

Dynamics of Forced Migration and The Politics of Language and Identity in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*¹

¹Nduka David Utah, ²Catherine John Mamman,
& ³Nwachinemere Okechukwu-Oji

¹Centre of Excellence in Migration and Global Studies,
National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi, Abuja

²Department of English and Literary Studies,
Faculty of Arts, Taraba State University, Jalingo

³Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri,

Corresponding author's email: utah2011@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958) as a literary framework for understanding colonialism as a multifaceted form of forced migration in Igbo society. While migration is frequently linked to geographical mobility, colonial contexts engender layered displacements, physical, cultural, linguistic, and epistemological, that disrupt indigenous social structures and epistemologies. The novel uses Okonkwo's ceremonial banishment to Mbanta, an internal exile that symbolises both physical displacement and symbolic marginalisation, as well as the larger cultural exodus brought about by missionaries and colonial administrators, whose foreign institutions and language policies undermine ancestral authority and communal cohesion. The study highlights the reciprocal, circulatory relationship between the literary text and the socio-cultural-political discourses of late British colonialism in Igboland (c. 1890– 1910) and the decolonising Nigeria of the 1950s by utilising New Historicism (Greenblatt). Achebe's strategic use of proverbs, untranslated Igbo terms, and oral traditions functions as counter-discourse, resisting colonial erasure by circulating indigenous knowledge systems. Complementing this, Migration Theory (Castles, 2009) provides conceptual tools to analyse exile, dislocation, and cultural adaptation beyond mere physical movement. Adopting a qualitative literary-analytical approach, the paper conducts close textual analysis of narrative strategies, proverbs, and character trajectories in Things Fall Apart, supplemented by comparative references to Igbo oral traditions and historical accounts of colonial incursion. The method positions Achebe's text as both literature and a socio-political document encoding vernacular responses to colonial pressures. By situating the novel within critical migration discourses, the study reveals how colonialism generated enduring forms of layered migration, physical, cultural, and linguistic that continue to inform contemporary debates on identity, decolonisation, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Forced migration; language policy; Achebe; Igbo society; Colonialism; Identity

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Dynamiques des migrations forcées et enjeux politiques du langage et de l'identité dans *Le Monde s'effondre* d'Achebe

Résumé

*Cet article examine *Le Monde s'effondre* (1958) de Chinua Achebe comme cadre littéraire permettant de comprendre le colonialisme comme une forme multiforme de migration forcée au sein de la société igbo. Si la migration est souvent associée à la mobilité géographique, les contextes coloniaux engendrent des déplacements à plusieurs niveaux – physiques, culturels, linguistiques et épistémologiques – qui perturbent les structures sociales et les épistémologies autochtones. Le roman utilise l'exil cérémoniel d'Okonkwo à Mbanta, un exil intérieur qui symbolise à la fois le déplacement physique et la marginalisation symbolique, ainsi que l'exode culturel plus vaste provoqué par les missionnaires et les administrateurs coloniaux, dont les institutions étrangères et les politiques linguistiques sapent l'autorité ancestrale et la cohésion communautaire. Cette étude met en lumière la relation réciproque et circulaire entre le texte littéraire et les discours socioculturels et politiques de la fin du colonialisme britannique dans le pays Igbo (vers 1890-1910) et de la décolonisation du Nigéria des années 1950, en s'appuyant sur le Nouvel Historicisme (Greenblatt). L'utilisation stratégique par Achebe de proverbes, de termes Igbo non traduits et de traditions orales constitue un contre-discours, résistant à l'effacement colonial par la circulation des savoirs autochtones. En complément, la théorie des migrations (Castles, 2009) fournit des outils conceptuels pour analyser l'exil, le déracinement et l'adaptation culturelle au-delà du simple déplacement physique. Adoptant une approche littéraire et analytique qualitative, cet article propose une analyse textuelle approfondie des stratégies narratives, des proverbes et des trajectoires des personnages dans *Le Monde s'effondre*, complétée par des références comparatives aux traditions orales Igbo et aux récits historiques de l'incursion coloniale. La méthode adoptée place le texte d'Achebe à la fois comme une œuvre littéraire et comme un document sociopolitique codant les réponses vernaculaires aux pressions coloniales. En inscrivant le roman dans le cadre des discours critiques sur les migrations, cette étude révèle comment le colonialisme a engendré des formes durables de migrations à plusieurs niveaux – physiques, culturelles et linguistiques – qui continuent d'alimenter les débats contemporains sur l'identité, la décolonisation et le développement durable.*

Mots-clés : Migration forcée ; politique linguistique ; Achebe ; société igbo ; colonialisme ; identité

INTRODUCTION

Migration in its multiple forms, be it voluntary, involuntary, internal, or transnational, remains one of the most significant human experiences shaping identity and power relations (Vertovec, 2004). In Africa, colonialism represents a particular form of forced migration, marked not only by physical displacement but also by profound cultural, linguistic, and psychological disruptions. Colonial regimes created forms of structural displacement that cannot be adequately understood through narrow definitions of migration limited to international movement. Colonial rule systems were embedded within broader state-building processes in which migration, governance, and economic restructuring were mutually reinforcing dynamics (Adamson, 2024). In Nigeria, British colonial rule restructured patterns of movement, identity formation, and language use, creating enduring tensions that continue to shape society. From the annexation of Lagos in 1861 to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, British colonial expansion imposed new administrative, economic, and cultural systems that triggered widespread internal migration. Urban centres such as Lagos, Onitsha, and Enugu emerged as administrative and commercial hubs, attracting migrants from rural hinterlands in search of wage labour (Heaton, 2024). These movements were often coerced by economic policies such as cash-crop production, taxation, and forced labour, which compelled rural populations to relocate (Gopalkrishna & Oloruntoba, 2012).

Such forms of displacement, though not always geographically transnational, constitute “forced migration” because they were driven by structural constraints rather than voluntary choice. As a result, migration must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing both spatial mobility and symbolic transformation (Castles et al. 2020; Vertovec 2004). The growing body of migration research has therefore expanded the analytical scope of migration beyond demographic movement to include the cultural and discursive processes through which mobility reshapes identities and social structures. Language lay at the heart of this process of colonial reorganisation. English, promoted as the language of administration, education, and Christian evangelism, gradually displaced indigenous languages from institutional domains. This linguistic imposition symbolised a form of epistemic migration, in which knowledge, identity, and cultural authority shifted away from local oral traditions toward colonial discourses (Bamgbose, 2000). In Igbo society, where proverbs, folktales, and communal idioms encoded collective memory and social norms, the erosion of orality represented a profound cultural dislocation

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), widely regarded as the foundational African novel in English, offers a penetrating exploration of these dynamics. Through the fictionalised account of the Igbo community's encounter with European colonialism, Achebe dramatises these layered dynamics of forced migration, linguistic displacement, and identity contestation. Language emerges in the novel as both a tool of resistance and an instrument of domination. The imposition of English and Christian discourse represents a symbolic migration away from indigenous epistemologies, while the erosion of Igbo proverbs, oral traditions, and communal idioms underscores the cultural violence of colonial intrusion. Through Okonkwo's life and his community's encounter with European colonialism, Achebe highlights the fracturing of social structures, the marginalisation of Igbo epistemologies, and the violent intrusion of colonial modernity. Migration here is not confined to geographical mobility but extends to the dislocation of meaning, voice, and identity. The protagonist Okonkwo's tragic trajectory encapsulates the struggle to preserve cultural integrity amidst the forced reordering of society by colonial modernity.

This study argues that Achebe's story functions as a site of cultural negotiation, simultaneously questioning the historical contingencies of colonial disruption and reinscribing indigenous agency within the larger circulation of social energy. It does so by applying Greenblatt's New Historicism, which is informed by Foucault's approach to power and discourse. According to Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1972), "colonialism is a discursive creation that creates truth regimes, shattering indigenous subjectivities while integrating European institutional and linguistic control mechanisms through capillary networks of power". Simultaneously, Achebe's text subverts and recirculates these forces in a counter-discourse of resilience, as demonstrated by Greenblatt's *Concept of self-fashioning* (1980), and the poetics of culture, which shows how colonial rhetoric created hierarchies of alterity, legitimising spatial conquest and epistemic dominance by entwining literary representations with anecdotal historical fragments. In migration studies, Castles and Miller (2009) discuss "forced migration" in *The Age of Migration*, which extends beyond refugees and war to include cultural displacement, offering a framework for understanding the Igbo community's coerced entry into a colonial modernity. Likewise, Blommaert (1999) and Irvine and Gal (2000) developed language ideology theory, which helps explain how the imposition of English served not just as a communicative tool but as a mechanism of power, marginalising indigenous languages and reconstituting identity along colonial lines.

In *Things Fall Apart*, these theoretical frames converge in the symbolic role of language. Achebe illustrates how the arrival of missionaries and colonial administrators imposed new linguistic hierarchies, privileging English as the language of education, governance, and spiritual authority. The shift from Igbo proverbs, folktales, and oral traditions to the textual authority of the Bible and colonial legal systems exemplifies what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) terms the "linguistic alienation" of African societies. Forced migration here is not marked by physical relocation but by the compulsion to inhabit a new linguistic and cultural order that displaces indigenous epistemologies. The analysis demonstrates how *Things Fall Apart* anticipates broader debates in African studies on the erosion of cultural sovereignty under colonialism and highlights the need to recognise forced migration as a multidimensional process that encompasses both physical and symbolic displacement. This approach not only deepens our understanding of Achebe's work but also contributes to migration and language policy studies by foregrounding literature as a critical site of theorising displacement, power, and identity.

OBJECTIVES

The dynamics of forced migration and the politics of language and identity in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* generally situate Chinua Achebe's literary narrative within broader theoretical debates on postcolonial migration, language ideology, and the resilience of cultural traditions in the face of external imposition. Specifically, the study sets out to:

1. examine the ways in which Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays colonialism as a form of forced migration, not only in terms of physical displacement but also through cultural, linguistic, and identity disruptions.
2. analyse the politics of language within the novel, with particular attention to the imposition of English and the consequences this has for Igbo cultural expression.
3. explores how identity is negotiated, reconstructed, or destabilised under the weight of colonial domination.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology, grounded in textual analysis and theoretical application. Since *Things Fall Apart* serves simultaneously as a literary text and a cultural document, this approach is well-suited to uncovering the layered intersections of forced migration, language politics, and identity formation

that the novel dramatises. Rather than seeking quantifiable outcomes, the study prioritises a nuanced reading of how Achebe's narrative reflects, critiques, and reimagines the socio-cultural upheavals of colonial Nigeria. At the centre of this methodology is a close reading of *Things Fall Apart*. Particular attention is paid to Achebe's narrative strategies, the portrayal of characters such as Okonkwo, and the novel's sustained use of Igbo oral traditions, including proverbs, folktales, and idioms. These features are not examined merely as stylistic devices, but as cultural mechanisms through which Achebe reclaims indigenous epistemologies while simultaneously revealing the dislocations produced by colonial intrusion. Such textual analysis provides the foundation for understanding how the novel frames colonialism as a form of forced migration, displacing communities not only in physical space, but also linguistically, psychologically, and symbolically.

Method of analysis

The methodology is further structured by three complementary theoretical frameworks. Postcolonial theory (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994) provides the critical tools to interrogate colonialism as a force of epistemic and cultural displacement, enabling an exploration of how Achebe's text resists, subverts, and reimagines colonial narratives of dominance. Critical language policy (Tollefson, 1991; Ricento, 2006) offers a lens for analysing the imposition of English as an instrument of power and its impact on indigenous linguistic practices, particularly the erosion of Igbo oral traditions and the restructuring of identity through language hierarchies. Finally, migration theory (Castles & Miller, 2009; Bakewell, 2011) provides a framework for conceptualising exile, dislocation, and adaptation as forms of forced migration that extend beyond physical mobility to encompass cultural and symbolic dimensions.

Sources of data

The primary text under review is Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), while secondary materials draw on scholarship in postcolonial studies, sociolinguistics, African history, and migration studies, which provide the comparative and contextual grounding necessary to situate Achebe's fictional representation within the historical realities of colonial Nigeria. The selection of this methodology is justified by the very nature of the research questions. The study seeks not to catalogue numerical patterns but to excavate the cultural meanings embedded in Achebe's narrative and connect them to broader structures of colonial power. By weaving together literary analysis with postcolonial, language policy, and migration theories, the methodology ensures a multidimensional exploration of how colonialism disrupted indigenous life, reconfigured linguistic

hierarchies, and destabilised cultural identities. It thereby positions *Things Fall Apart* not only as a canonical literary work, but also as a critical intervention in ongoing debates on migration, language, and decolonisation.

Research Design

The paper adopts a clearly qualitative, textual-analytic approach (close reading), typical of postcolonial analyses of Achebe's writings. This entails the interpretive study of story components such as linguistic shifts and displacement motifs.

Textual Evidence Criteria

The selection of textual evidence from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is based on its thematic importance to identity, language politics, and forced migration. This includes episodes of forced exile (such as Okonkwo's banishment) and cultural upheaval during missionary landings, as well as sections that juxtapose Igbo oral traditions, such as proverbs and folktales, with colonial literature like the Bible and legal codes (Chapters 20–25). To ensure analytical depth, the selection is limited to five to ten significant passages, with representation dispersed across the novel's plot arcs for thorough coverage.

Analytical Framework

By mapping Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) concept of "linguistic alienation" and the language ideology theory of Blommaert (1999) and Irvine and Gal (2000) onto specific textual evidence from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the analytical process applies important theoretical frameworks. Step by step, it analyses the inherent power dynamics that favour Eurocentric textual authority over indigenous epistemologies, after first identifying recurrent patterns, such as the replacement of Igbo proverbs and oral traditions by colonial biblical and legal discourses. To highlight similarities between forced relocation and cultural dislocation, it triangulates these observations with migration theory (Castles et al., 2020) and assesses the resulting identity reconstruction or erosion among Igbo characters.

RESULTS

A New Historicist reading of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* leads us to three main conclusions about how colonial power actually operated among the colonised. Firstly, colonialism didn't just move people physically; it forced a kind of "internal migration." It pushed people to abandon their spiritual beliefs, their family structures, and their deep connection to the land. We see this in the converts who walked away

from their traditions and the survivors of the Abame massacre, as well as in Okonkwo's own painful exile. This combination of force and the "seduction" of a new way of life created deep, permanent cracks in the community.

Secondly, the real battle for power happened through language. Instead of just accepting the "official" colonial stories, Achebe uses a unique blend of English and Igbo rhythms to push back. He essentially takes the coloniser's own tool and turns it into a way to reclaim his culture and resist being erased from history. Thirdly, who we are depends heavily on the world around us. The arrival of the British forced everyone to rethink their identity, which often led to a social death where people lost their place in society or even tragic choices like suicide.

Ultimately, Achebe isn't just missing the past; he is reclaiming it. By setting the story during the British takeover of Nigeria and writing it as the 1950s independence movement was gaining steam, he shows that stories and history are woven together. He ensures that the voice of the colonised isn't just heard, but prevails, turning the tools meant to wipe out his culture into a powerful means of survival. These findings are presented in three subheadings: dynamics of forced migration, the politics of language and the politics of identity.

Dynamics of Forced Migration

According to Okolie (2021), the internal, ritually approved displacement of traditional Igbo society and the externally imposed, culturally damaging displacement brought about by colonialism are the two crossing planes of forced migration in *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo's seven-year banishment to his mother's village of Mbanta following his unintentional killing of Ezeudu's child during a burial serves as an example of the first. To placate the earth goddess Ani, the Oracle's decision and clan custom dictate this banishment, which is not random. "He had been cast out of his clan like a fish out of its element," (Achebe, 1958/1994, p. 131) is how Achebe characterises Okonkwo's condition upon arriving. He depends on Uncle Uchendu's charity in Mbanta, where he is a foreigner in his motherland and is reminded that "a man belongs to his fatherland when things are good, but he belongs to his motherland when things are bad" (Achebe, 1958/1994, p. 132). This story foreshadows the psychological effects of relocation while also illuminating the communal and transient nature of the traditional Igbo legal system. Okonkwo's return to Umuofia is characterised by alienation from a hamlet already transformed by colonial occupation; he never entirely regains his sense of belonging.

A much more extreme and permanent kind of forced migration, cultural, ideological, and occasionally violent, is brought about by colonialism. Instead of physically deporting the Igbo in large numbers, the District Commissioner and white missionaries orchestrate a widespread conversion from indigenous belief systems to Christianity and colonial modernity. The most prominent example is the tale of Abame, as told by Obierika: after the community killed a white man they came across, colonial forces butchered them in retribution. The survivors are dispersed, their homes destroyed by fire, and their social structure destroyed. This incident foreshadows Umuofia's further exodus. Converts, especially mothers of twins and *osu* (outcasts), escape to the mission facility in the Evil Forest in search of both physical and spiritual refuge from customary rejection. Once the colonial government defends the converts and challenges clan authority, what starts as a voluntary movement becomes fundamentally compelled. For example, when a convert kills the sacred python, the clan is outraged but does not take decisive action because, as Obierika bemoans, "the white man had put a knife to the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." Furthermore, Mumu (2023) argues that Nwoye's conversion represents a personal transition from his father's too masculine environment to the compassionate Christian mentality. Nwoye successfully leaves his patrilineal identity after being drawn to the "poetry" of the new faith and the hymn that "seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul." According to New Historicism, these migrations are similar to the historical accounts of British colonial administrators and missionaries (like those of the Church Missionary Society), who recorded how conversion and taxes forced Igbo people to give up sacred groves, ancestral lands, and kinship duties in favour of mission stations and cash-crop economies (Achebe, 1958/1994, p. 58, Chapter 7). As a result, the book historicizes migration as a purposeful imperial-control tactic rather than merely depicting it.

The themes of displacement and cultural dislocation in *Things Fall Apart* resonate with contemporary African literary treatments of migration. As Obidiegwu et al. (2018) observe, African narratives frequently portray migration to Western countries as both an aspirational and anxiety-laden experience, reflecting ongoing concerns with identity, social integration, and cultural negotiation. In both historical and modern contexts, migration, whether internal to African polities or external to the West, produces complex psychological, cultural, and social consequences that are negotiated within familial, communal, and institutional frameworks. Integrating this perspective situates Achebe's narrative within a broader continuum of African engagement with mobility, displacement, and the enduring struggle to preserve cultural identity amid structural constraints.

The Politics of Language

Language in *Things Fall Apart* is the main area of conflict between indigenous resistance and colonial power, opines. Achebe purposefully blends Igbo grammar, proverbs, and untranslated vocabulary (chi, egwugwu, ogbanje, and obi) with English, the language of the oppressor. Litchfield-Tshabalala (2025) argue that the text appropriates the coloniser's medium to inscribe African experience, which is a classic new-historicist act of subversion. Igbo epistemology is preserved in proverbs, such as "If a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings" and "A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness" (Achebe, 1958/1994, p. 21). Here, he emphasises an oral tradition that precedes and survives colonial literacy. Achebe reverses the ethnographic gaze by forcing the English reader into a posture of cultural humility by refusing to gloss every Igbo word (Royanian & Sadeghi, 2014).

On the other hand, Guthrie (2011) posits that the colonial language is shown to be violent and reductive. After seeing Okonkwo commit himself, the District Commissioner considers writing a book titled "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger." Okonkwo's life tragedy could be summed up in "a reasonable paragraph" (Achebe, 1958/1994, p. 208). Real colonial literature, administrative records, and missionary memoirs that portrayed Igbo civilisation as barbaric and in need of "pacification" are explicitly echoed in this fictional title. Achebe's hybrid English is interpreted by New Historicism as a counter-narrative created during the historical period when Nigerian intellectuals were recovering narrative power. As a result, the book's language embodies the very cultural survival it portrays: it refuses to "fall apart" in the face of English domination.

The Politics of Identity

In the study, identity is performed, disputed, and eventually shattered by colonial encroachment; it is never stable. According to Özünl & Başkale (2019), Africans have a strong sense of cultural identity, and colonialism caused disastrous changes in their culture that distorted their identity. When colonial law replaces clan justice, Okonkwo's hyper-masculine self-concept, which is based on titles, yam barns, and a disdain for anything "feminine", collapses. He reasserts an identity that the new order has rendered obsolete with his ultimate act of killing the court messenger. Colonialism deprives the colonised of interpretive control over their own narratives, Oguike (2025), as demonstrated by the clan's unwillingness to bury him: "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life" (Achebe, 1958/1994, p. 207) and the Commissioner's clinical remark that his death is merely fodder for a book. After changing his name to Isaac, Nwoye adopts a new Christian identity that gives him a sense of belonging that his

father's inflexibility denied him: "He had taken the name Isaac and moved spiritually toward Christian compassion" (Achebe, 1958 / 1994, p. 58). When colonial weapons are used against them, even the *egwugwu* masquerades, embodiments of ancient authority, lose their power. These identity issues are situated within the broader historical project of colonial subject-formation as understood by New Historicism. The British aimed to supplant Igbo self-understanding with an administrative, Christian subjectivity. By humanising the Igbo world before the "fall," Achebe's work defies this interpellation and gives agency back to a people who were previously depicted as helpless victims.

DISCUSSION

A New Historicist interpretation situates Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as not only a reflection of the late-colonial historical context of Nigeria but also as a conscious counter-narrative that contests prevailing British imperial discourses. Composed at the threshold of independence, the narrative confronts historical phenomena such as missionary conversions, British incursions into Igbo regions (circa 1890–1910), and the "pacification" strategies that undermined cultural integrity.

Instead of being perceived as a separate artistic creation, the text operates as a locus of negotiation within the flowing "social energy" of its bifurcated contexts: the colonial epoch it illustrates and the decolonising 1950s during which it was crafted. It assimilates components from colonial administrative documentation, missionary autobiographies, and ethnographic accounts, while concurrently producing a subversive counter-energy that rehumanises the Igbo experience, consistent with Greenblatt's framework of reciprocal interaction between literary and nonliterary discourses.

Colonialism manifests as a comprehensive modality of coerced migration encompassing physical, cultural, linguistic, and identitarian dimensions that forces the Igbo to relinquish ancestral frameworks in favour of the imperial paradigm. The Abame massacre serves as a poignant illustration of violent physical dislocation: colonial forces retaliate with firearms and artillery following the villagers' killing of a white man "on an iron horse," scattering the remaining individuals "like locusts" and incinerating dwellings reflective of documented British punitive campaigns. The narrative subverts this violence by embedding the event within Igbo oral tradition, conceptualising migration as a deleterious dispersal instigated by the "white man

(who) has put a knife on the things that held us together,” rather than a narrative of benevolent advancement.

Language emerges as the principal sphere of contention. Achebe's hybridised English integrates Igbo proverbs, untranslated lexicon (chi, egwugwu, ogbanje), grammatical structures, and oral rhythms, thereby undermining the coloniser's hegemonic apparatus. Missionaries and colonial administrators impose English as the medium for scripture, legal discourse, and ethnography, thereby rendering Igbo epistemological frameworks obsolete and reducing intricate lives such as that of Okonkwo to “a reasonable paragraph” in the District Commissioner's reductive volume, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. By strategically utilising English, Achebe reclaims narrative sovereignty, compels English readers to engage in cultural defamiliarisation, and asserts the legitimacy of Igbo epistemologies.

Identity is portrayed as a realm of historically contingent “self-fashioning.” Colonial interpellation undermines traditional identities: Okonkwo's stringent masculine identity, constructed through titles, agricultural prosperity, and repudiation of the “feminine”, deteriorates as clan justice succumbs to colonial jurisprudence, his exile to Mbanta alienates him “like a fish out of its element,” and the disbanding of masked egwugwu reveals the fragility of collective authority. His ultimate act of defiance, decapitating the court messenger, reasserts an anachronistic warrior ethos, culminating in suicide and a refusal of burial. In contrast, Nwoye reconstructs his identity through conversion (as Isaac), attracted to the perceived compassion of Christianity. These ruptures illuminate Foucault's nexus of power and knowledge; however, the narrative circulates counter-energy, re-establishing interpretive authority for the colonised and illustrating that identity is dynamically reconstructed amidst tumult.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) reinterprets history from the perspective of the colonised, advocating, as scholars contend, that Africans must narrate their own histories to reclaim dignity and agency. Through the interconnected dynamics of migration, language, and identity, Achebe transforms the coloniser's instruments into mechanisms of resistance and cultural reclamation.

Furthermore, this New Historicist examination of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) explicitly addresses the research objectives by scrutinising three interrelated dimensions of colonial power: coerced migration as a complex mechanism of control, the politics of language as a battleground of contention, and the destabilisation and reconstruction of identity under the yoke of colonial domination. These facets

elucidate the operational dynamics of colonialism not merely as territorial subjugation but as a profound and invasive reconfiguration of Igbo social, cultural, and existential life, while Achebe's narrative actively resists imperial erasure by reclaiming historical agency.

The depiction of colonialism as engendering not solely physical relocation but a more profound "internal migration" or "diaspora within," obliging individuals and communities to forgo cosmological beliefs, kinship ties, connections to land, and ancestral systems. This is evidenced through punitive displacements, such as Okonkwo's ceremonial exile to Mbanta following an accidental homicide, which alienates him "like a fish out of its element" and disrupts his intrinsic sense of belonging. Furthermore, it is manifested in the violent disbandment of Abame survivors subsequent to the massacre, colonial retribution scatters them "like locusts" after the villagers kill a white man "on an iron horse," resonating with documented British punitive expeditions. Additionally, missionary "seduction" ideologically and spiritually lures converts away, as illustrated by Nwoye's departure and acceptance of Christianity, fracturing familial and communal ties. These instances exemplify how colonial forces amalgamate coercion with allure, engendering irreversible schisms and an existential uprooting that redirects individuals towards the imperial framework.

Additionally, the narrative's portrayal of language as the principal arena of power struggle reveals the imposition of English and resistance through hybridity. Colonial authorities and missionaries imposed English as the medium for administration, biblical texts, and ethnographic reductionism, consequently marginalising Igbo oral epistemology and rendering traditional wisdom obsolete. This epistemic violence culminates in the District Commissioner's intent to distil Okonkwo's intricate tragedy into "a reasonable paragraph" in his publication *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, thereby parodying authentic colonial texts that dehumanise and simplify African existence. Achebe contests this hegemony by crafting a hybrid English enriched with Igbo proverbs ("Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten"), untranslated lexicons (chi, egwugwu, ogbanje), oral rhythms, grammatical structures, and idioms. This approach subverts the coloniser's instrument, asserts the profundity and legitimacy of Igbo modes of knowing, defamiliarises English for non-Igbo audiences, and reclaims narrative sovereignty, transforming a language of domination into one of cultural reclamation and resistance.

Negotiation, reconstruction, and destabilisation of identity under colonial pressure are exposed through the portrayal of identity as inherently relational, historically contingent, and susceptible to colonial interpellation. Established identities disintegrate as colonial legislation replaces indigenous clan justice and Christian subjectivity contests Igbo cosmology. Okonkwo's inflexible masculine identity constructed upon titles, yam storage, martial valour, and the repudiation of femininity becomes increasingly untenable: his exile disrupts his sense of belonging, the revelation and disbandment of egwugwu reveals collective authority to be precarious, and his ultimate violent act (the decapitation of the court messenger) attempts to reassert an archaic self, culminating in suicide an act that repudiates ancestral interment and jeopardises social continuity. In contrast, Nwoye reconstructs his identity through conversion (as Isaac), discovering solace in Christianity's empathy that "addressed a vague and persistent concern." These transformative shifts underscore that colonial encounters necessitate a reevaluation of selfhood, often resulting in social decline, tragic isolation, or hybrid adaptation.

Taking together, Achebe does not merely mourn a vanishing pre-colonial existence; he actively reclaims and rewrites history from the vantage point of the colonised. Firmly situated within the specific historical context of British consolidation in eastern Nigeria (circa 1890–1910) yet invigorated by the decolonising fervour of the 1950s, the novel exemplifies New Historicism's contention that literature and history are mutually constitutive. Through the interrelated dynamics of enforced migration, linguistic contestation, and identity transformation, Achebe ensures that the colonised narrative asserts itself on its own terms illustrating that cultural preservation and resistance are achievable precisely through the repurposing of the very instruments once employed for obliteration. This renders *Things Fall Apart* a lasting counter-discourse that reinstates dignity, agency, and interpretive authority to the Igbo voice amidst colonial turmoil.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) transcends its designation as a foundational African literary masterpiece by providing a profound textual critique of the multifaceted mechanisms of colonialism: compelled migration, linguistic hegemony, and the transformation of identity. Through meticulously selected episodes, character portrayals, and narrative methodologies, Achebe elucidates how colonial intrusion functions as a comprehensive force of displacement physically,

ideologically, and existentially while concurrently facilitating resistance and cultural reclamation.

Colonialism is represented as a form of displacement that dislocates individuals and communities from their cultural and ancestral roots, engendering a “diaspora within.” The punitive exile of Okonkwo to Mbanta following the inadvertent killing of a clansman serves as a poignant illustration: “It was like beginning life anew without the vigour and enthusiasm of youth,” and he perceives himself as “cast out of his clan like a fish out of its element,” underscoring the existential dislocation from kinship, status, and territory. Nwoye’s conversion and subsequent departure epitomise ideological exile; attracted to the hymns of Christianity that “seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed,” he discovers emotional solace in the new faith, forsaking his paternal household and traditional affiliations. The massacre at Abame exemplifies violent physical dispersal: following the villagers’ act of killing a white man “on an iron horse,” colonial forces retaliate, obliterating the village and dispersing survivors “like locusts,” mirroring the Oracle’s prophecy that white men would arrive as locusts to bring destruction. These instances, together with the broader disintegration of traditional authority under the influence of missionaries and colonial administrators, expose colonialism as both involuntary mobility and internal exile that fractures communal unity.

Achebe’s intentional use of language constitutes the nucleus of resistance against colonial oppression. The imposition of English as the medium for religious texts, legal systems, and governance marginalises Igbo oral knowledge and reduces complex existences to oversimplified narratives, as parodied in the District Commissioner’s proposed book: “He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*,” which trivialises Okonkwo’s tragedy to “a reasonable paragraph.” Achebe counters this epistemic violence through the hybridisation of English with elements of Igbo, such as proverbs (“Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten”), untranslated terms (chi, egwugwu, ogbanje), and oral rhythms and idioms, thereby affirming the legitimacy of Igbo epistemologies and transforming the coloniser’s instrument into a vehicle for cultural authority and intellectual self-assertion.

The narrative delineates the tragic fragmentation of pre-colonial Igbo coherence under external pressures while illuminating potential avenues for resilience and hybrid renewal. Okonkwo’s inflexible identity, anchored in masculine accomplishment and

the repudiation of the “feminine”, deteriorates: exile alienates him, colonial law replaces clan justice, and his ultimate act of beheading the court messenger culminates in suicide, precluding him from ancestral burial. Nwoye reconstructs his sense of self through conversion (as Isaac), embracing a more compassionate alternative. Obierika’s lament encapsulates the overarching rupture: “He has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart,” poignantly articulating how colonial forces sever communal ties.

Ultimately, the narrative delineates the tragic disintegration of pre-colonial Igbo coherence in response to external pressures while concurrently illuminating avenues for cultural endurance and hybrid reinvention within the postcolonial milieu. Achebe’s narrative remains relevant as it elucidates how forced migration and linguistic politics continue to shape identity conflicts, from enduring postcolonial legacies to contemporary refugee crises and linguistic disparities, thereby affirming the resilience of colonised subjectivities in the face of structural upheaval.

RECOMMENDATION

The study offers an interesting and pertinent multidisciplinary analysis of Chinua Achebe's seminal work. By concentrating on the often-overlooked intersections of displacement, linguistic dominance, and identity formation in the context of colonial invasion, the work offers fresh insights into how European colonialism disrupts indigenous social fabrics through profound psychic and cultural uprooting as well as territorial conquest.

Achebe's intentional use of English laced with Igbo idioms, proverbs, untranslated phrases, and oral storytelling rhythms is a subversive act of language hybridity. This indigenisation of the coloniser's language not only challenges the hegemonic imposition of English as the sole conduit of “civilisation,” but it also validates the validity and profundity of Igbo philosophy. The study skilfully demonstrates how native languages are undermined by colonial discourse, leading to identity problems and self-alienation among the Igbo. Achebe, however, fights this by utilising English as an instrument for cultural reclamation and resistance.

Thus, this work is recommended for scholars, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates studying African studies, sociolinguistics, migration, and diaspora studies. It is an essential addition to the critical discourse on *Things Fall Apart* because it highlights the film's ongoing relevance to contemporary themes of forced relocation,

linguistic imperialism, and the enduring politics of cultural identity in the face of historical change.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. All information was collected and examined objectively, ensuring that the results are available only for scholarly research and the formulation of public policy. Additionally, it is stressed that the conclusions of this study have not been influenced by any financial, personal, or professional interests, highlighting the objectivity and integrity of the research process.

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