

The Enemy Within: A Hermeneutical Re-Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika, PhD
Department of English

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Email: asikaikchukwu@yahoo.com

Mobile phone: +2348038679214

&

Ewuzie, Olisa Felix

Department of English

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam.

Email: olisaco4u@yahoo.com

Mobile phone: +2348038173828

Abstract

This paper examines Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* using the theory of hermeneutics to establish the point that the cultural disintegration which the Umuofia people suffered during the imperialistic conquest of Africa arguably succeeded not because of the determination of the white men to upturn the cultural values of Umuofia but owing to insensitive and preposterous attitude of the Umuofia people. While many critics have often noted that the white men caused the disintegration of Igbo society and values, this paper elects to take a contrary dimension through a hermeneutical re-reading of Achebe's classic, *Things Fall Apart*. The study contends and through hermeneutical lenses, offers critical explanations and justification that the Umuofia people should be blamed primarily other than the white men for the culture disintegration and subjugation which their society went through during the colonial incursion. The paper, through a hermeneutical re-reading of *Things Fall Apart* via historical, cultural and intellectual contexts of the text, engenders a critical position on the novel through a decoding of some underlying

meanings and thoughts thrown up by the actions and inactions of Umuofia clan in their encounter with the white missionaries which invariably inflamed the destruction of their cherished cultural values. The paper draws a conclusion that the mission of the white men should not have been a complete success if not for the complimentary actions of the people of Umuofia as the study reveals.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, culture, disintegration, society, values.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe (1930 – 2013) is probably both the most widely known and the most representative African novelist. He is regarded as the father of modern African literature, and he came to canonical prominence owing to the impact of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) - the best-known work of African literature in the world. His indictment of colonial discourse in the essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,” originally delivered as a lecture at the University of Massachusetts in 1974 created awareness about true African identity contrary to the European view of Africa.

While *Things Fall Apart* was neither the first African novel nor the first to capture the trauma of the colonial encounter, Achebe's transliteration of the Igbo language - its beauty, philosophy, and cadences of speech - in clear, eloquent prose, and his intimate knowledge and subversion of the Western literary tradition moved literary critics around the world, and inspires generations of African writers. He further helped shape the direction of African writing in editorial roles - most notably as the founding editor of Heinemann's African Writers Series - and through his manifold critical and biographical essays, many of which preempt ideas at the core of postcolonial theory, with a more accessible and mellifluous idioms.

When *Things Fall Apart* was first published, Achebe announced that one of his purposes was to present a complex, dynamic society to a Western audience who perceived African society as primitive, simple, and backward. Unless Africans could tell their side of the story, Achebe believed that the African experience would forever be mistold, even by such well-meaning authors as Joyce Cary in *Mister Johnson*. In an interview published in 1994, Achebe explains that his anger about the inaccurate portrayal of African culture by white colonial writers does not imply that students should not read works by Conrad or Cary. On the contrary, Achebe urges students to read such works in order to better understand the racism of the colonial era.

Beyond using literature to correct misconceptions formed by foreigners about Africa, Achebe kept in mind his own Nigerian people as an audience. In 1964, he stated his goal for writing thus: “to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. . . . I would be quite satisfied if my novels . . . did no more than teach my (African) readers that their past — with all its imperfections — was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.”

This is to say that Achebe's primary purpose of writing *Things Fall Apart* is because he wants to educate his readers about the value of his culture as an African. *Things Fall Apart* provides readers with an insight into the Igbo society right before the white missionaries' invasion on their land. The invasion of the colonising force threatens to change almost every aspect of Igbo society; from religion, traditional gender roles and relations, family structure to trade. Nothing was spared. Consequently, Achebe blames the white missionaries for colonial and post-colonial subjugation of Igbo culture; this subjugation can be seen in terms of the oppressed social coherence between the individual and their society.

Achebe was determined to take the modern African Literature to greater heights as well as to prove to the Europeans the value of the African culture. The novel was published during a period when a lot of writers emerged from Nigeria; among them are Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri. These writers all play an influential role in modern African Literature, both in their countries and internationally. However, Achebe was the most successful writer of the lot because he “has been critical of the role of Christianity in Africa, his criticism has been regarded generally as moderate and his creative work has won almost universal praise for its objectivity and detachment” (Sharma 85). In fact, he is “one of the writers of his time with fluency in the English language” (Jiffynotes.com 1).

Based on the descriptions of Africa and its people by both Conrad and Cary, it comes as no surprise that Achebe and other African writers began to emerge and tell their story of Africa and its people. Not only were Conrad and Cary's novels a misrepresentation of Africa, they were also humiliating to its people. It is through the insights of *Things Fall Apart* that the world became more appreciative of Africa and its people and at the same time the truth surrounding the stereotypical ideas that once existed about Africa which began to appear in a much clearer light. According to Alimi, *Things Fall Apart* is all about the “collapse, breaking into pieces, chaos, and confusion” (121) of traditional Igbo culture that suffers at the hand of the white man's arrival in Umuofia along with his religion. The views about life that the white men have are totally different from the views that the Igbo have. What seems utterly appropriate and acceptable in traditional Igbo culture does not appear so to the white missionaries. They are quick to want to change certain elements of traditional Igbo culture which according to them are inappropriate and unacceptable. However, in so doing, the white missionaries fail to see that these inappropriate and unacceptable elements of traditional Igbo culture are what keep the Igbo together. The white men subtly engaged the support of many Igbo

people in the disintegration of Igbo culture and values. At the time the Igbos realized that their culture has been disintegrated, it was too late.

Hermeneutics: A Theoretical Clarification

The term hermeneutics is an interpretative concept which a reader uses to dig into author's intention in any given text for both verbal and non-verbal meaning using some established principles of interpretation. In the general sense, it is simply an art of interpretation and understanding. According to Guilherme Figueiredo “If we look at its etymological roots, we can see that the name 'hermeneutics' comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein* (which means 'to interpret') and the noun *hermeneia* (interpretation).” (1). Palmer collaborates this view when he notes that “traced back to their earliest known root words in Greek, the origins of the modern words 'hermeneutics' and 'hermeneutical' suggest the process of 'bringing to understanding,' especially as this process involves language, since language is the medium par excellence in the process.” (13).

Hermeneutics is initially developed as a religious tool with which Bible scholars conduct exegesis of the scriptures for critical explanation in their quest to arrive at the intention of biblical texts. Its origin could be traced to the Greeks. The word itself derives from the Greek god, Hermes, the son of Zeus and the nymph Maia. Hermes is the herald of the Olympian gods. One of his roles is to get messages from the gods and convey and interpret for the people who find it difficult to understand the language of the gods. This is to say that hermeneutic theory seeks the interpretation of a text using determined approaches to achieve a maximum understanding in line with the author's intentions. This approach to uncover author's intended meaning involves delving into the cultural, historical and intellectual contexts of the world of a given text.

In view of the foregoing, M.H Abrams opines that “hermeneutics originally designated the formulation of principles of interpretation that apply specifically to the Bible; the principles incorporated both the rules governing a valid reading of the biblical text, and exegesis.... Since the nineteenth century, however, “hermeneutics” has come to designate the theory of interpretation in general – that is, a formulation of the principles and methods involved in getting at the meaning of all written text....”(127). Chris Baldick adds that hermeneutics “involves basic problems such as the possibility of establishing a determinate meaning in a text, the role of the author's intention, the historical relativity of meanings, and the status of the reader's contribution to a text's meaning.” (112).

This theory also seeks to uncover issues beyond what the author might not have intended in his text but they are embedded especially when looking at different parts of the text as against the whole vis-a-vis cultural and historical background of the text. Rodney Frey buttresses this point that:

To hermeneutically interpret is to first dwell in the words of the text, as if, as an archaeologist, you are using your trowel and brush to bit-by-bit remove the earth encasing an ancient shard... A hermeneutical interpretation of a text can thus reveal more clearly the meaning of the words of the text, as well as the cultural and intellectual contexts in which it was formed, providing a means to better understand and share the original experiences and ideas of the author of the text.

Gadamer further adds to this view well when he writes that “... to understand an author was not the same thing as understanding writing and speech perfectly. The norm for understanding a book is not the author's meaning. For, 'since men cannot be aware of everything, their words, speech, and writing can mean something that they themselves did not intend to say or write.’” (190).

The key proponents of hermeneutics are Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey and they shaped the thoughts around hermeneutics during the 19th century. In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer added their thoughts to widen the theory of hermeneutics.

Heidegger coined the expression 'Hermeneutic circle' which he used to describe the process of deep understanding of a text. Hermeneutic circle therefore, refers to the notion that one's understanding of the text as a whole is derived by reference to the individual parts and one's understanding of each individual part is derived by reference to the whole. Not even the whole text nor any individual part can be well comprehended without reference to one another, and hence, it is a circle.

Nasrulla in his critical study of Friedrich Schleiermacher, explains that Schleiermacher offers a "formula" for interpretation, whereby we can identify with the author's overall situation, a formula which includes: objective historical reconstruction, which considers how a given utterance relates to language as a whole, and how the knowledge in a text is the product of language; objective divinatory reconstruction, which conjectures how the utterance or discourse itself will contribute to the language's development; subjective historical reconstruction, which examines a discourse as a product of an individual writer's mind; and, finally, subjective divinatory reconstruction, which assesses how the process of composition affects the writer.

Nasrulla further captured the thoughts of Schleiermacher as having asserted that the task of hermeneutics is to understand the text or utterance "just as well and then better than its author." (1).

It is against this background that this paper examines the Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with a view to establishing the

fact that the Umuofia people were basically responsible for the cultural disintegration they suffered in the hands of the white men other than the white men being the sole cause of the cultural subjugation that Umuofia town went through during their incursion. Therefore, this paper will explore several aspects of the text through the lenses of hermeneutics, highlighting the cultural implications of certain actions of Umuofia people to prove this point that the umuofians are the architect of their own downfall.

Umuofians as Architects of the Cultural Pollution of Umuofia

It is a popular perspective in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* that the Whiteman who introduced his religion and Western system of government caused the disintegration of the traditional Igbo society. Many aspects of the novel favoured this perspective that the Whiteman overpowered the Umuofia people and imposed his religious beliefs and culture on them. Many who held this view believed that the Umuofia people had little or no option in defending their land against the invasion of the Whiteman in that the Whiteman came with superior fire power to subdue anyone that rises in opposition against them in their imperialistic quest to take over Africa at all cost.

It was against this background that many readers and critics justifiably quote Obierika in *Things Fall Apart* that the Whiteman "...has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (141).

One of the critical questions Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* continues to raise is whether it was the colonial invaders who caused the disintegration of the Umuofia society. A close hermeneutical reading of the text, *Things Fall Apart*, reveals that even though the Whiteman may have put a knife on the 'things' that held Umuofia people together and made them fall apart, nonetheless, the argument holds that the Umuofia people had given the Whiteman the said knife with which he used to tear them

apart by embracing him and his religion without discretion. This resonates with Obierika's admittance that the Whiteman has won [his] brothers. "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (141). Umuofia people were not united to confront the Whiteman when he was conducting his evangelism throughout the length and breadth of Umuofia. They abandoned their belief system and their gods to embrace the strange teachings of the Whiteman. Obierika also observes that "Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power?"(140-141).

Some people of Umuofia who joined the white man's church emboldened him towards realising his mission of imposing his own culture and values on Umuofia clan. Umuofia people aided the white man to succeed. They upheld his government. Just like the Igbo proverb rightly observes that the domestic rat informed the wild rat that there is fish in the basket in the roof. Without the various assistance rendered to the white men by the people of Umuofia, white men would not have succeeded in the incursion of Umuofia and by extension Igbo land. Obierika further notes in the novel that some people of Umuofia joining the church of the white men made it difficult for the Umuofia as a town to consider the idea of fighting the white men for fear of endangering the lives of their own brothers. In other words, Umuofia opened the door for the white men to invade them and settle comfortably which adversely affected their cultural values. Chinwuba and Ezeugwu collaborating this view, observe that:

A critical study of Igbo cultural change reveals the reality of Agents as change catalysts. These Agents are in fact replete

in the internal and external dimensions of Igbo culture. Though many scholars blame more the external (white men) agency in the change that pervades Igbo culture, the internal agents who are Igbo natives are potentially more active. Of course, no culture crumbles from without but from within. In other words, no society falls on its own for there must be prior internal condition hatched by internal agents, which makes the culture vulnerable to external pressure. (1).

Recall that in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the earliest town the Whiteman invaded was Abame, a neighbouring village to Umuofia. As it was the custom, the Abame elders consulted their oracle and were told that "the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them." (111). The oracle further warned that "other white men were on their way. They were locusts...and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain." (111). These revelations, arguably, are demonstrations of clear insights the gods offered to the Abame people which significantly was early enough to elicit collective action and resistance from them against the onslaught of colonial conquest. The saying "to be forewarned, is to be forearmed", which finds equivalent in the Igbo people proverbial thought that "eme ngwa ngwa emeghalu odachi- if one acts fast, one can prevent a tragedy", ought to have applied here in the case of Abame people and their outcome of their consultations with the gods. The gods played their parts by revealing the invasion of the white men early enough. But Umuofians, on hearing the news did not take any action until when it was too late. Their actions further collaborate the popular Igbo proverb that Igbo people do not hurry to take shelter when they notice signs of rain until their bodies are drenched.

So many Umuofians out of bewilderment, threw their doors open to the Whiteman to come and settle among them. And this infiltration began the process of their downfall. Achebe

captured this thus: “They were talking excitedly among themselves because the white man had said he was going to live among them.” (117). The Whiteman in his characteristic manner, was not violent at first. He was busy engaging those the society rejected as 'efulefu' thereby gaining ground in Umuofia. The Umuofia people laughed at the foolishness of the Whiteman for engaging the inconsequential people in their society but little did they know that ideology spreads like a wild fire. Those regarded as efulefu were not banished by the society. They were only regarded as unserious set of people due to their laziness and laissez-faire attitude to life but they still mingled with the rest of the society. Thus, by not ostracizing those that went to listen to and embrace the Whiteman's religion early enough, Umuofians were corrupted by these first set of people that interacted and commingled with the white men. (139).

Umuofia did not consult their gods for guidance on how to tackle the invasion of the white men. They assumed that their gods would naturally wipe out the white men. On their own, they allocated the evil forest to the white men to build their church without consulting the Oracle thereby allowing a foreign god to compete with their own ancestral gods in their land. Umuofia committed a sacrilege but never saw it as such. Thus, one could assert that their gods they abandoned for a 'foreign god' equally abandoned them to sort out themselves in the hands of the white men whom they welcomed without consultations. No Igbo man survives a fight without his *chi* or personal god fighting along his side to defeat the enemy.

The gullibility of the people of Umuofia made the settling down of the white men so easy for him. The unsuspecting Umuofia was busy laughing at the gullibility of the white men while the white men were strategic in their approach, planting churches and schools and embarking on serious evangelistic works. These were captured in the words of Obierika when he narrates to Okonkwo in exile, the extent the white men have established themselves in

their land. “The Missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages...But many of them believed that the strange faith and white man's gods would not last.” (115).

It was this assumption that the white man's god would not last that made the elders and warriors of Umuofia not to rise to tackle the advances and excesses of the white men. Okonkwo appeared a lone voice hence could not resist the white men alone.

Chris Shepherd agrees with this view when he opines that “...we witnessed the challenge and weakening of Igbo spirituality, as well as the death of the tribe's livelihood. ...their own religious doctrine and passivity played a significant role in allowing the initial infiltration of an alien religion, and the final dissolution of a once prosperous culture.” (1)

Chinweuba and Ezeugwu add to this view when they classified the role of Umuofia people that enabled the white man to successfully upturn their cultural values as internal agent role while that of the white man they regarded as external agent role. According to them:

...change is one of the basic facts of human experience, the internal agent first made it significant in Igbo culture. They were the first to challenge the status quo. This internal significant role is what Taiwo calls 'a crack in the wall, which ushers in lizards.' (Taiwo, 2008:1) For such internal role opens, the door for the external Agents who cashes into the existing cultural rift and opportunistically operate successfully.(1).

Besides, many people in Umuofia perceived western education as the basic tool for survival hence they competed to send their sons to school. Their exposure to western education

brought about hybridity and complexities in the lifestyle of Umuofia people as an average Umuofia person that experience western education sees Umuofia culture as being inferior to the western culture and values. Many joined the white man in upholding his religion and government in Umuofia while betraying the Umuofia culture. The egwugwu was considered the peoples ancestors who have risen as immortals to visit the mortals. This masquerades are revered and should not be unmasked publicly, but during an egwugwu festival, Enoch who had joined the white man's religion, boasted that the egwugwu dare not touch a Christian, a boast that brought scuffles between him and the egwugwu where he unmasked one of them. (149).

Furthermore, people getting their children to study the white men's ways of life at school was seen as a thing of pride by the Igbo people without knowing that it was a direct attack on their own culture which they later realized but rather too late. One of the great men in Umuofia, Akunna, had given one of his sons to be taught in the white man's knowledge in the white man's school. (142). Afigbo collaborates this view when he noted that "...it was the quest for literacy that made many an African family send their children to school even after having sworn to live and die by the traditional culture. But literacy and school merely served to open the floodgates of many far-reaching social changes."(141).

Besides, in *Things Fall Apart*, the Igbo people were excited to have the white men settle among them. This excitement of seeing a man with a different skin colour and strange behaviour blinded the sense of judgment of Umuofia and all their neighbouring villages. According to Achebe, at Mbanta, the people were talking excitedly among themselves because the white man had said he was going to live among them."(117). The Whiteman settled and preached and made them believe that their gods are false and should not be worshipped. They condoned the Whiteman's false teachings and blasphemy against the oracle of Hills and Caves and Amadioha and Chukwu. The romancing of

the Umuofians with the Whiteman and desecration of their land with the preaching of a strange god must have provoked the neglected gods and ancestors who left them to fight for themselves.

Achebe captured the mood of the gods Umuofia people abandoned through the speech of Okika in the village meeting. "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 sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes." Okika went further to add that "... our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland."(162).

The people of Umuofia did not consult their gods in the matters of the Whiteman hence various gods in Igbo land left them to their fate to face the Whiteman alone. Mere accepting the religion of the white men amounts to desecration of the land hence their gods were weeping and turned deaf ears to Umuofia clan when they needed their help. A warrior like Okonkwo could not restrain his son Nwoye from following the ways of the Whiteman. The implication of this is that Okonkwo had already lost the battle in his own house and should not expect to win the white men who armed themselves against the rebellion of Umuofia people. The clan did not act as one and they were fighting alone without the support of their gods. The white men divided the people of Umuofia made them disregard their gods.

In the course of evangelism and preaching of the Whiteman, he had told them that 'All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent children.'(117). This was part of the scheme the whiteman deployed to destroy the psyche of an average Umuofia person in order to introduce his own god to them. The Whiteman had earlier told them that his own god killed his only son to save mankind yet he accused the gods of Umuofia of

killing people. In trying to counter the argument of the Whiteman, one of the men of Umuofia asked the whiteman, "If we leave our gods and follow your god . . . who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?" This is to say that they knew their gods were angry yet they did not pacify them by retracing their steps from following the whiteman.

It is also important to observe that if the Umuofia and other neighbouring towns did not provide interpreters for the whiteman, the whiteman would have been powerless. Thus, the whiteman is his craftiness made western education look so attractive that virtually every family eventually wanted to send their sons to schools to learn the ways of the whiteman. In the Bible, the building of the Tower of Babel purportedly crashed immediately God confused their language, and that shows that language is a unifying force among people and that was the weapon the Umuofia people armed the whiteman with by providing him with interpreters. If the whiteman did not succeed in getting interpreters, he would have been frustrated and leave within a short time. It is noteworthy that the whiteman did not learn Igbo language but introduced and set up a school to make his language of oppression to flourish in a foreign land.

The second class place the whiteman placed the Igbo language from the period of colonization is still lingering till today and Igbo nation and Africa by extension may never recover from it. The Umuofia town aided and abated the subjugation of the African society by making everything about the invasion and operation of the white men easy.

The kotma or local soldiers the white men used were the Igbo people and not white men. In other words, Igbo man arrested his fellow Igbo man during the reign of the whiteman in Igboland and in the other African society. They were used as instrument of oppression and led the way to the safest places where the Igbo man would have escaped to in the time of crises and conflict with the

white people. The kotma equally took bribe to pervert justice as they served as both police and court messengers. This is to say that in decoding the text through the hermeneutical lenses, the Igbo man was actually the architect of his own problem as he yielded himself as a willing tool in the hands of the whiteman for the subjugation of his own people. The white men made him believe that everything about him was inferior and has to be rejected for western way of life.

Who would believe that a warrior like Okonkwo will be put in prison, shaved and beaten with a stick by small boys whom the whiteman empowered as kotma. The Igbo society was silent when the whiteman began relegation of its culture and activities to the background. The Umuofia people lost their voice in fraternity and romance with the white men. Thus, it would be quite subjective to entirely blame the white men for the subjugation of the Umuofia society during their invasion.

The Umuofia clan was not united in purpose. They sabotaged themselves and by so doing undermined the Igbo spirit that advocates that one should be one's brother's keeper. The solidarity, oneness and synergy expected among brothers with a common enemy was lacking hence it was easy for the white men to take advantage of Umuofia people and upturned their cultural values.

Further, it is noteworthy to point that one of the ploys of the colonial masters that made the religion of the white men to quickly flourish among Umuofians and beyond was the acceptance of twins and their mothers by the white men. Based on the custom and traditions of Umuofia, twin babies are taboos are not meant to live. But the white men changed the narrative by imposing sanctions on those that killed twins. The ignorance of Umuofia people and their open condemnation of such act made women who lost their twins to find solace in the new religion of the white men. Not only that the twins were killed, the society in its naivety did not placate their mothers and these women held grudges against them which they vented when the whiteman arrived. Achebe

highlights the ignorance and hostility the Igbo society held against the mothers of the twins when he writes that, “Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and childbirth. But each time she borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance.” (121). The white men used all the opportunities they had to divide the Umuofia people including taking advantage of the ignorance of the locals about killing of twins.

Those that left the traditional religion for the white man's church left out of frustration, not knowing that this will have serious adverse effect on the Igbo culture and religion. Lame Maatla Kenalemang buttresses this point further when he opines that:

The decision to follow Christianity by some members of the Igbo society is greatly influenced by the suffering they had incurred from their own culture. Because they are so eager to get out of the pain and misery that Igbo religion had put them through, they do not realize that by joining the white missionaries, they are actually making things harder for themselves in the long run.” (16).

This is to say that the white men capitalized on the loopholes in the culture of Umuofia to introduce his own. They made the Igbo society look wicked hence succeeded in setting the women who lost their twin babies against the society. The action of the white men here no matter how good it seemed, was carried out with some ulterior motives to their advantage. The white men did not only put to an end to the killing of the twins but also welcomed the outcasts whom the society looked down on as second class citizens. In the novel, “These outcast, or osu, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received. And

so one Sunday two of them went into the church.” (125). The whiteman was subtle in his invasion of Umuofia. He preached gospel of peace but held a gun in his hand.

The warriors of Umuofia were indifferent as the white men polluted their land and culture out of fear of unleashing terror on them if they protested. The likes of Okonkwo made fruitless efforts to rouse them from their slumber to no avail. By the time the people of Umuofia realized that the white men have completely taken over the administration of their land and wanted to revolt, it was too late for them. When Okonkwo and some town's men were taken into detention was the time the Umuofia people realized that it could be any of their town's men turn any day to be humiliated but it was already late. Not even the spirit of all the masked *egwugwu* could change the narrative. When the town went with *egwugwu* to challenge the white missionary for the sacrilege the whiteman commits and to destroy his church, it was more or less an empty threat. The spirit of their ancestors had abandoned the Umuofia people. The *Egwugwu* roared “But this shrine which he built must be destroyed. We shall no longer allow it in our midst. It bred untold abominations and we have come to put an end to it.” (p.152). They never succeeded because they acted quite late.

The instances abound in the text where the Umuofia clan did not think through their actions in their dealings with the white men. They sacked their gods by taking actions which ordinarily they should not have taken without proper consultations of the goods of their land. But their action of acting independent of their gods demonstrated the Igbo proverb that when a person outruns his personal god in a race, such a person will run into his death.

Conclusion

This paper examines Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* using hermeneutical approach. In this discourse, it was obvious that the Umuofia people were lukewarm in taking many actions that were to timely.

They did not consult their gods in their dealings with the white men. This his paper explores the implications of the actions and inactions of the Umuofia clan and the consequences they faced for acting slowly. Umuofia assumes that the strange happenings in their land will resolve themselves in the course of time. They were slow in taking decisions in matters that involve their destinies, their culture and their entire existence. The actions and inactions of the Umuofia people propelled the white men in their quest to introduce their own culture and religion to Umuofia and by extension African society. The Umuofia people were carried away and the white men took advantage of Umuofia people taking them lightly hence, they introduced their cultures and equally subverted theirs simply because the Umuofia clan permitted the white men and invariably partnered in the process of the slowly but painful cultural subversion and annihilation that remains till date, the collective woes of Africans as a continent and a people.

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