

## Tradition Versus Modernity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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### Abstract

*Okonkwo, the embodiment of Igbo tradition in the story, has started acting a way that can jeopardize social peace. His exile makes easier the coming of the missionaries and Christianity into Umuofia. The Igbo have accepted the missionaries on their land like good strangers. Shortly afterwards, the foreigners appear as enemies of the clan. In this religious conflict, the outcasts or the victims of tradition regard Christianity as a way out or the source of salvation and freedom. The traditional Igbo society has become a fragile society under the yoke of colonialism. In this sense, immorality becomes morality and disorder turns into order. This can explain the subversive deeds Enoch perpetrates in the village under the cover of Christianity. Through the desanctification of the mask, one perceives the loss of ancestral values looming up on the horizon. His mental and psychological alienation impel Achebe to wonder about the survival of tradition in modern African society without references.*

**Keywords:** alienation, colonialism, desanctification, missionaries, references, way out.

### Résumé

*Le défenseur de la tradition Igbo qu'Okonkwo représente dans le cheminement de l'histoire commence à poser des actes qui visent la destruction de la paix sociale. L'exil d'Okonkwo facilite l'arrivée des missionnaires et du christianisme à Umuofia. Les Igbo ont accepté les missionnaires sur leur terre comme de bons étrangers. Progressivement, les étrangers se dévoilent comme des ennemis du clan. Dans ce conflit religieux, les parias ou les victimes de la tradition considèrent le christianisme comme une échappatoire, la voie du salut et de la liberté. La société traditionnelle Igbo est devenue une société de crise sous le colonialisme. Dans ce sens, l'immoralité devient la morale et le désordre s'émeut en ordre. C'est d'ailleurs ce qui explique les actions subversives qu'Enock mène dans le village sous le couvert du christianisme. A travers la désacralisation du masque, c'est la perte des valeurs ancestrales qui se profile à l'horizon. Son aliénation mentale et psychologique pousse l'auteur Achebe à s'interroger sur la survie de la tradition dans la société africaine moderne sans repères.*

**Mots-clés:** aliénation, colonialisme, désacralisation, missionnaires, repères, échappatoire.

## Introduction

Chinua Achebe is Nigeria's well-known novelist and probably the best-known writer of fiction from black Africa. The setting of *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is Igbol and in Eastern Nigeria just before and after the coming of the white man. The time can be narrowed further to the two decades spanning the turn of the nineteenth century when the British missionaries and administrators first penetrated the villages east of the Niger (Turkington, 1977, p.7). In this novel, Achebe offers an almost documentary account of the daily life, customs, ceremonies and beliefs of the Igbo people without evasion or romanticizing (Pala, 2017, p.1895). His objective in his first novel was not only to recreate an authentic picture of the traditional Igbo life, but also to reassert and re-establish its value and beauty. Literature acts as a tool to represent 'life' and also to make 'life' a social reality and easier to comprehend (Wellek and Warren, 1968, p. 94). As such, *Things Fall Apart* is regarded as a means of rehabilitating the African psyche, which had been severely damaged in its confrontation with the colonial invaders. It is also a means of destroying his society's acceptance of racial and cultural inferiority. The traditional Igbo society is depicted as a very well organized society where people live in harmony with their environment and their gods.

When the white man and the missionaries come, the Igbo people welcome them like good strangers. They give them a plot of land to build their house and their church. When they settle down, they ask the Igbo people to leave their traditional religion to the detriment of Christianity. The Igbo people refuse and start fighting against Christians to protect their land and their tradition. This cultural rap is the core of the conflict between tradition and modernity. In this strife, the main character Okonkwo is the embodiment of the Igbo tradition and the white man symbolizes western culture and its institutions. What are the causes of the conflict? How does Achebe represent this cultural clash? What is the implicit meaning of the clash between tradition and modernity? Our analysis focuses on two main points: pre-colonial Igbo society and modern Igbo society. The study of the novel, some critics believe, is the study of the society from which it emerges (Gikandi, 1987). The relationship between literature and society is a symbiotic one. To help in this analysis, sociological criticism and semiotics will be used.

### 1-Pre-colonial Igbo society

This section of our work is about pre-colonial Igbo society. In this pre-colonial society, Okonkwo is the incarnation of Igbo tradition. He fights for the maintenance of social cohesion, but his inflexibility turns him into a subversive. In this view, the analysis deals with a pillar of a peaceful society and a traditional subversive so as to show traditional society and its contradictions.

#### 1-1-Okonkwo, a pillar of peaceful society

The traditional Igbo society depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a well-organized society which works properly thanks to its traditional religion. In Igbo tradition, Chukwu is the supreme God. He is the almighty God who creates the earth and heaven. As such, he is the beginning and the end. Chukwu is a very busy God. He creates secondary gods: Ala (Ani), Ikenga, Chi, Agbala, Idemili, Amadiora, Ifejioku and Eruwho help him in his daily activities. In the Igbo collective consciousness, Ani plays a significant role in the life of every Igbo man. She is the goddess of the earth and fecundity (p.22). Beyond this

classification of the gods, we see class conflict in traditional society. Moreover, moral values such as discipline, solidarity and labor contribute to the maintenance of social cohesion. At the very opening of the book, the main character Okonkwo is portrayed as the spokesman of the Igbo aristocracy thanks to his determination and courage. The narrator refers to Okonkwo's celebrity when he asserts:

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights. (P.3)

In this passage, Okonkwo is portrayed as a particular young man who vanquishes the powerful and invincible wrestler, Amalinze. This historical victory compels the Igbo people to take him for a superman who is able to take up the serious challenges of today and tomorrow. In the narrative, farming and individual success allow the Igbo men to climb the social ladder. This explains the celebrity of Okonkwo in the nine villages of Umuofia: "Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan" (p.3). Okonkwo becomes rapidly a great influential member of the clan because of his audacity and his ability of charismatic leader.

The murder of Ogbuefi Udo's wife by the men of Mbaino brings about a crisis between the two neighboring villages. The men of Umuofia regard this murder as a declaration of war. They meet together on the market to decide what is to be done. The meeting is also meant to announce the sad news to Umuofia as a whole. "Those sons of wild animals have dared to murder a daughter of Umuofia[...]. The woman, said Ezeugo, was the wife of Ogbuefi Udo" (p.8). After several discussions, the overheated spirits have calmed down. The elders of the clan decide to start diplomatic discussions with their enemies to reach a compromise. "An ultimatum was immediately dispatched to Mbaino asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation" (p.8). In this belligerence, Okonkwo is appointed as the messenger of Umuofia to Mbaino. Umuofia is a clan of warriors. As such, no neighboring village dares to wage war against Umuofia. However, Umuofia usually wages war when it fails to solve a conflict in a peaceful way. The mission of the ambassador (Okonkwo) of Umuofia is to ask Mbaino to choose between war and a pacific settlement of the conflict.

When the messenger of Umuofia arrives in the village of their enemies, he is welcomed like an important guest. After two days discussion, the two parties come to an agreement. Then, Okonkwo returns home with the young Ikemefuna and a young virgin as compensation. The young girl is given to the widow and Ikemefuna become a hostage of Umuofia. Okonkwo is duty bound to take care of the boy on behalf of the clan. "[...] Ikemefuna came into Okonkwo's household. When Okonkwo brought him home that day he called his most senior wife and handed him over to her. 'He belongs to the clan,' he told her. 'So look after him'" (p.10). Okonkwo is still a young man but he plays significant roles in the clan. He then moves from one victory to another. Okonkwo is a promising young man. In this

respect, he has to lead his people to the Promised Land like Moses. As the Igbo proverb states: "If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders" (p.6). As revealed in the proverb, Okonkwo is a true promoter of the Igbo culture and tradition. All the different actions and movements of the protagonist are meant to maintain social harmony. However, the custodian of the Igbo tradition turns himself into a destroyer of social peace.

### **1-2- Okonkwo, a traditional subversive**

In the plot, Okonkwo is portrayed as the advocator of Igbo tradition. Despite, his social position, he violates traditional law several times. In so doing, he contributes to the fight against the ways of his forefathers. The hero's desire to be the antithesis of his father Unoka, is the first tangible sign of the fight of son against father. Unoka's failure turns him into the laughing stock of the village of Umuofia.

Unoka, for that was his father's name, had died ten years ago. In his day he was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. If any money came his way, and it seldom did, he immediately brought gourds of palm-wine, called round his neighbors and made merry. He always said that whenever he saw a dead man's mouth he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime. Unoka was, of course, a debtor and he owed every neighbor some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts. (pp.3-4)

Here, Unoka is depicted as a debtor and a lazy man. Contrary to Igbo men, Okonkwo's father dislikes farming. He enjoys playing music and drinking palm-wine with his friends. He is then an irresponsible chief of family who does not care about the future. "Whenever he saw a dead man's mouth he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime" (pp.3-4). In this way, Unoka dies in squalor with no social recognition. His misfortune has a great impact on Okonkwo's life. Okonkwo is in search of social recognition. Therefore, he does not want to resemble his father(p.7). He succeeds in becoming the contrary of his father. For instance: Okonkwo's courage and strength are opposed to his father's laziness and weakness. In Igbo land, a man is judged according to his merit but not the social condition of parents.

Okonkwo is in quest of identity. It is this perpetual quest for power and glory which brings about his sudden down fall. His inflexibility compels him to violate the sacred week of peace. He beats his youngest wife Ojiugo during the week of peace. "[...] Okonkwo broke the peace, and was punished, as was the custom by Ezeani" (p. 21). The violation of this traditional law is a serious offense of the goddess Ani. Okonkwo refuses compromise and he finally becomes an ally of evil forces. Despite, the warming of his best friend Obierika, Okonkwo takes part in the killing of his adopted child, Ikemefuna. "Ikemefuna's assassination comes as the logic implement of a social catharsis: the necessity to shed blood to stone for blood being shed" (Djiman, 2013, p.9). For the traditional reformist, Obierika, Okonkwo's active participation in the ritual of human sacrifice is another way to violate the principles of the goddess of land, Ani.

'I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy' he asked Obierika. 'Because I did not want to,' Obierika replied sharply. 'I had something better to do'.[...] You know very well, Okonkwo that I am not afraid of blood; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have

stayed at home. What you have done will not please, the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.’(p. 46)

In this paragraph, Obierika shows clearly his opposition to Okonkwo's intransigent and the evil side of Igbo tradition. His refusal to partake in the killing of Ikemefuna can be seen as a manifestation of his revolt against the negative aspects of tradition. His absence during this ritual is due to a lack of time: “I had something better to do” (p.46). This discourse of the traditional elite questions the validity of tradition. In this view, Obierika is a carrier of a mask of modernism in the rural space epitomized by the village of Umuofia. Furthermore, the funerals of Ezeudu are perceived as the breaking point of Okonkwo’s celebrity in the clan. This passage is about a crime committed by Okonkwo during the funerals of Ezeudu:

The drums and the dancing began again and reached fever-heat. Darkness was around the corner, and the burial was near. Guns fired the last salute and the cannon rent the sky. And then from the centre of the delirious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silence. In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man’s sixteen year old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo’s gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy’s heart.(p.86)

In the above extract, the narrator describes the attitude of the Igbo in front of death. Here, death is not viewed as a tragedy but as a continuation of life. In the text, funerals have political and social roles. The drums, the dance and the gunfire contribute to make death less alarming. In the village, when one dances during the funerals of a kinsman, one prays at the same time. As such, he or she who refuses to dance during the funerals of a close relation commits a serious offense. The novelist (Achebe) promotes a reform of culture in order to remove the obsolete practices from the Igbo tradition. The purpose of this cultural change is to save people life. For instance, Okonkwo could not have committed a crime during the funeral Ezeudu, if he were dancing without a gun. He wanted to perform an ancestral ritual and he finally destroyed his own life. “Okonkwo’s gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy’s heart” (p.86). As can be seen, the conflict between tradition (drums) and modernity (guns, cannon) in this traditional ritual engenders a tragedy. The explosion of the gun symbolizes the internal conflicts which corrode traditional African society before the coming of Europeans. We can also read this explosion as the end of social stability and the beginning of social anomy. The implicit of text suggests the preservation this social manifestation (funerals) without weapons. Okonkwo was dancing to show his attachment to the Igbo culture. But this same dance leads him to an exile of seven years. Okonkwo’s exile to Mbanta reveals that the Igbo society is in jeopardy.

## **2-The fragile Igbo society**

In this second part of our work, traditional Igbo society is described as an unstable society which is torn between two opposing feelings: the preservation of its cultural identity and its will to accept the contribution made by western civilization. The analysis deals with social crisis and war of two religions.

### **2-1- Social crisis**

The unstable society is a society where moral values are no more or are replaced by transitional ones. The unwanted departure of the hero Okonkwo to his mother’s village,

Mbanta, permits to understand that the village of Umuofia can never speak with one voice. The malice of man against his like becomes malice of the society against the individual. Okonkwo who is the torch carrier of the Igbo tradition becomes a social deviant. The Igbo aristocracy uses exile as a pretext to remove all traces of Okonkwo in Umuofia. Okonkwo destroys the clan and he finally destroys himself. The destruction of his compound and his wealth is an expression of his symbolic death. This passage highlights Okonkwo's downfall:

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their heart against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a cleans man. (p.88)

In this analysis, we realize that all the men of Umuofia do not participate in the attack and destruction of Okonkwo's compound. This attack is led by men who dwell in the same quarter with Ezeudu. Obierika is the eyewitness of the revolt of the clan against Okonkwo. This explains in a certain way his presence on the battlefield which Okonkwo's compound stands for in the plot. Here, Achebe denounces the intransigence and the cynicism of the law of land. This law is used to avenge the deceased son of Ezeudu. The violence and horror of this vandalism shows that the Igbo society is spitted. The destruction of Okonkwo's property by fire is a manifestation of the inflexibility of the Igbo men. As the narrator puts it:

It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. (p.94)

This discourse of the narrator sheds light on the ungratefulness of Man. Okonkwo throws himself body and soul into the defense of Umuofia and the Igbo tradition. Despite his commitment and his strong love for his homeland, Okonkwo is forced to leave Umuofia without any preparation. As it can be seen, Umuofia used the hero's celebrity to reach its political goal. Achebe castigates and denounces patriarchal system. In this system, a man belongs to his father's village when he is wealthy and famous. But he is left alone, when he is in a sorry plight. As such, the mother's village is a kind of asylum where one's is welcomed by the beloved ones. In the text, patriarchal system is regarded as a system of intransigence and matriarchal system is viewed as the one of brotherhood, forgiveness, love and solidarity. This is the reason why Mbanta gives Okonkwo a warm welcome. He has integrated the society and is accepted as a full member of village. However, the sudden appearance of the white man in the village of Abame is seen as a threat for the stability of the Igbo world.

'During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan'. [...] 'He was riding an iron horse. The first people who saw him ran away, but he stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones were near and even touched him. The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them'. (p.97)

In the passage, we notice that the change of the Igbo society is unavoidable. The process of modernization is engaged and nothing could stop it. "The white man" and his "iron horse" (p.97) epitomize western civilization. In the narrative, the British colonizer uses Christianity as a means to impose himself on the local people. "The missionaries had come to Umufia. They had built their church there won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages" (p.101). As such, the white man murdered by the men of Abame, is a missionary conducting field study. The British settler considers the murder of his compatriot as a declaration of war. In this respect, colonial forces smash the village of Abame into pieces. "Abame has been wiped out [...] It is a strange and terrible story [...]. They killed the man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree" (p.97). The conflict between tradition and modernity is also read through the antagonism of both cultures: "the elders", "their clan", "their Oracle", "their sacred tree" versus "the missionaries", "white man", "iron horse", "their church". The opposition of African and European civilization becomes a religious strife.

### **2-2-The war of two religions**

The exile of Okonkwo has fostered the easy coming of the white missionaries and Christianity into Umuofia. The Igbo have accepted the missionaries like good strangers. Shortly afterwards, the strangers show themselves as enemies of the clan: "The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta" (p.101). In the process of evangelization and conquest, Umuofia is already under the control of the British colonial forces and the evangelists are moving towards Mbanta. However, the traditional elite Obierika is utterly deterred when he realizes the presence Okonkwo's son Nwoye among the new converts. Nwoye's conversion is told in specific and emotional terms which describe a father's reactions to the unacceptable actions of his son. But Nwoye's conversion is also symptomatic of the way in which Christianity strikes against the things Okonkwo represents (Killam, 1969, p.28). In the view of Abiola Irele, "Nwoye's defection to Christianity has a double significance. It is at the same time a revolt against his father as well as a rejection of the society that he embodied" (1967, p. 170). In his position of first child, he is the very heir of the best-known Okonkwo who is sent into exile. Beyond the psychological alienation of Nwoye, we perceive a rebellion of young Igbo men against the culture and the tradition of their forefathers. In so doing, the African contributes to his own depersonalization. The young converts are in certain way the arrow-spears used by the missionaries in their fight against tradition. In this paragraph, the revolt of Christians against traditional religion is in focus:

The white man was also their brother because they were all sons of God. And he told them about this new God, the Creator of all the world and all the men and women. He told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone. A deep murmur went through the crowd when he said this. He told them that the true God lived on high and that all men when they died went before Him for judgment. Evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm-oil. But good men who worshipped the true God lived for ever in His happy kingdom. (p.102)

As revealed in the above passage, the white missionary laughs at the Igbo people and their culture. He describes the God of Christians as the mighty God who creates everything. Furthermore, he regards the Igbo man as a heathen who worships false gods. The implicit ideology of colonial discourse is meant to force the African to self-destruction. The church

heartens African people to forsake their religion and follow their one if they wish to be in the kingdom of God in the hereafter. In this perspective, the Igbo man who worships several gods is in the eyes of Christians an agent of evil forces. The white settler scoffs at African people and their religious beliefs when he takes the indigenous gods for things with no important. “All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit [...]. There is only one true God and He has made the earth, the sky, you and me and all of us” (p.103). The Igbo aristocracy fights against social change to perpetuate their traditional ways. In African collective consciousness, the negligence of traditional religion is an insult for the spirits and the gods of the clan. ““If we leave our gods and follow your god’ [...] ‘who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?” (p.103).The Igbo people fear the misfortune which can befall on the clan, if they leave ancestral practices. They clearly know that no man can win a fight against the spirits and the gods. For this reason, the Igbo man is rooted in tradition despites threats of Christianity.

In this religious conflict, the outcasts and the victims of tradition consider Christianity as an escape or a way out of suffering. The new faith is opposed to the obsolete rituals of tradition: the rejection of twins in the evil forest and human ritual sacrifice. The young converts trample down shrines and traditional institutions to compel every Igbo to become Christian. The zeal of the new converts brings about disorder in the clan.

One member in particular was very difficult to restrain. His name was Enoch and his father was the priest of the snake cult. The story went around that Enoch had killed and eaten the sacred python, and that his father had cursed him. (p.126)

Here, Enock succeeds in killing the sacred python which stands for the symbol of his father’s power with the help of the church. The murder of the sacred python has dual meaning. It both represents the symbolic death of the custodian of tradition (priest of python) and it also symbolizes the end of the cult of snakes. In addition, Enock smashes into an *egwugwu* and takes off its mask in the eyes of non-initiated men and women. For the Igbo, to unmask an *egwugwu* outside the sacred forest is an abomination. This sacrilege is metaphorically the death of the *egwugwu* mask. Traditional masks are humiliated and reduced to mere ordinary men. They then decide to answer back to Enock’s madness against tradition:

One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enock did. [...] Enock boasted aloud that they would not dare to touch a Christian. Whereupon they all came back and one of them gave Enock a good stroke of the cane, which was always carried. Enock fell on him and tore off his mask. The other *egwugwu* immediately surrounded their desecrated companion, to shield him from the profane gaze of women and children, and led him away. Enock had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion. (pp.131-132)

In this excerpt, one notices that Enock has committed an awful crime. His deed is unthinkable. Such event has never happened in the village of Umuofia since the beginning of the world. In this sense, Enock is a lunatic character who fights against invisible forces. In the narrative, an *egwugwu* mask is a very important institution of Igbo culture. The mask is the bridge which links the world of the living to the dead’s one. In Igbo world, the judgment of the mask is uppermost. Since the advent of colonialism and Christianity, the stable Igbo

society has become a fractured society. In this social anomy, immorality becomes social morality and disorder turns into social order. Enoch is a carrier of a mask. Behind this mask, we see the image of a facilitator of modernity. The death of the mask also epitomizes the downfall of the Igbo traditional society. The misbehavior of Enock engenders a war between the village of Umuofia and the Christian church. “The band of egwugwu moved like a furious whirlwind to Enoch’s compound and with machet and fire reduced it to a desolate heap. And from there they made for the church, intoxicated with destruction” (p.133). The destruction of the church and Enoch’s living place can be analyzed as a rejection of a strange religion and an exclusion of the dissidents or rebels. From then on, the peaceful coexistence between tradition and modernity becomes a myth.

Enoch is then an advocator of Christianity in the clan. His mental and psychological alienation help the writer tacking the issue of the survival of African culture in a globalized society without social references. The character Akunna also stands against the destruction of tradition. He counter-attacks and shows his opposition to colonial ideology. “We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods” (p.126). Implicitly, Achebe argues that Africans and Europeans worship the same God but in different ways. ““You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth [...]” (p.126). However, the reaction of Mr Brown reveals that Europeans are not ready to accept the existence and the validity of an African religion. He laughs at Akunna when he asserts “You carve a piece of wood. [...] and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood” (p.127). Akunna explains to the invader how traditional society is structured and work properly. As it can be seen, the secondary gods are the counterparts of the messengers in Christianity. The strong resistance of the elders enables Mr Brown to know that no fight is won in advance:

Mr Brown learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He went from family to family begging people to send their children to his school. But at first they only their slaves or sometimes their lazy children.(p.127)

In the novel, the colonizer uses colonial institutions like the church, the hospital and the school to impose his worldview on the local people. In this way, the acquisition of western education is linked to Christianity. “From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand” (p.128). The school and the church are meant to alienate school boys so that they can become promoters of modern ways in their village. “Blessed is he who forsakes his father and his mother for my sake” (p.108). Colonial administration continues his fight against the Igbo tradition. The district officer of Umuofia summons all the elders of the clan to a meeting. When they enter the meeting room, he arrests them and turns them into prisoners. Settler Mr Brown regards the Aged of Umuofia as spoilsports. As a consequence, the elders must be judged and punished for alleged attacks against Christians: “I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people’s houses and their place of worship. [...] I have decided that you will pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries” (p.137). The imprisonment of the custodians of tradition expresses the victory of Christianity over tradition. The traditionalists have lost the fight and they are bound to compensate the white man and his allies for their victory. As such, they must pay “two hundred bags of cowries” (p.137). Here, cowries refer to the money African people used at that specific moment of their

history. The amount of money the Igbo leaders have to pay for their freedom is too much. “Two hundred bags of cowries” is beyond the reach of the villagers.

Okonkwo is back from exile and he is among the captives of the colonial administration. The elders of the clan perceive their imprisonment as a downfall of their power. They decide to engage a last attack against the forces of occupation in order to restore their dignity. “Our fathers never dreamt of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done.[...] We must root out this evil. We must root them out too”(p.144). The final assault aims at avenging the spirits and the divinities of the clan. They all mourn the death of tradition. “All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping. Ogwugwu is weeping. Agbala is weeping, and all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilège they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes” (p.143). All the divinities of the clan are in mourning because tradition is no more under the yoke of colonialism. Okonkwo believes that he is still the powerful and invincible warrior. He then invites the Igbo men to wage war against the missionaries. But he realizes that Umuofia has lost courage and cohesion. Consequently, the Igbo men are turned into cowards and they do not speak with one voice. Okonkwo stands against social change which happens in the clan. He then decides to fight alone to avenge his ancestors: “I shall fight alone if I choose” (p.142). Okonkwo is a man of actions. He succeeds in killing one of the white man’s messenger: “The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside his uniformed body” (p.142). After killing a messenger with the blows of his matchet, Okonkwo takes his own life. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Ngũgĩ, 1967). His suicide symbolizes his refusal of modernity and self-sacrifice and compromise. Okonkwo’s death expresses the desire of African society to cooperate with European invaders.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, we notice that the conflict between tradition and modernity is revealed in the form of cultural clash between Igbo traditional religion and Christianity. The protagonist Okonkwo is the embodiment of tradition and the white missionary is the symbol of western civilization. Igbo culture and tradition are seen through the deeds and movements of Okonkwo. He is a carrier of positive values. As such, he is the custodian of Igbo tradition. His will to be the antithesis of his father Unoka turns him into a hybrid character. Okonkwo is divided between the concern of preserving the achievements of the past and his yearning for change. His intransigence and his maladjustment lead him to his own destruction. Achebe uses the text as an alibi to castigate and denounce the inflexibility and injustice of traditional society. He promotes dialogue between cultures because African continent could not bring anything to western countries if it withdraws into itself. African people have to select positive values from both cultures to create a rainbow cultural identity. This new cultural identity will enable African people to take up the challenges of globalization. Achebe yearns for the emergence of a democratic African society where the poor and the rich will have the same rights and duties. Beyond the writing of cultural clash, we see the image of a promoter of peaceful coexistence between Christianity and African traditional religion. “The writer in modern-day Africa has to assume the role of the conscience of the society, reminding readers and society of the high cultural ethos that must be upheld” (Ojaide, 1992, p.44). He

emphasizes the interrelatedness of literature with morality, the didactic quality of literature. Achebe sees his role as that of a neutral narrator. Thus, he presents, in a non-committal fashion, the tensions and conflicts between traditional values and alien culture (Nnoromele (2000, p.155).

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