’s beliefs. Culture inflicted by the society influences children as they form their socio-cultural identity. When children pick up different beliefs as their parents it causes friction between their relationship.

Analyzing the effect of parents and society on children’s defiance, Uzoigwe argues that children “dependence on the adult and the larger society for the realization of self however, laid bare the need for both the adult and the society to live by example and up to the standard norms and values of the society” (3). Before colonization was infested in Africa, the society and the people played a role in the relationship of parent and child. Achebe’s, *Things Fall Apart* portrays the relationship that Okonkwo had with his father, Unoka,

before he died. During that time period in the village of Umuofia, the villagers followed the cultural beliefs pertaining social class. A man was considered rich and strong by the titles he held in the village, the number of yams and wives and, his boldness. “ In his day he was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow” (Achebe 4). Unoka was considered weak because he was lazy and did not attain yams or titles, and owed many debts. Unoka’s character and the cultural beliefs affected Okonkwo on how he formed his socio-cultural identity because those were the things that surrounded him at the time. “ Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men usually had” (Achebe 16). Okonkwo resulted in different beliefs as his father because his father’s beliefs because his father had left nothing for him to possess he needed to do better so as to make a good reputation for his family. “ His fame rested on personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat...Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water” (Achebe 1). Okonkwo became a hardworking and ambitious man through wrestling, in fear of ever ending up like his father. The society and its citizens have an effect on the formation of children’s socio-cultural identity.

African families and portray the negative effects that religion brought into families and created a clash between parents and children morals that resulted to a dysfunctional family. The clash was brought upon by the western colonization in which it brought in new cultural beliefs. Now the people had two cultural beliefs they could and had to decide upon which of the sides to lean on, African, or the western ideals. The result of the decision

affected the relationship between the parents and the children whenever they adopted opposite beliefs which is reflected in the three novels. The generational gap also caused by the different ideals between the parent and child causes scrambles between their relationship and leads children in becoming rebellious to their parents' beliefs.

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