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### EXPLORING BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to get an insight into gender norms and beliefs that play a role in the development of different relationships. Furthermore, the study investigates the various gender roles that fall into the traditional realm and investigates the negative and positive attitudes of the genders towards their own lives in the novel. The significance of the study resulted from gender discussion in the light of symbolic interaction theory, which investigates the novel in the light of behaviour patterns and compares it with the culture brought upon the Igbo culture of Africa.

#### INTRODUCTION

Human behavior refers to the range of behaviors exhibited by humans and which are influenced by culture, attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, authority, rapport, hypnosis, persuasion, coercion and/or genetics. The traits vary from person to person and can produce different actions or behaviour from each person. Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) is one of the Nigerian authors who closely focused on human behavioral characteristics in the novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). The novel depicts the complete background of the cultural

picture of a fictional village in Nigeria. The name of that fictional village is Umuofia- Okonkwo's father's home village, where the novel explains the life of people before and after the missionary's arrival. The sudden arrival of missionaries resulted in the creation of mental dissonance where peoples were bewildered and faced marveling situations about how to react toward cultural alterations brought by missionaries who were of great threat to institutions, political structure, and cultural life of Igbo culture (Mezu, 2004).

Much of the European people migrated toward Africa in the various decades of the nineteenth- century and settled over thereby establishing their colonies to preach Christianity. Europeans, to carry on their mission to establish their colonies, went to different nations of Africa and Nigeria. These were among the prominent nations that received the most visitors. Umuofia community having the Igbo culture represents Nigeria. The threat to the Igbo culture is enormous. (Kenalemang, 2013)

The research in hand focuses on the reality of the novel by taking the actual position of Igbo culture and investigates it under the light of theory. Furthermore, the current study also considers the learning of different gender roles that how women and men got the objections from the past. It has been the prosaic truth that a major part of the individual's behavior comes from the learning of his gender knowledge and the individual adapts his behavior accordingly. For example, social adjustments, general psychology, covert attitude, cognitive function, emotional reaction, and overt behavior are because of this behavior learning. (Musse, 1971)

### ***Problem Statement***

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In every culture, many different roles must be fulfilled by the members of its society. One such role, arguably the most prominent, is gender. Gender roles are demonstrated to people as soon as they become a part of this world. The ways people treat newborns according to their sex greatly influence the process of teaching a child the articulate workings of a culture. Girls and boys alike learn a set of behavior, attitudes, responsibilities, and rights by their specific sex.

Building on the symbolic interaction theory of gender which suggests that gender roles are social constructs, the problem of this study was to explore the subject of gender and the accompanying gender roles that characters in the selected novel *The Things Fall Apart* play. By using narrative analysis

methods to characterize and describe the gender roles of the characters, this study led to inferences about the messages that the novel sent regarding gender behavior. This study also revealed themes that suggested what cultural attitudes were reflected about gender roles.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: THINGS FALL APART (1994)**

Because of its significance as the true representation of culture, *Things Fall Apart* got the attention of many scholars from the past and was investigated by many different critics. Many scholars investigated the postcolonial life of the Igbo community taking into account the work of Franz Fanon in the novel (Rhoads, 1993). She also explains that trends brought up by colonialism fully destroyed the systems developed by religion, the society of Igbo, and their democratic life. The work of Diana doesn't include postcolonial critic which was mentioned as the limitation of the study. Many new approaches were brought in the novel since the twenty-first century (Diana Akers Rhoads, 1993). Another significant scholarly work was conducted by Linda Strong-Leek in which he attempted to explore *Things Fall Apart* in the light of feminism. Her main emphasis was on exploring the negativity faced by women of Igbo. Besides these dispositions, the suicide of Okonkwo was the lesson for the Igbo community for the death of their culture in competition with colonialism which was impending on them (Friesen, 2006). The writer was indirectly pointing toward the plaintive nature and distressed Okonkwo by making him not return to traditional approaches and adopt the new culture. The study of this previous work of scholars comes across the finding that the work of Achebe has not been investigated in the light of postcolonial life. And how the religious strategies of European colonies affected society, psychology, education, mind, religion, and culture?

### ***Gender Roles and Society***

The women's movement got its kinetics at the beginning of the 20th century throughout the world and every society and civilization started to consider the significance of women's role in the development of societies. The women gained the right of voting, legal authority for abortion, freedom for the choice of birth control and employment along education. The focus was given to enhance the status of women in the entire western society (Musse, 1971). The current study considers the symbolic interaction theory; as its attributes were significant in the development of gender roles and depict the socialization process where the individual gains knowledge about his culture, analyzes him and then becomes an active, participative, and functioning member of his community (Lindsey, 1997). The symbolic interaction considers the time factor which was required for learning and also requires continuous reinforcement (Mead, 1964). Furthermore, the perception of individuals for adopted roles might change.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section explains the procedure adopted for this study. It gives detail about the technique utilized to conclude. The design of research elaborates the strategy or the procedure adopted for the interpretation of the study from the data collection procedure to reach the final step of conclusions most logically

and coherently. The research design method assists the researcher in addressing, investigating, and analyzing the research problem accurately. It depicts the collection, interpretations through various measurements of data. The current research is qualitative and also descriptive. The study proceeds through investigation of the novel *Things Fall Apart* in the light of symbolic interaction theory. (Copenhaver, 2002)

### ***Symbolic Interaction Theory***

According to Nilgun et al., (2009) this theory has great significance in the field of social sciences because of its ability to conceptualize and better understand human behavior. The theory explains that how individuals live in symbolic as well as the natural environment. It sheds light on the various values that were embedded with symbols within the minds of people. The basics of the theory come from the work of George Herbert Mead (1964) who comes with the idea of self that how it was created. He presented the theory that when people interact with each other or with groups the concept of self germinates. He further explained the two different types of interactions i.e. the non-symbolic and symbolic interaction. The symbolic type was the one that includes the thinking and interaction for any type of action. However, the non-symbolic interaction includes the actions of individuals which were without any premeditation and comes like a reflex for example running of individual from danger.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This section of the study investigates the novel in the light of symbolic interaction theory. This section of the study explains the social reality and the relationships between men and women in society, which is firstly structured in the unconscious mind. The examination of the language used in constructing genders in the novel is important as it unveils the relationships between the male and the female in society. This is because gender representation is influenced by unconscious and hidden desires in a man.

### ***Behavior Characteristics***

He (Okonkwo) has many qualities. He is non-emotional. He never expresses his emotions. He loves his sons but never shows his feelings. His behavior is harsh toward his family. He behaves cruelly to his wives.

“Okonkwo holds his household with heavy hands. His wives, especially the youngest lived-in perpetual fear” (Achebe, 1994, P.13). He also behaves his sons harshly. It is clear when he gave them yams to prepare. "If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaws. “It shows his cruel behavior" (P.32). The women were also the source of money, otherwise, she was valueless. As narrated “It is pity my three elder sisters got married too early for us to make money for them. We will try to make upon others “(P. 47).

### ***Competitive***

The novel exhibits the reality of African culture by explaining the tough and

competitive role of men in traditional societies. For everyday life, they settle various roles, laws, and ethical procedures and explain the dominant role in society. Therefore, the novel explains the competition in men's society for explaining their dominant role in society.

Along with that, the central character of Okonkwo depicts the interest in wrestling and participating in growing crops. The people of the Ibo community were found to have strong competition because of their achievement-oriented behavior and to gain status among their community. These were also the reasons which made Okonkwo become a leader and great warrior. In the case of war, Okonkwo defeated the renowned wrestler Cat. This was a great honor because the age of Okonkwo was only eighteen and he defeated the great warrior. His economic condition was also prosperous as he had two barns that were full of yams.

In addition to the role of farmers, men are responsible for protecting the clan and they are competitive. In Chapter Six, Achebe depicts a wrestling competition between many tribes of Umuofia. The competition was a good occasion for the men of each village to prove their manliness and maturity, with the winner normally promoted to be the clan warrior. Men would be well trained to wrestle for the competition and those who won the competition would be praised and loved by everyone as they could bring pride and dignity to the clan. In a scene after the competition, Okafo, a young man who won the wrestling match among the nine villages of Umuofia, was celebrated by his cheering supporters and carried back home in praise of his glory as of the best wrestler of Umuofia (Insuwan, 2014). "Okafo was swept off his feet by his supporters and carried home shoulder-high. They sang his praise and the young women clapped their hands" (Achebe, 1994, P. 44).

### *Self-Confident*

"He neither inherited a barn nor a title nor even a young wife. But despite all these disadvantages he had begun even in his father's lifetime to lay the foundations of a future." (Achebe, 1994, p.18)

The statement depicts the confidence that Okonkwo had in him. Since he doesn't have much financial benefit from his father but takes the initiative of taking a loan from Oberika. The life of Okonkwo was to gain a position and respectable status in his society, unlike his father who doesn't have any title. Both genders represent self-confidence in their lives.

Multiculturalism advocates for the significance of accepting cultural differences in proper ethical ways and avoiding the appreciation of any single culture over others. Although cultural differences were necessary for the self-confidence of people at the national level, they were also possibly destructive toward national and tribal pride. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* depicts in detail the cultural values of Ibos that were necessary for their self-confidence of both genders. The novel also depicts that these were the universal principles that spoil their disparaging potential (Peter, 2010).

According to Insuwan, (2014), besides the submission of matters to the elders, the Ibo believed in the powers of the supernatural, which were feared and respected for the survival of the clan. As their lives depended on nature, which was unpredictable, they formed a set of beliefs involving gods and ancestral spirits that could protect them and explain why they had to face malevolent nature.

For the Ibo gods were associated directly with natural phenomena and could yield both suffering and prosperity for the clan. An abundant harvest and fertile land were determined by the will of the gods. In the book, there are several descriptions of sacrifices to gods as a way to beg for protection and wealth. Even Unoka, Okonkwo's father, who was known as a lazy man, made a sacrifice to Ani, the earth goddess before planting: "Every year", he said sadly, "before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land. It is the law of our father" (Achebe, 1994, p.14). The Ibo's strong belief in the power of gods was also narrated in their tribal ceremonies.

Before the harvest, the Ibo arranged the Feast of the New Yam to give thanks to the earth goddess and ancestral spirits, as they believed these powers brought fertility to the land. Showing great respect, new yams were offered to the powers first and then the clan could eat them: "The feast of the New Yams was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers" (Achebe, 1994, p. 31).

Apart from gods, the Ibo believed in the power of ancestral spirits to provide ethical and moral guidance. The ancestral spirits were good Ibo men who had pursued their ancestral path in a past life. When they were alive, they had been industrious, working hard in the field, had gained titles, became good elders, and later, in death, good spirits (Afolabi & Abosede, 2014).

Because of their strong belief in the power of both gods and ancestral spirits, nobody resisted nor challenged their powers. The Ibo, with or without titles, as well as ordinary tribesmen, were all submissive to them. If a man challenged the powers, the tribesmen would be punished and suffered damage. In Chapter Four, Achebe portrayed the gods as standing above, a power to which everyone was to submit. In the scene, Okonkwo made the other clansmen angry after he beat his wife during the Week of Peace. They believed that it was disrespectful to the earth goddess and she would not bless the clan, "The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish" (Achebe, 1994, p.26). The next day, Okonkwo had to come to the shrine of the priest of the earth goddess with an offering to make a sacrifice.

### *Ambitious*

She chides Lady John for upholding the pretense "that to marry at all costs is every woman's dearest ambition till the grave closes over her. You and I know it isn't true" (p.197). "I am not afraid of work. I began to fend for myself even

at the age when most people still suck at their mother's breasts". "If you gave me some yams seed, I shall not fail you" (p.21)

It shows that he is a man of action. He is an ambitious person. He struggles to achieve titles and wealth. He wants to live like king. He takes four hundred yams from Nwakibi. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the link between Okonkwo, food, and his fate is the nature of his ambition. Son of a socially worthless father, the life of Okonkwo was full of ambition to gain respectable fame in society and not to be a failure like his father. He has, in other words, a hunger for renown, a craving perpetually sharpened by the searing memory of what his father had been.

Both genders depict their ambition to protect their change of tradition which was affecting their lives. Okonkwo depicts his resistance to the new religion and political order as he takes it against the manly nature of the Igbo tribe and also because they fear that they would lose their status in society. On one hand, the Achebe highlights the ambitious nature of his tribe for gaining education and move toward modern Africa and on the other hand, Achebe explains the determination of his tribe for cultural subjects like having several wives, defeating the strongest man in the village in a wrestling match. Women of the Igbo tribe depict their ambition by obeying behavior patterns like working hard in corps and by caring for their children.

### *Fearless*

"There is nothing to fear from someone which shouts. I have also heard that those Abame people were fools" (Achebe, 1994, p.140)

Umuofia represents manliness and a place where a man could play his real role. The people of Umuofia rarely fear coming across problems; they are zealous protectors of every unwelcome situation. They never show signs of cowardice. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland. Okonkwo regularly encourages Mbanta people to resist the colonizer's hegemony because they accept every type of abomination. One of the Mbanta men acknowledges that Okonkwo's view is rational and he suggests that his people should prevent the outsiders from distorting their cultural values. Then, they start to exclude all the practitioners of their religion from the privileges of the clan.

The famous saying of the Igbo tribe was "Wherever Something stands. Something Else will stand beside it". And this saying was reflected in the Umuofia where the community considers the personalities as gods and this was the fundamental aspect of their culture. They believed that behind every god the goddess also stands and assists behind. It was also believed that women were considered as the chief priestess of a male god while the male was considered as the chief priest of a female goddess (Peter, 2010).

"And so when he called Ikefemuna to fetch his gun, the wife who had just been beaten murmured something about guns that never shot. Unfortunately for her, Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran

out again and aimed at the as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn". (Achebe, 1994, p.37)

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The focus of the current investigation was the novel *Things Fall Apart* (1994) written by the late Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) who was a Nigerian author. The study investigates what role do gender norms and beliefs play in developing a relationship in the novel and how gender roles fall into the "traditional" realm? The play was best suitable for the examination of gender roles and their attitude. It reflects the social reality of the relationships between women and men in society, which is firstly structured in the unconscious mind. The whole novel was analyzed in the light of symbolic interaction theory and therefore it examined the first attributes i.e. Behavior Characteristics. However, looking at the novel there are five female characters. Male characters in this novel are more dominant and powerful as compared to female characters. Through this study, it has concluded that male has all the powers in Igbo culture. As found in *Things Fall Apart* a powerful tool used to dominate people in colonial countries was education. So, the study of the impact of a Western educational system on societies can be explored.

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